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5 Thousands mark 20 years after deadly Indian Ocean tsunami



6 Sources say Azerbaijan plane was downed by Russian air defenses



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15 Troubled Man City held by lowly Everton, Chelsea title bid rocked



Zionist carnage in Gaza, Yemen

WHO chief survives • 5 journalists slain • 3 babies die of cold • Outrage over Zionist's Aqsa visit



GAZA: (Left) Mourners attend the funeral of members of the press who were killed in a Zionist strike at the Al-Awda Hospital in the Nuseirat refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip on Dec 26, 2024. (Right) A Palestinian man holds the hand of his three-week-old niece Sila Al-Faseeh, who died of hypothermia, in the morgue of Nasser Hospital in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip on Dec 25, 2024. — AFP photos

GAZA/SANAA: Zionist air strikes pummeled Sanaa's international airport and other targets in Yemen on Thursday, a day after the latest attacks on the Zionist entity by Houthi rebels. The strikes targeting the airport, military facilities and power stations followed rising hostilities between the Zionist entity and the Houthis. Three people were killed and 14 were left wounded or missing after the Zionist attacks.

The head of the World Health Organization, who was at Sanaa airport amid Zionist bombardment, said there was damage to infrastructure but he remained safe. "One of our plane's crewmembers was injured. At least two people were reported killed at the airport," Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus posted on X, adding that other UN staff were also safe but their departure was delayed until repairs could be made.

The rebel-held capital's airport was struck by "more than six" attacks with raids also targeting the adjacent Al-Dailami air base, a witness told AFP. A series of strikes were also fired at a power station in Hodeida, a witness and the Iran-backed Houthis' official Al-Masirah TV station said.

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NEWS IN BRIEF

Amir names KWFIU chief

KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Thursday signed a decree appointing Dr Hamad Al-Mekrad as chairman of the Kuwait Financial Intelligence Unit (KWFIU) with the rank of ministry undersecretary for a period of four years, renewable once. The decree also includes the naming of Yusuf Al-Omar as deputy chairman of KWFIU with the rank of assistant ministry undersecretary for a period of four years, renewable once. — KUNA



Dr Hamad Al-Mekrad

Citizenship of 3,701 revoked

KUWAIT: The Supreme Committee of Kuwaiti Citizenship on Thursday announced stripping 3,701 people of Kuwaiti citizenship and that the decision in this regard would be referred to the Cabinet. An interior ministry statement said five of the individuals had dual citizenship. It said 94 individuals who had acquired citizenship for being relatives to those who had gotten it irregularly through fraud and allegations would be also stripped of the nationality. It added citizenship granted to 3,599 people from 54 countries has been revoked, along with one person in the 1959 category. — KUNA

CSC: Kuwaitis' wives to get paid

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti citizens' wives whose citizenship has been revoked pursuant to article 8 of the nationality law are to keep getting their full monthly salary, the Civil Service Commission said on Thursday. All state bodies have been instructed to continue paying salaries to these women whose citizenship has been revoked in line with the nationality law, CSC Chairman Dr Essam Al-Rubaiaan told KUNA. The said female employees would also retain their public jobs as per renewable annual contracts as of the day their citizenship was revoked, he reassured. — KUNA

GCC urges regional stability and unity

By Passant Hisham

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Abdullah Al-Yahya, during the 46th GCC Ministerial Council meeting in Kuwait, reaffirmed support for Syria's sovereignty and independence while opposing external interference. The GCC called for a political solution to the Syrian crisis, emphasizing refugee returns, militia disarmament and preserving state institutions.

GCC Secretary-General Jassem Al-Budaiwi stressed reconciliation and stability as priorities, condemning Zionist actions in Syria, including in the Golan Heights. The council also addressed Lebanon's instability, highlighting the importance of its Jan 2025 presidential elections and adherence to UN Resolution 1701. Reaffirming commitment to the Palestinian cause, the GCC condemned Zionist violations and advocated for a two-state solution based on 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as the capital. (See Page 3)



KUWAIT: Gulf Cooperation Council chief and foreign ministers pose for a picture after a meeting on Dec 26, 2024. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Saydnaya 'killer' judge arrested in Assad stronghold

DAMASCUS: A Syria war monitor said Thursday the country's new authorities had arrested a military justice official under the ousted government of president Bashar Al-Assad who issued death sentences in the notorious Saydnaya prison. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, Mohammed Kanjo Hassan was arrested in the coastal Tartus province, a stronghold of Assad's clan, along with 20 members of his entourage.

Kanjo Hassan headed Syria's military field court from 2011 to 2014, the first three years of the war that began with Assad's crackdown on Arab Spring-inspired democracy protests, according to Diab Serriya, co-founder of the Association of Detainees and Missing Persons of Saydnaya Prison. He was later promoted to chief of military justice nationwide, he said, adding that he sentenced "thousands of people" to death.

Serriya's group estimates that Kanjo Hassan made \$150 million dollars from bribes paid by relatives of detainees desperate for information on their loved ones. Syria's exiled National Coalition of opposition forces welcomed the arrest, describing it as an "important step on the path to justice and the

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LATAKIA: A fighter affiliated with Syria's new administration pets a man's dog at a checkpoint in this coastal city on Dec 26, 2024. — AFP

India's former PM Manmohan Singh dies aged 92

NEW DELHI: Described as a "reluctant king" in his first stint as prime minister, the quietly spoken Manmohan Singh was arguably one of India's most successful leaders. The first Sikh in office, Singh, 92, was being treated for age-related medical conditions and died after he was brought to hospital after a sudden loss of consciousness on Thursday.

He is credited with steering India to unprecedented economic growth and lifting hundreds of millions out of dire poverty. He went on to serve a rare second term. Prime Minister Narendra Modi said: "India mourns the loss of one of its most distinguished

leaders, Dr Manmohan Singh Ji." He applauded the economist-turned-politician's body of work.

Born into a poor family in a part of British-ruled India now in Pakistan, Singh studied by candlelight to win a place at Cambridge University before heading to Oxford, earning a doctorate with a thesis on the role of exports and free trade in India's economy. He became a respected economist, then India's central bank governor and a government advisor but had no apparent plans for a political career when he was suddenly tapped to become finance minister in 1991.

During that tenure in 1996, Singh was the architect of reforms that saved India's economy from a severe balance of payments crisis, promoted deregulation and other measures that opened an insular country to the world. Famously quoting Victor Hugo in his maiden budget speech, he said: "No power on earth can stop an idea whose time has come," before adding: "The emergence of India as a major econom-



Manmohan Singh

ic power in the world happens to be one such idea." Singh's ascension to prime minister in 2004 was even more unexpected. He was asked to take on the job by Sonia Gandhi, who led the center-left

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Local

Kuwait's volunteers driving success at Khaleeji Zain 26

Nearly 4,400 volunteers dedicate their time to ensure best experience for fans

KUWAIT: The volunteers of Kuwait have played an essential role in the successful organization of the 26th Arabian Gulf Cup, "Khaleeji Zain 26," currently being held in Kuwait. With nearly 4,400 volunteers contributing their time and effort, they have significantly supported the smooth operation of the tournament, assisting both the organizing authorities and the fans, and demonstrating a strong commitment to their country.

Since the tournament began on December 21, and even prior to the event, young Kuwaitis have actively volunteered. The Public Authority for Sport opened registration for volunteers, and the response was remarkable. The volunteers come from various professional backgrounds and have worked alongside officials to ensure the event is carried out effectively, reflecting Kuwait's capability to host international events with efficiency.

Throughout the tournament, volunteers have been visible in many areas, from assisting with parking logistics at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium to guiding spectators to their seats. Their presence has ensured the comfort and safety of attendees, while also providing support by distributing water, beverages, and other essential items, creating a welcoming environment for everyone.

Abdullah Al-Adwani, head of the Volunteer Committee for Khaleeji Zain 26, shared with KUNA that the volunteers have been vital in ensuring a smooth experience for the attendees. "Our goal is to provide a positive experience for fans attending the matches," he explained. Al-Adwani highlighted that volunteers had received both theoretical and practical training in crowd management, delivered by global experts, with a focus on Jaber Al-Ahmad International and Jaber Al-Mubarak Stadiums.

Omar Al-Mutairi, from the Kuwait Youth Authority and a volunteer coordinator at Jaber Stadium, noted that volunteers are responsible for directing



KUWAIT: Volunteers are seen outside the Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium. — KUNA photos

spectators to their seats and entrances. "So far, we have had no major issues, and the cooperation from the fans has been great," he said. Ghanem Al-Enezi, another volunteer at the stadium gates, explained that his role involves guiding people to the correct entrances and ensuring they have what they need for a comfortable experience.

Samira Al-Shammari, a volunteer from the Civil Defense, mentioned that she and her team are prepared to handle any emergencies or evacuations if necessary. "We are trained and ready to respond in case of an emergency," she said.

The volunteer program was launched through the government's Sahel application, with volunteers undergoing interviews to ensure they were well-prepared for their roles. Many of the volunteers have prior experience in organizing large-scale events, including previous Gulf Cup tournaments and other international sporting events hosted in Kuwait.

These volunteers are integral to the tournament's success. They provide crucial logistical support and serve as a point of contact for attendees, assisting them from arrival at the stadium to finding their seats. Their work is not only focused on managing

crowds but also ensuring the safety and comfort of fans, enhancing the overall experience. Volunteers have been trained in various aspects of event management, making them a key part of Kuwait's ability to deliver a high-quality event.

The organizing committee for Khaleeji Zain 26 has emphasized the importance of the volunteers' contributions, which are expected to leave a lasting impression on visitors. As the tournament continues, these volunteers are playing a significant role in ensuring the event runs smoothly and providing a positive experience for all involved. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Officials inspect Souq Al-Mubarakiya to enhance consumer protection during Khaleeji Zain 26. — KUNA photos



Ministers inspect Souq Al-Mubarakiya to combat fraud

KUWAIT: Khalifa Al-Ajeel, Minister of Commerce and Industry and Abdullatif Al-Meshari, Minister of State for Municipality Affairs and Housing, conducted a field inspection at Souq

Al-Mubarakiya on Thursday to boost consumer protection and combat commercial fraud, Kuwait News Agency reported. This visit coincides with the ongoing Khaleeji Zain 26 Gulf Cup in Kuwait.

During the tournament, the souq has transformed into a vibrant hub for football fans from across the Gulf, who have shared videos of their team spirit, impromptu football games, and lively celebrations on social media. Fans have also embraced the local culture, sampling dishes, shopping for souvenirs, and enjoying the atmosphere.

The inspection, joined by Ministry of Commerce Undersecretary Ziyad Al-Najim and acting Director-General of Kuwait Municipality Manal Al-Asfour, is part of a regulatory campaign to ensure compliance with commercial laws. The ministers focused on verifying product prices, checking the quality and expiration dates of goods, and ensuring proper invoicing by merchants to prevent fraud. This initiative reflects Kuwait's commitment to maintaining a transparent and consumer-friendly market during the tournament.

Kuwait envoy presents credentials to Erdogan



ANKARA: Kuwaiti Ambassador to Turkey, Abdulaziz Ahmad Al-Adwani, presented his credentials Thursday to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan during a ceremony held at the presidential palace in the capital city, Ankara. A statement issued by Kuwait's Embassy in Ankara, and obtained by KUNA, mentioned that Ambassador Al-Adwani discussed during the meeting mechanisms of boosting bilateral ties across a variety of fields including, economic, health, security, educational and defense industries. The meeting also underlined keenness of both leaderships on exchanging visits, and affirmed the strength of the deeply rooted and extended relations. Ambassador Al-Adwani relayed greetings of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to the Turkish president. — KUNA

Kuwait Coast Guard modernizing fleet, introducing drones

KUWAIT: Kuwait Coast Guard is working on refurbishing and modernizing its fleet, Kuwait News Agency reported Thursday. Commodore Sheikh Mubarak Ali Al-Sabah, Director General of Kuwait's Coast Guard, said a budget of KD 45 million has been allocated for this purpose, with 11 boats currently being sent to Abu Dhabi for major overhauls, including the replacement of engines and other equipment. This initiative aims to enhance the operational readiness and efficiency of the Coast Guard in carrying out its duties.

As part of its efforts to further secure Kuwait's waters, the Coast Guard will soon integrate "maritime drones" into its fleet. These drones are set to begin operations during Ramadan in 2025 and will be active 24/7 for two years. Equipped with live-streaming cameras, warning systems, and tracking technology, the drones will significantly enhance the Coast Guard's ability to monitor and safeguard



Commodore Sheikh Mubarak Ali Al-Sabah, Director General of Kuwait's Coast Guard

Kuwait's waters from potential security threats.

Sheikh Mubarak also announced that the Coast Guard is preparing for a comprehensive shift towards digital operations. By January 1, 2025, the Coast Guard will fully transition to electronic systems for managing licenses and documentation, eliminating paper-based processes. This transition

will include maritime licenses for boats, vessels, and maritime driving, streamlining operations and improving efficiency.

Furthermore, Sheikh Mubarak emphasized the importance of enhancing the training and readiness of Coast Guard personnel. The administration has been conducting weekly live-fire exercises in Kuwait's territorial waters to ensure that its forces are well-prepared for any security challenges they may face. Additionally, the Coast Guard is updating its training programs, incorporating new technologies such as artificial intelligence, and implementing a more robust training system to prepare future leaders.

Sheikh Mubarak also underscored the organization's ongoing commitment to strengthening the role of women in the security of Kuwait's territorial waters. He emphasized that the Coast Guard recognizes women as key contributors to its mission, and they are actively involved in critical roles, both in military and civilian capacities, to protect the nation's maritime borders.

He pointed out that women have been instrumental in the management of several major projects within the Coast Guard, including the new radar system designed to enhance Kuwait's maritime security. One such project is being led by Farah Ibrahim, who is overseeing the implementation of the radar sys-

tem, which will significantly improve the monitoring and security capabilities of Kuwait's territorial waters. Notably, 40 percent of the team involved in this critical project comprises women, highlighting the Coast Guard's dedication to empowering women in both military and civilian roles.

The radar system, which is expected to be fully operational within 16 months, aims to bolster efforts to protect Kuwait's waters from illegal activities such as smuggling and unauthorized intrusions. The system will involve the construction of 12 new towers, complete with radar, cameras, communication devices, and new electronic navigation systems, marking a major advancement in the Coast Guard's technological capabilities. Additionally, the project will include maintenance and training over the next 10 years, ensuring its long-term sustainability and effectiveness.

Sheikh Mubarak also took the opportunity to commend the work of the General Department of Anti-Drug Control, with whom the Coast Guard has been working closely to combat the illegal trafficking of drugs into Kuwait. He explained that the Coast Guard has developed comprehensive plans and strategies to deal with security threats, and part of this includes the reorganization of its personnel to ensure a more effective response to illegal activities in Kuwait's waters.



Commodore Sheikh Mubarak (center) poses for a photo with Coast Guard personnel.



The Sabah Al-Ahmad Naval Base



KUWAIT: Coast Guard personnel perform their work at the Sabah Al-Ahmad Naval Base. — KUNA photos

Crown Prince receives GCC foreign ministers



HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.



KUWAIT: HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets with Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Abdullah Al-Yahya, GCC Secretary General Jasem Al-Budaiwi and GCC member states' foreign ministers. — KUNA photos

KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah warmly received, on Thursday, at Bayan Palace, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Abdullah Al-Yahya, and the Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Jasem Mohammed Al-Budaiwi. The meet-

ing also included the foreign ministers of the GCC member states: Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud (Saudi Arabia), Dr Abdullahif bin Rashid Al-Zayani (Bahrain), Badr bin Hamad Al-Busaidi (Oman), Khalifa bin Shaheen Al-Marar (UAE), and Dr Mohammed Abdulaziz Al-Khulaifi (Qatar).

This gathering was held ahead of the 46th Extraordinary Meeting of the GCC Ministerial Council in Kuwait. The discussion emphasized Kuwait's ongoing commitment to strengthening Gulf Cooperation and addressing key regional and global issues.

Present at the meeting were Major General (Retd) Jamal Mohammed Al-Dhiab, Director of the Crown Prince's Office, Mazen Isa Al-Issa, Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs at the Crown Prince's Office, and Abdulmohsen Jaber Al-Zaid, Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs for Protocol Affairs. — KUNA

GCC foreign ministers affirm support for Syria's sovereignty

GCC calls for lifting Syria sanctions, condemns Zionist incursion in Golan Heights



Kuwait's Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya



Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Jasem Al-Budaiwi



KUWAIT: Foreign Ministers of GCC countries convene for the 46th extraordinary meeting of the GCC Ministerial Council. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By Passant Hisham

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Abdullah Al-Yahya, reaffirmed the GCC's steadfast commitment to upholding Syria's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity during his speech at the 46th extraordinary meeting of the GCC Ministerial Council, held in Kuwait on Thursday.

"We strongly oppose all forms of external interference and reaffirm our full support for the Syrian people's right to determine their own future," declared Al-Yahya, who is the ministerial council's chair. He emphasized that the council is calling for the resumption of an inclusive political process, ensuring participation from all parties.

The GCC's top diplomats met to discuss developments in Syria and Lebanon following the fall of Bashar Al-Assad's regime, which collapsed earlier this month when anti-regime groups took control of Damascus. On December 8, the Zionist entity launched a military campaign in Syria, advancing into the Syrian buffer zone in the occupied Golan Heights to search for weapons and Hezbollah collaborators. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu initially called the Zionist entity's presence "temporary," he later stated it would continue until a new security arrangement is made with Syria's new authority.

