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## Kuwaiti FM meets Syrian leader

Kuwait urged to reopen Damascus embassy, resume ties • Kuwait sends first aid planeload to Syria



(Left) Kuwait's Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya meets Syria's new leader Ahmed Al-Sharaa in Damascus on Dec 30, 2024. (Right) The first Kuwaiti planeload of relief supplies heads to Syria on Dec 30, 2024 from Kuwait's Abdullah Al-Mubarak Air Base. — KUNA photos

**DAMASCUS:** Kuwait's Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya met Syria's new leader Ahmed Al-Sharaa in Damascus on Monday. Al-Yahya, accompanied by GCC Secretary General Jassem Al-Budaiwi, arrived in the Syrian capital heading a high-level delegation to Syria within the framework of GCC ministerial council recommendations of guaranteeing Syria's independence, sovereignty and unity, a message of support to the Syrian people's will. Kuwait is the current chair of the ministerial council.

Syria's newly appointed foreign minister Asaad Hassan Al-Shibani urged Kuwait to reopen its embassy in Damascus and resume relations with Syria. Speaking at a joint press conference, Shibani said: "We call with all love and joy on brothers in Kuwait to open their embassy in Damascus and resume diplomatic relations very soon."

Continued on Page 6

### NEWS IN BRIEF

#### Kuwait to tax MNCs 15%

**KUWAIT:** Finance Minister Noura Al-Fassam announced on Monday Kuwait will impose a domestic minimum top-up tax (DMTT) of 15 percent on multinational entities starting Jan 1, 2025. The tax aims to diversify income sources, reduce reliance on oil revenues and enhance economic competitiveness in line with the New Kuwait 2035 vision. The ministry will conduct workshops and meetings with affected companies and issue executive regulations to ensure smooth implementation. — KUNA

#### Maid held for killing baby

**KUWAIT:** The public prosecution said on Monday an Asian maid has been held for interrogation for allegedly killing the child of her sponsors by putting him in a washing machine. The public prosecution did not provide further details on the incident or the age of the child, but local media said the baby was just 15 months old. The prosecution said it has interrogated the maid and ordered a forensic examination of the body of the deceased infant.

#### 71 killed in Ethiopia accident

**ADDIS ABABA:** At least 71 people died in Ethiopia when a truck packed with passengers traveling to a wedding plunged into a river on Sunday. The accident occurred in Bona district in Sidama state. Wosneyeh Simion, spokesperson for the Sidama regional government, said on Monday at least 71 people had died, including 68 males and 3 females. He said that the driver had lost control of the "freight truck" — which was carrying 76 people, including those heading to the wedding and day laborers — when trying to turn a tight bend ahead of a bridge. — Agencies

#### UAE light aircraft crash kills 2

**DUBAI:** A light aircraft crashed Sunday off the coast of Ras Al Khaimah killing two people, the Emirati aviation authority said. "A light aircraft operated by the Jazirah Aviation Club crashed into the sea, claiming the lives of both the pilot and co-pilot," said the General Civil Aviation Authority in a statement, adding the victims were of Indian and Pakistani nationality. "The crash occurred shortly after takeoff, near the Cove Rotana Hotel along the beach," the aviation authority said. — AFP

## 24% have yet to submit biometrics; last day for expats

By B Izzak

**KUWAIT:** The deadline for expatriates to register their biometric data ends on Tuesday and the period will not be extended, officials of the General Department of Criminal Evidence said. Those who fail to

submit the compulsory biometric data will have all their applications, transactions, bank accounts and renewal of residency completely blocked, head of the department Maj Gen Eid Al-Owaidan said in an interview on Monday.

The deadline for Kuwaitis ended on Sept 30, and a majority of the 16,000 Kuwaitis who did not submit their biometrics had their transactions and bank accounts blocked. Owaidan said in an interview with Kuwait TV's news channel that the nine centers of the department will continue to receive expats and citizens daily from 8 am to 8 pm. The suspension of the transactions and bank accounts will be lifted immediately after the bio-

metric data are submitted, he said.

So far, about 76 percent of those required to undergo the registration (people aged 18 years and above) have completed the process, Owaidan said. Those who haven't done so include 16,000 Kuwaitis, around 224,000 expats and just over 88,000 bedoons or stateless people, he said. The department has carried out the biometric registration of about 2.5 million people.

Owaidan denied rumors that the interior ministry plans to impose fines on those who fail to submit their biometrics, adding only their transactions and bank accounts will be blocked and renewal of residency of expats will be suspended.

## US ex-prez Jimmy Carter dies at 100; Amir pays tribute

**WASHINGTON:** Flags flew at half-staff across the United States on Monday as global tributes poured in for the life and legacy of Jimmy Carter — the longest-lived US president who died aged 100. The Georgia native, whose unlikely political ascent carried him from picking peanuts on the family farm to the Oval Office, was remembered in glowing eulogies as an ardent defender of human rights and champion of the downtrodden.

He will be honored with public observances in his beloved home state and in Washington in the coming days. The first president to reach triple digits, Carter had been in hospice care in his hometown of Plains since Feb 2023. The Carter Center, his post-presidential humanitarian and pro-democracy organization, announced Sunday he had died "peacefully" at home "surrounded by his family".



DENVER: Former President Jimmy Carter waves to the crowd at the Democratic National Convention at the Pepsi Center on Aug 25, 2008. — AFP

The White House flag was lowered to half-staff, while President Joe Biden has scheduled a state funeral for Jan 9 and declared it a National Day of Mourning. HH the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable of condolences to Biden expressing condolences on death of Carter, invoking Almighty Allah to grace his family patience. HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and HH

the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah sent similar cables of condolences.

No formal announcements have been made about ceremonies in Georgia, although the late president is expected to be conveyed by motorcade to the state capitol in Atlanta. The New York Times reported, citing longstanding plans. He will lie in repose for around 36 hours at the Carter Center, the organization said, before being flown to Washington to lie in state at the US Capitol for around the same duration. He will be buried in Plains after the traditional televised funeral at Washington National Cathedral accorded to every US president.

Biden said in a heartfelt speech Sunday that Carter had "lived a life measured not by words, but by his deeds," while the country's living former presidents — from Bill Clinton to Donald Trump — lauded his public service, work ethic and commitment to justice. The New York Stock Exchange — which just suffered its longest losing streak since Carter was in the White House — held a minute's silence.

International tributes were led by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and China's President Xi Jinping, who said he was "deeply saddened," according to state media.

Continued on Page 6

## More Gazans die in Zionist jails as WHO slams hospital raids

**RAMALLAH/GENEVA:** The Palestinian Authority's ministry for detainees and the Palestinian Prisoners' Club announced on Monday that they had received reports of the deaths of five Gazans in Zionist detention. Amani Sarahna, a spokesperson for the Prisoners' Club, confirmed to AFP that two of the five died on Sunday, while the remaining three died earlier.

The club said the five prisoners were arrested during the Zionist-Hamas war, some of them while fleeing from the north of the Gaza Strip southwards. According to the two organizations, 54 Palestinian detainees have died in Zionist prisons since the start of the war in Gaza. Thirty-five of the dead have been from the Gaza Strip, with the rest from the occupied West Bank.



GAZA: Children warm by the fire at the Bureij camp for displaced Palestinians on Dec 30, 2024. — AFP



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## Local



KUWAIT: stc honors top performing high school students at stc's headquarters in Olympia Tower in the presence of Maryam Al-Enezi, Assistant Undersecretary at the Ministry of Education and Muataz Aldharrab, CEO of stc.

# stc makes lasting contributions in community through CSR initiatives

## Company leverages partnerships to drive positive change in various sectors

KUWAIT: stc has consistently demonstrated its commitment to supporting the community through its comprehensive Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) program, which was further strengthened this year with its Sustainability Program. As a pioneer in Kuwait's telecom and digital industries, stc has been a catalyst for positive change by implementing or participating in initiatives within the key areas of education, environmental sustainability, sports, youth empowerment, and entrepreneurship. Through these activities and initiatives, stc aimed to make lasting contributions in the community, while also aligning with the company's strategic focus on enabling digital transformation.

Danah Al-Jasem, General Manager of Corporate Communications at stc, said: "Over the years, stc broadened its CSR framework to include various sub-programs that have played a role in shaping the company's commitment to its key pillars. Initiatives such as 'Weyak', the educational 'upgrade' initiative, and 'Because We Care' have now taken on a more prominent role under the framework, with annual recurring initiatives launched under their respective umbrellas."



stc officials pose for a photo during a visit to Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah Hospital in the presence of Gergasha Characters and stc Sofara'a Team.

Aside from its partnerships and collaborations, stc launched its own unique initiatives focused on addressing and highlighting key topics that impact the community. The initiatives, in alignment with the company's CSR pillars, aimed to either engage with the community or the company's employees in different positive ways. One key subject that stc strongly stands by is empowering the youth and supporting the younger generation. In launching its own initiatives under this category, stc held its annual programs for students, while introducing various educational platforms. These efforts, as well as other activities implemented by stc, have significantly contributed to strengthening the social fabric and fostering unity across diverse segments of Kuwait's society.

### Sustainability program

With a newfound outlook on sustainable practices, stc announced its Sustainability Program, an annual initiative that reinforces the company's commitment to sustainability across the ESG pillars. Under this program, stc implemented a series of strategic initiatives to enhance its carbon footprint and promote eco-friendly practices through community-driven projects focused on education, youth empowerment, and entrepreneurship.

Additionally, stc worked closely with government bodies and regulatory agencies to ensure compliance with the highest governance standards, further embedding transparency, accountability, and ethical business practices into its operations. Through this comprehensive approach, the Sustainability Program reflects stc's long-term vision of integrating sustainability into every aspect of its business, creating a positive and lasting impact on society and the environment.

A highlight of the 'Sustainability Program' was the launch of the first standalone Sustainability Report in line with our commitment to transparency and progress. This milestone reflects our dedication to integrating sustainable practices across all aspects of our business while creating long-term value for our stakeholders. As part of the campaign, stc collaborated with the Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy (MIEW), through an awareness-based social media campaign highlighting the importance of conserving water and electricity.

Another initiative was the partnership with Tadwire to launch an e-waste recycling initiative. Supported by the Kuwait National SME Fund, Tadwire complemented stc's sustainability initiative for the year 2024, focusing on ways to reduce the waste footprint in its offices, operations, and the community.

stc partnered with SEEDs by sponsoring Bloom Market, the first market dedicated to promoting sustainable lifestyle and entertainment in Kuwait, in addition to launching the Plastic Free July initiative, which included 17 sustainable Kuwaiti projects. All vendors in the market were committed to not using plastic, and participants ranged from recycled furniture stores to eco-friendly daily consumer goods and fashion clothing.



A snapshot from a futoor hosted by stc and partners, with over 3,000 meals distributed in Souq Al-Mubarakiya.

As part of a series of initiatives, stc announced its strategic sponsorship of the sustainability forum organized by the Kuwait Transparency Society. stc also collaborated with the Ministry of Municipality to launch a significant cleaning campaign in the Mutlaa desert area. With the spirit of environmental consciousness and community service in mind, employees were invited to participate in the clean-up, where they were presented with an opportunity to actively contribute to the preservation of the environment.

### Community events

In celebration of Kuwait's National and Liberation Days, stc launched a TVC concept which blended modernity and tradition through a focus on the importance of progression and sustainability in the community. The production featured several influential figures that have played a role in empowering the community, especially the younger generation. Following its long-standing commitment to sustainability, coupled with its extensive corporate social responsibility (CSR) program, the TVC aimed to reflect the values that stc stands by along with the importance of these activities in nurturing and empowering entrepreneurs, innovators, and the younger generation.

During the Holy Month of Ramadan, stc launched its "With good, we go further" campaign, which consisted of different activities and programs designed to emphasize the importance of performing good deeds for the greater good of the community. These initiatives came in the form of distributing meals, supporting worshippers during Ramadan, spreading awareness on various issues, and engaging with the community. The initiatives launched during the campaign included partnering with the Zajel Volunteer Team to organize various activities including the largest Futoor with over 3,000 meals distributed in Souq Al-Mubarakiya in collaboration with several partners. This came in addition to distributing Eid gifts at the Zajel Expo to families in need.

### 'Weyak' initiative

Al-Jasem added, "The 'Weyak' initiative remained to be an integral part of stc's CSR efforts in 2024, with innovative approaches to inspiring and empowering Kuwaiti youth while nurturing the entrepreneurial ecosystem within the community. Designed to support the aspirations of young innovators, startups, and SMEs, 'Weyak' provided tools and resources needed to either bring ambitious ideas to life or support existing concepts in thriving. With a special focus on blending creativity with business skills, the various programs under the initiative helped individuals achieve their set out objectives while contributing to the progression of Kuwait's economy."

With its objectives set on supporting SMEs in Kuwait, stc's 'Weyak' initiative engaged with aspiring entrepreneurs throughout various activities and programs. The company organized several gatherings for entrepreneurs and SMEs as part of its strategic focus on empowering the private sector to drive economic growth and societal advancement. The interactive experience enabled like-minded individuals to share their experiences and

unique journeys in starting their own businesses, while discussing the entrepreneurial landscape in Kuwait.

Aside from that, stc strengthened its strategic partnership with Flare Fitness by sponsoring the 'Flare Festival' for the fifth consecutive year. stc also organized its first gathering for Kuwaiti female photographers coinciding with 'World Photography Day', with a workshop conducted by Kuwaiti photographer, Haya Buqammaz.

### 'Upgrade' educational initiative

Commenting on the educational 'upgrade' initiative, Al-Jasem said: "Education remains one of the key pillars of stc's CSR framework, especially in 2024. Since the launch of its educational 'upgrade' initiative, stc focused on supporting educational programs and platforms that aim to uplift the education sector while spreading knowledge to members of the community. Several initiatives were launched throughout the year under the umbrella of the educational 'upgrade' initiative, each serving a different purpose. This focus mirrors stc's understanding of the nature of academic excellence in building a sustainable future."

Throughout the year, stc formed strategic partnerships with various institutions such as the National Union of Kuwaiti Students (NUKS) – Kuwait University Branch, Kuwait College for Science and Technology (KCST), Kuwait Technical College (KTECH), and the Sabah Al-Ahmad Center for Giftedness and Creativity (SACGC). The strategic partnerships focused on launching and sponsoring different programs that aimed to enhance the accessibility to educational platforms that can assist students and individuals in learning more about different subjects.

The company also participated in several honoring ceremonies for academic excellence. stc honored top performing high school students at stc's headquarters in Olympia Tower which was attended by Maryam Al-Enezi, Assistant Undersecretary for Educational Development & Activities Sector at the Ministry of Education, and stc executives including Muataz Aldharrab, CEO of stc. The Company also honored 130 exceptional students with physical disabilities for the third consecutive year. Sixty Kuwait University students who displayed academic excellence in the College of Arts were also celebrated by stc during 2024.

### 'Because we care'

As for stc's commitment to the environment and the community, Al-Jasem stated: "Environmental preservation, sustainable practices, and personal wellness are all key themes under stc's 'Because we care' initiative. Throughout 2024, stc launched and participated in numerous campaigns that aimed to spread awareness on various health issues and environmental causes that impact the community." Under the 'Because we care' initiative, stc carried out its annual health initiatives related to blood donation, breast cancer and prostate cancer. The company collaborated with various entities to promote and raise awareness on these health issues and the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle.



stc staff, participants, and Imam of Grand Mosque Sheikh Omar Al-Damkhi pose for a photo at a Quran memorization contest sponsored by stc.



stc executives pose for a photo with Kuwaiti winners of the inspireU program.

stc welcomed arriving pilgrims at Kuwait International Airport's Terminal 4 from Mecca for the third year in a row, in collaboration with the Kuwait International Airport and the Directorate General for Civil Aviation and Incheon Korea for Airports Services- T4. In celebration of Eid Al-Adha, stc organized a visit to Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah Hospital in the presence of Gergasha Characters and stc Sofara'a Team from all departments to distribute gifts and bring joy to the children who are seeking medical needs. As part of stc's ongoing commitment to foster health and wellbeing across the community and in collaboration with the Kuwait Oncology Association and other strategic partners, the company launched its annual breast cancer awareness campaign to promote early detection and prevention.

### 'inspireU' entrepreneur accelerator

In collaboration with inspireU from stc group, this year witnessed the launch of the second edition of the inspireU Program in Kuwait, an entrepreneurial state-of-the-art incubator and accelerator designed to support startups and SMEs in Kuwait, which focused on several areas including fintech, cybersecurity, Artificial Intelligence (AI), IoT, and online gaming. The program aims to equip entrepreneurs with the tools and guidance needed to turn their ideas into successful projects, fostering a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship to create new job opportunities and enhance sustainable growth, in line with stc's vision for enabling digital transformation.

By the end of 2024, stc celebrated the graduates of the "inspireU" program in a graduation ceremony held by stc Group in its HQ in Riyadh that recognized 44 businesses and startups that completed the inspireU program, including five startups from Kuwait. This marked the successful conclusion of the program's 10th and 11th intakes, as well as the first season of the advanced inspireU program.

### A lasting positive impact

As stc looks ahead, the Company remains deeply committed to creating a positive and lasting impact on the community through its comprehensive CSR and sustainability programs. These initiatives, rooted in stc's core values, aim to empower individuals, drive social and economic progress, and foster environmental stewardship. By addressing immediate community needs while laying the groundwork for long-term benefits, stc continues to build a legacy of positive change that resonates across Kuwait.

Al-Jasem concluded: "The progress we have made through our CSR and sustainability programs, as well as our collaborations with various institutions in Kuwait, align with our overall mission to drive positive and lasting change in the community. We are grateful for the opportunities we have had to contribute meaningfully to the lives of individuals and society as a whole. Moving forward, we aim to build on these achievements by strengthening our partnerships and exploring new ways to address the evolving needs of our community, ensuring a brighter and more sustainable future for generations to come."



Participants pose for a photo during the cleaning campaign launched in the Mutlaa desert in collaboration with the Ministry of Municipality.



KUWAIT: People from across the Arabian Gulf region gather in Souq Al-Mubarakiya to enjoy Kuwait's cultural heritage, sample traditional cuisine, while cheering on their national teams, during the Khaleeji Zain 26 tournament. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

# Gulf Cup fever unites fans in Mubarakiya

Fans revere Khaleeji Zain 26 as a celebration of unity, camaraderie



Gulf tourists walk around the busy souq.



Visitors browse the stalls where local Kuwaiti businesses are showcasing their offerings during a pop-up market held at Safat Square near Souq Al-Mubarakiya.

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Since the Gulf Cup (Khaleeji Zain 26) kicked off on December 21, fans from across the Arabian Gulf region have been gathering in Souq Al-Mubarakiya to cheer on their teams. Among them was Haidar Ali from Iraq, who, despite his national team's early exit in the group stage, remained upbeat about his visit. "While we didn't make it past the group stage, our performance against Bahrain and Saudi Arabia was underwhelming," Ali told Kuwait Times.

Ali, who had previously witnessed Iraq's victory in the 25th Arabian Gulf Cup, was disheartened by the team's decline this year. Similarly, Alhasan Al-Magabial, another Iraqi fan, attributed the team's struggles to tactical experimentation and lack of cohesion. Yet, Al-Magabial, like many others, praised Kuwait for its hospitality, likening Souq Al-Mubarakiya to Iraq's bustling Al-Shorja market. "The food here is incredible—Mrabian has been a highlight of my trip," he said.

For Mohammad Abaza, a Saudi fan, the Gulf Cup was more than just a tournament—it was a celebration of unity. "The football fever in Kuwait is contagious. It feels like all of the Gulf is united, regardless of the results," he said. Abaza, who spent time exploring Souq Al-Mubarakiya, couldn't resist buying souvenirs for his family and checking out the renowned thoub fabrics. Confident in Saudi Arabia's chances, he added: "Saudi Arabia will win the Gulf Cup this year. Our team's performance was outstanding and I'm looking forward to the next match. It's going to be epic." Abaza indicated that Kuwaitis and expats welcome their guests warmly, noting: "Me and my



Flags of the eight teams participating in the Gulf Cup tournament (Khaleeji Zain 26) are hung above the open-air Souq Al-Mubarakiya.

friends felt we are at home. Everyone offers to help us, show us around, or invite us over to their houses."

Qatari fan Abdullah Al-Mansouri's experience was defined by the spirit of camaraderie rather than victory. Despite his team's loss, Al-Mansouri relished his time in Kuwait, visiting cultural landmarks like

the Mirror House and Kuwait Towers. "Football is a universal language. After our team's setback, we are cheering for Kuwait," he said, expressing excitement for the upcoming matches. "We are ready to cheer wildly, and we went shopping yesterday for flags and t-shirts of the Kuwaiti team."



A folk Kuwaiti group performs at Safat Square.



