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BUSINESS | Page 1

Qatar's November PPI levels ease 3.03% month-on-month: PSA



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Iran vows revenge for Soleimani slain by US

The killing of a top Iranian general three years ago in a US drone strike will be avenged, President Ebrahim Raisi vowed yesterday at a commemoration attended by thousands. Then-US president Donald Trump ordered the strike which assassinated General Qassem Soleimani, 62, on January 3, 2020. Soleimani commanded the Quds Force, the foreign operations arm of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, and has been lionised by Iranian authorities. "We have not forgotten and will not forget the blood of martyr Soleimani," Raisi said. **Page 4**

Winter storm threatens heavy snow in US

More than a foot of snow could fall on the US Northern Plains and Upper Midwest over the next day, forecasters said yesterday, and the same storm threatened tornadoes and severe thunderstorms over parts of the South. After dropping around a foot of snow on parts of Nebraska and South Dakota, a powerful winter storm was moving eastward and could leave parts of southern South Dakota and Minnesota with another 12-18 inches, according to the National Weather Service (NWS). The same system was causing heavy rain and a chance of tornadoes along the Central Gulf Coast. **Page 6**

Germany rejects WWII reparations claims

Germany has rebuffed the latest push by Poland's nationalist government for vast reparations over World War Two, saying in response to a diplomatic note that the issue was closed, the foreign ministry in Warsaw said yesterday. Poland estimates its World War Two losses caused by Germany at 6.2tn zlotys (\$1.4tn) and has demanded reparations, but Berlin has repeatedly said all financial claims related to the war have been settled. "This answer, to sum it up, shows an absolutely disrespectful attitude towards Poland and Poles," Arkadiusz Mularczyk, Poland's deputy foreign minister, said. **Page 9**

Grief, anger in Russia over soldiers' deaths

Mourners voiced grief and anger yesterday at a rare public commemoration in Russia for the scores of soldiers killed by a Ukrainian strike on New Year's Eve. Admitting its worst ever military losses from a single Ukrainian attack, Russia on Monday said 63 servicemen were killed when a temporary deployment point was struck in Makiivka. Ukraine has taken responsibility for the strike and says the toll could be much higher. Russian bloggers say many of the victims were reservists recently mobilised into the army. **Page 9**

Bankman-Fried pleads not guilty in fraud case

Sam Bankman-Fried pleaded not guilty yesterday to criminal charges that he cheated investors in his now-bankrupt FTX cryptocurrency exchange. Bankman-Fried is accused of looting billions of dollars in FTX customer deposits to support his Alameda Research hedge fund, buy real estate and make millions of dollars in political contributions, in what prosecutors have called a fraud of epic proportions.

US House fails to pick Speaker

Divided Republicans in the US House of Representatives failed to elect a Speaker in the opening round of voting for the first time in 100 years yesterday as right-wing rebels blocked the party favourite. California lawmaker Kevin McCarthy was unable to earn the support of a simple majority. **Page 6**

Generation Amazing executes development projects in 35 countries

GA impacts lives of 1mn young people around the world through its sports-for-development programmes

Generation Amazing Foundation (GA), a Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy (SC) and FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 human and social legacy project, reached several important milestones in 2022, apart from impacting the lives of 1mn young people around the world through its sports-for-development programmes.

"Ever since Qatar won the bid to host the World Cup in 2010, GA has been driven by a fundamental belief that football can unlock the potential of young people around the world. We are delighted to have been able to keep our promise of reaching 1mn beneficiaries before the World Cup - and we will keep that energy moving forward into 2023," said Nasser al-Khori, executive director, GA.

Since being launched during Qatar's bid to host the FIFA World Cup, GA has implemented football for development projects in 35 countries. GA operates in alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, promoting inclusion and gender equality in its football for development programme, which teaches life skills, including communication, leadership, teamwork and organisation.

In the days leading up to the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, GA also organised the 4th edition of the GA Festival, where over 400 youth from across the world took part in a first-

of-its-kind international schools exchange programme.

The GA festival saw the launch of 'Goal 22: Football, Social Impact and Sustainability' - a first-of-its-kind youth exchange project that aims to empower young people who are passionate about football. Youth representing the 32 qualifying countries for Qatar 2022 came together in Doha for a series of workshops and activities.

"Seeing young people come together for a historic tournament, not only to support their teams, but to use football as a means of uplifting marginalised communities and building important life skills was amazing"

"Seeing young people come together for a historic tournament, not only to support their teams, but to use football as a means of uplifting marginalised communities and building important life skills was amazing. In many ways, 2022 was a year that culminated all of our efforts over the last 12 years," added al-Khori.