A final statement issued following the meeting

affirmed that the Golan Heights are Syrian Arab land and condemned the Zionist entity's decisions to expand settlements in the occupied Golan Heights. To support Syria's economic recovery, the council called for lifting sanctions against Syria and urged all partners, states, and organizations to provide full support to the Syrian people. The council emphasized its continued commitment to offering humanitarian assistance.

Gulf countries also affirmed support for efforts aimed at achieving a comprehensive and inclusive transitional process that fulfills the Syrian people's aspirations for stability, development, and a dignified life. "The GCC urges the international community to intensify efforts toward achieving a comprehensive and sustainable political solution," said Al-Yahya. He also underscored the importance of providing care for refugees and displaced persons, advocating for their voluntary and safe return in accordance with international standards.

The council welcomed the steps taken to ensure civilian safety, prevent bloodshed, achieve national reconciliation, and preserve Syria's state institutions and resources. Additionally, the decision to disarm militias and armed factions and restrict the use of weapons to the state was endorsed.

Jasem Mohammed Al-Budaiwi, Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), praised the Syrian Interim Government

for its efforts in ensuring a peaceful power transition and protecting civilians. He noted that these steps are essential for Syria's stability and its return to a key regional and international position. "Achieving national reconciliation and fostering dialogue are crucial for realizing the aspirations of the Syrian people for security, stability, and prosperity," he asserted.

Since the collapse of president Bashar Al-Assad's regime earlier this month, the Zionist entity has bombed Syrian military assets in Syria and sent troops into a buffer zone in the occupied Golan Heights. Zionist officials have called the incursion a temporary measure to ensure the entity's security but have not said when troops would be withdrawn.

Condemning the Zionist entity's repeated aggression toward Syria, Al-Budaiwi described such actions as blatant violations of international law. "(The Zionist entity's) continued attacks on Syrian territories, including its occupation of the buffer zone and the decision to expand settlements in the occupied Syrian Golan, violate international law and UN resolutions. The international community must take responsibility and act to halt these aggressions," he declared.

Serious concern for Lebanon

Turning to Lebanon, Al-Yahya expressed deep concern over the country's ongoing challenges,

reaffirming the GCC's full support for Lebanon's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity. "We reject any foreign interference in Lebanon's internal affairs," he stated.

Al-Yahya also highlighted the significance of the upcoming presidential elections, scheduled for January 9, 2025, calling them "a genuine opportunity to restore stability in Lebanon." The council emphasized the importance of adhering to UN Security Council Resolution 1701 and preserving Lebanon's national unity.

In this context, Al-Yahya emphasized: "We cannot turn a blind eye to the ongoing Zionist aggressions against Arab territories in Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine, nor to the brutal practices targeting the Palestinian people. These acts constitute a blatant violation of international law, humanitarian law, and the principles of sovereignty."

The GCC countries, he highlighted, "reaffirm their unwavering stance in supporting the just Palestinian cause and emphasize that the Palestinian people's rights are inalienable, particularly their right to establish an independent state based on the borders of June 4, 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital." He called for reopening dialogue to achieve justice for Palestine. "It is imperative to revive the peace process and ensure the resumption of negotiations to achieve a just and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian issue."

Al-Mutairi reviews final preparations for 'Kuwait Capital of Arab Culture'

KUWAIT: The Minister of Information and Culture, Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, met with the Supreme Committee for "Kuwait Capital of Arab Culture and Media 2025" to review final preparations for the event and discuss planned programs and activities. The Executive Office of the Council of Arab Information Ministers had approved the designation of Kuwait as the Arab media capital for the year 2025 in June 2023. In a statement, Al-Mutairi expressed gratitude to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for his patronage of the opening event. He noted that this support underscores Kuwait's political leadership's commitment to enhancing the nation's role as a cultural and media leader in the Arab world.

Al-Mutairi emphasized the importance of collaboration among all stakeholders to ensure the success of this significant project, which offers a unique opportunity to showcase Kuwait's rich cultural and media heritage. He highlighted that the event marks a continuation of Kuwait's leadership in fostering creativity, dialogue, and cultural exchange, with strong



KUWAIT: Minister Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi meets with officials to discuss preparations for Kuwait's plans to mark its designation as the Capital of Arab Culture and Media 2025. — KUNA

backing from His Highness the Amir, HH the Crown Prince, and HH the Prime Minister.

He also acknowledged the honor and responsibility of being named the Capital of Arab Culture and Media for 2025, encouraging the Supreme Committee to continue their efforts to make the event a success. The meeting also reviewed plans for high-quality initiatives aimed at increasing participation from local and regional cultural and media institutions. — KUNA

Kuwaiti humanitarian air bridge to Lebanon continues with 10th flight

KUWAIT: The tenth humanitarian flight from Kuwait's air bridge to Lebanon has successfully arrived in Beirut on Thursday, marking another significant step in Kuwait's ongoing support to the Lebanese people amid their current hardships. The flight, which carried nine tons of various food aid, is part of the Kuwait is by Your Side campaign, organized by Al-Rahma International Association in coordination with the Ministries of Social Affairs, Foreign Affairs, and Defense, with the support of the Kuwaiti Air Force.

Dr Adnan Al-Haddad, Deputy Director General for Communications, Marketing, and Information Technology at Al-Rahma International, highlighted that this shipment is an essential part of Kuwait's continuous humanitarian efforts to assist Lebanon, particularly during the difficult conditions faced by the Lebanese people due to Zionist aggression. The aid includes critical food items such as rice, beans, oils, baby milk, and other basic necessities needed by displaced families and those affected by the conflict.

Upon the arrival of the flight at Beirut's Rafic Hariri International Airport, it was received by Abdullah Al-Diyin, First Secretary of the Kuwaiti Embassy in Lebanon, who emphasized that this shipment underscores Kuwait's longstanding commitment to humanitarian work. Al-Di-

yin said the airlift "reaffirms Kuwait's leadership role in charity and humanitarian efforts, exemplified by the establishment of the humanitarian airlift to Lebanon as part of the Kuwait Stands by You campaign." The food aid will be delivered to the Lebanese Higher Relief Committee, which is responsible for coordinating the distribution of these essential supplies.

General Ahmed Ibrahim, a representative of the Lebanese Higher Relief Committee, expressed gratitude for the timely assistance, emphasizing the importance of these food supplies for Lebanese families, particularly those displaced by the ongoing conflict. He noted that the aid would help sustain displaced families unable to return to their homes, as well as those who have returned to their towns but still face significant challenges.

Since the launch of the air bridge, Kuwait has sent dozens of tons of medical, food, and shelter-related supplies to Lebanon. These shipments have been coordinated with several Lebanese entities, including the Lebanese Ministry of Health, the Lebanese Red Cross, and the Lebanese Higher Relief Committee, ensuring that the assistance reaches the most vulnerable communities across the country.

Dr Al-Haddad reaffirmed Kuwait's dedication to providing ongoing humanitarian aid, noting that the airlift was initiated under the guidance of Kuwait's leadership and with full cooperation from the relevant governmental and charitable organizations. He stressed that Al-Rahma International would continue its efforts to deliver assistance whenever needed to alleviate the suffering of those affected by the crisis in Lebanon. — KUNA



NBK strengthens commitment to advancing Kuwaiti society

Al-Mattar: NBK advancing its societal impact by diversifying support initiatives

KUWAIT: In 2024, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) reaffirmed its dedication to sustainability by actively initiating and supporting social programs spanning health, social development, environmental protection, youth advancement, education, and women empowerment. These efforts highlighted NBK's pivotal role in championing social responsibility in Kuwait, reinforcing its position as a leader in driving sustainable development in alignment with the country's national development plan's objectives.



Manal Al-Mattar

Over the course of the year, NBK reached notable milestones in its sustainability journey through a range of services, contributions, and initiatives. These efforts spanned key areas such as environmental stewardship, healthcare advancements, social empowerment, education, and sports development, highlighting the bank's dedication to embedding sustainability into its operations and fostering community support.

Commenting on NBK's Sustainability Report 2024, Manal Al-Mattar, Deputy General Manager and Head of the Corporate Communications Group at NBK, stated: "NBK remains committed to steadily amplifying the positive impact of our community investments by diversifying support and driving meaningful social change, all in alignment with the Group's ESG strategy, which we view as a fundamental responsibility."

NBK initiatives and programs

Bankee program: Promoting financial literacy in schools

This year saw the continued success of the Bankee program. Kuwait's first initiative of its kind, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Kuwait Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha). The program aims to enhance financial awareness among school students by offering practical and interactive lessons on financial literacy.



"Our goal is to cultivate a financially informed community that can contribute to sustainable economic growth in Kuwait by integrating financial literacy into the curriculum and promoting public-private partnerships through the implementation of the classroom economy model in schools," Mattar stated.

Bankee is the first program of its kind, developed by NBK, to introduce financial literacy to the community, with a focus on students in schools. Its aim is to enhance financial inclusion and ensure sustainable improvement in financial literacy within the community for the future. In its first academic year (2023-2024), the program included 30 schools, 3,400 teachers, and approximately 16,000 students. For the second year (2024-2025), the program aims to reach 60 schools, 6,000



teachers, and 30,000 students. The program seeks to introduce students to fundamental economic concepts and practices, including earning, spending, saving, and managing financial obligations. This is achieved through a classroom system that simulates the real economic environment, using practical methods and an interactive approach.

The program has been implemented in several primary schools in Kuwait since 2022. In recognition of its innovative approach, the bank was awarded the Bronze Award for the Bankee program at the Qorus Awards in the Environmental, Social, and Corporate Governance (ESG) category, honoring organizations that integrate sustainability and ESG standards into their operations.

Training programs for fresh graduates

NBK offered internship opportunities through a training program that it sponsored, supported, or organized, including the following initiatives:

Sponsorship of LOYAC training program "KON". Now in its seventh consecutive year, this program is organized in collaboration with Babson College for Entrepreneurship Education and aims to inspire students to lead and innovate with projects that contribute to societal progress. This year, 53 trainees participated in the program. Additionally, the bank supported another LOYAC initiative, Kilma, designed to enhance public speaking and persuasion skills. This three-week program saw the participation of 18 young individuals aged 13 to 17.

Sponsored the TAMAKAN Program, organized by Creative Confidence for the fifth consecutive year, offering 34 trainees specialized courses aimed at enhancing their skills and preparing them to become effective and valuable contributors to the workforce.

Organized the Aspire Program for high school students in 2024, training 120 students aged 14 to 18 on banking skills and conducting workshops in collaboration with the Ministry of Interior, Nazaha, Kuwait Dive Team, Omniya Recycling, and Creative Confidence. The program concluded with interactive field tours of some of Kuwait's most successful landmarks in business, culture, and finance, including Kuwait Airways, Jazeera Airways, Kuwait Danish Dairy Company (KDD), Grand Hyatt Hotel, and Kuwait Times newspaper.



Ramadan initiatives

Al-Mattar emphasized that one of NBK's most notable annual initiatives is its program dedicated to the month of Ramadan. This year, the program involved the distribution of 5,000 meals, including Iftar meals for fasting

individuals, through field tours across various areas in Kuwait throughout the holy month. NBK's meal trucks visited residential neighborhoods, popular markets, public transport hubs, and numerous key facilities to distribute Iftar meals, marking a significant milestone in the program's development. The initiative not only provided financial support but also invested in businesses and social programs, ensuring the ongoing impact of this charitable effort for families and individuals in need.

Environmental protection

NBK has further strengthened its commitment to community development by providing continuous support for LOYAC's impactful programs, particularly those centered around sustainability. A notable example is the Permaculture Training Program in Portugal, which underscores the strategic partnership between the bank and LOYAC in empowering youth and enhancing their understanding of environmental sustainability. Spanning seven days, this initiative exemplifies NBK's dedication to fostering a generation of socially responsible individuals who are equipped to drive positive change in the environment.

NBK also supported the "EcoQuest" competition, which LOYAC has established as a regular initiative to promote environmental awareness and foster knowledge and culture among high school students aged 15 to 17. This competition aligns with LOYAC's strategy for green spaces and its goal of raising environmental awareness among youth, preparing an empowered generation committed to advancing sustainable agriculture and expanding green spaces in Kuwait. This year, 35 students participated in the competition.

NBK also took part in the trips organized by the LOYAC Environmental Volunteer Foundation, as well as the Green Volunteering and Green Darb programs, which support the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 15, which focuses on life on land. This aligns with NBK's strategy to invest in and support society. The volunteer trips included visits to the Sulabiya and Wafra farms, with a total of 130 volunteers participating in the environmental training programs.

As part of its sponsorship of Kuwait Dive Team's project to protect and rehabilitate the marine environment, islands, and coral reefs, NBK supported the team in an operation

focused on removing harmful waste and neglected fishing nets. The Kuwait Dive Team successfully removed plastic waste and abandoned fishing nets from various areas of Kuwaiti coasts, contributing to the preservation of the marine ecosystem.



NBK also supported Omniya Recycling's "Your School's Wish" project, the largest educational competition across all government educational levels, aimed at collecting plastic for recycling.

NBK also extended its support to the Blank Camp for children aged 3 to 13, aiming to foster their creativity. As part of this initiative, the children created five advertisements centered around the concept of sustainability, in collaboration with a company specializing in animation production.

Diverse social support

Speaking about social initiatives, Al-Mattar highlighted the total social welfare efforts provided by NBK this year, led by organizations such as LOYAC, Bait Abdullah, and Kuwait Association for the Care of Children in Hospital (KACCH). The bank also supported various events, including Center 21 and the Kuwaiti Association for Learning Differences (KALD), along with projects in collaboration with the Red Crescent Society and the annual Ramadan "Doing Good Deeds" program. Furthermore, NBK contributed to significant cultural projects with the Jaber Cultural Center and Dar Al-Athar Al-Islamiyyah, reflecting the bank's commitment to being a leading supporter of events that hold cultural and artistic value, fostering purposeful development and strengthening the cultural depth of society.



Furthermore, NBK organized an open day for low-income children and their families, offering them a chance to enjoy a day filled with fun and sports activities, especially for those unable to access summer programs. This initiative reflects NBK's commitment to sustainable development and aligns with the United Nations SDGs, aiming to enhance the quality of life for underprivileged children and contribute to building a more equitable society. The event, held in collaboration with the Touristic Enterprises Company, hosted 55 children aged 6 to 12 who participated in swimming, sports lessons, competitions, and other recreational activities. Each child received gifts and prizes, making the day truly special.

NBK Run

NBK organized its annual NBK Run, reaffirming its dedication to community development through initiatives that foster social engagement. This year, the bank partnered with EQUATE Petrochemical Company to enhance the event, including a special needs category for participants. EQUATE sponsored this category across three groups: wheelchair users, visually impaired individuals, and those with prosthetics. The 30th edition of the race attracted over 7,000 participants and a large audience, underscoring NBK's success in

hosting events that consistently garner widespread participation and community trust.

NBK children's hospital activities

NBK continued its weekly activities at the NBK Specialized Hospital for Hematology, Cancer, and Pediatric Stem Cell Transplantation, aiming to provide exceptional psychological care for patients and their families. Over the year, the bank organized 16 activities, attended by approximately 300 children, creating moments of joy and support during their treatment journey.

As part of its "I Dream to Be" initiative, NBK brought joy to six children with cancer by fulfilling their dreams, highlighting the bank's dedication to making a meaningful difference in their lives. This year, NBK continued its support for Bayt Abdullah (BACH) and KACCH, reinforcing its commitment to health-focused initiatives aimed at supporting children with cancer.

Prioritizing employee well-being

Through its Employee Wellbeing Program, NBK provides a range of medical, health, and awareness campaigns dedicated to enhancing the well-being of its employees. As part of its health awareness campaigns, NBK collaborates with Wara Hospital, with specialists and doctors stationed at the NBK Clinic located at the bank's headquarters. The clinic, now man-

aged by Wara, provides employees with consultations and conducts necessary medical tests to support their health and well-being.

As part of this year's awareness initiatives, NBK launched several awareness campaigns aligned with international and national events. The most prominent of these campaigns focused on employee health, addressing mental health, nutritional health, physical well-being, exercise, as well as chronic conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, and incurable diseases like breast cancer, among others.

NBK also organized numerous recreational activities and trips for its employees. This year, the bank inaugurated a library corner for relaxation and leisure, while continuing to offer access to the health club at its headquarters for all employees.

Women empowerment

As part of its commitment to women's safety and security, NBK illuminated its headquarters in orange, marking one of Kuwait's landmarks for 16 days in support of the UN's "The World is Orange" campaign. This initiative aimed to raise awareness about the severity of gender-based violence. Notably, NBK was among the first organizations in Kuwait to sign the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPS) on the United Nations website





Trump wishes 'Merry Christmas' to 'left lunatics' in frenzy of posts

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Children hold national flags during prayers at the Baiturrahman Grand Mosque for those who lost their lives in the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami in Banda Aceh on December 26, 2024.-- AFP

Tears as Asia mourns tsunami dead

220,000 people killed two decades ago when a tsunami hit coastlines around Indian Ocean

BANDA ACEH, Indonesia: Tearful mourners prayed and lit candles Thursday at ceremonies across Asia to remember the 220,000 people killed two decades ago when a tsunami hit coastlines around the Indian Ocean in one of the world's worst disasters.

A 9.1-magnitude earthquake off Indonesia's western tip on December 26, 2004, generated a series of waves as high as 30 meters (98 feet) that pummeled the coastline of 14 countries from Indonesia to Somalia. In Indonesia's Aceh Province, where more than 100,000 people were killed, a siren rang out at the Baiturrahman Grand Mosque to kick off a series of memorials around the region, including in Sri Lanka, India and Thailand, which the tsunami hit hours later.