Visitors take pictures of Haydo, the official mascot for the Khaleeji Zain 26, at Souq Al-Mubarakiya.

## Sheikh Fahad honors 3 military personnel for role during Gulf Cup

KUWAIT: First Deputy Prime Minister Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Saud Al-Sabah honored three military personnel at Seif Palace for their dedicated efforts during the 26th Gulf Cup (Khaleeji Zain 26) matches. The honorees include Lieutenant Fahad Al-Nuwaiser, First Sergeant Ha-

mad Al-Enezi, and First Sergeant Mohammad Al-Noumsi, all of whom are part of the special forces. Their recognition is in appreciation of their selfless service in promoting humanitarian values and providing support and assistance to the public during the tournament.

In a statement from the Ministry of Interior, Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef, who is also the Minister of Defense and Interior, praised the honorees, emphasizing that they set an exemplary standard of humanitarian work. He commended their dedication in fulfilling their duty to maintain security while also offering unwavering assistance to en-

sure the comfort and safety of all attendees.

Sheikh Fahad noted that these exemplary figures represent the true values that the Ministry of Interior strives to instill, contributing to the positive image of its personnel at both national and regional events. He wished them continued success in their future endeavors. The Ministry of Interior reiterated in the statement that the responsibility of maintaining order rests with the security personnel, who serve the nation with dedication and a spirit of giving. This was evident in their interactions with the crowds during the matches hosted in the country. — KUNA

In my view

## Gulf Cup's true power lies in uniting the region's youth

Dr Khalid Al-Saleh

Local@kuwaittimes.com

The passage you've written contains valuable historical context and insightful commentary, but it could benefit from a few revisions for clarity, structure, and conciseness. Here's a refined version of your text with some adjustments:

In 1968, during the Mexican Olympic Games, the Bahraini delegation proposed the idea of the Gulf Cup, which was championed by Prince Khalid Al-Faisal, then Director of Youth Welfare at the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs in Saudi Arabia. Today, Al-Faisal is the Amir of Makkah. The proposal was presented to Stanley Rous, President of the International Football Federation (FIFA) at the time.

The inaugural Gulf Cup was held in Bahrain in 1970, running from March 27 to April 3. The tournament featured four teams: Kuwait, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar. The UAE joined in 1972, Oman participated in the third edition, and Iraq joined in the fourth tournament. Yemen became part of the competition in 2003, bringing the total number of participating teams to eight.

There is no doubt that the idea of using sports to strengthen relations between the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries was a brilliant one. Although politics has not left sports untouched, and some tournaments have seen moments of fanaticism that some believe could affect the fraternal bonds between the peoples of the Gulf, the tournament has largely served its intended purpose. The Gulf Cup has, in fact, increased the openness between the GCC countries, brought youth closer together, and allowed athletes to engage with one another.

One of my vivid memories of this tournament takes me back to the 1970s in Alexandria, where the late Sheikh Basil Sabah Al-Salem shared with us a story about the late Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Sabah Al-Salem. He recounted how the Amir had witnessed the joy of his children celebrating Kuwait's victory during a tournament held in Kuwait while they were abroad. Sheikh Sabah asked them to hold off on celebrating until he called the Minister of Interior to inquire about the progress of the final match. When he learned that the public had received both victory and defeat with a spirit of love, the Amir smiled and said to his sons: "Now rejoice."

This memory serves as a powerful reminder of the true spirit of sports—uniting people in mutual respect and friendship. Unfortunately, sports competition is sometimes exploited by internal and external forces to create distance between the masses and increase hostility between brothers. These harmful forces are still present among us today, and they use social media to provoke and inflame public sentiment, stirring up strife to achieve their divisive goals. The anonymity provided by social media platforms only makes it easier for these harmful elements to operate, leaving us uncertain of who is truly against us.

It is the responsibility of the public—especially the youth—to prevent these forces from achieving their goals. They must form an iron wall against these negative influences, ensuring that our bonds remain strong and united.

The true success of the Gulf Cup lies not just in sporting progress, but in bringing together the youth of the Arabian Gulf. It is about cooperation, unity, and the collective strength to face the challenges that lie ahead.

## Local

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Dasman Diabetes Institute

## Dasman Institute to host 1st summit on advanced diabetes care

KUWAIT: The Dasman Diabetes Institute (DDI), established by the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS), is set to host the 1st International Dasman Diabetes Institute Summit (IDDS) on Advanced Diabetes Care in 2025. The highly anticipated event will take place from January 23rd to 25th at the prestigious Waldorf Astoria Hotel in Kuwait.

The summit promises to be a groundbreaking event in the field of diabetes care, bringing together some of the world's leading experts. Esteemed professors and researchers from renowned institutions across the globe will present the latest developments in advanced diabetes care, ensuring attendees stay at the forefront of this crucial medical field. The event will also feature a series of interactive workshops led by prominent scientists, offering invaluable insights into innovative research, treatments, and management strategies for diabetes.

This summit provides an excellent opportunity for healthcare professionals, researchers, and experts to update their knowledge, engage with peers, and forge new collaborations that will shape the future of diabetes care. Attendees can expect a dynamic platform for learning and networking, as well as a chance to contribute to the growing body of knowledge in diabetes management.

For those interested in attending, registration is now open. To secure your place at this prestigious event, visit the official Dasman Diabetes Institute website at [www.dasmaninstitute.org](http://www.dasmaninstitute.org).

The Dasman Diabetes Institute looks forward to welcoming all participants to this historic event, as it continues its mission to advance healthcare and improve the lives of individuals affected by diabetes.

## Kuwait enforces fingerprinting at construction sites

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Public Works has begun implementing new guidelines to enhance oversight, transparency, and improve performance in government construction projects. In a statement to the press, Minister Dr Noura Al-Mashaan explained that the ministry has mandated all contracted companies to apply the latest biometric fingerprinting systems at all construction sites. This will allow the monitoring of employee attendance and departure, streamlining the progress of government infrastructure projects.

"The decision is designed to ensure the successful execution of projects, enhance work efficiency, and ensure the quality of implementation," she stated. She further emphasized that the Ministry of Public Works will collaborate closely with the companies responsible for government construction projects to ensure the systems are properly implemented, thereby improving transparency and oversight. She added that the ministry's readiness to provide all necessary support and facilitation to ensure the success of this initiative. — KUNA

## Kuwait marks Gulf Wildlife Day with focus on marine life

KUWAIT: The Environment Public Authority in Kuwait celebrated Gulf Wildlife Day on Monday, under the theme "Sustainable Marine Wildlife", in collaboration with the General Secretariat of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). In her speech during the celebration, Acting Director of the authority Samira Al-Kandari, highlighted that the GCC countries have worked to establish a scientific framework for protecting the environment and preserving natural resources in alignment with sustainable development goals.

Al-Kandari explained that in 1985, the GCC leaders adopted general policies and principles for environmental protection, as well as the convention on the preservation of wildlife and their natural habitats. This initiative reflects their deep understanding of the importance of conserving wildlife.

The GCC member states have been celebrating

## Photos of the Day



KUWAIT: South African meerkats, an Indo-Pacific region starfish, a bearded dragon, and a marmoset are seen at an indoor zoo at the Avenues Mall. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

# KISR, Coast Guard sign MoU to protect marine environment

Agreement includes creation of national database on marine pollutants



KUWAIT: Officials from the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR) and the General Directorate of the Coast Guard pose for a group photo. — KUNA photos

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR) and the General Directorate of the Coast Guard signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Monday, to strengthen cooperation in marine environmental protection and combat pollution.

In a statement to the press, Sheikh Mubarak Ali Yousef Al-Sabah, Director General of the General Directorate of the Coast Guard, explained that the MoU aims to support the efforts of the Coast Guard in reducing marine pollution, particularly that caused by ballast water and the spread of various harmful substances from vessels.

Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah emphasized that the Coast Guard's efforts reflect Kuwait's commitment to preserving marine safety on a broader scale, in line with its obligations under international conventions. He highlighted the importance of implementing signed agreements to maintain the country's marine environment.

The cooperation with the institute, he said, will also include conducting research studies on various aspects of marine pollution control in ac-

cordance with international laws and agreements. This includes the International Convention on Oil Pollution Preparedness, Response and Co-operation; the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships; and International Convention for the Control and Management of Ships' Ballast Water and Sediments.

Dr Faisal Al-Humaidan, Acting Director General of the MoU, noting that it reflects the Coast Guard's ability to confront environmental challenges through scientific research, innovation, and best practices to mitigate marine pollution and ensure the protection of marine ecosystems.

He added that the MoU involves conducting specialized research, organizing conferences, seminars, scientific workshops, and lectures. It also includes the creation of a national database on marine pollutants and ballast water, further reinforcing KISR's ongoing collaboration with national institutions to enhance capabilities and address challenges through research and studies.

The MoU was signed by Sheikh Mubarak Ali Yousef Al-Sabah, Director General of



Sheikh Mubarak Ali Yousef Al-Sabah, Director General of the General Directorate of the Coast Guard, and Dr Faisal Al-Humaidan, Acting Director General of KISR, sign an agreement to enhance protection of Kuwait's marine environment on December 30, 2024.

the General Directorate of the Coast Guard, and Dr Faisal Al-Humaidan, Acting Director General of the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research, in the presence of directors of various departments and specialists from both parties. — KUNA



Samira Al-Kandari

Gulf Wildlife Day annually on December 30. Kuwait is hosting this year's celebrations, which serve as a focal point for collective efforts aimed at protecting wildlife, ecosystems, and endangered species. She further emphasized that Kuwait and the other GCC countries are committed to addressing shared environmental challenges and working towards a sustainable vision that ensures the conservation of their natural resources for future generations. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Officials pose for a group photo during an event marking Gulf Wildlife Day. — KUNA photos



US, foreign leaders praise Jimmy Carter's legacy

## Anguish for Korea plane crash relatives amid grim salvage

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A woman cooks at a camp for displaced Palestinians in Khan Yunis, in the southern Gaza Strip on December 29, 2024. — AFP

# Famine is taking hold in Gaza: Watchdog

## Local medical staff say children are dying of malnutrition-related causes

**GAZA CITY:** Five times in the course of the past year, the world's leading hunger monitor warned that Gaza could be teetering on the precipice of famine. Each time, the watchdog stopped short of concluding one was under way. Gregory Shay, a retired pediatric pulmonologist from California, spent October treating children in Gaza, and to him it looked like famine was gripping the territory. Shay worked at Nasser Hospital in the southern Gaza city of Khan Yunis. Most of the children he treated subsisted on bread and rice, recalled Shay, a volunteer with the US-based non-profit organization MedGlobal. Without vegetables, fruit or meat, he said, the children lacked the vitamins or minerals needed to stave off disease.

Most days, Shay said he treated on average 40 new patients who were admitted to the hospital. Many had severe cases of pneumonia, and several others suffered from meningitis, an illness that can kill in hours. Newborns were often small for their age, he said. Some had birth defects or suffered from neonatal sepsis, a blood infection that's a leading cause of infant mortality. "I've never seen the kind and number of infections that I saw in Gaza," said Shay, who has made 35 medical aid trips during

the past decade. "You just look at these kids and you know that it's a famine."

Many food-security experts, aid workers and doctors say famine took hold in Gaza many months ago. But amid relentless Zionist entity bombing and restrictions on movement, analysts with the world's main hunger monitor, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification system (IPC), have struggled to get access to key data on acute malnutrition levels and deaths unrelated to violence. These metrics are vital for the IPC to determine if starvation has technically risen to the level of a famine.

IPC reports use a one-to-five scale to rank areas for acute food insecurity. It slides from minimal to stressed, crisis, emergency and famine. Gaza has consistently approached, but never technically reached, famine level. Most recently, the IPC's Famine Review Committee has warned that famine is imminent in areas of northern Gaza. Some experts want the IPC to lower its threshold for determining famine in conflict-ridden areas and expand the types of data it uses. In Ethiopia, Yemen and Sudan, Reuters found that governments or rebels have blocked or falsified the flow of data to the IPC or tried to quash its findings.

"If we can't access critical information,

confirming a famine becomes impossible — and so does saving lives," said Dalmar Ainashe, a food-security analyst with relief group CARE. For 10 years, Ainashe served as a member of the IPC Technical Advisory Group, which provides expert advice to IPC's leadership. He also has recounted how he survived a famine as a child in his native Somalia.

"In the chaos of conflict, clinging to unattainable quantitative thresholds isn't just unrealistic," Ainashe told Reuters. "It's a fatal oversight that risks abandoning entire populations to suffer and die in silence." Jose Lopez, the IPC's global program manager, said the hunger monitor does rely on various types of evidence to "ensure that IPC analysis findings are robust and thus credible." Regardless, a famine finding isn't a silver bullet. As Reuters reported, limited aid has reached Zanzam, a camp in Sudan for displaced people that the IPC deemed to be in famine. Moreover, if aid only flows when a famine is found, it's too late: Food and medical relief need to start arriving much earlier, long before people start dying. To prevent deaths, governments and others who can help address hunger need "to act before a famine is confirmed or even projected," the IPC's

Lopez said. "Simply changing the terminology is unlikely to address the issue." Even so, internal IPC documents reviewed by Reuters show that the hunger watchdog is considering modifying its famine definition. Among options mentioned in the September documents: lowering the mortality threshold or examining mortality trends rather than simply using a hard-and-fast threshold.

Such changes will take time, Lopez cautioned. "This work requires considerable collaborative effort and studies," he told Reuters. In Gaza, children were already dying of malnutrition-related causes in December last year, according to local medical staff. That's what Mona Abdel Atti says she witnessed when she began caring for malnourished patients as a midwife at Nasser Hospital.

One day last December, two infants were admitted to the hospital — a 5-month-old girl, and an 8-month-old boy, she recalled. Both were breathing rapidly and showing clear signs of malnutrition and dehydration. Their weights were critically low for their ages, their stomachs bloated and their skin dry, she said. The medical staff quickly administered plasma and blood transfusions and placed them on ventilators, Abdel Atti said, but their bodies were too weak. They died an hour apart. — Reuters

## Anger in Germany at Musk attempt to 'influence' election

**BERLIN:** Germany's government said Monday US billionaire tech baron Elon Musk is trying to sway February elections by praising the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), a move strongly rejected by major parties.

Musk—a key supporter of US President-elect Donald Trump, and his incoming "efficiency czar"—posted on his social media platform X this month that "only the AfD can save Germany".

He then doubled down on the claim with an opinion piece in a German Sunday newspaper. On Monday, German government spokeswoman Christiane Hoffmann said that "it is a fact that Elon Musk is trying to exert influence on the parliamentary election". "In Germany, elections are decided by voters at the ballot box," she told a regular press conference, adding that the country's "elections are a matter for Germans".

Europe's biggest economy will head to the polls on February 23 after the collapse of center-left Chancellor Olaf Scholz's unruly coalition government last month. Hoffmann said that Musk "is free to express his opinion, but one doesn't have to share it". She recalled that various branches of the AfD have been labeled "extremist" by Germany's domestic security agency.

Lars Klingbeil, co-leader of Scholz's Social Democrats (SPD), told the Funke media group that Musk "is trying the same thing as Vladimir Putin", the Russian president. "They both want to influence our elections and support the AfD, which is hostile to democracy," he said, accusing both Musk and Putin of "wanting Germany to be weakened and pushed into chaos".

Klingbeil said more action was needed on the European level to restrict the political power of big social media platforms such as X. Musk has repeatedly used X to attack Scholz personally, most recently in the wake of a deadly car-ramping attack on a Christmas market in the eastern city of Magdeburg on December 20. Musk called Scholz an "incompetent fool" and said he "should resign immediately".

Musk's interventions in German politics have also been criticized by Scholz's main rival, the leader of the conservative opposition CDU/CSU, Friedrich Merz. Merz labelled Musk's AfD endorsement as "interfering and presumptuous" and said he could not remember "a comparable case of meddling in the election campaign of an allied country in the history of Western democracy". — AFP

## Trump loses appeal of \$5m defamation, sexual assault verdict

**NEW YORK:** A federal appeals court on Monday upheld a \$5 million verdict that E Jean Carroll won against Donald Trump when a jury found the US president-elect liable for sexually abusing and later defaming the former magazine columnist. A unanimous three-judge panel of the 2nd US Circuit Court of Appeals in Manhattan rejected Trump's argument that the trial judge made mistakes in letting jurors hear evidence about the Republican's alleged past sexual misconduct, making the trial and verdict unfair.

The court said that evidence, including Trump bragging about his sexual prowess on an "Access Hollywood" video that surfaced during the 2016 US presidential campaign, established a "repeated, idiosyncratic pattern of conduct" consistent with Carroll's allegations. "Taking the record as a whole and considering the strength of Ms Carroll's case, we are not persuaded that any claimed error or combination of errors in the district court's evidentiary rulings affected Mr. Trump's substantial rights," the court said in an unsigned decision.

Lawyers for Trump did not immediately respond to requests for comment. A lawyer for Carroll did not immediately respond to similar requests. The May 2023

verdict stemmed from an incident around 1996 in a Bergdorf Goodman department store dressing room in Manhattan, where Carroll, now 81, said Trump raped her, and an October 2022 Truth Social post where Trump denied Carroll's claim as a hoax. Though jurors in federal court in Manhattan did not find that Trump, 78, committed rape, they awarded the former Elle magazine advice columnist \$2.02 million for sexual assault and \$2.98 million for defamation.

A different jury ordered Trump in January to pay Carroll \$83.3 million for defaming her and damaging her reputation in June 2019, when he first denied her rape claim. In both denials, Trump said he did not know Carroll, she was "not my type," and that she fabricated the rape claim to promote her memoir. He is appealing the \$83.3 million verdict.

Carroll's cases are continuing despite Trump having won a second four-year White House term on Nov 5. In 1997, in a case involving former President Bill Clinton, the US Supreme Court ruled unanimously that sitting presidents have no immunity from civil litigation in federal court over actions predating and unrelated to their official duties as president. Trump's lawyers argued the \$5 million verdict should be thrown out because the trial judge, US District Judge Lewis Kaplan, should not have let jurors hear testimony from two other women who accused Trump of sexual misconduct.

One, businesswoman Jessica Leeds, said Trump groped her on a plane in the late 1970s. The other, former People magazine writer, Natasha Stoyanoff, said Trump forcibly kissed her at his Mar-a-Lago es-

67 people on board. Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev has demanded that Moscow accept responsibility for mistakenly firing on the plane as it tried to make a scheduled landing at Grozny airport in south Russia.

Russia has not confirmed that one of its air-defense missiles hit the plane, though President Vladimir Putin told Aliyev in a phone call over the weekend that the systems were active at the time and that he was sorry the incident took place in Russian airspace. Azerbaijan's prosecutor general reported on Monday that the head of Russia's Investigative Committee had told Baku: "Intensive measures are being carried out to



PALM BEACH, Florida: US Coast Guard officers patrol near Mar-a-Lago, the residence of US President-elect Donald Trump, on December 30, 2024 in Palm Beach, Florida. — AFP

late in 2005. Trump's lawyers also said the trial judge should not have let jurors watch the 2005 "Access Hollywood" video, where Trump boasted graphically about forcing himself on women.

But the court said that in each of these encounters, "Mr. Trump engaged in an ordinary conversation with a woman he barely knew, then abruptly lunged at her in a semi-public place and proceeded to kiss and forcefully touch her without her consent." It said this was "relevant to show a pattern tending to directly corroborate witness testimony and to confirm that the alleged sexual assault [of Carroll] actually occurred." — Reuters

identify the guilty people and bring them to criminal responsibility." Russia has opened a criminal enquiry into the incident.

But it has not said whether it agrees that the plane was hit by one of its air-defense missiles and has not itself said anything about finding or bringing any perpetrators to justice. Aliyev had issued a rare forthright condemnation of Moscow—a close partner of Baku—on Sunday. He said the plane was "hit by accident" but was angry that Russia had apparently tried to hide the cause of the crash.

Demanding that Putin admit responsibility, Aliyev also accused Russia of putting forward alternative theories that "clearly showed the Russian

side wanted to cover up the issue".

Russia said Grozny, in the southern Russian region of Chechnya, was being attacked by Ukrainian drones when the AZAL airliner approached to make its landing through thick fog.

Survivors have described hearing explosions outside the plane, which then diverted more than 400 kilometers (250 miles) across the Caspian Sea towards the Kazakh city of Aktau, where it crash-landed. Kazakhstan said on Monday it had sent the plane's black boxes to Brazil, where they will be analyzed by the Aeronautical Accidents Investigation and Prevention Center, a unit of the Brazilian air force. — AFP

## Russia will punish those responsible for plane crash: Baku

**BAKU:** Azerbaijan said on Monday that Moscow had promised to punish those responsible for the downing of an Azerbaijan Airlines plane that Baku says was shot at by Russian air defenses.