Throughout the year, GA continued to support marginalised communities around the world through a number of initiatives. In June, GA took part in a roundtable event at the 26th Com-

monwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Rwanda, which will host a Generation Amazing Community Club. The club will feature sports facilities as well as a safe space for youth to interact with each other.

A few months later in August, GA announced a collaboration with the UN Refugee Agency and the Education Above All Foundation to develop a "Football 4 Development Playbook" - a new toolkit that aims to support some of the world's most vulnerable, forcibly displaced children.

In September, GA kicked off the 77th UN General Assembly week in New York through a special 'Scoring for the Goals' projection on the iconic UNHQ building. The initiative showcased the power of sport to inspire climate action and gender equality - as part of GA's commitment to UN Development Goals.

Towards the end of the year, GA reached another milestone by expanding football for development programmes in schools across Jordan and Oman through a number of partnerships. GA also organised a panel on the vital role women play in shaping the future of sports for development at Concordia Annual Summit. The roundtable included experts and leaders in the field to discuss how mega sporting events can translate into substantive and sustainable social change for communities in need.



Generation Amazing Foundation has highlighted its achievements in 2022.

Thunderous welcome to Ronaldo at Saudi club



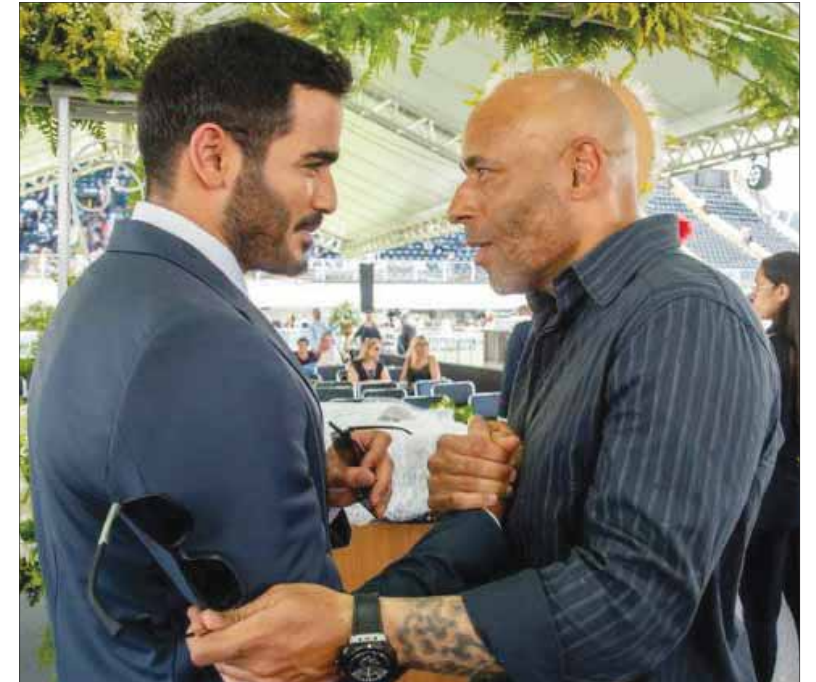
Al Nassr's new Portuguese forward Cristiano Ronaldo poses for a picture with youths during his unveiling at the Mrsool Park Stadium in the Saudi capital Riyadh yesterday. Ronaldo described himself as a "unique player" and insisted his career was not over as he received a thunderous welcome at his new club in Saudi Arabia yesterday. The Portuguese superstar, 37, said he had done all he could in Europe and was hungry for a new challenge as he was greeted by fireworks and deafening roars at Al Nassr's Mrsool Park stadium. The five-time Ballon d'Or winner, with five Champions League titles to his name, signed for an estimated 200mn euros to June 2025 not long after his acrimonious split with Manchester United. "It's not the end of my career to come to Saudi Arabia. This is why I change and, to be honest, I'm really not worried about what people say," Ronaldo said. "In Europe my work is done... I had many offers in Europe, many in Brazil, Australia, the US, even in Portugal," he added. **Sport Page 1**

Deputy Amir meets Nigeria's vice-president



His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani met yesterday at the Amiri Diwan with Vice-President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria Prof Yemi Osinbajo, and the accompanying delegation, currently visiting the country. The meeting dealt with reviewing bilateral relations between the countries and ways to boost and develop them, as well as topics of mutual interest. **(QNA)**

Sheikh Mohamed conveys Amir's condolences to family of Pele



HE Sheikh Mohamed bin Hamad al-Thani conveyed condolences of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani to family members of football legend Edson Arantes do Nascimento "Pele", during his participation in the funeral ceremony held at the Santos Stadium in Sao Paulo, the Federative Republic of Brazil. Emotional crowds bid Pele a final farewell yesterday, lining the streets of Santos to watch his coffin taken to its final resting place from the city's stadium. **(QNA) Sport Page 4**

Qatar condemns Israeli minister's storming of Al-Aqsa compound

Qatar has strongly condemned Israeli National Security Minister's storming of the courtyards of Al-Aqsa Mosque under the protection of the Israeli occupation forces, considering it a flagrant violation of the international law and the Hashemite guardianship over the holy sites in Occupied Jerusalem.