People recounted harrowing tales of horror and miraculous survival as giant waves swept in without warning, carrying debris including cars and destroying buildings in their wake.

"I thought it was doomsday," said Hasnawati, a 54-year-old teacher who goes by one name, at the Indonesian mosque that was damaged by the tsunami. "On a Sunday morning, where our family were all laughing together, suddenly a disaster struck and everything was gone. I can't describe it with words," she told AFP. At Aceh's Siron mass grave, where around 46,000 people were buried, emotional relatives recited Islamic prayers in the shade of trees that have

since grown there. Khyanisa, a 59-year-old Indonesian housewife, lost her mother and daughter, searching in vain for them in the hope they were still alive. "I kept chanting God's name. I looked for them everywhere," she said. "There was a moment where I realized they were gone. I felt my chest was in pain. I screamed."

The victims included many foreign tourists celebrating Christmas on the region's sun-kissed beaches, bringing the tragedy into homes around the globe. The seabed being ripped open pushed waves at double the speed of a bullet train, crossing the Indian Ocean within hours. In Thailand, where half of the more than 5,000 dead were foreign tourists, commemorations included tearful relatives laying flowers and wreaths at a wave-shaped wall in Ban Nam Khem, its worst-hit village. Napaporn Pakawan, 55, lost her older sister and a niece in the tragedy. "I feel dismay. I come here every year," she told AFP.

"Times flies but time is slow in our mind." A candlelight vigil on the beach at Khao Lak organized by the Swedish embassy in Thailand drew a crowd of around 100, the majority Swedes. Sweden was one of the worst affected countries by proportion of population.

Anna Elf, 50, said she brought her children there because it was "important for them to know what happened" on that day. "In Sweden everyone knows somebody who was affected or who lost somebody... it's kind

of like a national trauma," she said.

A total of 226,408 people died as a result of the tsunami, according to EM-DAT, a recognized global disaster database. There was no warning of the impending tsunami, giving little time for evacuation, despite the hours-long gaps between the waves striking different continents. But today a sophisticated network of monitoring stations has quickened warnings. In Sri Lanka, where more than 35,000 people perished, survivors and relatives gathered to remember around 1,000 victims who died when waves derailed a passenger train.

The mourners boarded the restored Ocean Queen Express and headed to Peraliya—the exact spot where it was ripped from the tracks, around 90 kilometers (56 miles) south of Colombo. A brief religious ceremony was held with relatives of the dead there while Buddhist, Hindu, Christian and Muslim ceremonies were also organized to commemorate victims across the South Asian island nation.

Nearly 300 people were killed as far away as Somalia, as well as more than 100 in the Maldives and dozens in Malaysia and Myanmar. Dorothy Wilkinson, a 56-year-old British woman who lost her partner and his parents to the tsunami in Thailand, said the commemorations were a time to remember the best of those who died. "It makes me happy to come... a bit sad," she said. "It's celebrating their life." — AFP



A tourist pays respect and offers flower to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the 2004 tsunami, in Peraliya on December 26, 2024. — AFP

Sri Lanka train memorial honors tsunami tragedy

PERALIYA, Sri Lanka: Just inland from the crashing waves on Sri Lanka's palm-fringed shores, the train slowly came to a stop on Thursday—marking the moment a deadly tsunami hit 20 years ago. Sri Lanka's Ocean Queen Express became a symbol of the biggest natural disaster to hit the South Asian nation in living memory, when the train was struck by the giant waves of December 26, 2004.

About 1,000 people were killed—both passengers and local residents, who had clambered inside desperately seeking shelter after the first wave hit. After they boarded, two bigger waves smashed into the train, ripping it from the tracks and tumbling it onto its side more than 100 meters (330 feet) from the shoreline.

Each year since then, the Ocean Queen has stopped on the tsunami anniversary at the spot in Peraliya, a sleepy village some 90 kilometers (55 miles) south of the capital Colombo, to commemorate those killed. "To me, it all brings back the very hard memories," said Tekla Jesenth, whose two-year-old daughter died as the waves hit the area. "I don't want to think about or talk about it—it hurts that much." "Monuments won't bring them back," she added.

Survivors and relatives of the dead boarded the train in Colombo early in the morning before it headed south with national flags fluttering on its front and then slowed to a creaking halt in commemoration. Villagers came out, the line was closed and a few moments of quiet settled.

Mourners offered flowers and lit incense at a beachside memorial for 1,270 people buried in mass graves, with Buddhist, Hindu, Christian and Muslim ceremonies held. "When I saw the first wave, I started running away from the waves," said U A Kulawathi, 73, a mother whose daughter was killed, her body swept out to sea. "The water reached the roof levels and people climbed the roofs to save themselves."

The 9.1-magnitude earthquake off the western coast of Indonesia's Sumatra island triggered huge waves that swept into coastal areas of Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India, Thailand and nine other nations around the Indian Ocean basin. A total of 226,408 people died as a result of the tsunami according to EM-DAT, a recognized global disaster database. Of those, 35,399 were in Sri Lanka. — AFP

10,457 migrants lost at sea bound for Spain in 2024

MADRID, Spain: At least 10,457 migrants died or disappeared while trying to reach Spain by sea in 2024, an NGO said Thursday, marking a 50 percent increase from last year and the most since it began keeping a tally in 2007. The 58-percent increase includes 1,538 children and 421 women, migrants rights group Caminando Fronteras or Walking Borders said in a report which covers the period from January 1 to December 5, 2024.

It amounts to an average of 30 deaths per day, up from around 18 in 2023. The group compiles its data from hotlines set up for migrants on vessels in trouble to call for help, families of migrants who went missing and from official rescue statistics.

It blamed the use of flimsy boats and increasingly dangerous routes as well as a lack of resources for rescues for the surge in deaths. "These figures are evidence of a profound failure of rescue and protection systems. More than 10,400 people dead or missing in a single year is an unacceptable tragedy," the group's founder, Helena Maleno, said in a statement. The victims were from 28 nations, mostly in



Spanish Red Cross members hold children after a 'cayuco' boat with 57 migrants onboard arrived at La Restinga port on the Canary island of El Hierro, on September 14, 2024. — AFP

Africa, but also from Iraq and Pakistan.

The vast majority of the fatalities — 9,757 — took place on the Atlantic migration route from Africa to Spain's Canary Islands, which has received a record number of migrants for the second year in a row. Seven migrant boats landed in the archipelago on Christmas Day, Spain's maritime rescue service said on social media site X.

At their closest point, the Canaries lie 100 kilometers (62 miles) off the coast of North Africa. The shortest route is between the coastal town of Tarfaya in southern Morocco and the island of

Paktika province, Afghanistan, on 24 December".

"International law obliges military forces to take necessary precautions to prevent civilian harm," the agency said in a statement, adding an "investigation is needed to ensure accountability". The Taliban government said the 46 deceased were mainly women and children, with another six wounded, mostly children.

An AFP journalist saw several wounded children in a hospital in the provincial capital Sharan, including one receiving an IV and another with a bandaged head. A Pakistani security official told AFP on Wednesday the bombardment had targeted "terrorist hideouts" and killed at least 20 militants, saying claims that "civilians are being harmed are baseless and misleading".

On a press trip to the area organized by Taliban authorities, AFP journalists saw four mud brick buildings

Fuerteventura in the Canaries. The Atlantic route is particularly deadly, with many of the crowded poorly equipped boats unable to cope with the strong ocean currents. Some boats depart African beaches as far as 1,000 kilometers (620 miles) from the Canaries.

To avoid controls, smugglers sometimes take longer, more dangerous journeys, navigating west into the open Atlantic before turning north to the Canaries—a detour that brings many to the tiny westernmost island of El Hierro, which since last year has experienced an unprecedented surge in arrivals. The regional government of the Canaries says it is overwhelmed, and in October thousands of people took part in rallies in main cities in the archipelago to demand action to curb the surge in arrivals.

During his Christmas Eve broadcast, Spain's King VI warned that "without proper management" of migration, "it can lead to tensions that erode social cohesion". "How we are able to deal with immigration—which also requires good coordination with our European partners, as well as with the countries of origin and transit—will say a lot in the future about our principles and the quality of our democracy," he added. Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez in August went on a tour of West African countries in a bid to boost local efforts to curb illegal migration from Mauritania, Senegal and the Gambia, the main departure points for migrant boats headed to the Canary Islands. — AFP

reduced to rubble in three sites around 20-30 kilometers (10-20 miles) from the Pakistan border. AFP spoke to multiple residents who said the strikes hit in the late evening, breaking doors and windows in villages and destroying homes and an Islamic school.

Several residents reported pulling bodies from the rubble after strikes targeted houses, killing multiple members of the same families. Afghanistan's Minister of Borders and Tribal Affairs Noorullah Noori called the attack "a brutal, arrogant invasion". "This is unacceptable and won't be left unanswered," he said during the site visit. Pakistani foreign ministry spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch did not confirm the strikes but told a media briefing on Thursday: "Our security personnel conduct operations in border areas to protect Pakistani from terror groups, including TTP." — AFP

UN calls for probe into air strikes on Afghan border

KABUL: The UN mission to Afghanistan on Thursday called for an investigation into Pakistani air strikes in Afghanistan, in which the Taliban government said 46 people were killed, including civilians.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) said it had "received credible reports that dozens of civilians, including women and children, were killed in airstrikes by Pakistan's military forces in

International

Azerbaijan flight was downed by Russian air defenses: Sources

Kremlin cautions on 'hypotheses' over plane crash

BAKU: An Azerbaijan Airlines flight that crashed in Kazakhstan on Wednesday killing 38 people was downed by a Russian air defense system, four sources in Azerbaijan with knowledge of the investigation told Reuters. Azerbaijan Airlines flight J2-8243 came down near the city of Aktau in Kazakhstan after diverting from an area of Russia in which Moscow has used air defense systems against Ukrainian drone strikes in recent months. The Embraer passenger jet had flown hundreds of miles off its scheduled route from Azerbaijan's Baku to Grozny, in Russia's southern Chechnya region. It crashed on the opposite shore of the Caspian Sea after what Russia's aviation watchdog said was an emergency that may have been caused by a bird strike. Officials did not explain why it had crossed the sea, but the crash happened after Ukrainian drone strikes this month hit Chechnya. The nearest Russian airport on the plane's flight path was closed on Wednesday morning.

One of the Azerbaijani sources familiar with the Azerbaijani investigation into the crash told Reuters that preliminary results showed the plane was struck by a Russian Pantsir-S air defense system, and its communications were paralyzed by electronic warfare systems on the approach into Grozny.

The source said: "No one claims that it was done on purpose. However, taking into account the established facts, Baku expects the Russian side to confess to the shooting down of the Azerbaijani aircraft."

Videos of the crash site posted on social media and verified by Reuters showed what appeared to be shrapnel damage to the wreckage of the tail section of the plane. Aviation security firm Osprey Flight Solutions said in an alert to airlines on Wednesday that footage of the wreckage and the circumstances around the air space in southwest

Russia indicated the possibility that the airliner was hit by some form of anti-aircraft fire.

Russia's Dagestan and Chechnya regions have been targeted by Ukrainian weaponized military drones this month, with Russian air defenses activated in response, Osprey said.

Earlier on Wednesday, the Russian defense ministry had reported the downing of 59 Ukrainian drones over several regions, it said. Some were reportedly downed in closed air space over regions bordering Ukraine, including the Sea of Azov. Flight operations were reportedly temporarily suspended at Russia's Kazan Airport due to the activity.

In addition, publicly available ADS-B flight tracking data shows that the aircraft experienced GPS jamming throughout its flight over southwest Russia, the alert said. In Brussels, NATO called for a full investigation into the cause of the crash. "Our thoughts and prayers are with the families and victims of Azerbaijan Airlines flight J28243," NATO spokesperson Farah Dakhallah said on X. "We wish those injured in the crash a speedy recovery and call for a full investigation." Kazakhstan's senate chairman said earlier on Thursday that the cause of the plane crash was still unknown.

The Kremlin on Thursday cautioned against "hypotheses" over the crash of an Azerbaijani plane which had been due to land in Russia as experts pointed to possible evidence of a missile explosion.

The Azerbaijan Airlines jet crashed near the Kazakh city of Aktau, an oil and gas hub, on Wednesday. Thirty-eight of the 67 people on board died.

"It would be wrong to make any hypotheses before the investigation's conclusions," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters. The Embraer 190 aircraft was supposed to fly northwest



A man lays flowers to Azerbaijan's Embassy in Moscow on December 26, 2024 paying tribute to the victims of Azerbaijan Airlines' plane crash. — AFP

from the Azerbaijani capital Baku to the city of Grozny in Chechnya in southern Russia, but instead diverted far off course across the Caspian Sea.

An investigation is underway, but some aviation and military experts said the plane may have been accidentally shot by Russian air defense systems as it was flying in an area where Ukrainian drone activity had been reported. Russian military expert Yuri Podolyaka said holes seen in the wreckage of the plane were similar to the damage caused by an "anti-aircraft missile system".

A former expert at France's BEA air accident investigation agency, also said there appeared to be "a lot of shrapnel" damage on the wreckage.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, he said the damage was "reminiscent" of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17, which was downed with a surface-to-air missile by Russia-backed rebels over eastern Ukraine in 2014. But Kazakh Senate speaker Maulen Ashimbayev condemned "speculation" about what happened. — Agencies

Pakistan convicts 60 more civilians of pro-Khan unrest

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan military courts have sentenced 60 more civilians for taking part in pro-Imran Khan unrest last year, the armed forces said Thursday, after international outcry over earlier announced convictions. Ex-prime minister Khan was arrested in May last year after being ousted from office and mounting an unprecedented campaign of defiance against the nation's powerful military leaders.

His detention over graft allegations sparked nationwide unrest, some targeting armed forces installations. The military—which has ruled Pakistan directly for decades at a time and still wields enormous influence—said last summer it would try the accused in court martial closed to the public.

The process was largely opaque until Saturday, when the military announced the first 25 convictions—prompting condemnation from the United States, European Union and United Kingdom.

"These military courts lack judicial independence, transparency, and due process guarantees," US State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said in a statement. Announcing 60 more convictions on Thursday, the military said the court martial had



Pakistan supporters hold a poster of former Pakistan Prime Minister and cricketer Imran Khan as they celebrate their team's victory in the third one day international (ODI) cricket match between South Africa and Pakistan at The Wanderers Stadium in Johannesburg on December 22, 2024. — AFP

now concluded. All of the 85 men were sentenced to between two and 10 years of "rigorous imprisonment". The military did not make clear what their convictions were, listing only the location of their offences. "The Nation, Government, and the Armed

Forces remain steadfast in their commitment to upholding justice and ensuring that the inviolable writ of the state is maintained," a military statement said.

Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party said his nephew was among the men whose convictions

were announced on Thursday, and that he was sentenced to a decade in prison. "Conducting trials in military courts has undermined the fundamental rights of citizens," Khan said, according to a summary of a conversation he had with lawyers and press inside jail, released on X.

The UK government said on Monday that Pakistan's decision to convict civilians in army courts "lacks transparency, independent scrutiny and undermines the right to a fair trial". The European Union said Pakistan is reneging on its international rights obligations, which guarantee legal judgments are made public. But Islamabad's foreign ministry spokeswoman on Thursday rejected the criticism, saying "Pakistan's constitution and legal systems have the capacity to resolve any issues that arise internally". Former cricket star Khan served as prime minister from 2018 to 2022, when he was ousted by parliament in a no-confidence vote. Khan's May 2023 detention lasted a matter of days but he was re-arrested three months later and has remained imprisoned since, facing a parade of court cases he claims are politically motivated. The 72-year-old was barred from running in February elections which were marred by rigging allegations. Meanwhile, PTI was targeted by a sweeping crackdown following the unrest, with thousands of grassroots supporters and senior officials arrested. A coalition of parties considered close to the military establishment emerged as the new government. — AFP

Zionist carnage in Gaza, Yemen...

Continued from Page 1

Houthi spokesperson Mohammed Abdulsalam called the strikes, which came a day after the Houthis fired a missile and two drones at the Zionist entity, "a Zionist crime against all the Yemeni people".

Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Thursday that his country's strikes on Houthi rebels would continue "until the job is done". The Zionist military said targets included "military infrastructure" at the airport and power stations in Sanaa and Hodeida, as well as other facilities at Hodeida, Salif and Ras Kanatib ports.

In Gaza, a Palestinian TV channel affiliated said five of its journalists were killed Thursday in a Zionist strike on their vehicle. A missile hit the journalists' broadcast truck as it was parked in the Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza, according to a statement from their employer, Al-Quds Today. The channel is affiliated with Islamic Jihad, whose militants have fought alongside Hamas in the Gaza Strip. The station identified the five staffers as Faisal Abu Al-Qumsan, Ayman Al-Jadi, Ibrahim Al-Sheikh Khalil, Fadi Hassouna and Mohammed Al-Ladaa.

They were killed "while performing their journalistic and humanitarian duty", the statement said. "We affirm our commitment to continue our resistant media message," it added. In a statement naming the five killed, the Zionist military claimed intelligence had "confirmed that these individuals were Islamic Jihad operatives posing as journalists".

According to witnesses in Nuseirat, a missile fired by a Zionist aircraft hit the broadcast vehicle, which was parked outside Al-Awda Hospital, setting the vehicle on fire and killing those inside. The Committee to Protect Journalists' Middle East arm said the organization was "devastated by the reports that five journalists and media workers were killed inside their broadcasting vehicle by a (Zionist) strike". "Journalists are civilians and must always be protected," it added in a statement on social media.