The AZAL Embraer 190 jet crash-landed in Kazakhstan on December 25, killing 38 of the

## International

# US, foreign leaders hail Jimmy Carter's legacy

Extraordinary leader and humanitarian: Biden • Americans owe Carter 'a debt of gratitude': Trump

WASHINGTON: Joe Biden led US presidents and other world leaders in paying tribute to Jimmy Carter, who died aged 100. "America and the world lost an extraordinary leader, statesman and humanitarian," Biden said in a statement released by the White House on Sunday.

He added later in a televised address that Carter "lived a life measured not by words, but by his deeds." "We'd all do well to try and be a little more like Jimmy Carter."

President-elect Donald Trump said Americans owe Carter "a debt of gratitude."

"The challenges Jimmy faced as president came at a pivotal time for our country and he did everything in his power to improve the lives of all Americans," he said on social media.

Among former US presidents, Bill Clinton said his predecessor had "worked tirelessly for a better, fairer world." George W Bush said Carter "dignified the office. And his efforts to leave behind a better world didn't end with the presidency."

Barack Obama hailed Carter for teaching "all of us what it means to live a life of grace, dignity, justice and service."

The 39th US president "was early to recognize that protecting our shared planet and promoting global public health were vital to national security interests," Secretary of State Antony Blinken said. Pope Francis "was saddened to learn" of Carter's death, recalling his "firm commitment, motivated by deep Christian faith, to the cause of reconciliation and peace between peoples, the defence of human rights and the welfare of the poor and those in need", said Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican's secretary of state.

At the United Nations, Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said Carter would be remembered "for his solidarity with the vulnerable, his abiding grace, and his unrelenting faith in the common good and our common humanity." World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus noted Carter's post-presidency work with his foundation "saved countless lives and helped bring many neglected tropical diseases close to elimination."

Egyptian leader Abdel Fattah al-Sisi praised Carter as "a symbol of humanitarian efforts" for his role in brokering the historic 1978 Camp David Accords, which established peace between Egypt and its most serious adversary at the time, Zionist entity. Zionist entity President Isaac Herzog said the treaty Carter clinched "remains an anchor of stability throughout the Middle East and North Africa many decades later."

"His legacy will be defined by his deep commitment to forging peace between nations," Herzog said. European Commission President



US President George W Bush (center) stands with President-elect Barack Obama (second left), former President George HW Bush (left), former President Bill Clinton (second right) and former President Jimmy Carter (right) in the Oval Office of the White House in Washington, DC, on January 7, 2009. — AFP photos



US President Jimmy Carter (second left) signs the order blocking Iranian funds in US banks, on November 14, 1979 in Washington DC. — AFP photos

Ursula von der Leyen called for Carter's "noble legacy" to live on.

"His work advanced peace, health and democracy worldwide," she said. "He will be remembered for his moral leadership." German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said with the death of Carter, "The United States lost a fighter for democracy. The world lost a great mediator for peace in the Middle East and for human rights."

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said Carter "was always thoughtful and generous with his advice to me." Mexico's ministry of foreign affairs called Carter's death a "regrettable loss."

Britain's head of state King Charles III said Carter's "dedication and humility served as an inspiration to many," while Prime Minister Keir Starmer paid tribute to the US leader's "lifelong dedication to peace." In Panama, where Carter reached an agreement to hand over the Panama Canal, then under US control, President Jose Mulino praised the Democrat for helping his country achieve "full sovereignty."

Brazil's Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva hailed Carter as "a lover of democracy and defender of peace," noting his pressuring of Brazil's dictatorship to release political prisoners. "He will be remembered forever as a name that defends the idea that peace is the most important condition for development," Lula said.

Though many focused on his time in office, from 1977-1981, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky highlighted Carter's "unwavering support for Ukraine in the face of Russia's unprovoked aggression." French President Emmanuel Macron said Carter had "been a



Former US President Jimmy Carter speaks onstage at the 25th anniversary MusiCares 2015 Person Of The Year Gala honoring Bob Dylan at the Los Angeles Convention Center on February 6, 2015. — AFP photos



Jimmy Carter and Egyptian President Anwar el Sadat meet at the White House on April 04, 1977. — AFP photos

steadfast advocate for the rights of the most vulnerable and has tirelessly fought for peace."

In China, where Carter's administration normalized diplomatic relations with Beijing in 1978, leader Xi Jinping said he was "deeply saddened". Carter "had long made significant contributions to advancing the development of China-US ties and fostering friendly exchanges and cooperation between the two countries", state broadcaster CCTV reported Xi as saying.

Carter's legacy lies even beyond Earth, as NASA Administrator Bill Nelson pointed out Sunday.

The space agency's Voyager 1 probe, launched in

1977 and still flying through the stars, carries a recorded message from Carter "that captures his core goodness and grace."

Carter says in the recording: "This is a present from a small distant world, a token of our sounds, our science, our images, our music, our thoughts and our feelings. "We are attempting to survive our time so we may live into yours. We hope someday, having solved the problems we face, to join a community of galactic civilizations."

Nelson, in a statement, added that "President Carter understood an important truth: that we find common ground when we look to the stars." — AFP

## US ex-prez Jimmy Carter dies at 100...

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Pope Francis offered "heartfelt condolences," the Vatican said, recalling Carter's "firm commitment, motivated by deep Christian faith, to the cause of reconciliation and peace."

Carter voted for last time in November's presidential election, casting his ballot by mail, according to his family, after voicing determination to "live to vote for Kamala Harris", the Democratic vice president who was ultimately defeated by Trump. He was the oldest ever former US president, outliving writers who contributed to his obituaries at The New York Times and Washington Post by seven years and 10 years respectively.

But his longevity had seemed unlikely when the Southern Democrat revealed in 2015 that he had brain cancer. The US Navy veteran defied the odds to enjoy a long post-presidency, after four years in

the Oval Office notable for his success in forging peace between the Zionist entity and Egypt, but overshadowed by the Iran hostage affair and his handling of an oil crisis. The father-of-four lost in a landslide to Ronald Reagan in 1980.

Yet in the decades that followed, Carter's reputation grew through his humanitarian and diplomatic work and his efforts to build homes with his wife Rosalynn as part of Habitat for Humanity. Carter won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002 "for his decades of untiring effort to find peaceful solutions to international conflicts, to advance democracy and human rights, and to promote economic and social development."

The first US president born in a hospital, he taught Sunday school at Maranatha Baptist, his church in Plains, well into his 90s. He was married for 77 years to Rosalynn, a fellow Plains native who had known Carter her entire life. By the time she died at age 96 on Nov 19, 2023, it was the longest presidential marriage in US history. Carter's final public appearance was at his wife's memorial service, where he sat in the front row in a wheelchair. — AFP



WASHINGTON: US President Jimmy Carter congratulates Egyptian President Anwar Al-Sadat and Zionist Premier Menachem Begin in a three-way handshake on March 26, 1979 on the north lawn of the White House after signing the historic US-sponsored peace treaty between the Zionist entity and Egypt. — AFP

## Kuwaiti FM meets Syrian leader...

Continued from Page 1

Al-Yahya called on the international community to reconsider sanctions imposed on Syria. He also said Kuwait's leadership also appealed for aid to be sent to Syria urgently. "The visit expresses our keenness on opening a new page of regional cooperation...we also value the responsiveness of the new administration in Syria to these efforts," he said.

Also on Monday, the first Kuwaiti planeload of relief supplies headed from Abdullah Al-Mubarak Air Base to Syria. Loaded with 20 million tons of food, mattresses and blankets, the cargo is destined for those most in need in Syria, as part of the humanitarian campaign "Kuwait by Your Side."

Chairperson of the Kuwait Red Crescent Society Ambassador Khaled Al-Maghames said in a statement that the relief supplies were dispatched upon orders of HH the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. He affirmed that the aid effort was intended to demonstrate solidarity with the Syrian people and alleviate hardships of people in need. The aid will be delivered to the Syrian authorities for distribution.

The new authorities in Damascus, from the ranks of Islamist-led rebels who until several weeks ago had fought to overthrow longtime ruler Bashar Al-Assad, now face the daunting task of rebuilding state institutions. The Syrian army has effectively collapsed, much like other institutions set up by the Assad clan and their notorious security apparatuses.

The new leadership last week unveiled an accord to dissolve the myriad of armed groups operating in Syria and integrate them into the defense ministry, and

has now named some prospective army officers. A decree published late Sunday on the Telegram account of Sharaa's General Command listed 49 people to be made commanders, in the first such announcement since the fall of the Assad government on Dec 8.

It said the appointments were part of efforts aimed at "the development and modernization of the military... in order to guarantee security and stability". The names include former rebels, some from Sharaa's Islamist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), as well as ex-army officers who had deserted to join the opposition in the early days of Syria's civil war.

Haid Haid, consulting fellow at Britain-based think tank Chatham House, said that "the top seven highest ranks of those promoted seem to be all from HTS." The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights war monitor said many of those appointed were close to Sharaa, including at least six foreigners either from HTS or aligned with it. In Sunday's decree, two men were given the rank of general, five were made brigadier generals and around 40 made colonels. One of the generals is HTS' military chief Murhaf Abu Qasra, who has been tipped to become defense minister in the transitional government.

In an interview Sunday with Saudi-owned Al Arabiya television, Sharaa admitted that so far government positions went solely HTS members of people close to the group. However, the leader promised "broader participation" in the future. The majority of Syrians named in the military decree come from HTS, with the rest from "allied factions", according to the Britain-based Observatory which has a network of sources inside Syria.

The monitor said it had identified six "foreign jihadists" among those promoted, including an Albanian, a Jordanian, a Tajik, a Turk and a Uyghur who is a member of jihadist group the Turkistan Islamic Party. Ayman Al-Tamimi, an expert on jihadist groups and the Syrian conflict, said he too had identified foreigners on the list. He mentioned a Uyghur, a Jordanian and a Turk who "headed the block of Turkish fighters under HTS, and is now a brigadier general". — Agencies

## More Gazans die in Zionist jails as...

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The detainees ministry is an arm of the Palestinian Authority responsible for the welfare of Palestinians in Zionist jails and their families. The two organizations named four of the dead prisoners as Mohammad Rashid Okka, 44, Samir Mahmoud Al-Kahlout, 52, Zuhair Omar Al-Sharif, 58, and Mohammad Anwar Labad, 57. An additional prisoner, Ashraf Mohammad Abu Warda, 51, died in the Zionist entity's Soroka Hospital on Sunday, the Palestinian Prisoners' Club said.

In a joint statement, the two organizations accused the Zionist entity of "liquidation operations against prisoners and detainees". They said the number of prisoners killed in Zionist jails was at a historic high, calling it "the most bloody phase". According to the statement, 291 Palestinian prisoners have died in custody since 1967, when the Zionist entity began occupying the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Currently, more than 10,000 Palestinians are being held in Zionist jails, including 89 women, at least 345 children and 3,428 administrative detainees who are held without trial.

Meanwhile, the WHO chief called Monday for the immediate release of Hossam Abu Safiyeh, director of Gaza's Kamal Adwan Hospital, who is being held by the Zionist military following a major raid on the facility. The Friday-Saturday assault on Kamal Adwan in Beit Lahia left northern Gaza's last major health facility out of service and emptied of patients, the World Health Organization said.

"Hospitals in Gaza have once again become battlegrounds and the health system is under severe threat," WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said on X. "Kamal Adwan Hospital in northern Gaza is out of service following the raid, forced patient and staff evacuation and the detention of its director. His whereabouts are unknown. We call for his immediate release."

The Zionist military claimed on Sunday that its forces had killed approximately 20 Palestinians and apprehended 240 others in the raid, calling it one of its "largest operations" conducted in the territory. The military also said had detained Abu Safiyeh, suspecting him of being a Hamas militant.

Tedros, who last week was caught up in a Zionist strike against Yemen's main airport that he said might have cost him his life, said the patients in critical condition at Kamal Adwan had been moved to the Indonesian Hospital, "which is itself out of function". "Amid ongoing chaos in northern Gaza, WHO and partners today delivered basic medical and hygiene supplies, food and water to Indonesian Hospital and transferred 10 critical patients to Al-Shifa Hospital," he said. "We urge (the Zionist entity) to ensure their health care needs and rights are upheld."

He said seven patients along with 15 caregivers and health workers remained at the "severely damaged" Indonesian Hospital, "which has no ability to provide care". "Al-Ahli Hospital and Al-Wafa Rehabilitation Hospital in Gaza City also faced attacks today and both are damaged," Tedros added. "We repeat: stop attacks on hospitals. People in Gaza need access to health care. Humanitarians need access to provide health aid. Ceasefire!" At least 45,514 Palestinians have been killed and 108,189 wounded in the Zionist military offensive in Gaza. — Agencies

## International

# Anguish for Korea plane crash relatives amid grim salvage

## Seoul inspects B737-800 fleet after worst disaster

**MUAN, South Korea:** Cries of anguish echoed through a lounge at Muan International Airport in South Korea on Monday as families waited for news of relatives killed in the weekend's Jeju Air plane crash.

The Boeing 737-800 from Thailand crashed Sunday while attempting an emergency belly landing, smashing into a wall and bursting into flames. All but two of the 181 passengers and crew aboard were killed. Grieving families are increasingly desperate—and angry—as they wait for formal identification of the remains of their loved ones, hoping to hold funerals and properly mourn.

Meanwhile, South Korea ordered Monday a "comprehensive inspection" of all Boeing 737-800 aircraft operated by the country's carriers, after a Jeju Air plane crash-landed and burst into flames, killing 179 people on board. US air safety officials and staff from the beleaguered aircraft maker Boeing were arriving to join investigators probing the worst air disaster on South Korean soil, which officials initially blamed on a collision with birds.

The plane was carrying 181 people from Thailand to South Korea when it made a mayday call and belly-landing

before crashing into a barrier and bursting into flames. Everyone aboard Jeju Air Flight 2216 was killed, save two flight attendants pulled from the wreckage.

South Korea began seven days of mourning, with flags flying at half-mast and the acting president flying to the crash site in southwestern Muan for a memorial. Acting President Choi Sang-mok, who has only been in office since Friday, said the government was making "every effort" to identify victims and support bereaved families.

"I apologize deeply... but the extent of the damage to the bodies is profound," an official told families at a briefing Monday, trying to explain the immense hurdles facing workers trying to recover remains while also preserving crash-site evidence. "There are many cases in which arms and legs have been severed," he said, his words causing cries of shock and horror among the waiting families.

Using finger prints and DNA analysis, authorities have identified 146 of the victims, and are working hard on the 33 still to be verified.

Soldiers were still combing through wetlands near the airport—apparently looking for body parts—and an AFP reporter saw blood-stained seats and

splatters of human remains on the ground near the wreckage. "We estimate that we can reconstruct 80 to 90 percent of the bodies if given a period of 10 days," the official said. Relatives said they understood the process took time and that the bodies were "heavily damaged", but were desperate for progress. "We want the authorities to bring our loved ones back, even if they are only 80 percent intact," Park Han-shin, who represents the victims' relatives, told reporters.

"The temperature is rising rapidly, even though it is winter, which could lead to a situation where the remains decompose quickly," he said, calling for stepped-up search efforts in the crash zone.

He also called on the officials to bring more refrigerated containers for the remains. The anger of the grieving relatives was palpable the night of the accident, when Jeju Air's CEO Kim E-bae, visited the families for the first time, bowing his head before them. "With a heart full of sorrow, I express my condolences and sympathies to those who lost their lives in this accident. I also sincerely apologize to the bereaved families," he said. But video circulating online showed family members shouting at Kim asking him why he came so late—eleven hours after the accident.



Relatives of passengers of a Jeju Air Boeing 737-800 series aircraft react near a make-shift shelter at Muan International Airport in Muan, near Seoul on December 30, 2024. — AFP

"It only takes one hour and 40 minutes to get from Seoul to Gwangju by KTX, so what have you been doing? What are you trying to achieve by showing up only now?" yelled one family member.

Others shouted "save my daughter!" and "would you have done that if it was your own flesh and blood?" At the crash

site, the devastating impact of the accident was still evident Monday, with blood-stained debris—seats, and twisted metal—strewn across the site, and the smell of burning and blood lingering. "It's heartbreaking," 71-year-old housewife Ms Yoo told AFP, saying her brother had been on the plane. — AFP

## Second Jeju Air jet suffers landing gear problem

**SEOUL:** A Jeju Air flight from Seoul on Monday was forced to return after encountering a landing gear problem, the airline said, a day after South Korea's most deadly plane crash. The Boeing 737-800 involved in the latest incident was the same model as the Jeju Air plane that crashed on Sunday killing 179 people after coming down without its landing gear engaged.

Jeju Air Flight 7C101, which departed Seoul's Gimpo International Airport for Jeju island "at around 6:37 am, returned to Gimpo at 7:25 am" after a landing gear issue was detected shortly after takeoff, the South Korean airline said. "Shortly after takeoff, a signal indicating a landing gear issue was detected on the aircraft's monitoring system," Song Kyung-hoon, head of the management support office at Jeju Air, told a news conference. "At 6:57 am, the captain communicated with ground control, and after taking additional measures, the landing gear returned to normal operation. However, the decision was made to return to the airport for a thorough inspection of the aircraft."

Local media reported that 21 passengers chose not to board an alternate flight to Jeju, citing con-



A Jeju Air official (center) bows his head and apologizes to the bereaved families of passengers of the Jeju Air passenger plane that crashed at Muan International Airport in Muan on Sunday. — AFP

cerns over safety and other reasons. Jeju Air's 41 plane fleet includes 39 Boeing 737-800 aircraft.

Seoul said on Monday it would conduct a special inspection of all 101 Boeing 737-800 planes in operation in the country, with US investigators, possibly including from plane manufacturer Boeing, joining the probe into the crash. "We are

reviewing plans to conduct a special inspection on B737-800 aircraft," said Joo Jong-wan, head of the aviation policy bureau at the South Korean transport ministry.

Joo added that the government plans to "implement rigorous aviation safety inspections in response to the (landing gear) incidents". — AFP

## Three foreigners die in Bangkok hotel blaze

**BANGKOK:** Three people, from the United States, Brazil and Ukraine, were killed after a fire broke out at a hotel near Bangkok's popular backpacker district on Sunday night, authorities said, with seven others being treated in hospital. The fire broke out on the fifth floor of the six-storey Ember Hotel, Bangkok's Fire and Rescue Department said. The hotel is near the Khao San area of Bangkok that is popular with backpackers and known for its bars and hostels.

A Brazilian woman died at the scene and two men, an American and a Ukrainian, were pronounced dead in hospital, police said in a statement on Monday, adding they were investigating the cause of the fire. "Authorities reacted quickly and the fire alarm sounded, but the smoke was fast," Bangkok Governor Chadchart Sittipunt told reporters late on Sunday. There were 75 people in the hostel, 34 of whom were rescued from the rooftop, the governor said in a statement on Monday. He has ordered a city-wide inspection of fire escape routes in hotels and entertainment venues.

"We have to build confidence and take care of tourists," Chadchart said. Tourism is a key driver of Southeast Asia's second-largest economy. Thailand recorded 32 million foreign tourist arrivals from Jan. 1 to Dec. 1, up 28 percent from a year earlier. In 2019, before the pandemic, visitor numbers reached a record of nearly 40 million. — Reuters

## Ex-husband convicted in French mass rape trial will not appeal

**MARSEILLE, France:** The Frenchman found guilty of drugging and raping his then-wife and soliciting dozens of men to do the same for more than a decade will not appeal his conviction, his lawyer said Monday. Dominique Pelicot was convicted and jailed for 20 years earlier this month after a trial that horrified France and beyond, while 50 co-defendants were also convicted and handed various sentences of between three and 15

## Kenya police fire teargas at protest over abductions

**NAIROBI:** Police in Kenya's capital Nairobi fired teargas to try to disperse protesters demonstrating on Monday against what they say is a wave of unexplained abductions of government critics as well as detaining some of those taking part. Dozens of Kenyans have been abducted in recent months, according to human rights groups, who blame the extrajudicial arrests on Kenya's police and intelligence services. Kenyan authorities have said that the government does not condone or engage in extrajudicial killings or abductions. Some groups of young protesters marched in downtown Nairobi while small

years. Gisele Pelicot was hailed as a hero for her courage and dignity throughout the three-month trial.

"Dominique Pelicot has taken the decision to not appeal the verdict," his lawyer Beatrice Zavarro told AFP and Franceinfo. An appeal "would force Gisele (Pelicot) to undergo a new ordeal, new confrontations, which Dominique Pelicot refuses" to do, Zavarro said, adding that "it is time to finish judicially". Monday is the last day for the defendants to file appeals, and 17 of Pelicot's co-defendants have already done so, according to Zavarro.