In a statement yesterday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs warned against the escalation policy pursued by the Israeli government in the occupied Palestinian territories, and asserted that compromising the religious and historic situation of Al-Aqsa Mosque is not only a violation of the Palestinians, but of millions of Muslims worldwide.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs held the Israeli occupation authorities responsible for the violence cycle that would happen as a result of this systematic escalation policy against the Palestinian people and on their lands and Islamic and Christian holy places. The ministry urged the international community to urgently act to stop these violations.

The ministry reiterated Qatar's firm



People walk towards the Dome of the Rock shrine at the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound in the old city of Jerusalem.

stance on the justice of the Palestinian cause, and the legitimate rights of the brotherly Palestinian people, including the full right to practising their religious rituals without restrictions and establishing their independent state within the borders of 1967, with eastern Jerusalem as its capital.

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates were among nations to con-

demn the visit of Israel's extreme-right new national security minister to Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, AFP reports.

The move by firebrand Itamar Ben-Gvir has enraged Palestinians, while the United States warned of steps which may harm the status quo.

Jordan's foreign ministry spokesman Sinan Majali said Amman summoned the Israeli ambassador, to "convey a protest message about the recklessness of the Israeli national security minister in storming the blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque".

Saudi Arabia condemned the "provocative practices" of Ben-Gvir.

Iran called the visit a "violation of international regulations and an insult to the values and sanctities of the Muslims," with a foreign ministry spokesman warning of a response from "Muslim nations".

The Palestinian foreign ministry called Ben-Gvir's visit a "serious threat".

Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem deemed it a "crime" and vowed the mosque compound "will remain Palestinian, Arab, Islamic". **Page 4**

AFA president lauds Qatar University for hosting team

Argentine Football Association (AFA) president Claudio Tapia has praised Qatar University (QU) for hosting the Lionel Messi-led Argentinian national football team during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022.

La Albiceleste – as the Argentinian team is known – had selected the QU campus to be their choice of residence during the World Cup, which was held from November 20 to December 18 last year.

At a press conference in San Juan, Argentina, Tapia was asked at what point did he become sure that the team would be the world champions. He said in response: “Since the first day, since the first day. Since we went to Qatar, to Qatar University who treated us very well, extremely well. We felt we were going to be world champions.”

On what inspired the team to stay at QU, he said the university has three outdoor sports complexes, in addition to an indoor facility for women. These facilities



Claudio Tapia

host various sporting activities, including football, volleyball, handball, basketball, tennis, swimming, diving, water polo, squash and others.

Among the most prominent of these facilities is Qatar University Stadium, which is one of the university's main facilities, and was built in accordance with international and Olympic specifications.

It includes a football field, running track and athletics tracks. It

can accommodate up to 10,000 spectators and includes rooms and facilities necessary to host big matches.

To view the relevant clip from the press conference, go to <https://twitter.com/QatarUniversity/status/1610264898180718592>

QU had recently announced that it would convert the room where Messi stayed during the World Cup into a mini museum. The QU campus was the base camp for the La Albiceleste for both accommodation and practice during the World Cup along with the Spanish team.

QU had opened three sports complexes for the teams to practise outdoor, in addition to the indoor gym facilities. QU had decorated the accommodation complex in the blue and white theme replicating the colour of the team's jersey.

The university also adorned the rooms with photographs of the jerseys and the names of several players written over them.



The QU campus was the base camp for the La Albiceleste for both accommodation and practice during the World Cup.

PHCC resumes memory clinic at Rawdat Al Khail Health Centre

The Primary Health Care Corporation (PHCC) has announced the resumption of the memory clinic services at Rawdat Al Khail Health Centre in co-operation with Hamad Medical Corporation. The services will be provided by a specialised team under the supervision of consultants in the field of geriatrics, psychiatric and occupational health with the support of nurses from the PHCC. It pointed out that the services would be available in three health centres - Leabaib, Rawdat Al Khail and Al Wajbah, pointing out that a thorough assessment is offered to patients over the age of 60 to detect any memory-related concerns. The clinic will resume receiving patients starting today. Patients need to be referred to the clinic by the family physician in the mentioned health centres. (QNA)

Qatar Charity building 15 schools for orphans in Bangladesh

Qatar Charity (QC), with the support from benefactors in Qatar, is constructing 15 schools in Bangladesh, which will include academic and residential facilities for nearly 3,500 students. According to the project plan, each of these schools will include classrooms, dormitories, rooms for teachers, and dining and activities halls for students.