Video from the scene of Thursday's attack showed the twisted wreckage of a white van with what appeared to be the remnants of the word "PRESS" in red on the back doors. Later on Thursday, dozens of relatives and fellow journalists took part in the funerals of the five journalists, whose bodies were wrapped in white shrouds. Blue flak jackets bearing the word "PRESS" were placed on top of the shrouded bodies. Women wept besides the bodies as men performed special prayers before burials.

Medics said the five were among at least 26 people killed in Zionist air assaults across the Palestinian enclave before dawn. They said 13 other people were

killed and 25 wounded in a Zionist airstrike on a house in Gaza City's Zeitoun neighborhood. The death toll could rise as many people were trapped under the rubble, they added. In Gaza City, a Zionist strike on a house in the suburb of Sabra killed eight more people, medics said, bringing Thursday's death toll to 26. The Zionist military said a 35-year-old soldier was killed in the central Gaza Strip.

The chief pediatric doctor at a southern Gaza hospital told AFP that three babies had died of "severe temperature drop" this week, as the war-ravaged Palestinian territory grapples with winter cold. In the most recent case, Dr Ahmed al-Farra of Nasser Hospital in Khan Yunis city said a three-week-old girl "was brought to the emergency room with a severe temperature drop, which led to her death".

Farra, the head of the hospital's pediatric services, mentioned two other cases his team handled on Tuesday. "A three-day-old baby and another baby, less than a month old, both died after a severe temperature drop," he said. "This is due to the fact that they live in tents," added the doctor, referring to Palestinians displaced by the more than 14-month war in Gaza who have sought shelter in makeshift camps, many in the coastal Khan Yunis area.

"The tents do not protect from the cold, and it gets very cold at night, with no way to keep warm," said Farra. The risk to newborns is particularly acute, he added, as many mothers suffer malnutrition affecting the quality of the milk their babies feed on. The deceased three-week-old girl, Sila Al-Faseeh, lived in the Al-Mawasi tent city, on the Mediterranean coast near Khan Yunis.

Her father, Mahmoud Al-Faseeh, told AFP that in her final hours, "the little girl woke up two or three times during the night to breastfeed". In the morning, the parents saw "she had bitten her tongue and was bleeding", said the father. "We took her to the doctor, who told us it was due to the cold, and there have been several cases with similar symptoms." Faseeh said it was "extremely cold, and the tent is not suitable for living. The children are always sick."

Zionist National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir visited Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa mosque compound on Thursday, triggering angry reactions from the Palestinian Authority and Jordan accusing the far-right politician of a deliberate provocation. "I went up to the site of our temple this morning to pray for the peace of our soldiers, the swift return of all hostages and a total victory, God willing," Ben Gvir said in a message on social media platform X.

He also posted a photo of himself on the holy site, with members of the Zionist security forces and the famed golden Dome of the Rock in the background. The Al-Aqsa compound in Jerusalem's Old City is Islam's third-holiest site and a symbol of Palestinian national identity. — Agencies

Saydnaya 'killer' judge arrested in...

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prosecution of those who committed crimes against the Syrian people". The arrest comes a day after 14 security personnel of the new authorities and three gunmen were killed in clashes when forces tried to arrest Hassan, according to the Observatory. On Thursday, state news agency SANA said security forces launched an operation against pro-Assad militias in the western province of Tartus, "neutralizing a certain number" of armed men. According to the Observatory, three gunmen linked with Assad's government were killed in the operation.

With 500,000 dead in the war and more than 100,000 missing, the new authorities have pledged justice for the victims of abuses under the deposed ruler. The Saydnaya complex, the site of extrajudicial executions, torture and forced disappearances, epitomized the atrocities committed against Assad's opponents. The fate of tens of thousands of prisoners

and missing people remains one of the most harrowing legacies of his rule.

In central Damascus, relatives of some of the missing have hung up posters of their loved ones, in the hope that with Assad's ouster, they may one day learn what happened to them. World powers and international organizations have called for the urgent establishment of mechanisms for accountability.

But some members of the Alawite community fear that with Assad gone, they may be at risk of attacks from groups hungry for revenge or driven by sectarian hate. On Wednesday, angry protests erupted in several areas around Syria, including Assad's hometown of Qardaha, over a video showing an attack on an Alawite shrine that circulated online. The Observatory said that one demonstrator was killed and five others wounded "after security forces... opened fire to disperse" a crowd in the central city of Homs.

The transitional authorities appointed by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) said in a statement that the shrine attack took place early this month, with the interior ministry saying it was carried out by "unknown groups" and that republishing the video served to "stir up strife". — Agencies

India's former PM Manmohan Singh...

Continued from Page 1

Congress party to a surprise victory. Italian by birth, she feared her ancestry would be used by Hindu-nationalist opponents to attack the government if she were to lead the country. Riding an unprecedented period of economic growth, Singh's government shared the spoils of the country's newfound wealth, introducing welfare schemes such as a jobs program for the rural poor.

In 2008, his government also clinched a landmark deal that permitted peaceful trade in nuclear energy with the United States for the first time in three decades, paving the way for strong relations between New Delhi and Washington. But his efforts to further open up the Indian economy were frequently frustrated by political wrangling within his own party and demands made by coalition partners.

And while he was widely respected by other world leaders, at home Singh always had to fend off the perception that Sonia Gandhi was the real power in the government. The widow of former prime minister Ra-

jiv Gandhi, whose family has dominated Indian politics since independence from Britain in 1947, she remained Congress party leader and often made key decisions.

Known for his simple lifestyle and with a reputation for honesty, Singh was not personally seen as corrupt. But he came under attack for failing to crack down on members of his government as a series of scandals erupted in his second term, triggering mass protests. The latter years of his premiership saw India's growth story, which he had helped engineer, wobble as global economic turbulence and slow government decision-making battered investment sentiment.

In 2012, his government was tipped into a minority after the Congress party's biggest ally quit their coalition in protest at the entry of foreign supermarkets. Two years later Congress was decisively swept aside by the Bharatiya Janata Party under Narendra Modi, a strongman who promised to end the economic standstill, clean up graft and bring inclusive growth to the hinterlands.

But at a press conference just months before he left office, Singh insisted he had done the best he could. "I honestly believe that history will be kinder to me than the contemporary media or, for that matter, the opposition parties in parliament," he said. Singh is survived by his wife and three daughters. — Reuters

International

Trump wishes 'Merry Christmas' to 'left lunatics' in frenzy of posts

President-elect doubles down on threats to seize Panama Canal

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden and his incoming successor Donald Trump issued starkly contrasting Christmas messages Wednesday, with the latter doubling down on recent comments about seizing the Panama Canal, buying Greenland and annexing Canada. While Biden posted a short, traditional seasonal message about "kindness and compassion," Trump fired off a rapid volley of three dozen posts through the day, with his Christmas messages directly addressing "radical left lunatics" and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, "whose Citizens' Taxes are far too high."

"Merry Christmas to the Radical Left Lunatics, who are constantly trying to obstruct our Court System and our Elections," the president-elect said in one message, using his characteristically erratic style of capitalization. He spent Christmas day firing off on his Truth Social website about his own perceived political persecution—a contrast to Biden's holiday wishes "to all Americans."

The Republican's comeback electoral win in November came on the back of heightened political polarization and division across the country, which Trump leaned into in his posts. Trump posted a photo showing himself as "patriot of the year," and another smirking at former president Barack Obama, a Democrat. Others included articles praising his cabinet picks, his wish to purchase Greenland and his complaints about fees paid by US ships



Demonstrators hold a banner that reads "Donald Trump, public enemy of Panama," during a protest outside the US embassy in Panama City on December 24, 2024. — AFP

passing through the Panama Canal.

The president-elect again called Trudeau the "governor" of Canada, saying if the country became "our 51st State, their Taxes would be cut by more than 60 percent" and "their businesses would im-

mediately double in size." Trump also doubled down on his threats to demand US control of the Panama Canal, complaining that China had "illegal" influence over the waterway and that Washington "puts in Billions of Dollars in 'repair' money, but will have abso-

lutely nothing to say about 'anything.'"

Minutes later, he announced his pick of Florida politician Kevin Marino Cabrera as ambassador to Panama, "a Country that is ripping us off on the Panama Canal, far beyond their wildest dreams." — AFP

India readies for 400m pilgrims at mammoth festival

PRAYAGRAJ, India: Beside India's holy rivers, a makeshift city is being built for a Hindu religious festival expected to be so vast it will be seen from space, the largest gathering in history. Line after line of pontoon bridges span the rivers at Prayagraj, as Indian authorities prepare for 400 million pilgrims—more than the combined population of the United States and Canada—during the six-week-long Kumbh Mela.

The millennia-old sacred show of religious piety and ritual bathing is held once every 12 years at the site where the holy Ganges, Yamuna and the mythical Saraswati rivers meet. But this edition from January 13 to February 26 is expected to be a mega draw, as it is set to coincide with a special alignment of the planets.

Beads of sweat glisten on laborer Babu Chand's forehead as he digs a trench for seemingly endless electrical cables, one of an army of workers toiling day and night at a venue sprawling over 4,000 hectares (15 square miles). "So many devotees are going to come," 48-year-old Chand told AFP, who says he is working for a noble cause for the mela, or fair. "I feel I am contributing my bit—what I am doing seems like a pious act."

A humongous tent city, two-thirds the area of Manhattan, is being built on the floodplains of Prayagraj, formerly called Allahabad, in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh. "Some 350 to 400 million devotees are going to visit the mela, so you can imagine the scale of preparations," said Vivek Chaturvedi, the spokesman for the festival. Preparing for the Kumbh is like setting up a new country, requiring roads, lighting, housing and sewerage.

"What makes this event unique is its magnitude and the fact that no invitations are sent to anybody... Everyone comes on their own, driven by pure faith,"



Laborers walk across a floating pontoon bridge on the banks of river Ganges, ahead of the Maha Kumbh Mela festival in Prayagraj. — AFP

Chaturvedi told AFP. "Nowhere in the world will you see a gathering of this size, not even one-tenth of it."

The Kumbh numbers, according to Chaturvedi, are mind-boggling. Some 150,000 toilets have been built, 68,000 LED lighting poles have been erected, and community kitchens can feed up to 50,000 people at the same time. Alongside religious preparations, Prayagraj has undergone a major infrastructure overhaul, and huge posters of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and state Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath dot the city.

Both are from the ruling Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), with politics and religion deeply intertwined.

The Kumbh Mela is an ancient celebration, with its origins rooted in Hindu mythology. Hindus believe that taking a dip in Sangam, the confluence of

the rivers, will cleanse them of their sins and help them attain "moksha", setting them free from the cycle of birth and death.

According to legends, deities and demons fought over a pitcher—or "kumbh"—containing the nectar of immortality. During the battle, four drops fell to Earth.

One drop landed in Prayagraj. The others fell at Haridwar, Nashik and Ujjain—the three other cities where the rotating Kumbh Mela is held on other years. But the one in Prayagraj—held every 12 years—is the largest. Organizing authorities are calling it the great, or "Maha" Kumbh Mela.

The last Kumbh Mela at Prayagraj in 2019 saw 240 million devotees, according to authorities—but that was the smaller "Ardh" or half festival, spaced in between the main event. — AFP

Bangladesh to investigate 2009 mutiny massacre

DHAKA: Bangladesh on Thursday ordered a commission to investigate a failed 2009 army mutiny and subsequent crackdown, including the role of alleged "foreign" backers, the inquiry chief said.

The violent mutiny sent shock waves through the South Asian nation and ended with the army crushing the mutineers, with scores arrested and sentenced to death. A previous official investigation into the mutiny which left scores dead blamed years of pent-up anger among ordinary soldiers, who felt their appeals for pay rises and better treatment were ignored. But that probe was carried out during the tenure of Sheikh Hasina, who was ousted as prime minister by a revolution in August, when she fled to old ally India. Since her fall, families of soldiers killed in the violence have been campaigning to reopen the investigation.

They have repeatedly accused Hasina—then newly elected—of orchestrating a plan to weaken the military to bolster her own power in a country prone to coups. Protesters have also alleged India's involvement in that plot. The claims are likely to infuriate New Delhi, which did not immediately respond to the allegations. "We aim to determine whether any foreign entity was involved in the carnage, as allegations of national and international conspiracy have been raised," commission chief ALM Fazlur Rahman told reporters. The mutineers stole thousands of weapons in February 2009 from the headquarters of the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) paramilitary squad before embarking on a killing spree in the barracks.

The uprising quickly spread, with thousands of soldiers seizing weapons and pledging allegiance to the mutineers before it was quashed by the army. Thousands were rounded up and tried in special military courts in the aftermath of the massacre, as the then newly-elected government of Hasina wrestled to regain control. — AFP

South Korea's oppn moves to impeach acting president

SEOUL: South Korea's opposition said Thursday it filed an impeachment motion against acting president Han Duck-soo, in an escalating row over the composition of the Constitutional Court which would decide whether to remove his predecessor from office.

South Korea fell in a political crisis when President Yoon Suk Yeol, currently suspended, declared martial law on December 3. Yoon was stripped of his duties by parliament on December 14 over the dramatic declaration, but a constitutional court ruling upholding the decision by lawmakers is necessary to complete the impeachment process.

The court is however currently short of three judges. While it can go ahead with its six members on the bench, a single dissenting vote would reinstate Yoon. The opposition wants Han to approve three more nominees to fill the 9-member bench, something that he has so far refused to do, essentially leaving both sides in a deadlock. The opposition Democratic Party therefore says the acting president should be impeached too.

"We have filed the motion... and will report it to the plenary session today," MP Park Sung-joon told reporters at the National Assembly of the acting president Han. "We will put it to a vote tomorrow."

Han's refusal to formally appoint the three judges proves that he "does not have the will or qualification to uphold the constitution," the Democratic Party's floor leader Park Chan-dae told reporters. Han has said that he would certify the judges' appointments only if his ruling People Power Party (PPP) and the opposition reach a compromise on the nominees.

"The consistent principle embedded in our constitution and laws is to refrain from exercising significant exclusive presidential powers, including the appointment of constitutional institutions," Han argued. "A consensus between the ruling and opposition parties in the National Assembly, represent-



South Korea Prime Minister and acting President Han Duck-soo bows as he delivers his address to the nation at the Government Complex in Seoul on December 26, 2024. — AFP

ing the people, must first be reached," added the 75-year-old career bureaucrat.

If the opposition passes the impeachment motion against Han in Friday's vote, it would mark the first time democratic South Korea has impeached an acting president. In Han's place, Finance Minister Choi Sang-mok would step in as acting president.

In the impeachment motion, the opposition accuses Han of violating his duty as acting president, citing his refusal to formally appoint the judges and promulgate two special probe bills to investigate Yoon's short-lived imposition of martial law and graft allegations involving his wife, Kim Keon Hee. Earlier this week, Han rejected the opposition's demand for the special bills that would establish two independent investigative bodies to probe the first couple, prompting warnings of impeachment from the Democratic Party.

Han is "intentionally avoiding the special investigation to probe those involved in the insurrection and has clearly stated his intention to reject the appointments of three Constitutional Court judges," the motion reads. Such actions, it adds, are "in violation of a public official's duty to uphold the law... and serve the public." If the opposition succeeds in their bid on Friday, South Korea will see its second impeachment of a head of state in less than two weeks, further destabilizing its vibrant political scene. — AFP

News in Brief

Bosnia's security minister held

SARAJEVO: Bosnia's security minister was arrested on Thursday on suspicion of corruption while he headed the road management company in the country's Serb entity, prosecutors announced. Nenad Nesic, 46, and six other people were held, including the current director of the road company, Putevi RS, in Bosnia's Serb Republic. They are accused of "criminal association, money laundering, abuse of official position or authority, and bribery", a statement read. — AFP

Fukushima nuclear sample removal

TOKYO: The operator of Japan's stricken Fukushima nuclear plant said Thursday it will start the second round of a tricky operation to collect samples of radioactive debris from the site this spring. Around 880 tons of hazardous material remain at the Fukushima site, 13 years after a catastrophic tsunami caused by a 9.0-magnitude earthquake triggered one of history's worst nuclear accidents. Removing the debris is seen as the most daunting challenge in a decommissioning project due to last decades, because of the dangerously high radiation levels. — AFP

Taiwan holds 'expansion' simulation

TAIPEI: Taiwan's Presidential Office staged on Thursday its first tabletop simulation of China's military actions in the region to boost the island's readiness against "authoritarian expansion", a security official said. Tabletop exercises are a tool strategists use to game out how real-world scenarios may unfold, testing how organizations will react and coordinate against a simulated threat. A national security official speaking on condition of anonymity told AFP the Thursday morning exercise, led by the president's office, involved 19 central ministries, local governments and NGOs. — AFP

Cambodia jails oppn party leader

PHNOM PENH: A court in Cambodia sentenced the head of an opposition party to two years in jail on Thursday for inciting social disorder, in the latest criminal case against government opponents. The court in Phnom Penh found Nation Power Party president Sun Chanthly guilty of the charge, which has been used repeatedly against critical voices in Cambodia. Rights groups have long accused Cambodia's government, headed by Prime Minister Hun Manet, of using legal cases as a tactic to silence opposition voices and legitimate political dissent. — AFP

Prison attack in Ecuador kills one

QUITO: An attack using explosives at the construction site of a maximum security prison in southwestern Ecuador killed one person on Wednesday, the government said, calling it a "terrorist act." "In the early morning of this December 25, 2024, a group of armed men perpetrated a terrorist act by violently entering the construction site of the new Santa Elena prison, where they detonated explosive devices," the presidency said in a statement. — AFP

Angolan presidential pardon

LUANDA: Angolan President Joao Lourenco has pardoned some 50 prisoners, including the son of his predecessor Jose Eduardo dos Santos who was serving a five-year jail term for embezzlement. A presidential decree posted on Facebook on Wednesday cited "good behavior" and the "absence of social danger" in granting freedom to the convicts. Jose Eduardo dos Santos, who died in 2022, ruled energy-rich Angola for 38 years until 2017. — AFP

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 27, 2024

China revises up 2023 GDP, sees little impact on growth

Policymakers pledge more stimulus to keep growth stable in 2025



A cargo ship loaded with containers sails from the Qingdao port in Qingdao, in eastern China's Shandong province on December 26, 2024. — AFP

BEIJING: China revised upwards on Thursday the size of its economy by 2.7 percent, but said the change would have little impact on growth this year, as policymakers pledged more stimulus to spur expansion in 2025. Policy support late this year has set the world's second-largest economy on track for a growth target of "around 5 percent" as activity warmed slightly, but challenges such as potential US tariff hikes still weigh on prospects for next year.