The convicted ringleader had been "astounded to see these appeals, especially (from) individuals who in the dock apologized to Gisele Pelicot," Zavarro said. "It seems to me that filing an appeal contradicts those words". Following the guilty verdicts at the end of De-

groups of others staged sit-ins as clouds of teargas hung in the air. They chanted slogans against the government, with some holding placards denouncing illegal detentions as police on horseback patrolled nearby. Among the protesters was opposition lawmaker Okiya Omtatah, who was taking part in a sit-in, with demonstrators using thick chains to hold them together as riot police tried to prise them apart.

Kenyan newspaper Daily Nation reported that Omtatah and 10 other protesters had been detained during the protests. Nairobi police commander Adamson Bungei and national police spokesperson Rosalia Onyango did not respond to Reuters requests for comment. The alleged abductions followed anti-government protests that started in June this year. Initially aimed at overturning proposed tax hikes, the demonstrations eventually evolved into a movement that cut across Kenya's traditional ethnic divisions, becoming the biggest threat to the incumbent President William Ruto's government. — Reuters

ember, one of Gisele Pelicot's lawyers said she had no fear of a new trial. "If it were to happen, she has already indicated to us that she would face it—if she is healthy, obviously, since she is a lady who is now 72," Stephane Babonneau told France Inter radio.

"In any case, she has no fear of it, that is what she told us." Gisele Pelicot has been praised for refusing to waive her right to a closed trial, saying she wanted to shift the shame associated with rape from victims to perpetrators. The appeals decisions come weeks before the daughter of Dominique and Gisele Pelicot, Caroline Darian, will narrate a TV documentary on the use of drugs to enable rape and sexual abuse.

Slated for broadcast by France 2 on January 21, the 90-minute film is set to include testimony from six

### News in Brief

#### Ukraine jails ex-policeman

**KYIV:** Ukraine said Monday it had sentenced a former police officer to 15 years behind bars on high treason charges for passing the location of air defense units to Russia. Kyiv has opened thousands of probes against Ukrainians suspected of collaborating with Russian forces since Moscow launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. — AFP

#### New body found from Channel

**LILLE, France:** A man's body was recovered from the Channel near northern French port city Calais on Monday, prosecutors said, the day after three migrants were killed attempting to reach Britain. "The victim is a black man aged around 30, yet to be identified at this stage," said Patrick Leleu, deputy prosecutor in Boulogne-sur-Mer. — AFP

#### IGAD envoy plans to visit Sudan

**NAIROBI:** The east African bloc IGAD's envoy to Sudan said Monday he planned a visit to the war-torn country next month where he is trying to act as a mediator. It comes a year after the government in Sudan froze relations with the regional bloc and suspended its membership of the body. — AFP

#### Russia opposes peacekeepers

**MOSCOW:** Russia is against the deployment of Western peacekeeping troops to Ukraine as part of any settlement to end the nearly three-year conflict, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said. Talk of the possible stationing of foreign troops in Ukraine to enforce any peace deal is circulating in Western capitals, with French President Emmanuel Macron and Poland's Prime Minister Donald Tusk discussing the issue in a meeting in Warsaw this month. — AFP

#### China hands boy life sentence

**BEIJING:** A Chinese court sentenced a teenage boy to life in prison on Monday for murdering his classmate, capping a case that sparked a national debate over the treatment of juvenile offenders. Three suspects, all aged under 14 at the time of the murder, were accused in April of bullying a 13-year-old classmate surnamed Wang over a long period before killing him in an abandoned greenhouse. — AFP

#### Mali court jails dissident

**BAMAKO:** A Malian court on Monday jailed a political figure for making critical remarks against the military rulers of neighboring Burkina Faso, a legal source and his family said. Issa Kaou N'Djim, who previously supported Malian junta leader Colonel Assimi Goita before distancing himself, made the comments during a program aired on local television station Joliba TV News. — AFP

other victims raped after being drugged unwittingly, as Gisele Pelicot was. They include women attacked at France's annual Fete de la Musique festival of street music aged just 15, another by a boss and one even by her father. "We are finally lifting the veil on a social reality which is hugely underestimated and much more widespread in France than people think," Darian said at a press conference earlier this month. France's ANSM medicines safety agency said reports of suspected criminal drugging leapt by 69 percent in 2022, to 1,229 cases—a figure campaigners say is the tip of the iceberg. Darian herself believes she was drugged and raped by Dominique Pelicot, after pictures of her naked and unconscious body were found among the detailed records her father kept of his crimes. — AFP

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 31, 2024

# Russian gas flows via Ukraine as transit deal expires Jan 1

## Moscow loses market share to Norway, US, Qatar

**MOSCOW/KYIV:** Russia pumped gas on Monday to European customers via Ukraine for one of the last days before a key transit deal expires at the end of the year, marking the almost complete loss of Russia's once mighty hold over the European gas market.

Supplies of Russian gas via Ukraine are due to stop from the early hours of Jan 1 after the current five-year deal expires. Kyiv has refused to negotiate a new transit deal as its war against Russia approaches the end of a third year. Russia and the Soviet Union spent half a century building up a major share of the European gas market, which at its peak stood at 35 percent, but the war in Ukraine has all but destroyed that business for Gazprom, Russia's state-controlled gas giant. Moscow has lost its share to rivals such as Norway, the United States and Qatar since the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, which prompted the EU to cut its dependence on Russian gas. The slump in Russian gas supplies to Europe pushed gas prices to an all-time high, stoking inflation and raising the cost of living across the continent.

The end of the transit deal is unlikely to cause a repeat of the 2022 EU gas price rally as the remaining volumes are relatively small. Russia shipped about 15 billion cubic meters (bcm) of gas via Ukraine in 2023 - only 8 percent of peak Russian gas flows to Europe via various routes in 2018-2019.

President Vladimir Putin said last week that there was no time left this year to sign a new Ukrainian gas transit deal, laying the blame on Kyiv for refusing to extend the agreement. The Soviet-era Urengoy-Pomary-Uzhgorod pipeline brings gas from Siberia via the town of Sudzha - now under the control of Ukrainian soldiers - in Russia's Kursk region. It then

flows through Ukraine to Slovakia. In Slovakia, the gas pipeline splits into branches going to the Czech Republic and Austria.

Most other Russian gas routes to Europe are shut, including Yamal-Europe via Belarus and Nord Stream under the Baltic that was blown up in 2022. The only other operational Russian gas pipeline routes to Europe are the Blue Stream and Turk-Stream to Turkey under the Black Sea. Turkey sends some Russian gas volumes onward to Europe including to Hungary.

Gazprom plunged to a net loss of \$7 billion in 2023, its first annual loss since 1999, because of the loss of the EU's gas markets. Disruptions to gas supplies have also sparked numerous contractual and political disputes. On Monday, Moldovan Prime Minister Dorin Recean ordered his government to start preparing for the possible nationalization of gas company Moldovagaz, which is 50 percent-owned by Gazprom. Gazprom had said it plans to suspend gas exports to Moldova from 0500 GMT on Jan. 1 due to unpaid debts. Moldova disputes it is in arrears for previous gas shipments and accuses Russia of destabilizing the country, which Moscow denies. Slovakian Prime Minister Robert Fico said on Friday that Slovakia would consider reciprocal measures against Ukraine such as halting back-up electricity supplies if Kyiv stops the gas transit from Jan 1.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy accused Fico on Saturday of opening a "second energy front" against Ukraine on the orders of Russia. Slovakia denied the accusation. Gazprom said that it will send 42.4 million cubic meters of gas to Europe



Supplies of Russian gas via Ukraine are due to stop from the early hours of Jan.

via Ukraine on Monday, a volume in line with recent days. Reuters reported last month that Gazprom is making the assumption that no more gas will flow to Europe via Ukraine after Dec. 31 in its internal

planning for 2025. Ukraine could consider continued transit of Russian gas on the condition that Moscow does not receive money for the fuel until after the war, Zelenskyy said earlier this month. — Reuters

## UK study warns of perils in AI-driven 'intention economy'

**LONDON:** Conversational artificial intelligence (AI) tools may soon "covertly influence" users' decision making in a new commercial frontier called the "intention economy", University of Cambridge researchers warned in a paper published Monday.

The research argues the potentially "lucrative yet troubling" marketplace emerging for "digital signals of intent" could, in the near future, influence everything from buying movie tickets to voting for political candidates. Our increasing familiarity with chatbots, digital tutors and other so-called "anthropomorphic" AI agents is helping enable this new array of "persuasive technologies", it added.

It will see AI combine knowledge of our online habits with a growing ability to know the user and anticipate his or her desires and build "new levels of trust and understanding", the paper's two co-authors noted. Left unchecked, that could allow for "social manipulation on an industrial scale", the pair, from Cambridge's Leverhulme Centre for the Future of Intelligence (LCFI), argued in the paper published in the Harvard Data Science Review.

It characterizes how this emergent sector—dubbed the "intention economy"—will profile users' attention and communicative styles and connect them to patterns of behavior and choices they make.

"AI tools are already being developed to elicit, infer, collect, record, understand, forecast, and ultimately manipulate and commodify human plans and purposes," co-author Yaqub Chaudhary said.

The new AI will rely on so-called Large Language Models—or LLMs—to target a user's ca-

## Climate change brought extreme heat in 2024: UN

**GENEVA:** Climate change sparked a trail of extreme weather and record heat in 2024, the United Nations said on Monday, urging the world to pull back from the "road to ruin". The outgoing year is set to be the warmest ever recorded, the UN's weather and climate agency said, capping a decade of unprecedented heat. Meanwhile emissions of greenhouse gases grew to new record highs, locking in more heat for the future, the World Meteorological Organization said.

"Climate change plays out before our eyes on an almost daily basis in the form of increased occurrence and impact of extreme weather events," WMO secretary general Celeste Saulo said.

"This year we saw record-breaking rainfall and flooding events and terrible loss of life in so many countries, causing heartbreak to communities on every continent. "Tropical cyclones caused a terrible human and economic toll, most recently in the French overseas department of Mayotte in the Indian Ocean. "Intense heat scorched dozens of countries, with temperatures topping 50 degrees Celsius (122 degrees Fahrenheit) on a number of occasions. Wildfires wreaked devastation."

The 2015 Paris climate accords aimed to limit global warming to well below two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels—and to 1.5C if possible. In November, the WMO said the January-September mean surface air temperature was 1.54C above



FRANKFURT: A photo shows the logo of the ChatGPT application developed by US artificial intelligence research organization OpenAI on a smartphone screen and the letters AI on a laptop screen in Frankfurt am Main. — AFP

ence, politics, vocabulary, age, gender, online history, and even preferences for flattery and ingratiation, according to the research. That would be linked with other emerging AI tech that bids to achieve a given aim, such as selling a cinema trip, or steer conversations towards particular platforms, advertisers, businesses and even political organizations. Co-author Jonnie Penn warned: "Unless regulated, the intention economy will treat your motivations as the new currency." "It will be a gold rush for those who target, steer, and sell human intentions," he added. — AFP

the pre-industrial average measured between 1850 and 1900. That puts 2024 comfortably on course to surpass the record set in 2023.

Last year temperatures were 1.45C hotter than before the industrial revolution, when humanity started burning large amounts of fossil fuels. The WMO is set to publish the consolidated global temperature figure for 2024 in January, with its full State of the Global Climate 2024 report to follow in March. In his New Year message, UN secretary general Antonio Guterres reflected on the record temperatures witnessed over the past decade.

"Today I can officially report that we have just endured a decade of deadly heat. The top 10 hottest years on record have happened in the last 10 years, including 2024," he said.

"This is climate breakdown in real time. "We must exit this road to ruin—and we have no time to lose," he said. "In 2025, countries must put the world on a safer path by dramatically slashing emissions, and supporting the transition to a renewable future."

"It is essential, and it is possible," Saulo said she had repeatedly warned about the state of the climate throughout 2024. "If we want a safer planet, we must act now," she said.

Experts from 15 international organizations, 12 countries and several leading academic and NGO figures convened at the WMO's Geneva headquarters from December 17-19 to work on a coordinated framework for tackling the growing threats from extreme heat.

The WMO turns 75 in 2025 and intends to mark the anniversary by focusing on the cryosphere: the frozen parts of the Earth, including sea ice, ice sheets and frozen ground. The WMO is also behind a major push for improved climate services and early warning systems. — AFP

## German flying taxi startup Volocopter files for insolvency

**BERLIN:** Flying taxi startup Volocopter said Monday it was filing for insolvency, days after another fellow German company in the field, Lilium, was saved from collapse. "Despite recent intensive fundraising efforts, finding a viable solution to maintain regular operations outside of insolvency proceedings has not been possible," Volocopter said in a statement, adding that the filing was made on December 26.

The company, founded in 2011, is now on the hunt for investors, and court-appointed administrator Tobias Wahl said that the aim was "to develop a restructuring concept by the end of February". Volocopter had been aiming to enter the market in 2025 with its two-seater "Volocity" electric air taxi model. It suffered a setback when it had to cancel test flights in Paris during this summer's Olympics at short notice when the certification for its aircraft engine didn't come through in time.

In December, Volocopter said that the Volocity model had fulfilled 75 percent of the criteria required by the European Union's Aviation Safety Agency (EASA). The firm is also working on a five-seater model which it hopes to present in 2027. Germany's entrants in the burgeoning "electric vertical take-off and landing" (eVTOL) sector have struggled to keep up with US and Chinese competition. Last week a company set up by a consortium of European and North American investors swooped in to save Lilium, which had filed for bankruptcy in October. Lilium has also been developing small electric-powered jets that can take off and land vertically. That case renewed debate about Germany's support—or lack thereof—for the country's startup scene. Critics have long lamented a dearth of funding for young, innovative companies, comparing the situation in Germany unfavorably with that in the United States and elsewhere. — AFP



## Burgan Bank continues to service customers during New Year holiday

**KUWAIT:** Burgan Bank has announced that it will be closing all branches on Wednesday, January 1, 2025, on the occasion of the New Year's holiday. The bank will resume normal operating hours at all branches on Sunday, January 5, 2025. However, to accommodate Burgan Bank customers, the Airport Branch will continue to operate 24/7 during the holidays.

For more information about Burgan products and services during the holiday, customers can contact the bank's contact center or WhatsApp at 1804080. Customers can also continue to conduct their financial transactions easily and securely using the Burgan Bank mobile app or the online banking platform (online.burgan.com). Burgan Bank would like to take this opportunity to extend its warmest wishes and heartfelt greetings to everyone in Kuwait for a joyous and prosperous New Year.

## Syria names Sabrine as first woman to lead central bank

**DAMASCUS:** Syria's new rulers have appointed Maysaa Sabrine, formerly a deputy governor of the Syrian central bank, to lead the institution as the first woman to do so in its more than 70-year history, a senior Syrian official said. Sabrine, a longtime central bank official mostly focused on oversight of the country's banking sector, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

She replaces Mohammed Issam Hazime who was appointed governor in 2021 by then-President Bashar Al-Assad and remained on after Assad was ousted by a lightning rebel offensive on

Dec 8. Since the rebel takeover, the bank has taken steps to liberalize an economy that was heavily controlled by the state, including by cancelling the need for pre-approvals for imports and exports and tight controls on the use of foreign currency. But Syria and the bank itself remain under strict US sanctions.

The bank has also taken stock of the country's assets after Assad's fall and a brief spate of looting that saw Syrian currency stolen but the main vaults left unbreached, Reuters reported. The vault holds nearly 26 tons of gold, the same amount it had at the start of its civil war in 2011, sources told Reuters, but foreign currency reserves had dwindled from around \$18 billion before the war to around \$200 million, they said. — Reuters



Maysaa Sabrine



## Business

# NBK Mobile App strengthened its position as Kuwait's leading digital banking platform

## Bank introduced and upgraded over 90 services and features in 2024

KUWAIT: Demonstrating unwavering attention to the finer details of its customers' needs and aiming to enhance their banking experience in ways that impact their daily lives, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) strengthened its digital leadership in 2024 by introducing and upgrading over 90 services and features on the NBK Mobile Banking App.

Through the introduction of new services and products, alongside enhancements to existing offerings, NBK has delivered a digital experience that not only meets but often surpasses customer expectations. The App empowers users to manage their accounts and conduct banking transactions seamlessly and securely, anytime and anywhere, eliminating the need for branch visits.

This year, the NBK Mobile Banking App introduced a host of innovative features, encompassing a wide array of services and products, including but not limited to:

### Al-Jawhara Miles credit card

Through the NBK Mobile Banking App, NBK customers can now effortlessly apply for a Visa Infinite Credit Card, seamlessly linking it to their Al-Jawhara or Al-Jawhara Savings Accounts. This integration grants them access to a wide range of exclusive benefits, enhancing their banking experience.

This unique card, the first of its kind in the market, offers customers the unique opportunity to earn welcome miles equivalent to three times the card's credit limit, with a potential of up to 150,000 miles. Additionally, it amplifies the chances of winning in Al-Jawhara account draws by threefold, significantly enhancing the likelihood of securing weekly and monthly prizes. Customers also gain increased eligibility for the grand prize draw, offering a staggering one million dinars, held three times a year.

### WAMD service

Available through the NBK Mobile Banking App, this service enables customers to send and receive money seamlessly, easily, and conveniently, using only the recipient's mobile number. No additional bank account details are required, making the process simple and efficient.

### 247 Visa Platinum prepaid card

Through the NBK Mobile Banking App, customers can now transform their everyday purchases into a smart savings opportunity with the NBK 247 Visa Platinum Prepaid Cashback Card. This innovative card offers customers up to 24 percent cashback on their daily expenditures, making each transaction a step toward rewarding savings.

### Prepaid gift cards

NBK Mobile Banking App enables customers to effortlessly issue digital prepaid gift cards, allowing users to quickly create and load virtual cards directly through the application. These cards can be gifted to family and friends on various occasions, offering flexibility and convenience. The recipient can easily add the card to their e-wallet and begin using it immediately for purchases both within Kuwait and internationally, as well as for online transactions.

### Monthly statement

Customers can now access their monthly statements directly from the account details page of the NBK Mobile Banking App. They have the option to customize the statement period or select specific dates and can easily share the statement via their preferred method, such as email or applications like WhatsApp, without the need to visit any of the bank's branches.

### NBK Quick Send

This service empowers NBK customers to instant send funds via the NBK Mobile Banking App. Users can generate instant payment links, sending them to both NBK customers and non-customers alike, simply by entering the recipient's name, phone number, and the desired amount.

### Load account

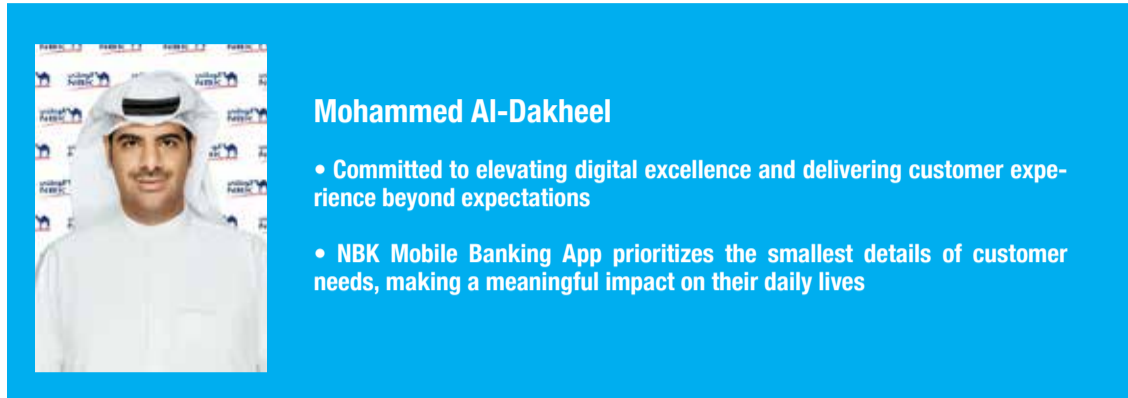
A notable feature introduced this year to the NBK Mobile Banking App is the ability for users to load their NBK accounts using K-Net portal. This functionality allows for seamless top-ups at any time, from anywhere, even during weekends and public holidays, providing unparalleled convenience.

### Al-Jawhara Saver Account

Customers now can apply to the first of its kind account and get competitive rates and earn bonus interest up to 1.5 percent for the first year in addition to entering the Al-Jawhara monthly and grand draws. The more they save, the higher interest they can earn.

### Contact your relationship manager

This service offers NBK Premium Services cus-



### Mohammed Al-Dakheel

- Committed to elevating digital excellence and delivering customer experience beyond expectations
- NBK Mobile Banking App prioritizes the smallest details of customer needs, making a meaningful impact on their daily lives

tomers the ability to view their Relationship Manager's (RM) name and contact details, as well as conveniently book appointments through the NBK Mobile Banking App. To ensure maximum convenience, customers can easily schedule appointments at their preferred times within branch working hours, simply by selecting the desired date and time with a single click. A reminder notification will be sent 24 hours in advance, ensuring a seamless and efficient experience.