“Our school building was very dilapidated. When it rained, water seeped into the old building, causing the students to suffer a lot,” said Md Mofiz Khan, president of Char Bongshi Dakhil Madrasha committee in Raipur

of Lakhimpur district. He expressed his happiness with the under-construction building for the school, adding that the new building will play a helpful role in the academic improvement of the students.

“Most of the people in our village are poor. Boys and girls are not getting good opportunities to study. If this building is constructed, about 200 students will get the opportunity to study in a good environment,” said Babul Biswas, president of a school committee in Vabanipur of Pabna district. Tahmina Akhter Raina, a government official of Pabna dis-

trict, said, QC, is playing a praiseworthy role in the education sector of Bangladesh by extending various support that include the construction of schools and orphanages to enable underprivileged children to have opportunities to study. She also hoped for the continuation of such support from the benefactors of Qatar in the future.

In the last five years, QC has constructed 38 educational facilities for academic and residential services that benefit nearly 10,000 students. Besides, QC is sponsoring 3,312 orphans in Bangladesh.



Deputy Amir chairs second meeting of QU board



His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani, the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Qatar University (QU), yesterday chaired the second meeting of the QU Board of Trustees for the academic year 2022-2023 at the Amiri Diwan. At the outset of the meeting, the board reviewed what has been implemented of its decisions and recommendations taken during the first meeting of the academic year 2022-2023. It also discussed the topics on its agenda and took appropriate decisions thereon, including the approval of the establishment of a major in automation and control of mechanical systems and a major in materials engineering at the College of Engineering. The board approved the amendment of university fees, including tuition and housing fees. It also reviewed the recommendations of the institutional accreditation team and the proposed mechanisms for their implementation. (QNA)

‘Modern infrastructure to push growth in Qatar’s tourism sector’

By Peter Alagos
Business Reporter

Qatar's modern and world-class infrastructure, such as hospitality-related facilities that opened in time for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, would play a key role in the growth and development of the country's tourism sector.

According to Palma Libotte, president of the Italian Chamber of Commerce in Qatar, one of the “strong points” of Qatar's tourism sector is that the country boasts of many new and modern hotels that offer “very competitive rates” both for leisure and corporate tourism.

The recently-concluded World Cup opened many opportunities for destination management companies (DMCs) and tour agencies in Qatar to showcase



Palma Libotte

the country's best tourism gems. Libotte noted that stakeholders and key players in Qatar's tourism and hospitality sector stand to gain from current weather conditions that allow more tourists to visit a variety of scenic outdoor locations across the country.

While the revelry brought by the World Cup is over, Libotte noted that there are still many reasons for tourists to visit the country and enjoy Qatar's long tourism season for “eight fabulous months” from October to May. “Now is a great time to enjoy the desert and the northern areas of Qatar, such as Al Zubarah Fort and the nearby abandoned Al Jumail Fishing Village, the mangroves of Purple Island, and the recently-installed ‘Shadows Travelling on the Sea of the Day’ by Olafur Eliasson.

“From a product perspective and having worked in many fields of the tourism sector through Doha-based Italian DMC, QTours, I can say that the country's main competitive advantage with Dubai is that the traditions and culture in Qatar are still strongly perceived by tourists, and this contrast with ultramod-

ern infrastructure makes it a really appealing destination,” Libotte emphasised.

During the World Cup, Libotte noted that desert tours were the “main draw” and the “most sold” packages, as well as the Dhow cruise. “Everyone wanted to ride the camels and the quad bikes, as well as enjoy the spectacular view that Khor Al Udaid offers. Many tourists loved the food and highly admired Qatar's safe environment. She also lauded how the staff of the Doha Metro handled passengers, which helped make Souq Waqif, Lusail Boulevard, and Katara – the Cultural Village very accessible to tourists.

“The programme of concerts and the series of activities in the fan zones encouraged people to go out every day; it was like a never-ending festival with an incredible energy and atmosphere,” Libotte explained.

Palestinian girl band plays melody of freedom at D'reesha arts festival

An all-girl Palestinian music band has taken the message of freedom, resistance, and justice beyond the confines of Palestine by singing and playing melodies and rhythms at a Qatar Foundation (QF) event recently. As many as 33 young women took part in QF's D'reesha Performing Arts Festival, promoting Palestinian culture, according to a story on QF website.

Billed Banat Al-Quds, meaning “Girls of Jerusalem,” it showcased patriotic, folkloric, Arabic, and popular songs that draw inspiration from the Palestinian resistance. Bodour Alyateem, who recently joined the Banat Al-Quds band, said: “I am happy to represent my country, Palestine, in cultural shows abroad. We, as Palestinians, have an important message and cause, and every one of us must represent it, no matter the different ways to express it.”