Gross domestic product (GDP) in 2023 was raised by 3.4 trillion yuan to 129.4 trillion (\$17.73 trillion), Kang Yi, the head of the National Bureau of Statistics, told a press conference, while releasing the fifth national economic census. He did not explain the reasons for the 2023 revision, but said the bureau would provide further details on its website within days.

China's economy has "withstood the test of multiple internal and external risks over the past five

years, and maintained a generally stable trend while progressing," Kang said. In previous five-yearly economic censuses, China revised up the size of the economy for 2018 by 2.1 percent and for 2013 by 3.4 percent. The fifth economic census carried out over the past five years encompassed the three years of the COVID-19 pandemic, which had a significant impact on the economy, Kang added.

The international environment had witnessed "profound and complex changes" since the previous such census, he said. The revision of 2023 GDP would not have a significant impact on China's 2024 GDP growth rate. Lin Tao, the bureau's deputy head, told the same briefing, however.

On Thursday, the World Bank raised its forecast for China's economic growth in 2024 and 2025, but warned that subdued household and business confidence, along with headwinds in the property sector, would keep weighing it down next year.

The economic census will provide important data to help formulate tasks for China's 15th five-year plan from 2026 to 2030, and help achieve its 2035 goals, Kang said, without elaborating. President Xi Jinping's vision of "Chinese-style modernization" envisages doubling the size of the economy by 2035 from its 2020 level.

Government economists estimate that would require average annual growth of 4.7 percent, a target many analysts outside China consider overly ambitious. At an agenda-setting meeting this month, Chinese leaders pledged to increase the budget deficit, issue more debt and loosen monetary policy to support economic growth next year in expectation of more trade tensions with the US when President-elect Donald Trump takes office in January. Last week Reuters reported that the leaders agreed to raise the budget deficit to 4 percent of gross domestic product next year, its highest on

record, while maintaining an economic growth target of around 5 percent.

The economic census showed the number of business entities in the secondary and tertiary industries at the end of 2023 rose 52.7 percent from the end of 2018, but growth of employment lagged, at 11.9 percent. The economic census showed changes in China's job market, with 25.6 percent more people employed in the tertiary industries at the end of 2023 than at the end of 2018, but secondary industries had 4.8 percent fewer employees. As a severe property crisis hobbles a macroeconomic rebound, employees of property developers fell 27 percent to 2.71 million by the end of 2023 against the corresponding 2018 figure, the economic census data showed. Tertiary industries range from retail to transport, catering, accommodation, finance and property, while secondary industries cover mining, manufacturing, utilities and construction, for example. — Reuters

Turkey lowers interest rate to 47.5%

ISTANBUL: Turkey's central bank lowered its key interest rate on Thursday, the first cut in nearly two years as it battles with double-digit inflation. The bank's monetary policy committee decided to reduce the policy rate from 50 percent to 47.5 percent, with a statement citing improvement in "inflation expectations and pricing behavior".

The last cut was in February 2023. The central bank began to raise interest rates last year to battle soaring prices, after President Recep Tayyip Erdogan dropped his opposition to orthodox monetary policy.

It has kept the main rate stable at 50 percent since March. Thursday's decision signals the start of an easing cycle after eight months of steady policy. The bank said the decisiveness over its tight monetary stance "is bringing down the underlying trend of monthly inflation and strengthening the disinflation process". In November, Turkey's annual inflation rate slowed for the sixth month in a row, at 47.1 percent.

The central bank now expects inflation to reach 44 percent at the end of 2024, up from a previous estimate in August of 38 percent. The bank said the level of the policy rate would be determined in a way to ensure the tightness required by the pro-



ANKARA: Foreign exchange rates are displayed against the Turkish lira in this photo. — AFP

jected disinflation path, taking into account both realized and expected inflation. This week, the central bank announced that it would hold fewer policy meetings next year.

"The Committee will make its decisions prudently on a meeting-by-meeting basis with a focus on the inflation outlook," the bank said, adding it would "decisively use all the tools at its disposal in line with its main objective of price stability". The bank "will make its decisions in a predictable, data-driven and transparent framework", it added. Hakan Kara, former chief economist at the central bank, welcomed the cut as "very reasonable and balanced start" that came with a "cautious/optimistic communication".

"In my opinion, the central bank is doing its best. From now on, the ball is in other policies," Kara commented on social media platform X, including in the pace of spending and regulations on critical institutions. The rate slash comes amid a moderate increase in Turkey's minimum wage after several rounds of negotiations.

The net monthly minimum wage has been raised by 30 percent to 22,104 lira (\$600), beginning from January 1 -- far below the demands of the workers union. The union had demanded a 70 percent increase. Erdogan welcomed the rise this week and said: "We once again remained true to our promise not to let our workers be crushed by inflation". — AFP

Nippon Steel pushes deadline to close US deal

TOKYO: Japan's Nippon Steel said on Thursday it has extended the closing date for its \$14.9 billion purchase of US Steel as US President Joe Biden weighs whether to block a deal that has faced intense opposition since it was announced. The closing date was revised to the first quarter of 2025 from the third or fourth quarter of 2024 previously. Nippon paid a hefty premium to clinch the deal last December in an auction, but the deal faced opposition from the powerful United Steelworkers union (USW), as well as politicians.

Biden has said he wants US Steel to be domestically owned and operated, while President-elect Donald Trump has vowed to block the deal after he takes office in January. On Monday, the committee that vets foreign deals in the US for security concerns referred the decision whether to approve or

block the deal to Biden. He has 15 days to decide, and if he takes no action, the merger will get an unexpected green light.

"Nippon Steel hopes that the President will use this time to conduct a fair and fact-based evaluation of the acquisition. We remain confident that the acquisition will protect and grow US Steel," the company said on Thursday. US Steel shares were up 1.7 percent before the bell. They have never hit the offer price of \$55 per share, signaling investor worries over the timeline for the deal's completion.

Japan Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba urged Biden to approve the merger to avoid marring recent efforts to strengthen ties between the countries, Reuters reported in November. Nippon also said on Thursday the review process of the antitrust division of the US Department of Justice was also underway, without specifying when it may end. Despite the opposition, US Steel shareholders overwhelmingly voted in April to approve the acquisition. The two companies have also worked to assuage concerns over the combination. Nippon has offered to move its US headquarters to Pittsburgh, where the US steelmaker is based and promised to honor all agreements in place between US Steel and USW. — Reuters



TOKYO: This picture shows an office building (center) where Nippon Steel's head office is located in Tokyo on December 19, 2023. — AFP

China to build hydropower dam in Tibet

BEIJING: China has approved the construction of what will be the world's largest hydropower dam, kicking off an ambitious project on the eastern rim of the Tibetan plateau that could affect millions downstream in India and Bangladesh. The dam, which will be located in the lower reaches of the Yarlung Zangbo River, could produce 300 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity annually, according to an estimate provided by the Power Construction Corp of China in 2020.

That would more than triple the 88.2 billion kWh designed capacity of the Three Gorges Dam, currently the world's largest, in central China. The project will play a major role in meeting China's carbon peaking and carbon neutrality goals, stimulate related industries such as engineering, and create jobs in Tibet, the official Xinhua news agency reported on Wednesday. A section of the Yarlung Zangbo falls a dramatic 2,000 meters (6,561 feet) within a short span of 50 km (31 miles), offering huge hydropower potential as well as unique engineering challenges.

The outlay for building the dam, including engineering costs, is also expected to eclipse the Three Gorges dam, which cost 254.2 billion yuan (\$34.83 billion). This included the resettling of the 1.4 million people it displaced and was more than four times the initial estimate of 57 billion yuan. Authorities have not indicated how many people the Tibet project would displace and how it would affect the local ecosystem, one of the richest and most diverse on the plateau. But according to Chinese officials, hydropower projects in Tibet, which they say hold more than a third of China's hydroelectric power potential, would not have a major impact on the environment or on downstream water supplies.

India and Bangladesh have nevertheless raised concerns about the dam, with the project potentially altering not only the local ecology but also the flow and course of the river downstream. The Yarlung Zangbo becomes the Brahmaputra river as it leaves Tibet and flows south into India's Arunachal Pradesh and Assam states and finally into Bangladesh. China has already commenced hydropower generation on the upper reaches of the Yarlung Zangbo, which flows from the west to the east of Tibet. It is planning more projects upstream. — AFP

Business

A gold rush for 'green finance' risks changing our relationship to nature

World needs to invest extra \$4.1tn by 2050 to meet its climate goal

WASHINGTON: To combat climate change and help nature to recover, a lot more investment is urgently needed. The UN's State of Finance for Nature report claims that if the world is to meet climate, biodiversity and land degradation targets, it needs to invest an extra \$4.1 trillion (£3.2 trillion) by 2050.

With most of the existing funding coming from public sources (\$133 billion), calls to close the "investment gap" are now focusing heavily on private investments, commonly referred to as green finance. Such is the power of this narrative that the need to involve corporate investors has come to be seen by many as self-evidently true. There are a great deal of initiatives looking to provide or secure private investments to restore nature, for example through carbon and biodiversity markets. But a major risk is being overlooked: when we put a price on something given to us by nature, this fundamentally changes how we relate to it.

The entire global economy is already based on this commodification of nature. Food and fuel, for example, have been bought and sold for millennia. But now we are expanding the frontier to previously non-traded constituents of the natural world, such as carbon or biodiversity itself.

This process can change our relationship to those aspects of nature. For instance, while we may have once felt we had a moral obligation to save a certain species or habitat, once that form of nature is commodified, our motivations may switch to "conservation because it makes a profit". The UN secretary general, Antonio Guterres, articulated this worldview at the launch of a State of Finance for Nature report in 2021, when he said that: "By taking profits of nature-based solutions, we can vastly improve human well-being and prosperity".

All this heightens the risk of increased inequality. For instance, as most of the world's land is owned by only a few people, those people will be at advantage when it comes to selling carbon credits

(by planting trees or protecting peat bogs on their land, for instance). This concentrates the ability to make money out of carbon in the same hands. (This is similar to large property owners being able to charge rents and accumulate more wealth).

The idea that nature is something that can be bought and sold in a market was originally a western concept, but has now spread across the world. As market thinking is extended further into the natural world, those remaining non-western frameworks risk being further marginalized. The "Mother Earth law" in Bolivia, for instance, enshrines in law the idea that people take care of nature because it is like taking care of family. Ideas like this are not particularly compatible with a world in which forests are protected and species are saved because there is money to be made doing so.

Despite evidence of the risks of nature commodification, alarmingly little attention is being paid to it in the newly supercharged advocacy for green finance, which has a feeling of a new gold rush.

The UK is a good example of how a push for private finance to fix the climate and biodiversity crises means the problems of nature commodification are ignored. In 2023, the then government set a target to stimulate £500 million per year of private investment into nature recovery, aiming to increase it to £1 billion per year by 2030 (there are no signs yet that the Labour government, elected in 2024, will change this strategy).

But when analyzed 19 policy and advisory documents that form this green finance strategy, it is found they overwhelmingly think of risks in terms of how they affect investors or the market. There is lots of talk of uncertainty around financial returns, or the chances of losing consumer confidence due to "greenwashing". Just one document, a discussion of "natural capital", provides specific examples of ethical and cultural threats for rural communities.



A resident burns foliage and debris in the town of Acoua, days after Chido wreaked havoc on the French Indian Ocean territory of Mayotte on December 25, 2024. — AFP

Overall, there seems to be an implicit narrative in favor of commodification. Critically, it is not that the risks are unknown, but the framing remains decidedly commercial, centering the potential challenges for consumers and investors, and not in our relationship with nature. Meanwhile, red flags are already flying, as more stories emerge of market-based "carbon offsetting" policies that benefit big landowners and can end up widening rural inequalities and preventing local communities from accessing the income generated by wind farms, forests or peat bogs.

Those with a vested interest in making profits from nature may underplay the issues with com-

modification. And those same issues might be inadvertently ignored by people who are strongly committed to nature recovery but frustrated with slow progress. However, if we fail to engage with the way that private green finance fundamentally changes how we relate to nature, we might make things worse.

This is not to discount the possibility of ethical initiatives to invest in nature, but simply applying "good standards" will not be sufficient. We need a deep collective reflection on whether this is what we really want as a society and if so, how we effectively prevent and mitigate those risks. — Reuters

News in Brief

China resumes inspections of Australian lobster: Report

BEIJING: China's commerce ministry on Thursday said it has resumed regular quarantine inspections for lobsters imported from Australia, effectively restoring shipments that had been disrupted since late 2020 due to a diplomatic dispute. China hopes to work with Australia to properly manage bilateral economic and trade relations and to expand and deepen cooperation in both traditional and emerging sectors, ministry spokesperson He Yongqian told a regular news conference. In late 2020, China imposed unofficial bans and tariffs on Australian goods valued at \$20 billion, including coal, wine, and rock lobster, after Canberra called for an inquiry into the origins of COVID-19. — AFP

Colombia minimum wage to increase 9.54% to \$323

BOGOTA: Colombia's minimum wage will increase by 9.54 percent in 2025, Colombia's President Gustavo Petro said on Tuesday, announcing the hike by decree after a deal was not reached between the government, business associations and workers unions. The minimum wage in 2025 will rise to 1.4 million pesos (\$323.90) per month, Petro said, up from 1.3 million pesos per month this year. The increase is smaller than the hike announced for this year. At the end of 2023, the government announced the minimum wage for 2024 would increase by 12 percent. — AFP

World Bank announces \$12m for Vanuatu quake recovery

WELLINGTON: The World Bank on Tuesday announced \$12 million towards emergency response and recovery in Vanuatu, a week after a 7.3 magnitude earthquake killed at least 14 people, wrecked buildings and cut power and water supplies. The scale of the disaster had been devastating for Vanuatu and would hit the economy hard, Stephen N Ndegwa, World Bank Country Director for the Pacific and Papua New Guinea, said in a statement. — AFP

Mexican president promises Pemex will pay suppliers

MEXICO CITY: Mexican state energy company Pemex is working with the country's finance ministry to pay suppliers over the next three months, President Claudia Sheinbaum said on Monday, without specifying the amounts. Despite efforts to reduce debt under Sheinbaum's predecessor Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, the company remains one of the world's most indebted energy companies. "Nobody will be without receiving a payment," Sheinbaum said in her regular morning press conference. "There are resources to do so, and we're working with the finance ministry on this." In late November, the association that represents the interests of some of the most important oil service providers in Mexico asked Pemex to pay overdue debts totaling 103.6 billion pesos (\$5.1 billion). — AFP

Switching off from work can be hard, but a break might help

WASHINGTON: It's never been easier to stay connected to work. Even when we're on leave, our phones and laptops keep us tethered. Many of us promise ourselves we won't check emails during our break. But we do. Being away from the workplace, and even in a new location, is often not enough to detach psychologically. We might still be thinking about a demanding project we raced to finish or even feel guilty about leaving others to cover for us.

It mightn't be spelled out by our employers but having phones and laptops can create an underlying expectation we are constantly available, even outside the usual work hours. This feeling of connection or "digital presenteeism", can impact our health by making us stressed, anxious and burnt out.

Switching off our work tools when we are out of the office or on leave can remove these problems as well as helping improve and enjoy our non-work activities and relationships.

While recently passed right to disconnect laws in Australia legally support workers to switch off, there's another option already available to workers. Taking annual leave. Unfortunately, many workers don't take advantage of this valuable resource, with an estimated 160 million annual leave days banked up by Australian workers. One in five have more than the typical yearly allocation of four weeks unused.

Taking a break doesn't just feel good, it's been shown to benefit your health. A 2017 meta-analysis of 86 studies revealed taking holidays can lead to reduced stress and less exhaustion during the holiday period. So what do we do with all the extra time we have? Sleep more? Do more exer-

ercises? Studies show that's exactly what happens when we are on holiday. We studied movement patterns of 375 adults during annual leave. We found people were more physically active, less sedentary and had more sleep each day – all of which are good for our health.

Holidays can also be associated with changes in how our body functions. A study of 112 holiday makers who attended a wellness resort for six days in the United States had increased heart rate variability which indicates greater resilience to stress. Also, the odds of meeting metabolic syndrome criteria decreased with each break taken each year in a cohort of workers who took on average five holidays each year. If you're male and still not convinced, there is evidence that taking holidays is linked with living longer. Men who take more frequent holidays and more leave days a year have lower mortality rates than those who don't?