### Ordering a secondary prepaid card

NBK customers now have the option to request a secondary prepaid card linked to their account through the NBK Mobile Banking application. This feature enables the primary cardholder to extend the benefits of their credit card to other family members, while maintaining full control over the spending limits, ensuring a secure and flexible way to manage family finances.

### Update Civil ID

The NBK Mobile Banking App now offers customers the convenience of renewing their Civil ID through the Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI). If a customer's Civil ID has expired or is nearing expi-

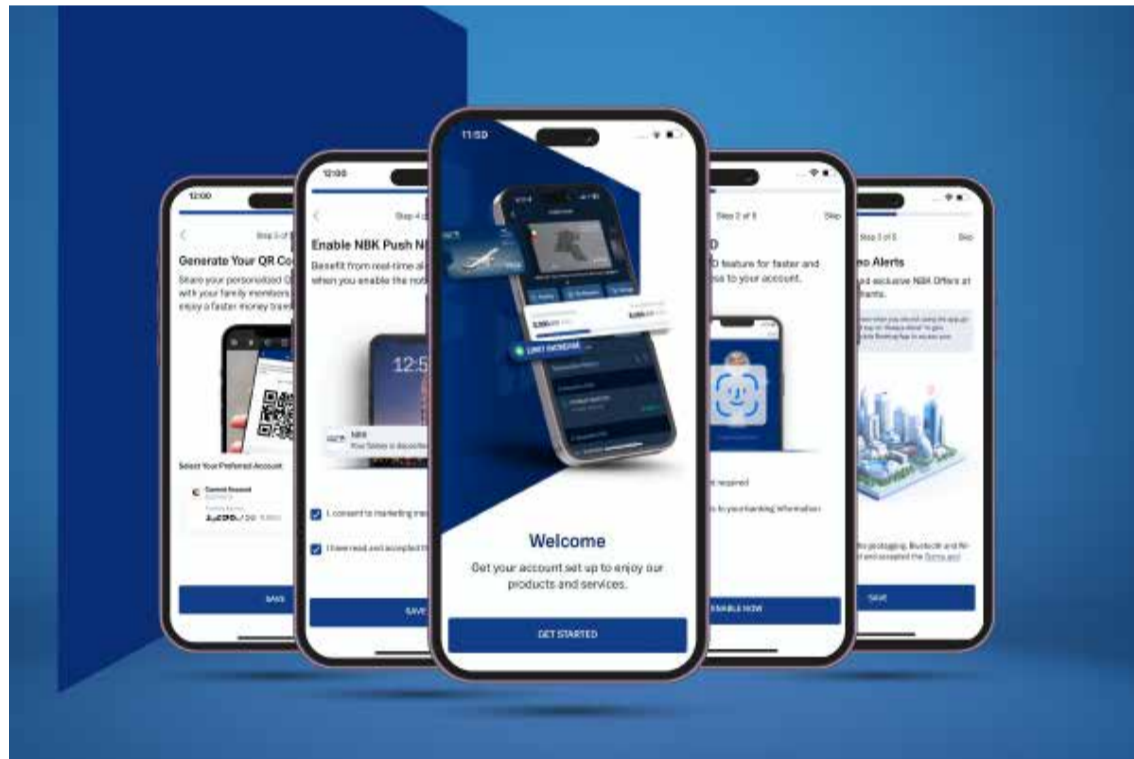
dividend service. Notably, customers can enroll in this service via KCC using a single bank account, ensuring a seamless and efficient experience.

### Approve in app payment

This service is an authenticated method that provides an additional layer of security to protect against fraudulent when making transactions using cards. In this release we are providing this service for credit, prepaid and debit cards, offering users an even more secure experience when using their cards to make transactions through the app.

### Interest paid in advance with NBK FlexibleTerm Deposit

The latest updates to the NBK Mobile Banking App provide customers with the option to open an NBK Flexible Term Deposit and earn interest in advance, with additional flexible interest payment options available on a monthly, quarterly, or annual basis. Customers can open a term deposit with a minimum amount of KD 1,000, in either KD, GBP, or USD, all through the app. Interest is calculated based on the deposit duration and the selected payment frequency, offering customers greater flexibility



ration, an alert will appear on their screen, notifying them of the need for renewal. Upon NBK's authorization to retrieve the necessary information from PACI, a notification is sent to the customer, prompting them to confirm if the transaction was accepted or declined, ensuring a seamless and efficient process.

### "Afaq" for international transfers in GCC

NBK has introduced an advanced international transfer system through its innovative "Afaq" service via the NBK Mobile Banking App. This service enables users to settle their transfers almost instantly, offering special rates for customers transferring funds to GCC countries in celebration of its launch.

The revamped UEFA Champions League Platinum Mastercard Prepaid Card by NBK

The revamped card is the first prepaid cashback card for kids in Kuwait, it is available to all family members with age starting as low as 7 years old.

### e-Dividend payment

Through the NBK Mobile Banking App, the Bank's customers can now register for the electronic dividend (e-Dividend) transfer service. This service enables the direct deposit of cash dividend amounts into the accounts of shareholders who are registered with Kuwait Clearing Company (KCC), offering a streamlined and efficient way to receive dividends. By offering registration for the electronic profit transfer service through the NBK Mobile Banking App, the bank aims to simplify the process for its customers, encouraging them to use their NBK accounts to subscribe to the

ty in managing their investments.

### Personal products and profile nickname

Users of the NBK Mobile Banking App can now assign a personalized name to any NBK product they hold, including accounts, cards, loans, and even beneficiaries. This feature allows users to modify or delete the product name at any time, making it easier to identify and navigate to their renamed products. As a result, users can access their products more quickly and efficiently, facilitating seamless electronic transactions. In addition to adding a personalized nickname to your profile.

### Linking minor accounts

You can link your minor accounts to your profile easily with NBK Mobile Banking Application, where you can manage their accounts easily in addition to creating standing orders after the linkage

### Hide amount

NBK added a layer of security. Users now have the flexibility to hide/unhide the amount displayed of their products, such as accounts, credit cards, prepaid, loans, and all types of deposits whenever they want. This gives them more privacy when opening the application in public places. It's simple, all the customers have to do is shake their devices to hide/unhide the balances.

### Mobile Application Security Assessment (MASA)

As the first mobile banking application in the

GCC, NBK Mobile Banking received the MASA Security Certificate on Google Play, verifying the security and safety of the app. NBK is committed to providing the most secure digital financial services and strives to maintain the best-in-class digital security standards.

### Submit your suggestions

As part of NBK's commitment to maintaining continuous communication with its customers and responding to their feedback on the bank's services, users of the NBK Mobile Banking App can now submit and send their suggestions on a range of topics, including accounts, cards, loans, payments, and transfers. This feature allows the bank to actively engage with its customers and enhance their overall banking experience.

### See all new updates

NBK Mobile App users can explore the latest services and products in detail, including their features, benefits, and how to make the most of them. This feature ensures that users have all the information they need about new products, empowering them to make informed decisions before applying for or utilizing these offerings.

### No minimum balance for new account opening

In addition to the seamless banking solutions provided by NBK, customers can now also have the option to open a new account with zero minimum through NBK Mobile Banking App balance and enjoy a world-class digital banking experience without having the need to visit the branch.

### Numerous improvements

In addition to the introduction of new services, NBK has made several enhancements to existing features in the NBK Mobile Banking App in 2024. Customers can now seamlessly add prepaid cards issued through the app to their Apple Wallet immediately upon issuance. Additionally, they now have the option to select their Prepaid card PIN at the time of issuance for selected card types, offering greater convenience and control over their banking experience.

The new enhancements also allow users to view the outstanding balances in their accounts, along with the remaining monthly transfer limit, all on the same screen. This feature makes it easier for customers to track their monthly transfer activity, showing both the amounts they have already transferred and what remains, thereby helping them to better manage their accounts and control their monthly transfers. In addition to that, users can capture their device name in device management page

Furthermore, for quick access to send and receive services from main dashboard. Users can make quick payment transactions or splitting invoices, the names of the sender, beneficiary, and the payment purpose are clearly displayed. Additionally, when entering the IBAN number of the recipient, their bank details automatically appear on the screen, streamlining and accelerating the transfer process for a more efficient experience.

NBK Mobile Banking users can now make their transfers faster and easier by showing their mobile number to appear as a new beneficiary for other NBK App users, so that they can transfer money using the phone number, NBK customers can customize and modify their names displayed in the NBK Mobile Banking App, where they can keep the name as it is or modify it and make it shorter or in the way they prefer to display it according to their wishes and preferences, and users can customize and modify the names of their devices displayed in the application from the option "Manage Devices", the way they prefer to display them on their screens.

Commenting on these achievements, Mohammed Al-Dakheel, Head of Digital Banking Business at NBK, stated: "At NBK, we are committed to advancing our digital excellence by continually enhancing the services offered through the NBK Mobile Banking App, a platform our customers trust to efficiently complete their banking transactions." "Throughout 2024, we continued to introduce new services and enhancements to the App, aiming to deliver a pioneering digital banking experience that not only meets but exceeds our customers' expectations," added Al-Dakheel. He also highlighted a notable growth in banking operations completed through the App, reflecting an increase in customer satisfaction with the services it offers.

As a testament to NBK's leadership in digital banking, the NBK Mobile Banking App was awarded the "Best Mobile Banking App" in Kuwait by Global Finance. The accolade was presented during the magazine's annual ceremony in London, where it also recognized the "Best Consumer Digital Banks -2024."

## Dollar reigns with support of higher yields

NEW YORK: The dollar maintained its firm stance on Monday, while the Japanese yen traded around five-month lows, as global currencies headed to the end of a year characterized by diverging central bank outlooks. The dollar index, which measures the greenback against a basket of six other major currencies, was up 0.1 percent at 108.1 on the day. It has kept around this level after touching a two-year peak of 108.54 on Dec 20.

Underpinned by rising US yields and expectations for US rates to stay higher for longer, the dollar index is up 2.1 percent in December, bringing year-to-date gains to 6.5 percent. "Despite paid forecasters almost universally calling for a weaker US dollar in 2024, the

greenback looks set to close the year higher against all major currencies with the buck reigning supreme," said Chris Weston, head of research at Pepperstone. The dollar has gained in each of the last three months, with traders expecting President-elect Donald Trump's policies of looser regulation, tax cuts, tariff hikes and tighter immigration to be both pro-growth and inflationary, which will likely keep US yields elevated.

US 10-year Treasury yields hit a more than seven-month high last week. The yield hovered close to that mark on Monday, at 4.599 percent. The yen, on the other hand, was trading at close to five-month lows on Monday, flat at 157.85, with only the risk of Japanese intervention preventing another test of the 160 level last seen in July. The dollar has gained 10 yen since Dec 3, with much of the decline in the Japanese currency coming after the Federal Reserve's Dec 18 message of caution around future rate cuts.

That view has weighed heavily on the yen, which hit its weakest level since July 17 last week at 158.09 per dollar and has shed 10.6 percent so far this year, on track for a fourth yearly decline against the greenback. It came off the July lows on Friday af-

ter a summary of opinions from the Bank of Japan's December policy meeting showed some policymakers gaining confidence in an imminent rate increase, while the Japanese central bank also cut its monthly bond purchases.

Still, Japanese yields remain notably low, and recent comments have sown doubts about the BOJ's commitment to lift rates. The BOJ held interest rates steady at 0.25 percent at this month's meeting, and Governor Kazuo Ueda said the central bank was scrutinizing more data on next year's wage momentum and clarity on the incoming US administration's economic policies.

Fawad Razaqzada, market analyst at City Index, said the BOJ may be better positioned to raise rates next year, and expected the yen to rally in coming months. "With above-target inflation remaining persistent for much of 2024, price pressures could increase further should the yen weaken even more. To support its currency, the Bank of Japan may wish to start raising rates more meaningfully..." Razaqzada said. "A potential flight to safety, a drop in US bond yields, or government intervention could all help to weaken the dollar/yen in 2025." Traders are on watch

for any potential intervention by Japanese officials to shore up the currency if it continues to weaken, as they have done multiple times this year. Japan Finance Minister Katsunobu Kato on Friday reiterated concerns over a sliding yen, repeating his warning to take action against excessive currency moves.

This year-end liquidity kept other currencies in tight ranges. The euro fell 0.2 percent to \$1, not far from recent troughs. The currency is heading for a calendar-year drop of roughly 5.5 percent on the dollar, after the European Central Bank cut interest rates four times in 2024 and with markets expecting the ECB to take a quicker pace with rate cuts than the Fed in 2025.

The next interest rate cut by the ECB could be longer in coming after a recent uptick in inflation, ECB Governing Council member Robert Holzmann was quoted as saying on Saturday. Leading cryptocurrency bitcoin was up around 0.5 percent at \$93,578, but is down about 3 percent on the month after retreating from a record high of \$108,379.28 hit on Dec 17. It has surged about 120 percent so far this year. — Reuters

## Business

# China urges more aid for people in need as economic woes persist

## Stocks close up, led by energy and financials • HK shares down

**BEIJING:** The Chinese government urged local officials to provide more financial relief or step up one-time allowances to people in need ahead of major holidays over the next month, as China's economic difficulties are set to extend into 2025. China's economy has struggled to gather steam this year, mainly due to a protracted property crisis and weak domestic demand. Securing employment, particularly for fresh college graduates, is also a policy priority, authorities say.

Ahead of New Year's Day and the Lunar New Year in late January, local governments with financial capacity are encouraged to distribute relief funds or step up one-time allowances to those in need, the Ministry of Civil Affairs said in a statement published on Saturday. The ministry issued a similar call in late September ahead of a major holiday for one-off assistance to the extremely poor, orphans and those in difficulty.

According to the ministry's weekend statement, assistance to certain groups, such as unemployed people who have not been paid unemployment insurance and those without a source of income, must be strengthened. Jobless college graduates, the ill and families facing financial difficulties should also receive help, it added. According to official data, China's unemployment insurance system paid out 160.07 billion yuan (\$21.93 billion) from January to November, up 25.5 percent year on year.

The ministry also urged local governments to better monitor low-income groups.

The World Bank, in a report last Thursday, said the pace of China's poverty reduction slowed in 2024 and is expected to decelerate further in 2025 and

2026, due largely to slower economic growth projected in years to come. Tepid household consumption, the main drag on the economy, is the key to next year's growth recovery, analysts say. Policymakers have vowed to revive household demand.

China stocks ended slightly higher on Monday, buoyed by gains in energy and financial shares, while smaller stocks weighed on overall performance. Hong Kong shares were down. For 2024, onshore shares are set to log gains for the first time after three years of losses as multiple policy stimulus measures since September lifted market sentiment.

- China's blue-chip CSI300 Index closed up 0.5 percent, while the Shanghai Composite Index was up 0.2 percent. Hong Kong's benchmark Hang Seng was down 0.2 percent.

- Energy shares traded onshore were up 1.3 percent, leading gains in the onshore market, while financial stocks were up 1.2 percent.

- Small-cap stocks traded on the Beijing Stock Exchange slumped 4.4 percent, dragging on onshore performance.

- The market is expected to remain active in the first half of January but external disturbances are likely to increase in the latter half, leading to a cooling of market sentiment, said a strategist at Citic Securities.

- "Policy expectations are anticipated to heat up again after the Lunar New Year," he said.

- Trading volumes have declined since an October spike that was triggered by a slew of stimulus measures.

- China's finance ministry said in a statement on



A woman works at a textile factory in Siyang County of Suqian municipality in east China's Jiangsu province. — AFP

Monday that the proportion of new energy vehicles procured each year as government vehicles should not be less than 30 percent of the total and 100 percent in urban areas to "to support and promote" their use.

- The CSI Auto Index added 0.6 percent but Chinese electric vehicle giants traded in Hong Kong

dropped, with Xpeng HK down 5.8 percent.

- China's central bank governor was quoted as saying by state media on Sunday that the weighted average reserve requirement ratio (RRR) for banks stands at around 6.6 percent after the RRR cut, and this level still leaves "some room" when compared to the central banks of major global economies. — Reuters

## World shares tick lower as high yields test lofty valuations

**LONDON/SYDNEY:** World shares drifted lower on Monday as elevated government bond yields prompted investors to pull out of equities at the end of a year that has been positive for many regional markets. MSCI's broadest index of world shares dipped 0.1 percent, but is still 17 percent higher for the year. Trading volumes were thin ahead of the New Year holiday on Wednesday. Stock markets in Germany, Italy and Switzerland are shut on Tuesday as well, while those in the UK and France have a half-day trading session.

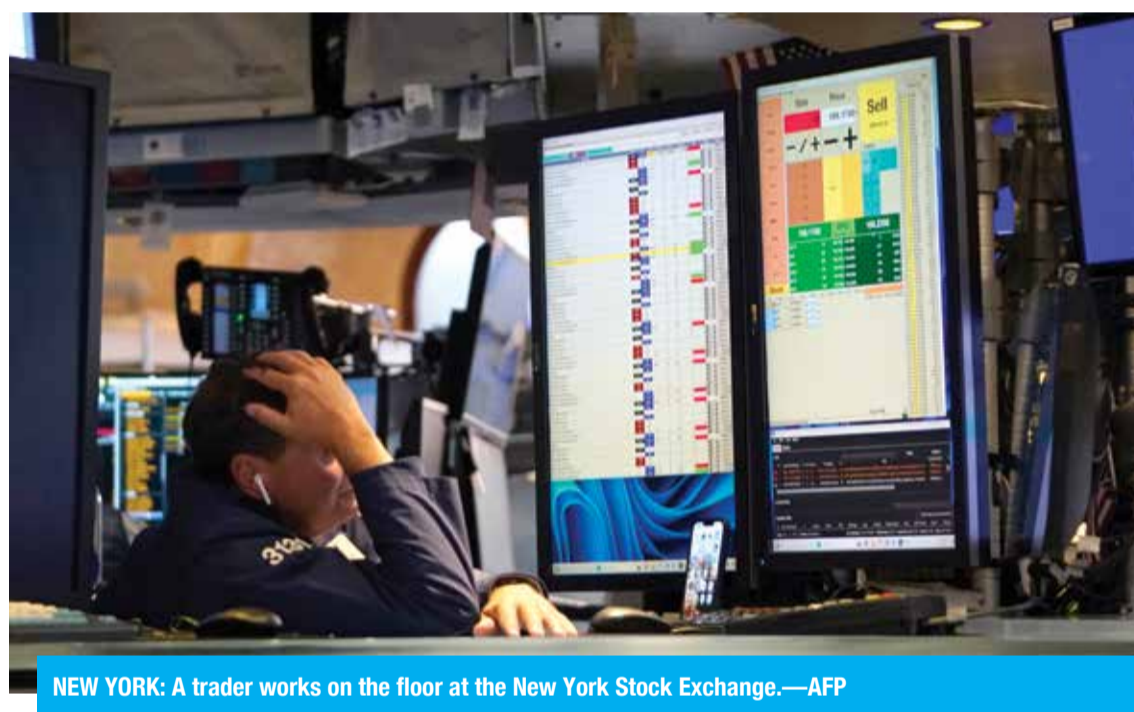
European stocks opened lower. The pan-European index ticked down 0.1 percent by 1030 GMT, weighed down by the technology and industrial goods sectors. This week China reports on the purchasing power of its manufacturing industry (PMI) on Tuesday, while the US activity data from the manufacturing industry in December is due on Friday.

South Korea's main index KSI1 has suffered a storm of political uncertainty in recent weeks, and is saddled with losses of 9 percent for the year. It was last down 0.2 percent.

Shares of South Korean budget carrier Jeju Air hit their lowest level on record on Monday, in the wake of a plane crash that killed 179 people. China's blue-chip CSI300 Index closed up roughly 0.5 percent, to be up almost 16 percent on the year with almost all that gain coming in just two weeks in September after Beijing promised more stimulus. Hong Kong's benchmark Hang Seng closed roughly 0.2 percent lower.

Japan's Nikkei share average retreated on its last trading day in 2024, down from Friday's five-month high, as investors locked in profits on the index that rose nearly 20 percent for the year. S&P 500 futures and Nasdaq futures were both lower by roughly 0.2 percent following Friday's sell off.

The S&P 500 is up 25 percent for the year and the Nasdaq up 31 percent, which is stretching valuations when compared to the risk-free return of



NEW YORK: A trader works on the floor at the New York Stock Exchange.—AFP

Treasuries. Yields on 10-year Treasuries are near eight-month highs at 4.597 percent and ending the year around 75 basis points above where they started, even though the Fed delivered 100 basis points of cuts to cash rates. "The continued rise in bond yields, driven by the reassessment of less restrictive monetary policy expectations, creates some concern," said Quasar Elizundia, a research strategist at broker Pepperstone.