Travelling and crossing the walls of Palestine was not easy for Alyateem and her friends, as they hold Palestinian passports, which is not recognised in most countries of the world. “Our journeys often take several hours, and sometimes days, due to the restrictions placed by the Israeli occupation forces. Also, there is no airport inside Palestine to travel through.”

Alyateem pointed out that the internal confrontations and wars that take place in Palestine affect the mental health and daily life of all citizens, but this does not make them surrender. “Despite the challenges we face inside Palestine, we do not give up, and we always find other ways to make our voices heard.”

The Banat Al-Quds band from Palestine has chosen music as a weapon to resist the Israeli occupation.



Banat Al-Quds performing at D'reesha Performing Arts Festival.

Saheed Azzeh, one of the participants in the show said: “Songs and melodies are part of the identity and culture of the Palestinian people, and therefore, we have taken them as a method to express the culture of resistance. Besides the double standards of the media today about Palestine, we can, through music, talk about captives, martyrs, and Palestinian civilisation and culture.”

“Music is a tool for resistance and for representing Palestine in a way that breaks the stereotype about it. Through our participation in the festival, we want to spread our message in a peaceful way through music, because we believe that music truly touches people's hearts.”

Aida Qumbar who joined the band since its inception, and has been singing since the age of 12, said: “I have always loved music,

Travelling and crossing the walls of Palestine was not easy for Alyateem and her friends, as they hold Palestinian passports, which is not recognised in most countries of the world

and I am happy to participate in Arab and international events to present art through which we can share our Palestinian cause with the world.”

Qumbar pointed out that their participation in the D'reesha Performing Arts Festival was an irreplaceable opportunity, especially since it coincided with the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022.

“Our presence in Doha at a time when a global mega event was being organised gave us the opportunity to communicate with a larger audience of different cultures and countries, and to

share with them our Palestinian culture.

“I haven't witnessed solidarity with the Palestinian people as much as I saw in Qatar, and we all felt the sincerity and love of the people in Qatar for Palestine, whether citizens or residents, and their dream of liberating it despite all circumstances.

“What I loved most about being in Qatar is that I was able to put the Palestinian keffiyeh on my shoulder, and raise the Palestinian flag without fear and hesitation, as we are not allowed to do so inside Palestine.”

Outcomes of 2022 Arab Opinion Index released

■ The eighth in a series of public opinion surveys across the Arab world, was based on findings from face-to-face interviews conducted with 33,300 individual respondents in 14 Arab countries

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

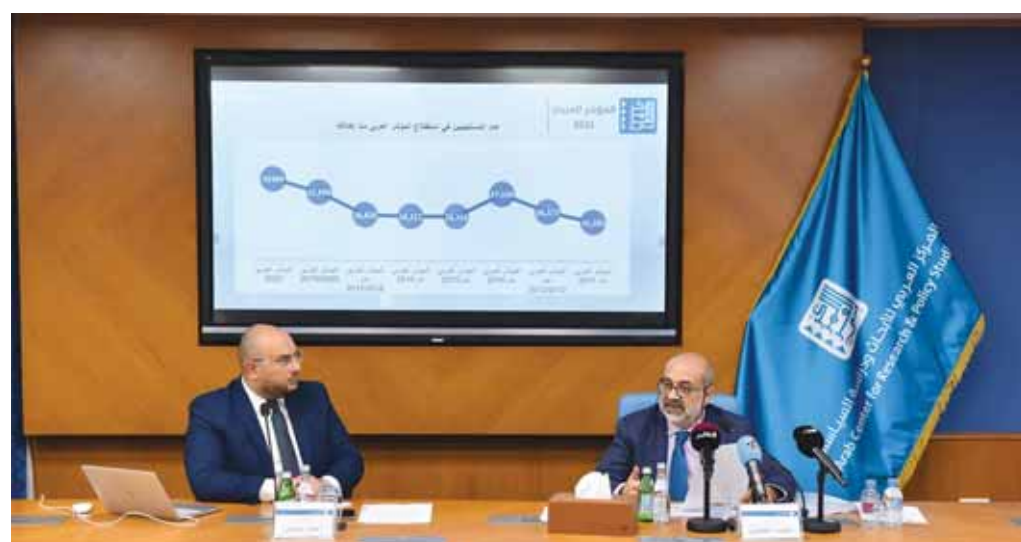
The Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies (ACRPS) yesterday released in Doha the outcomes of the 2022 Arab Opinion Index.

The eighth in a series of public opinion surveys across the Arab world, was based on the findings from face-to-face interviews conducted with 33,300 individual respondents in 14 Arab countries: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Iraq, Jordan, Palestine, Lebanon, Egypt, Sudan, Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, Libya, and Mauritania.