Simply taking leave is beneficial. Longer breaks do not have increased benefits and when you go is also unimportant. A study of locations found those who took a short four day break in a hotel did not benefit more than those who took a break at home. Both groups showed positive changes to stress, recovery, strain and wellbeing.

In our study, the largest favorable changes were experienced by people who took one to two weeks' leave or those who spent time outdoors camping or hiking. However positive changes were observed for all types of holidays. Ultimately, the best vacation is the one that fits your preferences and budget – there's no such thing as a perfect holiday.

If you haven't already, book some time off and get away from the workplace. Here are five ways to make the most of the time:

1. Finish up your to-do list and clear out your inbox: returning to work after a summer holiday with fewer unfinished tasks allows the positive effects of the holiday to linger longer.



Being away from the workplace, and even in a new location, is often not enough to detach psychologically.

2. Step away from the normal routine: try to limit work-like activities (such as shopping, cleaning, computer-based tasks) and find environments that feel removed from your typical routine and obligations.
3. Engage in "soft fascination" activities: exploring nature is an example of an activity that gently holds your attention while leaving headspace for reflection. These types of activities have been shown to provide restorative mental benefits.
4. Reduce the friction and chaos: avoid putting yourself in settings of conflict (such as visiting a difficult family member), confusion (busy, unfamiliar environments) or tension (excessive travel and/or tight timelines).
5. Take more frequent breaks: aim for multiple short breaks throughout the year, rather than a single longer vacation. This spreads out the benefit with more lead-in time and longer comedown.

The research is clear: vacations are essential for our health and wellbeing. So, if you haven't already, book some time off and get away from the workplace. — Reuters

BYD contractor denies 'slavery like conditions'

SHANGHAI/BEIJING: Jinjiang Group, a contractor for Chinese electric vehicle maker BYD, said on Thursday Brazilian authorities' portrayal of their employees as "enslaved" was inconsistent with the facts and that there were translation misunderstandings. Brazilian labor authorities had on Wednesday said they found 163 Chinese nationals working in "slavery-like conditions" at a construction site for a BYD-owned factory in Brazil's Bahia state. BYD said then that it had cut ties with the firm that hired the workers and was working with authorities.

"Being unjustly labeled as 'enslaved' has made our employees feel that their dignity has been insulted and their human rights violated, seriously hurting the dignity of the Chinese people. We have signed a joint letter to express our true feelings," Jinjiang said on its official Weibo account.

Their statement was reposted by Li Yunfei, general manager of branding and public relations at BYD, on his own Weibo account. He accused "foreign forces" and some Chinese media of "deliberately smearing Chinese brands and the country and un-

dermining the relationship between China and Brazil".

A BYD representative directed Reuters to Li's Weibo post when asked about Jinjiang's comments and the situation. Jinjiang did not respond to a request for comment from Reuters. BYD has been building the factory with an annual capacity of producing 150,000 cars initially in Brazil, the Chinese EV giant's largest overseas market, as part of plans to start production there in 2024 or early 2025. Brazil is poised to hike tariffs on imported EVs to 35 percent in July 2026 from 18 percent currently.

On Wednesday, China's foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said the Chinese embassy in Brazil was communicating with Brazilian counterparts to verify the situation and handle it. Jinjiang said there had been translation and cultural difference issues that had led to the situation, and that the questions from the Brazilian inspectors had been "suggestive". It also posted a video showing a group of Chinese workers in front of the camera with one of them reading out a letter that Jinjiang said the workers have jointly signed. The letter said, for instance, that 107 workers had handed their passports to the company for help with applying for a temporary ID certificate in Brazil. The Brazilian labor inspectors had said that the workers had had their passports withheld by the company.



This handout picture released by Brazil's Workers Public Ministry (MPT) shows an operation that rescued 163 workers from "slave-like conditions" in Camacari, Bahia state, Brazil on December 24, 2024. — AFP

"We are very happy to come to Camacari to work," an unidentified Chinese male said in the video. "We have been complying with laws and regulations, working hard during

the period with a hope that the construction of the biggest new energy vehicle project in Brazil could be completed as soon as possible," he added. — Reuters

Weekender

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 27, 2024

Step by step from Oman to Kuwait

Abdulrahim Al-Ruwaihi's journey revives the legacy of ancient travels and highlights unity and safety of Gulf nations



By Khaled Al-Abdulhadi

Abdulrahim Al-Ruwaihi, an Omani traveler, embarked on an extraordinary 2,000 km journey with two companions, walking along the Gulf coast of the Arabian Peninsula to Kuwait in 56 days. Their adventure pays homage to the epic journeys of our forefathers, reviving the spirit of exploration and endurance.



Abdulrahim Al-Ruwaihi on the Kuwaiti border.



Kuwait Times: Let's start with a brief introduction. Can you tell us about yourselves and how you are connected?

Abdulrahim Al-Ruwaihi: I am Abdulrahim bin Abdullah Al-Ruwaihi, accompanied by my logistical support team — Captain Abdullah bin Salem Al-Ruwaihi, my cousin, and Captain Salem bin Abdullah Al-Saeedi. Captain Salem and I are close friends and like brothers. We are both involved in the Qadimon Association for Walking and Volunteer Work in Oman.

I chose this team for the trip because each member brought unique strengths and perspectives. We worked as a cohesive unit, complementing one another's roles. One handled logistical support by car, while the other walked with me, alternating paths during the journey. By the grace of God, the trip took 56 days and covered 2,000 kilometers.

KT: This accomplishment is extraordinary. Most people would see it as a fantasy. How did the idea come about, and where did the inspiration come from?

Al-Ruwaihi: Indeed, most people view it as impossible. But with God's help and our determination, we turned the dream into reality. This journey, traversing Gulf countries one by one, was a beautiful adventure. Starting from Oman, our beloved homeland, we reached Kuwait, the land of friendship and peace.

KT: How did you plan the trip — from starting the journey to resting and meeting your needs along the way?

Al-Ruwaihi: As a seasoned traveler, I had previously completed a similar journey from Oman to Abu Dhabi

on foot. This inspired me to embark on an even greater adventure by visiting multiple Gulf countries.

I began planning a year and a half before the launch, calculating distances, estimating the duration and costs, and identifying essential needs. After these preparations, I sought permits

challenges in areas without services, going 3-4 days without facilities or Internet access. The first two weeks were particularly tough due to extreme heat. These were the main obstacles we encountered, but we managed to adapt and continue.

KT: What message would you like to convey to people?

Al-Ruwaihi: Our journey carried several messages. First, it reminded us of the blessing of security and safety we enjoy in the Gulf countries — a reality we experienced firsthand, thanks to God, our rulers and our



Abdulrahim Al-Ruwaihi, Abdullah bin Salem Al-Ruwaihi, Salem bin Abdullah Al-Saeedi and Khaleeji Zain 26 officials with the Gulf Cup trophy and official ball.

from Oman's ministry of culture, sports and youth, which also coordinated with neighboring countries. Once approvals were secured, I formed my logistical support team.

KT: Did you face any challenges along the way, and how did you overcome them?

Al-Ruwaihi: Thankfully, there were few issues. However, we did face

KT: What advice would you give to those planning a similar journey?

Al-Ruwaihi: Anyone considering such a trip should conduct a thorough study of the route, including the starting and ending points, and plan every detail carefully to minimize obstacles. Choosing the right season is also crucial. With proper planning, they can avoid significant difficulties.

brave security forces. Second, we aimed to support Gulf teams participating in Khaleeji Zain 26, particularly the Omani national team. Finally, we sought to promote the culture of walking and honor the legacy of our ancestors, who once traveled great distances on foot.



Abdulrahim Al-Ruwaihi with his cousin Abdullah bin Salem Al-Ruwaihi and friend Salem bin Abdullah Al-Saeedi.



Whirling dervishes perform Sema during the Seb-i Arus

Exploring Rumi's legacy



By Islam Al-Sharaa

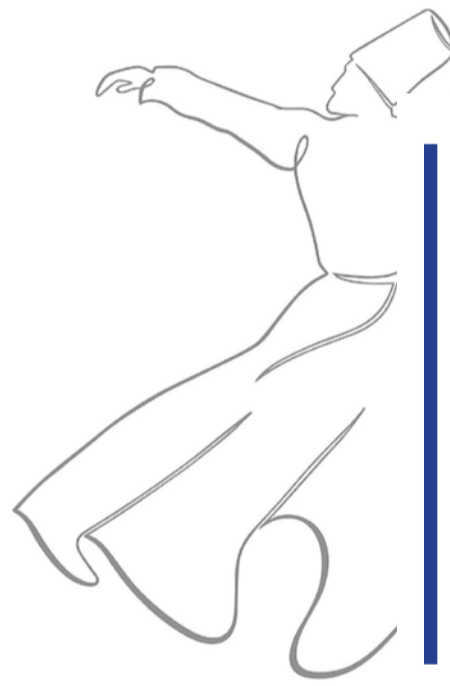
A land rich in ancient heritage, breathtaking landscapes, and unforgettable cultural experiences, Turkiye offers a journey like no other. Recently, Kuwait Times embarked on a remarkable trip exploring the profound legacy of Rumi, the iconic Sufi poet and philosopher whose teachings transcend time and borders.

Centered around the Seb-i Arus ceremonies in Konya, which commemorated the 751st anniversary of Rumi's passing, the journey was a celebration of love, spirituality and unity. These events honored Rumi's philosophy of embracing humanity and provided an opportunity to witness the mesmerizing whirling dervishes and immerse participants in the vibrant culture and history of Konya, Karaman and Ankara.

back to Neolithic times, with the UNESCO-listed Catalhoyuk as a testament to the region's ancient civilization. The Catalhoyuk Information and Visitor Centre enriched this heritage with interactive displays. Konya is also renowned for its cuisine, featuring dishes like etli ekmek (a pizza-like dish) and firin kebabi (oven-baked meat). These dishes reflect the region's Seljuk and Mevlevi traditions.



Etili ekmek



Unique blend of history, culture and spirituality



Anitkabir, Ankara

economic activity. Landmarks like Anitkabir, the mausoleum of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, and the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations highlight its historical significance. Ankara also offers a vibrant culinary scene, featuring delicacies like Bey pazari guveci and the iconic Ankara simit.

Anitkabir: The Eternal Resting Place of Ataturk
Anitkabir, located on Rasattepe Hill in Ankara, is the mausoleum of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the founder of the Republic of Turkiye. It stands as a symbol of the Turkish nation's respect and admiration for its leader, blending grand architectural design with profound historical significance.

Completed in 1953, Anitkabir combines modernist design with elements inspired by ancient Anatolian architecture. The structure is characterized by symmetrical lines, imposing columns and expansive courtyards. Built with materials sourced from various regions of Turkiye, the mausoleum reflects national unity.

Key features include Lions' Road (Aslanli Yol), a 262-meter ceremonial pathway flanked by 24 lion statues that leads to the main complex. The Mausoleum Hall houses Ataturk's sarcophagus, surrounded by reliefs and inscriptions that commemorate his achievements and vision. The Independence Tower and Freedom Tower flank the entrance, symbolizing the nation's struggle for independence and commitment to democracy. The Peace Park enveloping Anitkabir features trees and plants donated by over 25 countries, symbolizing Ataturk's dedication to peace and international cooperation.

Anitkabir also hosts a museum that chronicles Ataturk's life and the founding of the Turkish Republic. It features personal belongings, historical documents and displays on the War of Independence, offering visitors an immersive experience of Turkiye's transformative era.

where ancient traditions, spiritual legacies and modern achievements coexist harmoniously. By exploring Rumi's teachings, savoring regional delicacies and marveling at historical landmarks, participants were immersed in an experience that celebrated the country's timeless heritage.

This recent journey through Konya, Karaman and Ankara encapsulated Turkiye's essence —



Anitkabir

From ancient Neolithic sites and majestic Seljuk architecture to delectable regional cuisines and dynamic modernity, the trip offered an enriching exploration of Turkiye's timeless treasures. The journey began with the commemoration of the 751st anniversary of Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi's passing during the Seb-i Arus ceremonies in Konya, a celebration of unity and love. Known as the "Wedding Night", this event marks Rumi's spiritual union with the divine, highlighted by the Sema performances of whirling dervishes.

Konya: The City of Whirling Dervishes

Konya, a central Anatolian city, serves as the cultural heart of Rumi's legacy. It is home to the Mevlana Museum, where visitors explored Rumi's teachings and artifacts. Konya's history dates

Karaman: A Window to Antiquity

Karaman, another city in Central Anatolia, boasts a history dating back to 8000 BCE. It served as a military and trade hub for the Hittites and later became the Karamanid state's capital. Notable landmarks include Karaman Castle, Hatuniye Madrasa and Mader-i Mevlana Mosque, the latter being significant to Rumi's early life. The city's culinary specialties included Divle obruk cheese, aged in natural sinkholes, and dishes like batirik and Zeyve kebab.

Ankara: The Modern and Historical Capital

Ankara, Turkiye's capital, blends modernity with a deep historical lineage. Known for its role in the War of Independence and the establishment of the Republic, Ankara is a hub of political, cultural and



Beysehri Esrefoglu Mosque in Konya.



Mevlana Museum in Konya.



Nation's Library in Ankara.



boulevard

A green getaway



At the heart of Saimiya lies a paradise that embodies the very essence of leisure. With its bustling gardens and stunning layout, Boulevard is a top destination that offers a unique blend of outdoors, entertainment, shopping and dining experiences.

The park features a diverse range of activities and attractions for all ages. "Boulevard is a wonderful place to spend the weekends. My kids love it so much. It is a must-visit for Kuwaitis, expats and tourists alike," Norah Ahmed told Kuwait Times as she played with her children.

"This place is quite unique. It is a perfect blend of modernity and tradition. The first thing that captured my attention was its striking design,"

said Prisca Ben, an African expat, whose sentiments were echoed by Ahmed Bader, a Kuwaiti engineer.

The park is renowned for its lush greenery, featuring diverse plant species, trees and meticulously maintained lawns. Interspersed with man-made lakes and rivulets, it provides picturesque settings for leisurely walks and relaxation. A notable feature is the walking bridge and a color-changing tunnel, enhancing the park's charm, especially during evening hours.

"Boulevard is a hub for art and entertainment. Companies and individuals host various events and exhibitions that showcase local and international artists. Visitors can take a leisurely stroll and admire the beautiful flora. It's the perfect spot to



By Chidi Emmanuel

relax and take a break from the hustle and bustle of the city," explained Abdel Waleed, a Jordanian expat working in one of the shops in the park's mall.



WHAT'S ON IN KUWAIT

Event: Bugsha
Location: Souq Sharq Walkpath
Date: December 26-28, 2024
Time: 2 pm to 11 pm



Event: The Corner Festival
Location: The Corner - Shuwaikh
Date: December 25-28, 2024
Time: 6:30 pm to 8:30 pm



Event: The Walk festival (activities and circus)
Location: The Walk Mall
Date: December 26 to January 5

Event: The Big Bounce Arabia
Location: Al-Khairan Mall
Date: December 26 to January 4



Event: Winter Market
Location: Al-Khairan Mall
Date: December 26 to January 1



Event: Al-Farsi Kite
Location: Bnaider - Road 258
Date: December 27, 2024
Time: 1 pm to 5 pm



Event: Red Palace activities
Location: Red Palace
Date: December 27- 28, 2024

Event: Pet Zone end of year show
Location: Pet Zone - Rai
Date: December 28, 2024

Event: Madang New Year party
Location: Madang
Date: December 28, 2024
Time: 5 pm



Event: Treasure Hunt
Location: The Scientific Center
Date: December 28, 2024

Sports

Australia's top order fires to take charge of 4th Test against India

India's Kohli fined for Konstas shoulder bump during fourth Test

MELBOURNE: Australia's top four all slammed 50 or better on Thursday to take a firm grip on day one of the fourth Test against India, with fearless teenage opener Sam Konstas stealing the show. Batting after captain Pat Cummins won the toss on a steamy day, the hosts reached 311-6 by the close in front of more than 87,000 fans at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. They were aided by some inconsistent early bowling and a flying start from Konstas.

The 19-year-old blasted a hugely entertaining 60 off 65 balls in a debut to remember, pounding 18 off one Jasprit Bumrah over and having a run-in with superstar Virat Kohli. At the close, Steve Smith was not out 68 and Pat Cummins was eight. Marnus Labuschagne made 72 and Usman Khawaja 57.

All the bowlers were punished but they rallied with four wickets in the final session, including dangerman Travis Head for a duck, to haul themselves back into the contest. Bumrah led the charge, ending with 3-75.

"It was quite surreal with the big crowd, the biggest crowd I've ever played before," said Konstas. "I just played with freedom and backed myself. Lucky to get a few runs. A bit disappointed with the way I got out but hopefully we have got a bit of momentum for tomorrow."

The five-match series is locked at 1-1 after India won by 295 runs in Perth before being crushed by 10 wickets in Adelaide. The rain-affected third Test in Brisbane was drawn. "A lot of credit to the way Sam played. The intent he showed sort of put us on the back foot," said Indian batting coach Abhishek Nayyar.

"But it took a lot of character for our bowlers to stick in there. It wasn't the easiest conditions to bowl. At times like that it is important to stick to your plans and post-lunch we came back really strong." With Konstas in for the axed Nathan McSweney, he and Khawaja shared an 89-run opening partnership—the hosts' best of the series—before the teenager

was undone by the spin of Ravindra Jadeja. Australia's youngest-ever opener faced the first over from a menacing Bumrah and survived despite the Indian spearhead repeatedly beating his bat.