"The possibility that the Fed may keep restrictive monetary policy for longer than expected could temper corporate earnings growth expectations for 2025, which could in turn influence investment decisions," said Elizundia. Bond investors may also be wary of burgeoning supply as President-elect Donald Trump is promising tax cuts with few concrete proposals for restraining the budget deficit.

Trump is expected to release at least 25 executive orders when he takes office on Jan 20, covering a range of issues from immigration to energy and crypto policy. "Changes to immigration, trade, and fiscal policy under the second Trump administra-

tion will likely be meaningful but stop short of some of the more dramatic proposals," said a Goldman Sachs note on Sunday night by David Mericle and Alec Phillips. Widening interest rate differentials have kept the US dollar in demand, giving it gains of 6.5 percent for the year on a basket of major currencies. The euro held steady on Monday but this year so far has lost more than 5 percent on the dollar to last stand at \$1.0436.

The dollar held near a five-month top on the yen at 157.79 JPY, with only the risk of Japanese intervention preventing another test of the 160.00 barrier. The strength of the dollar has been something of a burden for gold prices, though the metal is still 27 percent higher for the year so far at \$2,612 an ounce. Oil has had a tougher year as concerns about demand from China and a likely influx of supply from the US in 2025, kept a lid on prices and forced OPEC+ to repeatedly extend a deal to limit supplies. Brent fell 19 cents to \$73.98 a barrel, while US crude fell 26 cents to \$70.34 per barrel. — Reuters

## US disburses \$3.4bn in budget aid for Ukraine

**WASHINGTON:** The United States has sent \$3.4 billion in additional budget aid to Ukraine, giving the war-torn country critical resources amid intensifying Russian attacks on Ukrainian civilians and infrastructure, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said on Monday. Yellen said in a statement the direct budget assistance, provided in coordination with the US Agency for International Development and the State Department, marked the final disbursement under the 2024 Ukraine Security Supplemental Appropriations Act.

A US official said the funding brings the total in US budget aid to Ukraine to just over \$30 billion since Russia's invasion in February 2022. Most of those funds are used to keep Ukraine's government running by paying salaries to teachers and other state employees. Earlier on Monday, US President Joe Biden announced \$2.5 billion in additional security assistance for Ukraine, which is separate from the direct budget aid. Nearly three years into the war, Washington has committed \$175 billion in total assistance for Ukraine.

President Joe Biden's administration has been racing to shore up support for Ukraine before Republican President-elect Donald Trump takes office on Jan 20, given his public questioning of military aid and vows to end the Ukraine war within 24 hours of taking office. Trump wants Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskiy to make a deal with Russian President Vladimir Putin to end the nearly three-year-old Ukraine war. Some of his fellow Republicans, who will control both houses of the US Congress starting next month, have also cooled on sending more aid to Kyiv. Yellen said continued economic aid for Ukraine was crucial to allow it to maintain government services and continue to defend its sovereignty, warning against moves to cut funding. — Reuters

## Russian billionaires whose chem factories fuel Russia war machine

**LONDON:** Chemicals factories founded or owned by some of Russia's wealthiest men are supplying ingredients to plants that manufacture explosives used by Moscow's military during the war in Ukraine, an analysis of railway and financial data shows. Reuters identified five chemical companies, in which five Western-sanctioned billionaires hold stakes, that provided more than 75 percent of the key chemicals shipped by rail to some of Russia's largest explosives factories from the start of the war until September this year, according to the railway data.

The news agency's analysis demonstrates for the first time how heavily factories forming part of Russia's war machine rely on these men and their companies. The billionaires include Roman Abramovich, former owner of Chelsea Football Club, and Vagit Alekperov, who was ranked by Forbes in April as Russia's richest man with a fortune estimated at \$28.6 billion. Abramovich and Alekperov did not respond to requests for comment sent via their companies or lawyers. London-listed Evraz, in which Abramovich holds a 28 percent stake, said it supplied the chemicals for "civilian use only". Lukoil, a refiner in which Alekperov retains a sharehold-

ing, said it "does not manufacture explosives or any related components". Anna Nagurney, a University of Massachusetts professor who closely studies supply chain networks related to the Ukraine-Russia war and reviewed Reuters' findings, said the five companies were aiding Moscow not only by providing essential chemical ingredients for munitions but also by earning much-needed hard currency from exports of civilian products, including fertilizers.

"These chemical companies may be operating as civilian ones, but they are sustaining the war effort," Nagurney said. To determine from where Russia's main munitions factories received their supplies, Reuters analyzed the movement of more than 600,000 rail shipments that carried the chemicals needed to make explosives from the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 through September 2024.

The railway data from two commercial databases in Russia was supplied to Reuters by the Open Source Centre, a British-based NGO devoted to collecting publicly-available intelligence and monitoring potential sanctions violations. It detailed the type of cargo in every railway wagon, the weight, origin and destination, and the names of the company that sent the goods and



KYIV, Ukraine: A woman holds a slogan which reads "Third winter in captivity, Free Azov" as relatives and friends of Ukrainian prisoners of war from the Azov Brigade and other units take part in a rally to call for their exchange with Russian prisoners at St. Sophia Square in Kyiv on December 29, 2024. — AFP

the company that received them. Reuters cross-checked the data from the two databases to confirm its accuracy. However, the news agency was unable to confirm whether the data included every rail shipment to the explosives factories, or the extent to which the plants received deliveries by road.

The data showed that the billionaires' companies supplied vital ingredients to five explosive and gunpowder factories in Russia that are subject to Western sanctions. The plants are subsidiaries of the giant Russian state arms manufacturer and automaker Rostec. Using leaked tax invoices cov-

ering parts of 2023, Reuters was also able to verify that four of the chemicals firms were suppliers to four of the explosives manufacturers.

Neither the Kremlin, the defense ministry, nor Rostec responded to Reuters' questions about civilian companies' role in supplying Russia's munitions industry. Before the war, all the explosives plants, as part of efforts to diversify, also used to make explosives or gunpowder for civilian use. Reuters could not determine whether such civilian sales continue and whether the chemicals supplied might be earmarked for civilian usage. — Reuters

## Starlink to roll out direct-to-cell services in Ukraine

**KIEV:** Ukraine's leading mobile operator Kyivstar has signed an agreement with Elon Musk's Starlink to introduce direct-to-cell satellite connectivity, Kyivstar's parent company said on Monday. Direct-to-cell devices are connected to satellites equipped with modems that function like a cellphone tower, beaming phone signals from space directly to smartphones.

Kyivstar expects direct-to-cell services with messaging functionality to be operational in the fourth quarter of 2025, the telecoms group said in a joint statement. The operator will expand voice and data services in later stages. Financial details of the agreement were not disclosed.

SpaceX-owned Starlink, which also provides critical internet connectivity to war-torn Ukraine and its military, launched its first set of satellites with direct-to-cell capabilities earlier this year. The satellite broadband firm has struck deals with local providers for direct-to-cell services in the US and seven other countries, including Japan and New Zealand. Ukraine will be one of the first countries in the world with direct-to-cell connectivity and the first conflict zone where Starlink will roll out this technology, according to its website. Russia has ramped up its efforts to jam signals between Starlink satellites and ground terminals in Ukraine since 2022.

The agreement comes as Musk, Starlink's owner, grows more engaged with the incoming Trump administration in the US and its Ukraine strategy. In November, he joined a call between President-elect Donald Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy in which he said he would continue supplying Starlink satellites to Ukraine, Axios reported. — Reuters

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 31, 2024

# As India's Bollywood shifts, stars and snappers click



In this photograph taken on Nov 19, 2024, a group of paparazzi take pictures and videos of Bollywood actress Sara Ali Khan outside a hotel in Mumbai.



In this photograph taken on Nov 18, 2024, a paparazzo waits on his motorbike to take pictures of Bollywood actor Ranbir Kapoor outside his residence in Mumbai.



In this photograph taken on Oct 11, 2024, paparazzi and fans take pictures and videos of Bollywood actor Amitabh Bachchan outside his residence in Mumbai. — AFP photos

From riding pillion on zooming motorbikes to round-the-clock airport stakeouts, India's celebrity-hunting paparazzi photographers have gone from "outcasts" to becoming a key part of Bollywood's vast film industry machine. Times have changed for celebrity snapper Manav Manglani, who scored big at the wedding of Bollywood star Shilpa Shetty in 2009 – by climbing a tree and perching on a branch for hours to spy over the venue's walls. "We ...were considered outcasts," said the photographer, describing the early days of his trade.

Fifteen years later, Manglani pushes streams of content to over 6.5 million followers on Instagram. "We are part of the system now," he said, commanding a squad of nearly 20 photographers who stake out popular gyms, chic cafes and luxury hotels, their phones buzzing with tips. The team has divided the megacity into coverage zones, including someone stationed at the airport full-time.

Mumbai-based Bollywood, the core of India's Hindi-language film industry, is the longtime heart of moviemaking in the world's most populous nation and a major cultural export. In celebrity-obsessed India, it can be a lucrative trade.

## 'Brand-building'

Bollywood began a century ago. But it was in the 1970s that film magazines began publishing "inside" industry gossip, said Ram Kamal Mukherjee, a former editor-in-chief of Stardust magazine. The Bollywood publication brought "stories from the studios, bedroom stories, stories from the make-up van," he said.

The first wave of paparazzi began in India in the early 2000s, with freelance photographers chasing celebrities. The insatiable demand by social media and ubiquitous availability of smartphones shifted gears again – with photographers no longer "just providing pictures" but working to help produce a narrative, he said. "Today there is intervention," Mukherjee said, citing examples such as staged incidents where young actors seemingly spontaneously hand cash to beggars. "There is



Bollywood actors Ranbir Kapoor and his wife Alia Bhatt pose with their daughter Raha upon their arrival for a Christmas brunch in Mumbai on Dec 25, 2024.

brand building." That has come alongside wider industry changes, including viewers shifting from the big screen. Traditional blockbuster spectacles drawing crowds into cinemas have been challenged by long-format narratives on streaming platforms viewed at home, commonly called OTT or "over-the-top" services in India. This, observers say, has helped paparazzi develop a role in the publicity machine.

"Being an influencer with followers with a very popular page, helping them promote the movies, the OTT, and the brands... we are now important," Manglani said. Indian movies released in theatres raked in an "all-time high" of \$1.4 billion in box office revenue in 2023, according to consulting firm EY.

But competition is fierce. Mandvi Sharma, a former publicist for mega-star Shah Rukh Khan, said the two sides can be "co-dependent", especially for younger ac-

tors hoping photographers can boost their fame. "Things have changed," said Viral Bhayani, a photographer with over 12 million Instagram followers, recalling how a decade ago he would have to "beg" for information about organized media events.

It's been quite a shift, "from being thrown out of places... to now being called everywhere," he said. Bollywood also faces rising challenges from other Indian-language film centers. Of the country's 1,796 cinema releases last year, just 218 were Bollywood's traditional fare of Hindi-language movies, said EY.

## 'Need us'

Photographers now snap more candid images of celebrity daily lives, often more relatable to millions of fans than red carpet glamour or formal magazine shoots. Despite their careers being more closely linked, old frictions

remain, especially for big-name stars. In 2023, Bollywood star Alia Bhatt made a police complaint for "gross invasion" of privacy after two photographers took pictures of her at home from a neighboring rooftop.

But Manglani said his images are also a useful barometer to measure actors' presence on the screen. Producers, directors and the brands, "are keenly watching whom am I featuring... what's happening, and what is the traction on that celebrity," Manglani said. "We used to run behind them," he said. "We wanted money, we were earning by the picture... Now it's both ways. They also need us, we also need them."

Sneh Zala, a younger celebrity snapper, sees his job as a service for both sides. "I want the fans... to see where their favorite celebrities are going, what they are doing in their lives," said Zala. "I am just the mediator between the actors and their fans." — AFP



In this photograph taken on Nov 22, 2024, paparazzi take pictures and videos of Bollywood actress Akanksha Puri at the airport in Mumbai.



In this photograph taken on Nov 8, 2024, a group of paparazzi take pictures and videos of Bollywood actor Ajay Devgn at a hotel in Mumbai.



In this photograph taken on Nov 25, 2024, paparazzi take pictures and videos of Bollywood actress Bhumi Pednekar outside a hotel in Mumbai.

## How a driving school program empowers Pakistani women

Pakistani student Laiba Rashid, 22, hopes her life will change once she learns how to drive a motorcycle after undergoing a training program that teaches women how to operate two-wheelers in the bustling eastern city of Lahore. Although the program is 7 years old, it's rare to see women driving motorcycles. Women driving cars or riding pillion on two-wheelers driven by a male relative is more socially acceptable in the conservative, Islamic nation.

"I hope this will change my life because I am dependent on my brother to pick me up and drop me to college," Rashid told Reuters on her first day at the Women on Wheels (WOW) driving program offered free by the Lahore traffic police. She said she wants to buy a motorcycle to go to college, adding that, previously, there were no women drivers in her family. "Now everybody is convinced that women should be independent in their movement to schools, jobs and markets," she said.

Women driving two-wheelers has been a cultural and religious taboo, said Bushra Iqbal Hussain, a social activist and director of Safe Childhood, an organization advocating the safety of female children. But more women are now changing the culture, she said, like they did in the 1980s with regular cars, in a bid to reduce their reliance on men to commute.

The WOW program has been in operation since 2017, but has become increasingly popular in recent months as car prices have soared and motorcycles offer a cheaper alternative. "Stagnant wage growth and high inflation have eroded the purchasing power of the middle class, leaving motorcycles as the only viable option for many households," said auto sector analyst Muhammad Abrar Polani of investment house Arif Habib Limited.



Women bikers participate in a women's bike rally in Karachi on March 7, 2021, on the eve of International Women's Day. — AFP photos



Participants of Women on Wheels (WOW) ride their motorbikes to mark International Women's Day in Karachi on March 7, 2022.



Women police personnel under Pakistan's Pink Wheels project, initiated for women safety, listen to an instructor at the Women's Enclave reporting center in Gujranwala on Sept 3, 2024.



Women participants of Women on Wheels (WOW) raise their helmets at the start of a rally launching the Women on Wheels campaign in Lahore on Jan 10, 2016.

The cheapest four-wheeler in Pakistan, where the annual GDP per capita is \$1,590, costs about 2.3 million rupees (\$8,265) compared to about 115,000 rupees for the most affordable China-made two-wheeler. Sohail Mudassar, a traffic warden, said the WOW program has trained at least 6,600 women, and Rashid's batch was the 86th since it started.

"Women of different ages and segments of society join our camp," said female trainer Humaira Rafaqat, a senior traffic warden who has trained about 1,000 women. "Young women are quick learners because they are enthusiastic and take risks."

One of them, Ghania Raza, 23, who is pursuing a doctorate in criminology, said learning to drive a

two-wheeler gave her a deep sense of achievement and empowerment: "It was like breaking a glass ceiling," she said. Shumaila Shafiq, 36, a mother of three and a part-time fashion designer, said she has been driving her husband's motorcycle to the market and other places after graduating from the program.

She has designed a special short length abaya, a dress used by conservative Muslim women, to wear while operating the motorcycle. "Wearing a long abaya with loose fitting poses risks as it may get entangled in the wheels," she said, adding that she intends to market the design to fellow women riders. — Reuters



In this picture taken on May 13, 2018, Pakistani women celebrate as they ride pink motorcycles during the Pink Motorcycle rally in Lahore.



In this picture taken on March 5, 2024, women ride motorbikes during a riding lesson with the women-only group "Rowdy Riders" at an open ground in Karachi.

## Demand for Japanese content booms post 'Shogun'

Fueled in part by the success of TV hit "Shogun", foreign studios are hungry for quality Japanese content and local creators are adapting to meet demand. Fans of Japanese manga and anime cartoons have often criticized foreign adaptations that are unfaithful to the original material. But "Shogun", based on the 1975 novel by Australian-British writer James Clavell, broke the mold when the period drama series — mostly in Japanese and hailed for its authenticity — won 18 Emmy awards in September.

Other recent Japanese works have also become worldwide hits. Franco-US-Japanese show "Drops", based on a manga of the same name, won best drama series at the International Emmy Awards in November. Netflix's 2023 adaptation of the manga superhit "One Piece" — starring Mexican actor Inaki Godoy as the lead — was hailed by viewers and critics alike and will return for a second season.

More adaptations of major manga and anime hits are in the works, including the superhero adventures of "My Hero Academia" and the ninja escapades of "Naruto". "Demand from Western markets is clearly increasing," said Kaori Ikeda, managing director at TIFFCOM, the content trade fair affiliated with the Tokyo International Film Festival.

But Japanese companies lack "know-how" when it comes to things like negotiating rights, she told AFP. So TIFFCOM has organized Tokyo Story Market, a space to facilitate networking and meetings between international producers and Japanese publishers.

### 'Whitewashing'

Foreign studios are also getting better at avoiding some of the pitfalls of the past, such as the 2017 film version of the manga "Ghost in the Shell" starring Scarlett Johansson. Critics accused the movie, whose main actors except Takeshi Kitano were all non-Japanese, of "whitewashing". Similarly, the 2017 supernatural thriller "Death Note" was panned for veering too far from the original manga.

"Manga authors are highly respected and fan communities are very vigilant," said Klaus Zimmermann, producer of "Drops". His adaptation takes some liberties, such as starring a French actor as one of the main characters, but Zimmermann insists it was developed in collaboration with the authors of



This picture taken on Feb 13, 2024 shows Japanese actor Hiroyuki Sanada attending the red carpet event for FX's "Shogun" at the Academy theater in Los Angeles. — AFP

the original manga. "It was about finding the spirit of the manga so as not to distort it," he told AFP.

Yuki Takamatsu, a rights negotiator at the manga's publishing house Kodansha, said the process of adapting "Drops of God" was "amazing". "Everyone was open to tackling those challenges together... At every step, everyone was understanding about how we should do it," he said.

Past failures were in part down to publishers struggling to communicate their wishes to foreign producers, who in turn lacked a proper understanding of manga and anime, Takamatsu said. "Back just 15, 20 years ago, most of the enquiries we received from those big studios were like, hey, I know 'Dragon Ball', do you have 'Dragon Ball' IP?" Takamatsu told AFP. "But nowadays, especially since Covid, the producers in their 30s, 40s, they watch anime together with their kids on Netflix or Amazon" and then reach out, he said.

### Japanese TV goes global

Japanese broadcasters have also become "better and better (at) presenting and marketing their

content" abroad, said Makito Sugiyama, executive director at the Broadcast Program Export Association of Japan (BEAJ). This includes their participation at global events such as MIPCOM in Cannes, an annual trade show for the television industry, Sugiyama said. Japanese broadcasters have long had success selling show concepts abroad, like the one for "America's Funniest Home Videos", known in Britain as "You've Been Framed". Now, some Japanese dramas are also finding a wider echo abroad. Nippon TV's original drama "Mother" became a hit thanks in part to its Turkish remake, and has been broadcast in around 50 countries.

Western viewers have overcome their initial reluctance to watch series with Asian actors, believes Masaru Akiyama, chief executive of the BEAJ. "They have got used to it, they don't care anymore. They want to see, they want to feel the stories." "Shogun" was "a game changer for Japan," he added, and Ikeda agrees. "That a samurai story with such attention to historical detail can become mainstream entertainment is proof of the potential" of Japanese content, she said. — AFP

## 'Mufasa' and 'Sonic' claim N America box office supremacy

The holiday weekend in North America saw two films battling for box-office supremacy and both emerging with a claim to first place. Disney's animated drama "Mufasa: The Lion King" prevailed in the five days from Christmas Day through Sunday with an estimated take of \$63.8 million, industry watcher Exhibitor Relations reported Sunday.

But Paramount's action comedy "Sonic the Hedgehog 3", which booked \$59.9 million for that same five-day holiday period, came out on top for the traditional Friday-through-Sunday stretch, edging the Disney film by \$38 million to \$37.1 million. Overall, the weekend generated "big, although not record-breaking box office" numbers, said analyst David A Gross, adding that "the next seven days should be excellent."

New vampire pic "Nosferatu" from Focus Features also posted impressive numbers, with \$40.3 million for the five-day period and \$21.2 million for the three-day weekend. Gross called that "an excellent opening for a new horror film" — a remake of the 1922 silent classic inspired by the 1897 novel "Dracula" — and noted that critics' reviews are outstanding.

The ensemble cast includes Bill Skarsgard, Aaron Taylor-Johnson, Willem Dafoe and Nicholas Hoult. Universal's musical fantasy "Wicked", starring Cynthia Erivo and Ariana Grande, earned \$31.7 million for five days (\$19.5 million for three) as the latest spin on the magical world of Oz slipped one spot to fourth place. Its global earnings now stand at \$634 million. And Disney's animated "Moana 2" had an estimated \$28.3 million in ticket sales for five days (\$18.2 million for three), slipping one spot but holding on to top-five status for the fifth straight week.