The Arab Opinion Index remains the largest public opinion survey carried out in the Arab world. Sampling followed a randomised, stratified, multi-stage, self-weighted clustered approach, giving an overall margin of error between +/- 2% and 3% for the individual country samples. The overall samples guarantee probability-proportional-to-size (PPS), ensuring fairness in the representation of various population segments.

More than 72,000 hours of work were carried for these surveys by a team of 920 individuals, equally balanced in gender. The team covered a total of 890,000km across the population clusters sampled, covering many cities, villages and neighbourhoods at the targeted countries.

The results of the index are presented according to the countries surveyed and according to the general average of each Arab region. For the purposes of comparison, the data of the countries surveyed is classified according to the geographical regions of the Arab world, in particular The Arab Maghreb - Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, Libya, and Tunisia, the Nile Valley - Egypt and Sudan, the Arab Mashreq - Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq, and the Gulf - Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Qatar. Dr Mohamed al-Masri, executive director of the ACRPS, reviewed the outcomes of the 2022 Arab Opinion Index at a press conference yesterday. He pointed out that the outcomes have to be interpreted within their contexts, taking into con-



Dr Mohamed al-Masri (right) announcing the survey results yesterday.

sideration the different levels of respondents' interests, their culture perspectives and local circumstances.

On the economic level, around 25% of the respondents said their income covers their basic needs and they save some of it. Around 42% said that their income does not cover their needs and they have to find other means, for instance 83% of those said that they have to borrow from family and friends while 16% rely on the aid they get from various charities.

Regarding the feeling of safety and security in the home country, 61% of the respondents said the situation is very good while 30% described the situation as very bad. Around 28% said they want to migrate abroad to improve their living and economic conditions and stay there for a number of years and then return back home. However, 11% of the respondents, especially those living in Iraq, Lebanon and Libya, said they want to migrate abroad for political and security reasons.

Regarding the threats to the Arab national security, around 28% of the respondents said Israel poses the most threat, 13% said the US poses the most threat, and 9% said the threat comes from Iran. However, in Egypt, around 20% of the respondents said that Ethiopia poses the most threat for their national security.

The outcomes of the survey

indicate there is a considerable trust and confidence in the army, the public security and the judiciary while the trust decreases for the governments and the legislative councils and bodies. Yet, most respondents saw that army and the military should not assume the authority in their countries and they prefer a more democratic system.

Further, public opinion for democracy, which was defined by 85% of the respondents as a guarantee of the basic rights, while 20% defined it in terms of justice and equality, 14% defined it as separation of powers, 6% as safety and security, and 5% described it as improving the economic situation.

As for the 2011 revolutions in the Arab World, often known as the Arab Spring, 46% of the respondents evaluate them as positive, and 39% see them as negative.

The public positive ratings have dropped over the years due to the development and turn of events across the targeted countries. Around 77% said they use the Internet, 22% said that they do not use it and 44% said they use it on daily basis. According to the outcomes of the survey, 94% of the Internet users said they have social media accounts mostly on Facebook and Twitter with around 77% of the respondents in the GCC region indicating that they prefer mainly Twitter.

The most followed topics are

the social issues followed by the political issues. As for trusting these sources, 48% of the respondents said that they only trust the established news platforms, 44% the mediapersons' pages, with only 32% having some trust for influencers and social media stars, with the trust going to the lowest levels.

The survey also explored the role of religion and religiosity in public life with 61% of respondents describing themselves as religious, 24% as very religious and 12% moderately religious. Most of the respondents focused on the ethical aspect of religiosity, and most respondents refused to make religion as the basis for dealing and transactions with others, in addition to rejecting any interference of religion in politics.

Around 76% of the respondents to the survey stressed that the Palestinian Cause is the cause of all Arabs and not the Palestinians' alone. Further, 84% refused to recognise Israel as a state while 8% agreed to recognise Israel as a state on condition of allowing the recognition and establishment of an independent Palestinian state.

As for the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war, around 44% of the respondents rejected the war and considered it an unjustifiable Russian aggression against Ukraine, while 19% see it as a justifiable war against Ukraine, and 37% refused to give any opinion.

LuLu-Abu Issa promotion mega draw winners picked



The mega draw pertaining to LuLu-Abu Issa Promotion was held yesterday at LuLu Hypermarket, D-Ring Road branch, under the supervision of an inspector from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. A total of 25 prizes were given away to the winners. Officials from LuLu Group and Abu Issa Marketing & Distribution were present at the draw. Details of the prizes: iPhone 14 (five), Smart TV 50" (five), LuLu shopping voucher worth QR1,000 (five), LuLu shopping voucher worth QR500 (10).

Top SC official says 80% of waste from World Cup 2022 recycled

Eighty percent of waste collected from World Cup stadiums has been recycled, said the Sustainability Executive Director at the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy (SC) Engineer Bodour al-Meer.