Tension

Konstas said before the match he had a plan to combat Bumrah, and as he got his eye in he incredibly reverse ramped him for two fours and a six in one over, bringing the crowd alive. A frustrated Kohli forcefully bumped shoulders with him at one point and they exchanged words, which could see both players in trouble if the match referee takes the matter further.

"I was just doing my gloves and I think he accidentally bumped me. But that's just cricket, the tension," said Konstas. He was unfazed and slammed 18 off the next Bumrah over, including another six. His half-century came off just 52 balls—the third-fastest on debut for Australia.

At the other end Khawaja, twice the age of his opening partner, was content to be the support act, grinding his way to a 27th Test 50 in a welcome return to form. Bumrah finally removed him after a 121-ball stay with Khawaja's pull shot going only as far as KL Rahul at midwicket, leaving Labuschagne and Smith to see them to tea.

Smith survived three lbw appeals from Akash Deep when they returned before India finally earned a reward when spinner Washington Sundar, in the side for Shubman Gill, tempted Labuschagne into a drive that was collected by Kohli.

The dangerous Head marched to the crease after plundering centuries in both Adelaide and Brisbane but only lasted seven balls. Bumrah did the damage, with the Australian leaving a delivery that clattered into his off stump, before the Indian star accounted for Mitchell Marsh (4) and Alex Carey (31) fell to Deep.

Meanwhile, Cricket's governing body fined In-



MELBOURNE: Australian batsman Marnus Labuschagne throws his bat in the air after his dismissal on the first day of the fourth cricket Test match between Australia and India at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) in Melbourne on December 26, 2024. — AFP

dian batting superstar Virat Kohli 20 percent of his match fee for deliberately bumping shoulders with young Australian batsman Sam Konstas in the fourth Test on Thursday.

The Indian veteran made forceful contact with the 19-year-old debutant after Konstas belted the bowlers around the Melbourne Cricket Ground on his way to a blistering 60 off 65 balls. It sparked a heated exchange between the pair in the first session, with Konstas' fellow opener Usman Khawaja and umpire Michael Gough intervening.

The International Cricket Council (ICC) announced on Thursday that Kohli "has been fined 20 percent of his match fee and awarded one demerit point for breaching Level 1 of the ICC Code of Conduct". The code relates to "inappropriate physical contact with a player, player support personnel, umpire, match referee or any other person including a spectator during an international match," the ICC said in a statement. "No formal hearing was needed as Kohli accepted the sanctions proposed by match referee Andy Pycroft," it added. — AFP

Lakers pip Warriors after another LeBron-Curry classic

NEW YORK: LeBron James and Steph Curry served up a Christmas Day feast as their rivalry delivered another classic with the Los Angeles Lakers edging the Golden State Warriors 115-113 on Wednesday. Curry made a stunning 31-foot three point throw with 7.1 seconds left on the clock to tie the game, only for Austin Reaves to win the game for the Lakers with a driving layup with 1.1 seconds left.

The 36-year-old Curry and James, three years his senior, had traded three-pointers down the stretch as fans were treated to a ding-dong finale from the two future Hall of Famers. James put up 31 points and ten assists without the support of teammate Anthony Davis, who left the game in the first quarter after turning his ankle.

Game-winner Reaves enjoyed a triple double with 26 points, 10 rebounds and 10 assists. Curry's 38 points included 8-15 three point shooting while Anthony Wiggins made 21 points and 12 rebounds, but Golden State fell to an 11th loss in 14 games.

"Today is the day of giving, and that's what me and Steph continue to do and try to do for our fans, for our beautiful game," said James. "We don't know how many times we're going to be able to have this matchup. We try to give the game what it deserves, because it's given us so much, we try to give it right back," he added.

James was playing in a record 19th Christmas Day game and took the occasion to take a gentle swipe at the NFL's encroachment on the day. "I love the NFL but Christmas is our day," he said. Mikal Bridges and the New York Knicks edged Victor Wembanyama and the San Antonio Spurs 117-114 in a thriller at Madison Square Garden.

French star Wembanyama put up 42 points with 18 rebounds and four blocks for the Spurs but Bridges took the glory with a brilliant



BOSTON: Jayson Tatum #0 of the Boston Celtics drives to the basket during the game against the Philadelphia 76ers on December 25, 2024 at the TD Garden in Boston, Massachusetts. — AFP

15-point fourth-quarter display that left him with a season-high 41 points and the win.

The 20-year-old, who stands 7-foot-3 (2.21m), was 16-31 on shooting and made six of 16 three-point throws and while Bridges took the applause from the home crowd, he was quick to praise the Frenchman.

"From 40 feet out, from right under the rim, from 15 feet out, he's just unbelievable, just to see what he's doing, credit to him and how much work he has put in," said Bridges. The 28-year-old Bridges, who was traded from the Brooklyn Nets in July, shot 17-25 from the field and was six for nine on three-point attempts as his team improved to 20-10.

San Antonio were just a point behind with two minutes remaining before Bridges made back-to-back jumpers to open up a five-point lead. Karl-Anthony Towns with 21 points and Jalen Brunson with 20 points

and nine assists were crucial for the Knicks in the win.

76ers upset Celtics

Defending champions the Boston Celtics (22-8) lost back-to-back games for the first time this season when they were upset at home by the Philadelphia 76ers 118-114. Injury-prone 76ers star Joel Embiid hurt his ankle in a pregame fall but was able to start and showed his importance with 27 points, nine rebounds and the game clinching free throws at the end to clinch the win for the 11-17 Philadelphia.

Tyres Maxey scored 33 points and made 12 assists with his 13 points in the fourth quarter crucial as Philadelphia, who had led by 16 at the break, recovered from Boston's third quarter rally. Jayson Tatum top scored for the Celtics with 32 points and also grabbed 15 rebounds. — AFP



HOUSTON: Derrick Henry #22 of the Baltimore Ravens avoids a tackle from Eric Murray #23 of the Houston Texans during the first quarter at NRG Stadium in Houston, Texas. — AFP

Chiefs secure AFC top seed, Ravens crush Texans

MIAMI: The Kansas City Chiefs clinched the top seed in the AFC with Patrick Mahomes throwing three touchdowns in a dominant 29-10 Christmas Day win at the Pittsburgh Steelers on Wednesday.

The defending Super Bowl champions will now have a first-round bye and home-field advantage throughout the playoffs but a third straight loss for the Steelers means they no longer control their own destiny in the race for the AFC North divisional title.

The Chiefs (15-1) look to be hitting their prime form at just the right time but the Steelers (10-6), who have also clinched a post-season berth, have now lost three in a row and sit behind the Baltimore Ravens in the AFC North.

Mahomes, who threw for 320 yards on 29 of 38 passing, was in charge from the outset, finding Xavier Worthy with a seven-yard touchdown pass before connecting with Justin Watson on an 11-yard pass to open up a 13-0 lead in the first quarter.

The Steelers thought they had got back in the game when Jaylen Warren ran into the end-zone but the score was ruled out by a holding penalty. The frustration was increased on the next play when Steelers quarterback Russell Wilson was picked off by Justin Reid.

Pittsburgh did give themselves some hope in the second quarter with Wilson finishing off a 72-yard, 11-play drive, with a one-yard rush. The teams exchanged field goals in the third before the Chiefs ran away with the game in the fourth.

A two-yard rush from Kareem Hunt made it 22-10 and then Mahomes found his trusted target Travis Kelce in the end-zone with a 12-yard pass to settle the contest. Kelce, caught eight passes for 84 yards to pass the 1,000 receptions mark, only the third tight-end to achieve that milestone after Tony Gonzalez and Jason Witten.

"I thought it was a full team performance," said Mahomes. "Defense stepped up, offense stepped up, everybody had their imprint on the game," he said. "We are getting healthy at the right time, the big guy (Kelce) leads us off but we have got guys everywhere so it's nice," he added.

Steelers head coach Mike Tomlin was frank in his assessment of his team's loss, which follows defeats to the Philadelphia Eagles and Baltimore. "That sucked, to be blunt," said Tomlin. "Not the type of ball we wanna play and really kind of eerily similar to our last performance in that we are not doing the fundamental things well enough. — AFP

Hungry Sabalenka ready for more Slam success

BRISBANE: World number one Aryna Sabalenka says she is "fresh and ready to go" in her bid for a third straight Australian Open title, warning she has plenty of room for improvement. The 26-year-old enjoyed a sensational 2024, reaching seven finals and winning four titles, including the US Open.

Her year was kickstarted by defending her Australian Open crown, beating China's high-flying Zheng Qinwen in the final. Should she win it again, she will become the first woman to claim three straight Melbourne Park singles titles since Martina Hingis between 1997-1999.

"I feel fresh and ready to go," the Belarusian said, according to the WTA website Thursday, after arriving for the Brisbane International which starts on Sunday ahead of the Australian Open from January 12.

"I love Australia and I always come here hungry and always come here ready. I feel all the support here, and I think that's the best thing about Australia, that people are really, really, into tennis."

Sabalenka also began 2024 in Brisbane, reaching the final without losing a set only to crash to Kazakhstan's Elena Rybakina in the decider. She spent time in the off-season at her home in Florida before heading to the Middle East to prepare for Australia



BRISBANE: Belarus' Aryna Sabalenka poses during a media conference ahead of the Brisbane International tennis tournament at Kangaroo Point Cliffs in Brisbane. — AFP

and will use the Brisbane tournament to fine-tune her Grand Slam preparations.

"You work hard on lots of things in the pre-season," she said. "The first tournament before the major tournament is the one where you can try it out and see what's going to work well for you, and what's not."

Despite her rise through the ranks to be the player to beat heading into 2025, Sabalenka said there were still parts of her game that need work. "Oh, there is so many things to improve," she said. "I mean, I'm not that good with maybe my game at the net in singles. There is a lot of things to improve in my touch game."

"There is so many things, even my serve is not as good as I want it to be, so there is always (elements) to improve." — AFP

Rybakina ready to put Ivanisevic insight to test at United Cup

PERTH: Former Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina expressed confidence Thursday that her new partnership with Novak Djokovic's former coach Goran Ivanisevic will pay dividends, starting at the mixed-teams United Cup. The world number six completed a Dubai training block with the Croat before joining her Kazakhstan compatriots for the Perth leg of the 18-nation tournament, which starts the 2025 season and is also being played in Sydney.

Kazakhstan face Spain in the opening tie on Friday, with Rybakina a favorite against 54th-ranked Jessica Bouzas Maneiro. The match will be the first test of her new collaboration with the 53-year-old Ivanisevic, who parted ways last season with 24-time Grand Slam champion Djokovic. "We had a couple of weeks together. Goran's a fun guy," said Rybakina, the beaten finalist in the 2023 Australian Open. "I can't say (too) much about our work, but we had a good preparation. Not much time has passed but I'm already getting experience from him, especially as a player, how he used to prepare."

"I'm learning every day, I'm feeling much better physically and hopefully we can do well here," she said after an injury-marred 2024. Ivanisevic came on board with Rybakina in November after Djokovic shook up his team as he hits the twilight of a remarkable career, replacing him with Andy Murray. — AFP

Sports

Troubled Manchester City held by lowly Everton

Chelsea stunned by Fulham in blow to Premier League title hopes

LONDON: Erling Haaland had a second-half penalty saved as crisis-torn Manchester City failed to end their dismal run with a 1-1 draw against lowly Everton, while title contenders Chelsea suffered a first home defeat against Fulham since 1979 on Thursday.

Champions City have just one victory in their last 13 games in all competitions as their Christmas schedule started in disappointing fashion. Bernardo Silva put City in front early on before Iliman Ndiaye salvaged a point for Everton.

City are languishing in seventh place and sit five points adrift of the top four, with their astonishing decline showing no sign of ending. City boss Pep Guardiola conceded ahead of the game that his troubled side are at risk of failing to qualify for the Champions League for the first time in 15 years and their latest setback was another blow to that target.

"Of course we need results and we didn't get it. The team played really good again in all departments and unfortunately could not win," Guardiola said. "We accept it. It is life. We did not expect it to not win games many times. But what do you have to do? Continue."

Everton had kept five clean sheets in their last six games but were breached after just 14 minutes. Jeremy Doku fed Silva and his effort across goal deflected off Jarrad Branthwaite and looped beyond the helpless Jordan Pickford.

Everton levelled when Manuel Akanji sliced an attempted clearance into the path of Ndiaye, who fired into the top corner for Everton's first away goal in over two months. Seven minutes into the second half, Haaland had the chance to end his longest goal drought at the Etihad but Pickford dived low to his right to make the save.

At Stamford Bridge, second-placed Chelsea were stunned by Fulham's late fightback for a 2-1 win

in a dramatic west London derby. Cole Palmer put Chelsea ahead after 16 minutes, the England forward drilling home from the edge of the area after weaving through the Fulham defence in dazzling style.

Forest on the rise

But Fulham levelled with eight minutes left when Antonee Robinson's cross was headed down by Timothy Castagne and Harry Wilson nodded in from close range. Chelsea were furious, claiming Alex Iwobi had fouled Pedro Neto in the build-up to the goal.

But there was worse to come for the Blues in stoppage-time when Rodrigo Muniz converted Sasa Lukic's pass with a clinical strike. Chelsea are four points behind leaders Liverpool, who have two games in hand and host Leicester later on Thursday.

Nottingham Forest climbed to third place after a 1-0 win against spluttering Tottenham at the City Ground. Forest went ahead in the 28th minute when Anthony Elanga raced onto Morgan Gibbs-White's pass and stroke a composed finish past Fraser Forster.

Forest boss Nuno Espirito Santo had just 17 games in charge of Tottenham before being sacked in 2021. But Forest's fourth successive win was sweet revenge for Nuno, whose former club had Djed Spence sent off in the closing moments for a second booking.

Tottenham are stuck in 11th place as the pressure mounts on boss Ange Postecoglou. Newcastle swatted aside 10-man Aston Villa 3-0, moving up to fifth place after winning three consecutive league games for the first time since 2023. Anthony Gordon struck with a superb curling strike after just two minutes at St James' Park.

Villa's Jhon Duran was sent off in the 32nd min-



MANCHESTER: Manchester City's Norwegian striker #09 Erling Haaland (L) takes the ball past Everton's English goalkeeper #01 Jordan Pickford (C) during the English Premier League football match between Manchester City and Everton at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester, north west England, on December 26, 2024. — AFP

ute for violent conduct after stamping on Newcastle's Fabian Schar. Alexander Isak made Newcastle's numerical advantage count in the 59th minute as the Swedish striker tapped in his seventh goal in his last six appearances.

Joelinton wrapped up the points in stoppage-time with a curler from 18 yards. Jarrod Bow-

en's 59th-minute goal gave West Ham a 1-0 win at bottom of the table Southampton after the visitors saw Guido Rodriguez's red card overturned by VAR. It was a frustrating start for new Saints boss Ivan Juric, who has replaced the sacked Russell Martin. Bournemouth and Crystal Palace shared a goalless draw at the Vitality Stadium. — AFP

Sydney-Hobart yacht crews set off on gale-threatened race

SYDNEY: Crews of more than 100 yachts set sail Thursday on a "boat-breaking" Sydney-Hobart yacht race, with gale-force winds and high seas forecast for the gruelling bluewater classic.

Under blue, mid-summer skies, spectators crowded onto boats and lined the shore of a breezy Sydney Harbour as a starting cannon set the fleet on a dash to the open ocean. In a dramatic opening contest, reigning line honors champion LawConnect lost an early lead when one of her sails failed to unfurl.

Comanche, four-time line honors champion and the event's record holder, took over as frontrunner. By late evening, Comanche was speeding southwards down Australia's east coast with a lead of more than eight nautical miles over LawConnect.

LawConnect edged Comanche to win by just 51 seconds last year and the two 100-foot supermaxis are again expected to battle for line honors. Alive, last year's overall winner of the Tattersall Cup, which takes into account boat size and other factors, was the first casualty of this year's race, retiring with reported engine issues.

Of the 104 entrants at the start of the race, 102 remain after the withdrawals of Alive and the two-handed Transcendence Rudy Project, which dismasted. Race crews face gales, storms and big waves as they sail south and then tackle the notorious Bass Strait towards the Tasmanian state capital Hobart. Weather is a critical factor in the 628-nautical mile event, first held in 1945.

'Boat-breaking'

Six men died, five boats sank and 55 sailors were



SYDNEY: This handout image taken and received from Rolex on December 26, 2024 shows the yacht Whisper competing at the start of the annual Sydney to Hobart yacht race on Boxing Day on Sydney Harbor. — AFP

rescued in 1998, when a deep depression exploded over the fleet in the Bass Strait. "We are seeing strong wind warnings developing through the afternoon today and getting up to gale, so about 35 knots," meteorologist Gabrielle Woodhouse said in the last briefing hours before the start.

A strong south-westerly change would move across Bass Strait early on Friday morning, potentially bringing showers, lightning, thunder, and waves of up to 4 meters (13 feet). "It's going to be a fast and furious first night out there on our way down to Hobart," said Matt Allen, co-skipper of Comanche.

"It's probably going to be boat-breaking sort of conditions," Allen said ahead of the race. "The really small boats are really going to cop it a few times in

Pakistan opening bowler Khuram Shahzad struck twice and Mohammad Abbas claimed a late wicket as South Africa reached 82 for three at the close. Pakistan's approach made for frenetic cricket after Bosch broke a cautious opening stand of 36 when he had Pakistan captain Shan Masood caught at first slip for 17. Opening partner Saim Ayub (14) and Babar Azam (4) followed in quick succession but Pakistan opted for attack rather than a defensive rebuild.

Pakistan coach Aaqib Javed said in a pre-match television interview that he didn't expect a significant difference in approach from his players after they beat South Africa 3-0 in a one-day series which ended on Sunday.