Meantime, Searchlight Pictures' "A Complete Unknown", with Timothee Chalamet portraying an enigmatic Bob Dylan during the dizzying years that propelled the singer-songwriter from anonymity to world fame, took in a solid \$23.3 million for five days (\$11.6 million for three). Dylan himself has described Chalamet as a "brilliant actor."

Rounding out the top 10 were: "Babygirl" (\$7.2 million for five days, \$4.4 million for three); "Gladiator II" (\$5.9 million; \$4.2 million); "Homestead" (\$5.3 million; \$3.2 million); and "The Fire Inside" (\$4.3 million; \$2 million). — AFP



The artist's dress, reflected in a mirror and surrounded by rubber threads, symbolizes a state of confusion and loss. — KUNA photos



Bags symbolize the journey of life



Red threads that symbolize energy, memory, life and vital connections.

## THE SOUL TREMBLES: IMMERSIVE SHIOTA EXHIBITION AT GRAND PALAIS



Paris' majestic glass-domed Grand Palais is inviting visitors to take a stroll through famed artwork of Japanese artist Chiharu Shiota. The Soul Trembles is an exhibition immersing visitors in a reflective journey of the complexity of the human experience. The Berlin-based artist is known for her work in interwoven yarn, wires and the diverse mediums of daily life to create installations that mirror the intricacies of emotions, connections and memories.

The red, black and white coloring of entangled webs carry powerful symbolism, as red represents energy and vitality, while black stands as an allegory for loss and darkness and white represents purity and renewal. Alongside the installations, the exhibition also offers a chronology of Shiota's career with photographs and documentaries showcasing her creative journey. — KUNA



## For the first time, Syrians 'not afraid' to talk politics

For decades, any Syrian daring to broach political topics got used to speaking in hushed tones and with a watchful eye trained for a listener among the crowd. "There were spies everywhere," Mohannad Al-Katee said in Al-Rawda cafe in Damascus, adding almost in disbelief: "It's the first time that I sit in a cafe and I can talk about politics".

"It was a dream for Syrians," said Katee, 42, a researcher in political and social history. Until now, he like thousands of others had grown accustomed to watching for the proverbial flies on the walls of Damascus' renowned cafes. Today, those same cafes are alive and buzzing with the voices of patrons speaking freely about their country for the first time.

Such discussions "were banned under the previous regime, then there was a relative opening during the Damascus Spring", Katee said. He was referring to the year 2000, when Bashar Al-Assad took over from his late father Hafez and slightly loosened the reins on political life in Syria. Initially, the young Assad had opened up an unprecedented space, allowing for political salons to flourish alongside calls for reform in a country that had long grown accustomed to fear and silence.

"But it didn't last," said Katee. A few months after his succession, Assad rolled back those gains, putting an end to the short-lived "Damascus Spring". In the subsequent years, according to Katee, informants were ubiquitous, from "the hookah waiter to the man at the till, it could have been anyone".

### 'The walls have ears'

Politically active since 1998, he fled to Saudi Arabia in 2012, a year after the outbreak of Arab Spring protests whose violent repression led to the eruption of the nearly 14-year civil war. "Political life consisted of secret meetings," he said. "We



People play cards as they sit at a coffeshop in the center of Damascus on December 28, 2024.-AFP Photos



were always taught that the walls have ears." Today, "Syrians can never go back to obscurantism and dictatorship, to accepting single-party rule," he said.

A little further on, in the Havana cafe once known as a meeting point for intellectuals and activists in a distant past, Fuad Obeid is chatting with a friend. Himself a former owner of a cafe he had to shut down, the 64-year-old said: "The intelligence services spent their time at my place. They drank for free as though they owned the place."

For over 50 years, the Assads maintained their vice grip on society, in large part through the countless informants that walked among the population. On Saturday, Syria's new intelligence chief, Anas Khattab, announced that the service's various branches would be dissolved. Obeid said: "I used to keep a low profile so they wouldn't know I was the owner. I told customers not to talk politics for fear of reprisals." Now, he noted, in Havana cafe as in others, the difference is like "night and day".

### 'Truly free'

Back in Al-Rawda, discussions are in full swing over hookahs and games of backgammon. The owner Ahmad Kozorosh still can't believe his eyes, having himself witnessed numerous arrests in his own cafe over the years. "I am now seeing almost exclusively new faces," he said. "People who had been sentenced to death, imprisoned." To celebrate the new era, he is holding weekly symposiums in the cafe, and will even launch a new political party to be named after it.

Real estate agent Nesrine Shouban, 42, had spent three years in prison for carrying US dollars, a punishable offence in Assad's Syria. Alongside



An independence-era Syria flag is displayed at a coffeshop in Damascus on Dec 28, 2024.



thousands of others who found freedom when the doors of prisons were flung open, she was released on December 8 from the notorious Adra prison. "They had dangled in front of us the possibility of an amnesty" from Assad's administration, she said. "Thankfully, the amnesty came from God. At cafes, we didn't dare say anything. We were even afraid that our phones were bugged," she said. Now, for the first time, she said she felt "truly free".

Despite concerns over the radical Islamist background of Syria's new rulers, a breath of freedom has washed over the country for the first time, with public demonstrations being organized — an unthinkable prospect just one month earlier. "We are not afraid anymore," said Shouban. "If Jolani makes mistakes, we will denounce them," she added, referring to Syria's new leader Ahmed Al-Sharaa, known by his nom de guerre Abu Mohammad Al-Jolani. "In all cases, it can't be worse than Bashar Al-Assad." — AFP



Syrian real estate agent and former detainee Nesrine Shouban, 42, smokes a waterpipe.



Ahmad Kozorosh, owner of Damascus' Al-Rawda coffeshop.



## Sports

# Australia win 'amazing' Test thriller to take 2-1 series lead over India

## Pat Cummins named player of the match for his six wickets and 90 runs

MELBOURNE: Australia ripped out seven Indian wickets in the final session of a dramatic fourth Test in Melbourne on Monday to win a thriller by 184 runs and go 2-1 up in the five-match series.

India crumbled to 155 all out with just 12.5 overs left in the match and will need to win the final Test starting in Sydney on Friday to level the series and retain the Border-Gavaskar Trophy.

"What an amazing Test match," said Australia captain Pat Cummins, who was named player of the match for his six wickets and 90 runs in a pulsating contest played out in front of record crowds at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

"I reckon that's one of the best I've been part of. I mean, all week, the crowd's been ridiculous and the cricket's been just as good."

Set an unlikely 340 to win, India looked well placed to salvage a draw when opener Yashasvi Jaiswal and Rishabh Pant batted through the second session in unflustered fashion to take their side to 112-3 at tea.

### 'Get the job done'

But Pant perished trying to slog part-time spinner Travis Head for six to spark a collapse as India's last seven wickets fell for 34 runs from 20.3 overs. Top-scorer Jaiswal was out for 84 to Cummins, who took 3-28 in the innings, and Nathan Lyon ended the contest when he trapped Mohammed Siraj lbw to spark wild scenes of celebration among the home team. Pace bowler Mitchell Starc said Australia never lost faith they could force victory in the last session. "There were a few patches through the day with the wicket not doing a whole lot, but we managed to find a way," Starc said.

"I think that's just a feature of the group at the



MELBOURNE: Australia's Travis Head (L) and Sam Konstas leaves the field after the conclusion of the match on day five of the fourth cricket Test match between Australia and India at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) in Melbourne on December 30, 2024. — AFP

moment, is that calmness, to have that belief that we can get the job done." The departure of Pant for 30 ended an 88-run partnership with Jaiswal and rejuvenated the Australia bowlers. Ravindra Jadeja and first-innings centurion Nitish Kumar Reddy went quickly before Cummins ended Jaiswal's gritty 208-ball knock in controversial fashion.

The 23-year-old was given not out to a caught-behind appeal from an attempted hook. But

the decision was overturned by the TV umpire on visual evidence that the ball had changed direction, even though no noise was picked up by technology.

Akash Deep was caught at short leg off Scott Boland, who took 3-39, before Jasprit Bumrah scored his second duck of the match. A tenacious Washington Sundar was left not out five after facing 45 balls.

Cummins completed an inspirational Test, with his 90 runs in the two innings being the best match tal-

ly of his career. "Yeah, you never really know what you're going to get with my batting, so fortunately it came off this game," he said.

"We talk about it a lot, us lower order. You know, we put a lot of work into it. We know that can be the difference in a lot of Test matches."

### 'What a week'

Cummins removed opposing captain Rohit Sharma and KL Rahul and Starc dismissed Kohli from the last ball before lunch to leave India tottering at 33-3.

"We wanted to set the platform where the last two sessions, if we had wickets in hand, we can go for those runs. But they bowled perfectly as well," the out-of-form Rohit admitted.

"Then we wanted to fight till the end but unfortunately couldn't do it. It is pretty disappointing. We had our opportunities, we had our chances."

Rohit said Australia's final-wicket stand of 61 between Lyon and Boland in the second innings which took Australia to 234 all out was a major blow to India's victory hopes.

It came after the exceptional Bumrah, who took 5-57 in the second innings and nine wickets in the match, had reduced the hosts to 91-6 midway through day four.

The match set the record attendance for any game of cricket in Australia, with 373,591 going through the gates over five days. "I don't think we've ever witnessed something like that so, yeah, what a week to be involved in," said Australia's Head.

"It's two bloody good teams going at it, and I felt like it ebbed and flowed throughout and it's probably one of the best Test matches that I've been involved in. "It's just nice to come out with a win. It's been a long five days." — AFP



CENTURION: South Africa's Aiden Markram is bowled by Pakistan's Mohammad Abbas (unseen) during the fourth day of the first cricket Test match between South Africa and Pakistan at SuperSport Park in Centurion. — AFP

## SA coach Conrad unapologetic about easy route to final

CENTURION: South African coach Shukri Conrad brushed off criticism about the uneven scheduling of the World Test Championship after his team qualified for the final. South Africa beat Pakistan in a dramatic two-wicket win in Centurion on Sunday to earn their sixth successive Test win.

On the average points system used for the championship, the South Africans are guaranteed a place in the final next June, even if they lose their last match, the second Test against Pakistan starting in Cape Town on Friday.

"People abroad will be shouting that we had an easy draw. Well, I'm not going to apologize for that. We're just thrilled that we can be at Lord's next year," Conrad said after the victory against Pakistan. Australia's win against India in Melbourne on Monday put them in pole position to join South Africa at Lord's, although they still have to play a fifth Test against India and two matches away against Sri Lanka.

South Africa's path to the final illustrated the imbalance in the quantity and quality of the fixtures for the nine teams contesting the World Test Championship (WTC), a fact highlighted by former England captain Michael Vaughan, who called for a revamp of the format. "At the moment every team plays a wildly different number of games and that just does not create a balanced outcome or totally fair league table," Vaughan wrote in a column for British daily The Telegraph. South Africa's program consisted of just 12 matches, the joint lowest number together with Bangladesh.

England played 22 Tests and Australia and India, the other members of cricket's 'big three', had 19 fixtures each. South Africa had six series, all of only two matches. They shared a series against India 1-1 but did not play against Australia or England.

Australia, India and England, by contrast, played each other in a five-match 'marquee' series. With no team dominating, they all shed points, affecting their average points standings. After sharing the honors against India, South Africa effectively forfeited a series in New Zealand because their governing body prioritized a Twenty20 tournament.

Conrad could not select any players contracted by the T20 franchises, which ruled out most of his first-choice players. Since then, though, South Africa have won away series in the West Indies and Bangladesh and beaten Sri Lanka at home before scraping home against Pakistan.

Conrad admitted that his team were far from their best at Centurion, needing an unbeaten ninth wicket stand of 51 between Marco Jansen and Kagiso Rabada to secure the win. "The WTC weighs on you, you really want to get to the final, but we need to be a lot more resilient and clinical. We saw what pressure did to some of our players but they will grow enormously from the experience. — AFP

## Duffy, Hay heroics secure T20 series for NZ over S Lanka

MOUNT MAUNGANUI: Crucial wickets to Jacob Duffy and a rollicking cameo with the bat by Mitchell Hay saw New Zealand beat Sri Lanka to wrap up their Twenty20 series with a game to spare at Mount Maunganui on Monday.

New Zealand made 186-5 in their 20 overs, with player-of-the-match Hay cracking an unbeaten 41 from 19 deliveries. Sri Lanka in reply were all out for 141 with Duffy taking four wickets for a miserly 15 runs, including the tourists' top scorers Kusal Perera for 48 and Pathum Nissanka for 37.

"I said at the start whoever could use the wind the best would do pretty well, and we were able to do that with the bat," New Zealand captain Mitchell Santner said, while also praising Duffy's bowling. "Every time I bring him back he gets a pole.

"The best way to slow a run rate down is to take wickets and that's what we were able to do in the middle." The 45-run victory, following their eight-run win on Saturday put New Zealand 2-0 up in the three-match series.

"I'm really disappointed with the results," Sri Lankan captain Charith Asalanka said, adding his side needed to adapt more quickly to New Zealand pitches. "They're more bouncy than at home, that's the main thing, and we have to adjust to that. At the same time they (New Zealand) were brilliant."

Sri Lanka started their run race cautiously with eight off the first two overs before Nissanka launched into New Zealand's strike bowler Matt Henry, taking 16 off his next over. But, no sooner had Sri Lanka

## Swiatek romps as Tsitsipas crashes at United Cup

PERTH: Iga Swiatek romped to an emphatic victory in her season-opening match at the United Cup Monday, but Stefanos Tsitsipas crashed as Kazakhstan upset Greece to make the knockout round of the mixed-team tournament.

Five-time Grand Slam winner Swiatek was on court for the first time since news broke in late November that she served a one-month ban for a doping violation. But the Pole quickly shook off any nerves in Sydney with a 6-1, 6-0 thrashing of Norway's Malene Helgo, needing just 62 minutes for the demolition job.

"Pleased with everything, honestly. I'm happy for sure with the performance," said the world number two. "It's not always easy to play for your country, sometimes the pressure is a bit bigger.

"I feel good, I feel happy, happy I can play tennis overall," she added. "I'm just going step by step and we'll see what's next." The 23-year-old tested positive for the heart medication trimetazidine (TMZ) in an out-of-competition sample in August when she was ranked number one.

However, the International Tennis Integrity Agency (ITIA) accepted that the violation was not intentional and she escaped with a one-month sanction. While she was in electric form, Greek star Tsitsipas had a day to forget. He is coming off a mediocre 2024 in which his ranking dropped to its current 11 from a career-high three and was hoping for a confidence-boosting fresh start in Perth. But he was stunned 6-4, 7-6 (7/0) by 78th-ranked Alexander Shevchenko.

### Tried hard

Kazakh world number six and 2022 Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina then survived a late wobble before burying Greek hopes with a 6-4, 6-3 de-



MOUNT MAUNGANUI: Sri Lanka's Binura Fernando (R) and Charith Asalanka (L) celebrate the wicket of New Zealand's Daryl Mitchell during the second Twenty20 cricket match between New Zealand and Sri Lanka at Bay Oval in Mount Maunganui on December 30, 2024. — AFP

started to fire, Santner came into the attack into the fifth over and removed Kusal Mendis for 10 with his first delivery. Nissanka and Perera had lifted the score to 71 by the 10th over when Duffy, who turned the first game in New Zealand's favor, again made a crucial breakthrough. A slower delivery to Nissanka was scooped to Henry at fine leg and the Sri Lankan talisman was gone for 37.

When Perera was bowled at the start of the 16th over it was the beginning of the end for Sri Lanka as their last seven wickets fell for just 14 runs. New Zealand, who again lost the toss and were told to bat first, produced a steady performance until Hay

opened up with three overs remaining.

In the final 18 deliveries New Zealand scored 43 runs, 35 of them coming from Hay as he atoned for his first-ball duck in game one. After New Zealand lost Rachin Ravindra for just one early, Tim Robinson and Mark Chapman put on 69 for the second wicket.

But in the 10th over, after belting the first ball from Wanindu Hasaranga over the midwicket fence, Robinson misread the next delivery and was bowled for 41. Another "wrong 'un" from Hasaranga undid Chapman, who was stumped for 42 off 29 deliveries. Hasaranga returned the best figures for Sri Lanka with 2-28. — AFP

## Rohit concedes his form is 'disturbing' for beaten India

MELBOURNE: India captain Rohit Sharma admitted on Monday his batting form is "disturbing" after a double failure in the 184-run fourth Test loss to Australia in Melbourne. Rohit also highlighted the need for team-mate Rishabh Pant to bat more sensibly after throwing his wicket away twice in the defeat, which leaves the tourists trailing 2-1 in the series. Their batting will need to improve for the fifth and final Test starting in Sydney on Friday, which India must win to retain the Border-Gavaskar Trophy.

India's highest run-scorers at the Melbourne Cricket Ground were their two youngest players, continuing a bountiful series for both. Opener Yashasvi Jaiswal's 84 made up more than half of India's second innings of 155, complementing his first innings knock of 82. All-rounder Nitish Kumar Reddy scored a fighting maiden century in the first innings. Questions have arisen about the form and ongoing selection of Rohit, 37, and to a lesser degree, fellow-veteran Virat Kohli, 36.

Rohit struggled throughout the 3-0 home series loss to New Zealand in October-November and has failed to get past 10 runs in any of his five innings in Australia. "A lot of the things I am trying to do are not falling in the place that I would want to," Rohit said. "Mentally, look, it is disturbing without a doubt if you've come here and you want to try to do successfully what you are supposed to. "But as of now that is where it is and there are things that we as a team need to look at, and I personally need to look at as well. "We will see what happens. There is still a game to go." Pant reached 28 and 30 in his two innings but was guilty of gifting his wicket with loose swipes which were caught in the outfield. Rohit expected middle-order specialist Pant, renowned for an attack-first batting mentality, to fine-tune his approach in Sydney. — AFP



SYDNEY: Poland's Iga Swiatek celebrates her victory against Norway's Malene Helgo during their women's singles match at the United Cup tennis tournament on Ken Rosewall Arena in Sydney on December 30, 2024. — AFP

feat of Maria Sakkari. "I'm really happy for the team," said Rybakina, now working with Novak Djokovic's former coach Goran Ivanisevic. "We all tried hard.

"It was a tough match for me today and I'm so happy to be in the quarter-finals." Rybakina took the first set and led 5-0 in the second, but the former world number three Sakkari won three games in a row to threaten a comeback.

Rybakina came through on her third match point as Sakkari mis-hit an overhead after 85 minutes. "At 5-0 you have nothing to lose, she played more aggressively and hit some good shots," said Rybakina. Shevchenko called his defeat of a sluggish Tsitsipas "one of the best" of his career.

"He was not at his best today. But I played really well and found the moment to win that match," he said. "It will definitely go in my record as one of my best wins." Defending champions Germany, led by Alexander Zverev, face China in the Perth evening session. In Sydney, Katie Boulter led Britain to victory over Argentina with all three teams in the group, which also includes hosts Australia, still in contention for the knockout rounds. World number 24 Boulter took 86 minutes to take down 100th-ranked Nadia Podoroska 6-2, 6-3. — AFP

Underdog Billy Harris looked on track to seal the

Sports

# Haliburton shines as Pacers avenge blowout loss to Celtics

## Cole Anthony caps Magic's 21-point rally past Nets

LOS ANGELES: Indiana's Tyrese Haliburton scored 31 points as the Pacers turned the tables on the NBA champion Celtics with a confident 123-114 victory in Boston on Sunday. Two days after Jaylen Brown's 44 points propelled the Celtics to a 142-105 blowout victory over the Pacers Indiana got their revenge.

Haliburton added six rebounds and seven assists without a turnover and six players scored in double figures for Indiana, whose lights-out shooting in the second quarter saw them seize a seven-point half-time lead that they would push to as many as 16.

Brown stayed hot, delivering 31 points on 13-of-21 shooting with six assists. Jayson Tatum added 22 points with nine rebounds and six assists. Pascal Siakam and Andrew Nembhard scored 17 points each for Indiana. Nembhard adding eight rebounds and eight assists as he returned after missing Friday's game with left knee tendinitis.

Nembhard said maintaining their pace in the fourth quarter—when Boston cut an 11-point deficit to two with 7:38 to play, was key for Indiana. "I think that was the biggest thing we did late in the game," he said. "We kept pace in the game. We didn't slow it down and worry about the score too much."

In Orlando, Cole Anthony drove for the game-winning layup as the Magic erased a 21-point deficit to beat the Brooklyn Nets 102-101. Tristan da Silva scored 21 points to lead the injury-ravaged Magic. Goga Bitadze added 19 and Anthony scored five of his 10 in the fourth quarter as Orlando closed the game on a 22-4 scoring run.