Speaking to Qatar News Agency (QNA), al-Meer said 54% of the waste has been converted into compost, 22% into plastic, 14% into paper and cardboard, 8% into glass, and 2% into metals and electronics.

The climate change issues and the optimal utilisation of natural resources are among the top priorities of the Sustainability Department at the SC which set a comprehensive strategy to encourage transition to a circular economy stemming from the expansion of recycling processes and supporting them on a wide scale locally, she added, stressing the importance of sustainability of national resources and utilising them in a thoughtful and responsible manner. There are many recycling-based national industries that are witnessing an accelerating growth followed by the circular economy which is an economic system that seeks to halt the constant wastage of resources and strives to utilise and develop them to serve Qatar and achieve its national vision, alongside the UN sustainability goals. She noted the launch of an industrial coalition last month to be one of the crucial pillars of the legacy projects associated with the tournament which focuses mainly on plastic recycling, offers drastic solutions for the treatment of plastic waste and reduces pollution arising from it, in addition to reducing landfill carbon emissions.

Commenting on the tournament's waste, al-Meer said that such matter is of utmost importance as the SC gave it an absolute priority from the outset prior to embarking upon the construction of stadiums, pointing out that the main focus was on recycling the construction waste which posed a big challenge for them. Consequently, prolonged meetings were held with the contractors to further explain the importance of recycling and its economic value for Qatar, including the promised financial saving from the process.

There was a success in recycling 70-80% of the tournament construction waste, in addition to utilising 90% of the waste from the former Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium in the new construction operation of the stadium, al-Meer said, adding that during the preparation for the tournament, the focus was shifted from construction phase to operation, where a new objective was pursued to convert 100% of waste generated from landfills into various new materials and to elevate the recycling percentage. Accordingly, detailed reports were produced and offered electronically in order for all operators in the construction sector to review and utilise them in the future, she said.

Regarding the concept of zero emissions, al-Meer estimated the carbon footprint of the tournament at 3.6mn tonnes, of which 1.5mn units were secured through the Global Carbon Council (GCC) that was established by a contribution from the SC, while FIFA had contributed in securing 300,000 units, and the remaining part was secured via AI



Engineer Bodour al-Meer

Kharsaah Solar Power Plant.

However, for the sake of having a successful project, professional consultants were hired by FIFA to calculate the estimated carbon units based on the global criteria and guidelines of determining the carbon offsetting value, she said.

Pertaining to the plans and projects, a sustainability strategy was set to encourage the optimal utilisation of natural resources and included the implementation of the best and sustainable global football tournament ever, which left a major legacy for Qatar, including the launch of "Wave of Unity" coalition to enhance the environmental legacy of the tournament in collaboration with the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change to achieve Qatar National Vision 2030, the UN sustainable development goals, and in determining the 12th goal "Consumption & sustainable production" and moving the Qatari circular economy forward, al-Meer noted.

She pointed out that from the outset the SC has been seeking to leave a legacy for the benefit of all in the post-tournament era to be essentially based on the expertise and experiences of the long years of preparation, along with the most important lessons learned by hosting a major and global sporting event.

She said the SC has been encouraging recycling of construction waste and their reuse in various projects over 12 years, in addition to designing and operating eco-friendly and sustainable stadiums to reduce the rates of water and energy utilisation, in addition to reducing the natural raw materials.

She added that the SC published the reports and experiences to capitalise on them further by all local and international entities.

With regard to the dissemination of the sustainability concept at the local level, the CEO pointed out that the SC has succeeded in translating the concept on the ground through pursuing the first comprehensive sustainability strategy for the tournament; in partnership between the host country and FIFA through which 70 projects were carried out and which achieved 20 goals that covered five core themes, namely sustainable greenhouse, air quality, waste management, reduction of carbon emissions and water efficiency. All stadiums reflected the Qatari environment and culture, and considered the international sustainability standards by choosing their locations to serve the local community, raising the efficiency of the use of energy and water, and improving the quality of their environments. (QNA)

QSFA lines up slew of activities for January

Qatar Sports For All Federation (QSFA) has announced its championships and activities agenda for January, which include distinctive and qualitative sporting events.

At a press conference held by the federation yesterday at its headquarters in Lusail Sports Arena, the organising of the men's padel tournament which will kick-off at Al Sadd Sports Club on Jan 29, was revealed.

The event will last for four days. The tournament is for non-professional Qatari youth and includes three categories.

The groups will be classified in co-operation with the Tennis and Squash Federation, and Al Sadd Club. QSFA Director of Events and Activities Abdullah al-Dosari said the goal focuses on promoting the culture of championships in order to provide an opportunity for youth to practice their preferred sports at the appropriate place.