'Not backing down'

Javed reasoned that positive stroke play was required to score runs on a seam-friendly pitch. It seemed the majority of Pakistan's batsmen were

still in aggressive one-day mode. Both Paterson and Bosch benefitted from batsmen playing poor strokes.

"When we saw them really coming at us we just said, be patient," said Bosch. "There was enough in the wicket that if you held your area there was always a ball that was going to get them out."

"It was (about) holding our nerve and not backing down," added Bosch. Saud Shakeel hit three boundaries off his first five balls after the loss of Azam before gloving a catch to wicketkeeper Kyle Verreyne to be out for 14 off six balls.

Kamran Ghulam was undeterred, racing to a 52-ball half-century and sharing a rapid 81-run fifth-wicket stand with Mohammad Rizwan (27). Ghulam went for his shots, sometimes to the frustration of the South African bowlers, and his feisty effort included an exchange of words with Kagiso Rabada – South Africa's most impressive bowler despite not taking a wicket – and Verreyne. — AFP

Gasperini's fairytale of Atalanta under threat from Napoli

NAPOLI: Atalanta's winning run and top spot are at risk when the Serie A leaders take on fourth-placed Lazio this weekend, with Napoli and Inter Milan ready to pounce should Gian Piero Gasperini's side finally slip up.

Atalanta appear unstoppable, with a club record 11 successive league victories sending them soaring up the table to what seemed an unlikely position earlier this season. They slumped to three defeats in their opening five games, including a 4-0 thumping at Inter, but a remarkable upturn in form has their fans dreaming of a first-ever league title.

Gasperini led Atalanta to their first European trophy last season, ending Bayer Leverkusen's 51 match unbeaten run to win the Europa League, the Bergamo club's second major trophy in their 117-year history. That was Gasperini's first-ever trophy win, a just reward for his loyalty and work put in at Atalanta since joining in 2016.

Gasperini helped turn a club which had bounced between the top two tiers into a side consistently competing in European football, but his reign could easily have ended prematurely. In his first season, Atalanta lost four of their opening five games, but the club kept faith and finished fourth, their highest ever finish in the top flight at that stage.

Atalanta's success has been built, not on high-spending, but rather an exceptional youth academy and scouting program, along with Gasperini's aggressive, attacking playing style and an ability to get the best out of players.

The club sells big – in the last three seasons Teun Koopmeiners joined Juventus, Rasmus Hojlund signed for Manchester United and Cristian Romero went to Tottenham Hotspur – while new signings arrive for much less, often having failed elsewhere.

Gianluca Scamacca lasted one season at West Ham United, before scoring 12 league goals and six in the Europa League last season with Atalanta. After the striker's anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) injury in pre-season the club bought Mateo Retegui from Genoa, where he scored seven league goals last season. He already has 12 this campaign, topping the Serie A scoring charts.

Charles De Ketelaere failed to find the net in his debut season at AC Milan. Atalanta took him on loan last season and he scored 10 league goals before joining on a permanent move. Ademola Lookman rarely impressed at the likes of Everton and RB Leipzig, but was recently named African Footballer of the Year, and scored a hat-trick in the Europa League final. — Reuters

Paterson, Bosch give S Africa edge over Pakistan in first Test

CENTURION: Debutant fast bowler Corbin Bosch said South Africa reaped the rewards for "holding our nerve" against aggressive Pakistan batting on the first day of the first Test against South Africa at SuperSport Park on Thursday.

Bosch, the son of a Test fast bowler, took a wicket with his first ball in Test cricket and finished with four for 63 as Pakistan were bowled out for 211. Dane Paterson, enjoying a late-career surge at the age of 35, took five for 61 – his second five-wicket haul in successive Tests.

Classifieds

Clinics & Hospitals

Clinics

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

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

Hospitals

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

Change of Name

I AJIM AKABAR MADRE, holder of Indian Passport No. P1092844 having permanent address 101c, Khatib Mohalla, At Post Saitavade, TAI/Dist Ratnagiri, State Maharashtra, India, Pin code: 415613, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will read as (Given name) Azim Akbar Ali and (Surname) Madre.
#6616—27/12/2024

Zain's fan zones bring more excitement to the Khaleeji Zain 26 experience

Live match broadcasts, competitions & prizes, daily activities and more across 5 locations



Zain's fan zones welcome fans throughout the tournament.



The tournament mascot, Haydo.

KUWAIT: Since the first whistle blew to mark the start of Khaleeji Zain 26, Zain, the Title Partner of the tournament, has been committed to enriching the fans' experience both inside and outside the stadium. Through dedicated fan zones spread across Kuwait, Zain celebrates this regional sporting event throughout the tournament's duration.

Zain welcomes fans daily at Murouj from 4 PM to 10 PM, in addition to the fan zone at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium on match days. Live matches are broadcasted on massive screens, complemented by engaging competitions, exciting prizes, interactive entertainment such as traditional band performances, and a variety of sports-themed activities for children, among others.

Zain also invites Gulf football enthusiasts to visit fan zones at the Souq Sharq waterfront, The Walk Mall, and The Avenues Mall, all of which host exceptional sports and entertainment activities throughout the tournament.

Zain's engagement with fans extends beyond the activities in the fan zones. The company also organizes a variety

of exciting segments and competitions, offering valuable prizes to match attendees at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium and Jaber Al-Mubarak Stadium before kick-off and during halftime. These include features such as the "Fan of the Match" segment, which highlights outstanding supporters, Zain's quiz competitions, and more.

The tournament, which began last week with a spectacular opening ceremony, will conclude on January 3, 2025. This marks the fifth time Kuwait has hosted the Gulf Cup. As Zain warmly welcomes Gulf delegations and fans to this premier regional event, the company reaffirms that its strategic partnership with this prominent championship underscores its commitment to supporting major sports events and competitions, enhancing Kuwait's standing in the regional sports arena.

Zain's partnership with this tournament further emphasizes its ongoing support for sports at both the local and regional levels. Ahead of the competition's kick-off, Zain hosted the tournament's original trophy at its headquarters,

serving as the first stop of its promotional tour in Kuwait. Zain employees and their families had the unique opportunity to capture memorable moments with the trophy before the tournament officially commenced.

The promotional tour included multiple stops, such as Kuwait International Airport, partner and sponsor premises, and The Walk Mall. The tour also showcased the trophy and official match ball at Zain's Murouj fan zone. Zain took pride in welcoming Gulf teams and delegations to Kuwait by offering exclusive lines featuring their respective country codes and complimentary lines for guests to enhance their connectivity experience during their stay in Kuwait. These were distributed at both air and land entry points.

Additionally, Zain collaborated with Kuwait Times to release a special edition celebrating the launch of Khaleeji Zain 26. This edition features detailed information about the tournament, participating teams, match schedules, and more. It is available at Zain's fan zones throughout the event.

Saudi to host 27th edition of Gulf Cup

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The General Assembly of the Arabian Gulf Cup Federation has approved Saudi Arabia's hosting of the next edition of the Gulf Cup (GCC 27), which will be held in Sep-

tember 2026. The General Assembly's approval of the Kingdom's hosting of the 27th edition of the Arabian Gulf Cup came unanimously, through the vote of the members of the General Assembly during its meeting held today in Kuwait.

The meeting was attended by Saudi Arabian Football Federation President Yasser Al-Meshal, Secretary General Ibrahim Al Qasim, and Board of Directors member Muayad Al Shehri. Al-Meshal expressed his thanks and gratitude to the wise leadership for the generous and unlimited support for the sports sector in general and

football in particular, which resulted in the Kingdom's selection to host the 27th Arabian Gulf Cup.

He also praised the efforts of Prince Abdulaziz bin Turki Al-Faisal, Minister of Sports and President of the Saudi Olympic and Paralympic Committee, for the continuous interest and follow-up to harness all capabilities to host various major sporting events.

A series of successes

Al-Meshal thanked Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, President of the Arabian Gulf Cup Federation, and the members of the General Assembly of

the Arabian Gulf Cup Federation for their confidence in choosing the Kingdom to host the major Gulf event.

He also praised the efforts of the Federation in strengthening the bonds of brotherhood among the Gulf people through the great interest in this historic tournament, which carries noble meanings and enjoys the attention of Gulf and Arab fans in general.

The President of the Saudi Federation welcomed the fans from the brotherly Gulf countries on the land of the Kingdom in a new edition of the prestigious tournament, which the Kingdom is honored to host again.

Bahrain beat Iraq to advance in the semis of Gulf Cup

KUWAIT: Bahrain qualified for the semi-finals of the Khaleeji Zain 26 after beating Iraq 2-0, in the second round of the second group of the tournament, on Wednesday evening. Bahrain topped the group table with 6 points, while Iraq's score froze at 3 points in third place.

The start of the match came quickly from both sides, looking to snatch an early goal to confuse the opponent's accounts. Mahdi Abdul-Jabbar missed a great chance for Bahrain in the ninth minute after he was completely alone in front of goal, but he shot over the crossbar.

Iraq responded quickly with a shot from Ahmed



KUWAIT: Bahraini and Iraqi players fight for the ball.

Yassin that was well saved by the Bahrain goalkeeper. The Iraqi national team controlled the center of the field as time passed and tried to penetrate the solid

Bahraini defense through its star player Ali Jassim, while Bahrain's quick counterattacks posed a great inconvenience to the Iraqi defenses.

Mohammed Marhoon tried to surprise the Iraqi team with a shot from inside the box, but it went wide of the goal in the 30th minute. In the 38th minute, Ali Meden scored the first goal for Bahrain after an assist from Mohammed Marhoon, and the first half ended with Bahrain leading by one goal.

Bahrain did not give its Iraqi counterpart a chance to regain its balance and surprised it one minute after the start of the second half with the second goal through the brilliant Ali Meden, who followed up on the rebound of the ball from the Iraqi keeper.

In the 56th minute, Iraqi striker Ayman Hussein almost reduced the deficit, but Bahrain goalkeeper Ibrahim Lutfallah saved his close-range shot. The Bahrain goalkeeper continued his brilliance and saved a solo shot by Iraqi striker Muhammad Ali in the 61st minute.

Kuwait eyes semis berth as fans rally

KUWAIT: Kuwait football fans are on cloud nine this week, and head coach Juan Pizzi aims to keep the feel-good momentum alive as The Blues prepare to face Asian champions Qatar at the Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium on Friday night. The Khaleeji Zain 26 hosts currently sit atop Group A with Oman on four points after a dramatic 2-1 victory over the highly-rated UAE on Tuesday night. The result has sparked a rush for tickets, with a capacity crowd expected for the final group-stage match.

"It was a very difficult match on Tuesday, and of course, the players are tired, but they are optimistic for the game against Qatar," Pizzi said at the pre-match press conference held at the Crowne Plaza. "The fans are understandably happy because we defeated a very strong UAE team. The players returned to training yesterday and showed their mental readiness. They

are focused on Qatar, and we will play to qualify for the semifinals.

"There is very little difference between the eight teams in this tournament, as we saw in Yemen's match against Saudi Arabia (2-3). We have full respect for all teams here, including Qatar, who are a very good side. I believe the team with the best physical fitness will win tomorrow's match."

Kuwait midfielder Mushari Ghannam noted the team's focus on preparation while staying grounded. "We are properly preparing for the match against Qatar, who are a very strong side as the champions of Asia. But this is the Gulf Cup, and it's a different scenario. We will build on the positives from the UAE game and address the negatives to keep our supporters happy." A draw will suffice for Kuwait to finish in the top two and secure a semifinal berth, while Qatar must win to advance.

Asian champions Qatar aim to spoil Kuwait's party on Friday night, needing a win by at least two goals to guarantee a place in the semi-finals. Qatar currently sits on one point from two matches, trailing Oman and Kuwait, who each have four points. At the pre-match press conference, head coach Luis Garcia acknowledged the challenge but expressed

confidence in his team. "It will be a very tough game. Kuwait is doing very well in front of their fans, but we are confident we can perform well and get the victory to advance to the semi-finals.

"Despite the short recovery time since Tuesday's match, I'm pleased with the players' fitness and mindset, which is crucial," Garcia added. Garcia has faced criticism for squad rotation, with young players given significant roles amid injuries and suspensions to senior team members. "We have three players unavailable due to injury and suspension, which affects us in such a short tournament. But we have a squad of 26 players, and everyone is ready to contribute.

"This tournament is an important opportunity for Qatar's young players to prove themselves in a big competition. We are proud of them, and they are doing really well. If we don't give them a chance now, the future will be problematic. Maybe it's their time." Asian Footballer of the Year Akram Afif is expected to lead the team once again, with Garcia praising him as "a teammate everyone would love to have."

UAE coach Paulo Bento remains optimistic about his team's chances despite a disappointing campaign so far. UAE must win their final Group A match

against Oman to qualify for the semi-finals. "The people, the press, like to assign blame, but that's not our job," Bento said at the pre-match press conference. "My job is to make the team play well, be better than the opponents, and win three points. We've not achieved that yet, but the performances were not bad.

"Mistakes are part of the game. We made them in the previous matches, and we may make them again. The key is to rise above them. Oman is a well-organized team with a coach who knows his players well. But we are optimistic and will give our best to win and qualify."

Oman, tied with Kuwait at the top of Group A, have impressed with disciplined defensive performances and dangerous transitions. Oman coach Rasheed Jaber emphasized that all four teams still have a chance to qualify. "The chance is equal for all four teams, so tomorrow is like starting from zero points," Jaber said. "We are improving day by day and have the desire and effort to qualify. The result will define us, and I have full confidence in my players."

Both Group A matches — Kuwait vs Qatar and UAE vs Oman — will kick off simultaneously on Friday night, with the top two teams advancing to the semifinals.

Khaleeji Zain fans hail Kuwaiti hospitality, smooth organization

By Khaled Al-Abdulhadi

KUWAIT: Fans at the Bahrain-Iraq match, held on Dec 25 for the second match of Group B, shared their thoughts on the game. The diverse crowd, hailing from various backgrounds, praised the overall experience, including the ease of access at the border and the stadium.

Bahraini fan Ibrahim Al-Haddad expressed optimism about his team's performance. "The team played tactically well, reflecting the reputation of our national team. This is probably the best game they've played, even better than the previous one. Qualification to the semifinals is now 100 percent guaranteed, allowing the players to rest during their next match against Yemen," he said.

Wallaa Al-Mansouri, from Basra, Iraq, commended Bahrain's performance but criticized Iraq's approach. "We cannot rely on one player to receive the ball and finish the game. In football, the better team deserves to win. If Iraq continues playing this way, they won't qualify," he said. Wallaa expressed hope for a nostalgic final featuring Iraq and Kuwait, reminiscent of the 1980s. "I thank the Kuwaiti government, HH the Amir and the interior minister for facilitating everything for Iraqi fans. Kuwait will always be in our hearts."

Yaqoub, a Kuwaiti fan, praised Bahrain's performance and shared his prediction. "The Bahraini team was incredible, while Iraq fell short of expectations. I expect Bahrain to reach the finals and face Kuwait, with Kuwait winning 2-0." Iraqi fan Hussein Ali acknowledged Bahrain's superior performance and expressed concerns over Iraq's substitutions. "The Iraqi-Saudi match will be very challenging. If Iraq doesn't make it to the finals, I hope Kuwait does because their organization has been perfect, and they've been very supportive."

Nour Ali added, "The next game between Iraq and Saudi will be very close. In football, the team that seizes opportunities wins. Bahrain is a strong favorite for the final." A Bahraini fan emphasized the familial atmosphere at the game. "We came not just for the win but to support friends and family. The organization has been perfect. I even forgot my phone at customs but retrieved it easily."

Muhammad Al-Tamimi, an Iraqi fan, described the match as competitive and congratulated Bahrain on their victory. "Even though we lost, Bahraini people are our brothers, and they deserve the win. Today is their day; tomorrow will be ours. The organization was beautiful, and the border reception was amazing. Kuwait and its people are truly wonderful."

Ali Al-Afari, an Omani fan, praised both the match and the event's organization. "It's no surprise that Kuwait excels in hosting such events. Their hearts are always open to everyone. I hope the final will be between Oman and Kuwait." Iraqi fan Bahjat shared his positive experience visiting Kuwait. "Arriving here was so easy, and the security personnel were welcoming and helpful. I thank Kuwait for their hospitality; we are one family."

Bahraini fan Hussein Al-Hajari also commended the seamless travel experience. "Driving to Kuwait was easy, from finding bookings to parking. The organization was top-notch." Iraqi fan Feras Adnan, who traveled from the United States, said, "This was a beautiful game. In football, there are winners and losers. All teams in the tournament are highly competitive, making it hard to predict the finalists." Another Iraqi fan, Hussein, congratulated Bahrain and expressed hope for an Iraq-Kuwait final. "Hard luck to Iraq. Given the performance, the loss was expected. Everything in Kuwait, from our arrival to the stadium, was well-organized."

Ansam Al-Jabir, an Iraqi residing in Kuwait, said, "Both teams were strong. Of course, we hoped to win, but this is football. The organization was incredible." Mohammed Fadel, a Kuwaiti fan, observed, "Both teams were cautious in their play. Bahrain showed a slight edge, but Iraq still has a chance if they open up more in the next game."

Iraqi fan Mahmoud noted that Bahrain capitalized on their opportunities, saying, "The score doesn't reflect the title holders." Another fan, Ali Hasoun, agreed, emphasizing the importance of seizing chances and calling Iraq the favorites to win the tournament. Overall, fans applauded the efforts of Kuwait's organizing authorities, highlighting the seamless border procedures and exceptional hospitality throughout the event.