Cam Thomas, back after missing 13 games with a hamstring strain, came off the bench and led Brooklyn's scoring with 25 points but missed a jump shot as time expired. Anthony admitted that da Silva, who scored 13 points in the fourth quarter, was supposed to get the ball on the play that yielded his game winner.

When that failed to pan out, he said, "I'm like, alright, I'm gonna go get a layup!" The Nets were without veteran Dorian Finney-Smith, who was traded along with Shake Milton to the Los Angeles Lakers on Sunday in a deal that sent D'Angelo Russell to Brooklyn.

### Heat down Rockets

Miami's Tyler Herro scored a game-high 27 points before he was ejected in a bench-clearing brawl that saw six people tossed in the waning seconds of the Heat's 104-100 victory over the Rockets in Houston. The Heat were up 99-94 when Rockets reserve Amen Thompson flung Herro to the court with 35.7 seconds remaining.

Both players, who had been jostling for position before an inbounds pass, were ejected, along with Miami's Terry Rozier and Houston guard Jalen Green, Rockets coach Ime Udoka and his assistant Ben Sullivan.

Houston's Fred VanVleet had been ejected with 47 seconds remaining in an unrelated incident. In a game that featured 13 lead changes, the Rockets led by seven with 8:10 to play. Herro's basket with 1:56 remaining put Miami up 95-94 and they pulled away to win amid the closing chaos.

In Oklahoma City, Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 35 points to fire the Western Conference-leading Thunder to a 130-106 victory over the injury-hit Memphis Grizzlies. Gilgeous-Alexander was an efficient 14 of 19 from the floor with six rebounds, seven assists and four blocked shots and with the game in hand sat out most of the fourth quarter.

Atlanta's Trae Young posted a double-double of 34 points and 10 assists as the Hawks handed the Toronto Raptors a 10th straight defeat,



BOSTON: Andrew Nembhard #2 of the Indiana Pacers shoots against Sam Hauser #30 and Jaylen Brown #7 of the Boston Celtics during the third quarter at the TD Garden in Boston, Massachusetts. — AFP

136-107. Young made seven of the Hawks' 18 three-pointers, his efforts from beyond the arc matching the Raptors' total of three-pointers.

De'Andre Hunter added 22 points off the

bench for the Hawks who won their fourth straight and spoiled the season debut of Toronto's Bruce Brown after his recovery from arthroscopic knee surgery. — AFP

## Juve draw as match interrupted after Vlahovic abuse

ROME: Juventus and Fiorentina drew 2-2 on Sunday as the Serie A match was interrupted after seven minutes following racist insults from the stands aimed at home striker Dusan Vlahovic. Earlier, Napoli edged past struggling Venezia 1-0 to move level on points with leaders Atalanta.

In Turin, a Khephren Thuram double was cancelled out first by Fiorentina's Moise Kean and then late on by Riccardo Sottil. "I don't believe in bad luck," Juventus coach Thiago Motta told Sky Sport Italia after his side's 11th draw in 18 league outings this term.

"We should have killed off the game and don't leave a chance to the opponent. I don't believe in bad luck. I believe in merit." But the match was overshadowed inside the first 10 minutes when referee Maurizio Mariani called over the two captains to tell them he was stopping play while an appeal over the tannoy at the Allianz Stadium called on fans to cut out racist chants. The two teams then gathered in the center circle, before the match resumed. Broadcaster DAZN reported that Fiorentina fans hurled insults in the direction of their former player Vlahovic, who is Serbian.

Since leaving Fiorentina, his club from 2018 to 2022, Vlahovic, 24, has been targeted by fans of the Viola. In November 2023, Fiorentina were given a suspended one-match ban for chants directed at three Juventus players, including Vlahovic.

Juventus midfielder Thuram opened the scoring after play restarted with a 20th-minute strike. It was the first goal scored by the son of former Juventus and France international Lilian Thuram since he joined the Old Lady in the close-season.

Former Juventus forward Kean levelled on 38 minutes before Thuram doubled up three minutes after half-time. The hosts looked set to leapfrog their fifth-placed opponents but Sottil struck in the 87th



TURIN: Juventus' Portuguese forward Francisco Conceicao (C) and Fiorentina's Italian defender #06 Luca Ranieri (L) fight for the ball during the Italian Serie A football match between Juventus and Fiorentina at the Allianz Stadium in Turin. — AFP

minute to ensure both sides remain level on 32 points.

### 'Definitely happy'

Earlier, Romelu Lukaku wasted a chance to put Napoli ahead in the 37th minute from the penalty spot. His effort was saved by visiting goalkeeper Filip Stankovic. Giacomo Raspadori decided the match with his first goal of the season after 79 minutes, slotting home a loose ball after Venezia failed to clear.

Napoli's third-straight victory brought them level with Atalanta, who drew with Lazio on Saturday, and have a superior goal difference. "Totalling 41 points after 18 matches, nobody, even the most optimistic, thought we could do it at the start of the season, but

we still have to improve, we're a developing team," said Napoli coach Antonio Conte.

"I am definitely happy, because this is a team that is growing," Conte said. "If we could score a few more goals, we would all be calmer, more peaceful and less likely to have heart attacks." Inter Milan, 3-0 winners at Cagliari on Saturday, are third, one point behind the leading duo but with a game in hand.

Napoli can move into sole possession of the lead next weekend when they face Fiorentina, while Atalanta and Inter face each other in the Italian Supercup in Saudi Arabia. Paulo Dybala's crisp right-footed volley earned Roma a 1-1 draw at AC Milan in Sunday's final match. — AFP

## Kuwait clinch more medals at Arab weightlifting tourney

DOHA: Kuwaiti weightlifters won more medals in the third day of the Arab Weightlifting Championship currently held in the Qatari capital Doha.

Women's athlete Abrar Al-Fahad grabbed two gold medals and one silver in the tournament so far, amid worldwide participation, which is based on the Olympic system.

Another woman weightlifter Al-Zahra Kamshad grabbed three medals, one silver and two bronze in the senior category competition.

Women's athlete Razan Al-Mutairi took fifth place in the senior category competition, but for the 76-weight category. Amal Al-Enezi won fourth place in the senior category competition. Finally, Atiyab Al-Shameri won three silver medals in the 87-weight senior category.

In men's competitions, weightlifter Sultan Al-Qahtani won sixth position in the junior 81-weight category. Abdulhamid Akbar won three bronze medals in the Junior 89-weight category. — KUNA



Kuwait weightlifters display their medals while holding the Kuwaiti flag.

## AC Milan hire Conceicao after firing Fonseca

ROME: AC Milan named Sergio Conceicao as their new coach within hours of sacking fellow Portuguese Paulo Fonseca on Monday after just six months in charge. Fonseca paid the price for the Italian giants' inability to mount a Serie A title challenge.

"Sergio Paulo Marceneiro da Conceicao has been appointed as the Head Coach of the men's First Team until 30 June 2026," Milan said in a statement. Conceicao, 50, was available after ending a seven-year stint with Porto in June this year having guided them to three league titles and four Portuguese Cup successes.

His only head coaching experience outside of Portugal was a season with Ligue 1 side Nantes, although he knows Serie A having played for Lazio in two spells, Parma and Inter Milan from 1998-2004. Conceicao has shown extraordinary character to rise to the heights he has.

The 56-times capped winger once contemplated quitting the sport after losing his father, mother and younger brother while still a teenager. Fonseca, 51, had pre-empted the announcement of his dismissal by saying he had been fired as he left the San Siro following his press conference after the draw with AS Roma on Sunday.

The 1-1 draw was the sixth of the season and left Milan in seventh spot, eight points off Lazio in the fourth and final Champions League place, and also a massive 13 adrift of city rivals Inter, who are in third spot and challenging for the title.

In a statement, Milan thanked Fonseca for his "great professionalism". Milan, the seven-time European champions, have been battling inconsistent form and anger from their supporters. Fonseca has been in open conflict with senior players and questioned his squad's commitment, repeatedly going after countryman and star winger Rafael Leao and dropping France full-back Theo Hernandez for a teenage academy player in a dismal goalless draw with Genoa earlier this month.

Meanwhile the club's fans are on a war footing, attacking the owners on December 21 when a celebration of the club's 125th birthday was marred by the very obvious absence of Paulo Maldini among the iconic players parading on the pitch, but also chants demanding that owners, US investment fund RedBird, sell up. — AFP

# Classifieds

### Clinics & Hospitals

#### Clinics

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

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

#### Hospitals

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

### Change of Name

I, **Asiya Tarannum**, holder of Indian Passport No. V5158155 having permanent address J117, Garden Reach Road, Ram Nagar Lane, West Bengal, 700024, India, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as Asiya (given name) and Arman Malik (surname).  
#6617, 31/12/2024

## Kuwait's Pizzi plotting his former team's downfall to reach final

### Bahrain coach hopes to outfox his predecessor in Kuwait clash



Kuwait's head coach Juan Pizzi



Bahrain's coach Dragan Talajic



Saudi coach Herve Renard



Oman's coach Rasheed Jaber

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait head coach Juan Pizzi is giving nothing away ahead of the mammoth Khaleeji Zain 26 semifinal face-off with his former employers Bahrain on Tuesday night (kick off 8:45 pm).

A capacity of 57,000 crowd is expected at the Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium to watch the host nation come up against a Bahrain team that has impressed in Kuwait, but lost their last Group B encounter to Yemen.

Pizzi was national manager of Bahrain prior to taking up his post in Kuwait in the summer, so he knows his opposition players well, but he was keeping his cards close to his chest at the eve-of-match press conference.

"Every team has positive and negatives, and we have analyzed their team but I will not share my style of play here today or give anything away," he said. "What I can say is that we will fight in order to achieve the best result for Kuwait."

Kuwait will be without suspended star midfielder Ahmed Al-Dhefiri for the match, but Pizzi said his squad has prepared well and is confident of advancing towards another final and their 11th Gulf title with the passionate support from the fans.

"The fans have been right behind us and we call on them to support the national team against who will give their best on the field," said Pizzi, adding that his team has shown "big development" in the six months that he has been in charge.

Bahrain had the luxury of resting key players for their defeat against Yemen, having already qualified with two previous victories, and Pizzi accepts this is an advantage for them.

"We have had three days of rest, although there has been the big pressure of the matches to date on my players. Bahrain have an advantage of resting players at the last game, but we are very optimistic and share the fans hopes for a positive result," he said. In the earlier semi-final on Tuesday, Saudi Arabia will face Oman at the Jaber Al-Mubarak International Stadium (5:30 pm).

Bahrain head coach Dragan Talajic believes he can outfox his predecessor Juan Pizzi who is now in charge of the Kuwait side that he faces in the semi-final of the Khaleeji Zain 26 tonight at the Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium (kick off 8:45 pm).

Talajic praised Pizzi as an "excellent coach who I have huge respect for" and admitted that the Argentinean knows his players just as well as he does.

"My full respect for Mr Pizzi for all his work with Bahrain," said Talajic at the eve-of-match press conference. "He is a very good coach. He was working with my boys before me and knows

everything about us. But tomorrow is not a game between Pizzi and Dragan.

"We respect Kuwait. The game is 50-50 because this is a semi-final but I hope my boys play nice football, like Kuwait too. A full stadium, 60,000 people, it will be a great occasion for everyone."

Bahrain have reached the semi-finals at the last three Gulf Cup editions, winning the crown for the only time in 2019, but their latest ambitions took a knock when they lost to Yemen in their final Group B game after two earlier wins.

"Yes, we lost to Yemen and I take responsibility," he said. "I put 11 new players on the pitch. Yemen played much better and congratulations to them, once again, for a good performance. It was a slap to me and to my players but it will be good for our players to bounce back for our Kingdom."

Talajic declined to talk tactics and only reiterated: "You will see tomorrow night, God willing, what my boys can do." In the earlier semi-final on Tuesday, Saudi Arabia will face Oman at the Jaber Al-Mubarak International Stadium (5:30 pm).

Oman head coach Rasheed Jaber believes their Khaleeji Zain 26 semi-final showdown with Saudi Arabia will be decided by the smallest of details at the Jaber Al-Mubarak International Stadium in Kuwait on Tuesday night.

The 2023 finalists have impressed by winning Group A, securing a win over Qatar and draws with Kuwait and UAE, and are focused on facing a star-studded Saudi side that has improved with every match since their opening defeat to Bahrain.

"The match will be a very tough semi-final," said Rasheed at the eve-of-match press conference. "We respect Saudi Arabia. They have distinguished players and a big history. But we need effort from our players who must concentrate for the full 90 minutes because this match will be decided on the small details and mental strength of the players."

Saudi Arabia fans have travelled to Kuwait in huge numbers, packing out the 57,000-seater Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium for their final Group B decider against Iraq at the weekend.

But this match will be played at the smaller Jaber Al-Mubarak stadium that seats 15,000 fans, with Jaber saying his side is unfazed by possibly being outnumbered in the stands.

"Our team is well-organized and have handled all of the matches well," he said. "We need to create a playing style for our strengths and to stop Saudi playing. We are used to their big spectator numbers, but we are also used to going to stadiums in front of 50,000 or 100,000 home spectators so it won't

phase us." Several injuries are hampering the Oman preparations, but, again, the coach is not making excuses and believes his side can go all the way in Kuwait and win their third Gulf crown this week. The last coming in 2018.

"Irrespective of our line-up, I trust all of my players. Our target is to qualify for the final though after all the work and effort that we have done in the past days. We are ready for the potential to play 90 minutes, 120 mins or even the penalties. Mental concentration will be the main factor for the players."

Meanwhile, winger Marwan Al-Sahafi has arrived in Kuwait to bolster Saudi Arabia ahead of their Khaleeji Zain 26 semi-final with Oman. Al-Sahafi has arrived from his Belgian club Beerschot who have started their winter break, but his head coach, Herve Renard, has not revealed whether the 20-year-old will start.

"I don't know what will be my next 11," Renard told media at the eve-of-match press conference. "I want to find the best 11 to start, but also to finish because we can make five substitutions."

After losing their opening match to Bahrain, Saudi Arabia edged past Yemen and then returned to form with their impressive 3-1 win over Iraq to qualify for the last four, and keep their hopes of a fourth Gulf title alive. Playmaker Salem Al-Dawsari played a leading role in that win, and the coach paid tribute to his Al-Hilal skipper who was a doubt coming into the tournament.

"Salem broke his nose and wasn't supposed to play here until the semi-final, if we qualified," said Renard. "But he decided to come in against Bahrain and this was a fantastic message to the youth players because when this kind of player shows this level of determination, all the squad will follow. We know we have a great captain and all of us will be behind him because what he did was important for the team and country, so all of us must follow this determination."

The Green Falcons have conceded more goals than anyone – six – at this tournament, but are also lead goal scorers with eight, prompting many questions about tactics.

"Yes, we have conceded six, but have scored eight which is more important," he said. "We always want a good full game, but sometimes opponents force you to be in a difficult situation. We need to keep improving if we want to achieve our goal of winning this tournament."

Later on Tuesday evening, the second semi-final will see hosts Kuwait take on Group B winners Bahrain at the Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium.

## Qatar savor success, Saudi named World Cup hosts

**KUWAIT:** Qatar were in full celebration mode to kick off 2024 with the successful defense of their Asian Cup title while Saudi Arabia ended the year on a high after being named hosts of the 2034 World Cup. In between, Japan and Iran reasserted their status as regional heavyweights in 2026 World Cup qualifying but it has not been smooth sailing for some of the other top sides with South Korea and Australia failing to impress.

At the continental championships in Qatar, the hosts secured consecutive trophies with victory over surprise package Jordan in the final in Doha. Akram Afif's eight goals saw him end the tournament as top scorer and the captain would go on to be named Asian Player of the Year for a second time.

Qatar's success boosted belief they could make a second straight appearance at the World Cup having hosted the 2022 tournament but by November those hopes were hanging by a thread as defeats by the United Arab Emirates and Iran cost coach Marquez Lopez his job.

Japan were knocked out of the Asian Cup by Iran in the quarter-finals but they quickly shrugged off that disappointment to go nine points clear in their World Cup qualifying group while Australia and Saudi Arabia stumbled below them.

The Socceroos and Green Falcons both made coaching changes after faltering starts to their 2026 campaigns but the race for Group C's second automatic qualifying spot remains tight with Bahrain, Indonesia and China also in contention.

Iran quickly took command of Group A but South Korea's struggles on and off the pitch continued. With the controversy over Hong Myung-bo's appointment as manager dominating the headlines, South Korea opened their Group B campaign with a 0-0 draw with Palestine in Seoul, a result which sparked heavy criticism from fans and pundits.

Hong's side continued to blow hot and cold but they have held onto top spot in the group, with Iraq and Jordan breathing down their neck.

### Olympic woes

There was disappointment for South Korea when they failed to qualify for the Olympic Games for the first time since 1984, while Asia under-23 champions Japan fell at the quarter-final stage in France. The Japanese women's team, the Nadeshiko, were eliminated at the same stage by the United States.

Japan's Kiko Seike succeeded Sam Kerr as women's Asian Player of the Year having scored the goals that steered Urawa Red Diamonds to the Women's Asian Club Championship. A long-term knee injury sidelined Kerr for much of the year and while Australia's Matildas continued to draw big crowds in her absence their streak of 16 successive home sellouts ended amid a disappointing run of form. The Asian Football Confederation launched the inaugural edition of the Women's Asian Champions League in a major boost to the game, with 21 clubs vying for a \$1.3 million top prize.

In the revamped men's edition, the Asian Champions League Elite, the likes of Neymar and Cristiano Ronaldo guided star-studded Saudi clubs into the knockout rounds with ease in the West region. Japan's Yokohama F Marinos, runners-up to Al Ain last season, lead the East on goal difference ahead of Gwangju and Vissel Kobe but only six points separate 10 teams in the race for one of eight berths in the next round.

In December, FIFA President Gianni Infantino announced that Saudi Arabia would become the second nation from the Middle East to host the quadrennial tournament in 2034 -- 12 years after neighbors Qatar staged the 2022 edition. — Reuters

## Liverpool pull 8 points clear with West Ham rout

**LONDON:** Liverpool moved a step closer to a record-equaling 20th English top-flight title as a 5-0 thrashing of West Ham opened up an eight-point lead at the top of the Premier League.

Luis Diaz, Cody Gakpo, Mohamed Salah, Trent Alexander-Arnold and Diogo Jota were on target for the rampant Reds in east London as they ended the year as huge favorites to deliver just a second league title in 35 years.

Nottingham Forest are the surprise closest challengers in second, but Arsenal and Chelsea can close the gap when they are in action later in the week.

Arne Slot has repeatedly stressed nothing can be won yet with Liverpool still one game shy of the halfway mark in the Premier League. But the Dutchman's succession of Jurgen Klopp continues to look flawless after a 23rd win in 27 matches in all competitions. "I enjoyed it a lot because it doesn't happen many times that I could just sit back and enjoy," said Slot. Diaz had rested for the 3-1 win over Leicester on Boxing Day and it was the Colombian who opened the floodgates on 30 minutes at the London Stadium.

His intended pass into Curtis Jones rebounded back into his path off a West Ham defender and he dispatched his shot low into the corner. Mohammed Kudus was inches away from an equalizer when his effort came back off the post.

But another heavy home defeat puts Hammers boss Julen Lopetegui back under pressure after a



LONDON: West Ham United's Greek defender #15 Konstantinos Mavropanos (3L) battles for the ball with Liverpool's Colombian midfielder #07 Luis Diaz during the English Premier League football match between West Ham United and Liverpool. — AFP

four-game unbeaten run. "We are talking about the best team in the Premier League and around the world, but at home and in front of our fans, I am very sorry about this," said Lopetegui. Two goals in four minutes just before half-time killed the game as a contest. Salah's delightful turn helped tee up Gakpo to roll in his ninth goal in 14 games.

The Egyptian then curled in at Alphonse Areola's near post, with some help from the West Ham goalkeeper, to hit the 20-goal mark for the eighth consecutive season since joining Liverpool in 2017. Speculation over Alexander-Arnold, Salah and Virgil van Dijk's futures has not derailed Liverpool's flying start under Slot.

All three could discuss a move to a foreign club

on a free transfer next season within days, but remain focused for the moment on winning a second Premier League title together. "The only thing in my mind is that I want Liverpool to win the league and I want to be part of it," said Salah.

"That is the only thing I have focused on. I will do my best to win the trophy. We are in the right direction but there are other teams trying to catch up with us. We just need to stay humble and go again."

Rumors over Alexander-Arnold's potential move to Real Madrid have resurfaced again in the Spanish media over the past week and the England international showed why he is a man in demand with a thunderous strike that deflected in off Max Kilman. — AFP