In a statement yesterday, he indicated that the QSFA will organise the 7th Qatar Youth Football League, which will begin in February at Al Sadd Club.

It will be held in a league or group system in case the number of participating teams increase. He said the Qatari family rac-



QSFA Director of Events and Activities Abdullah al-Dosari.

es are scheduled to take place on January 16 and 30, through which the federation aims to encourage children to practice sports and to bring together the family members through a sporting activity, at the country's public parks. Participation among community members would also be expanded, especially the elderly by providing them with a unique opportunity to improve their health through exercise.

Al-Dosari added that the federation's agenda was hosting sporting events and tourna-

ments amounting to 575 events, and encourages those interested in sports to participate to enjoy and benefit from the events.

Al-Dosari revealed that participation in the Al Furjan Football Tournament is open, and added that it would be staged on Al Thumama pitches on January 16, in addition to the ongoing preparations for the 90km race Qatar East to West Ultramarathon which also begin on January 16.

The race was postponed from 2022 due to its coincidence with the activities of the FIFA World

Cup Qatar 2022, and as the race extends from Corniche to Dukhan area and is expected to witness a great turnout from all nationalities, with the number of participants reaching 739 individuals and 12 teams.

QSFA Director of Events and Activities Abdullah al-Dosari said the goal focuses on providing opportunity for youth to practice their preferred sports

He explained that the daily outdoor sports events and activities for the programme "365 Days of Activity" are continuing in public parks at Al Rayyan, Aspire, and Al Dafna for men, in addition to sports activities for women at Al Luqta Park and Women's Sport Committee.

He noted that the Qatar Sports for All Federation will announce new special events for children and adults to emphasise the importance of exercising and pursuing a healthy lifestyle. (QNA)

Planting programme launched



The Ministry of Municipality's Public Gardens Department has announced the launch of the 7th edition of Plant your Country (2022-2023) programme in co-operation with Al Faisal Without Borders Foundation. The department has completed its preparations for the new season of the programme, providing all the necessary tools and production materials, in addition to co-ordination with the schools, where the planting processes started on Monday. A total of 36 schools are participating in the current season, including eight international schools and 28 government schools.

REGION/ARAB WORLD



The mother of Palestinian teen Adam Ayyad, who medics said was killed during a clash with troops, is comforted during his funeral in Bethlehem, in the occupied West Bank, yesterday.

Troops kill Palestinian child in Bethlehem

AFP
Ramallah

Israeli forces killed a child in the West Bank city of Bethlehem yesterday, the Palestinian health ministry reported, as Israel said police officers fired on people throwing Molotov cocktails.

The health ministry announced "the death of the child Adam Essam Shaker Ayyad, 15, with a bullet in the chest fired by the occupation soldiers during the aggression on Bethlehem at dawn today."

Israel's military said rocks and Molotov cocktails were thrown at border police officers during an operation in Bethlehem's Dheisheh refugee camp. "The forces fired toward Molotov cocktails (sic) hurlers who risked their lives, hits were

identified," the army said in a statement.

The official Palestinian news agency, Wafa, reported clashes erupted when Israeli forces entered Dheisheh, in the southern occupied West Bank, to search houses.

Ayyad is the third Palestinian killed by Israeli forces in the West Bank since the start of the year.

On Monday, two Palestinian men were shot dead in the northern city of Jenin, when clashes broke out as the army demolished the homes of two Palestinians accused of killing an Israeli soldier in September.

More than 150 Palestinians and 26 Israelis were killed last year across Israel and the West Bank, including Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem, according to an AFP tally.

In December, the United Na-

tions said 2022 was the deadliest year in the West Bank since its records began in 2005.

The inauguration last week of the most right-wing government in Israel's history, led by Benjamin Netanyahu, has sparked fears of a military escalation in the Palestinian territory occupied by Israel since the 1967 Six-Day War.

Two of Netanyahu's extreme-right coalition partners have taken charge of critical powers regarding the West Bank. Bezalel Smotrich holds the portfolio for Israeli settlement policy in the territory, while Itamar Ben-Gvir serves as national security minister with powers over the border police force which operate there.

Both have a history of inflammatory remarks about Palestinians.

Mideast nations condemn Israel minister's visit to Al-Aqsa compound

Agencies
Jerusalem

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates were among nations to condemn a visit yesterday by Israel's extreme-right new national security minister to Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque compound.

The move by Itamar Ben-Gvir has enraged Palestinians, while the United States warned of steps which may harm the status quo.

"Our government will not surrender to the threats of Hamas," Ben-Gvir vowed in a statement published by his spokesman, after the Palestinian group warned such a step was a "red line". Ben-Gvir's visit comes days after he took office as national security minister, with powers over the police, giving his decision to enter the highly sensitive site considerable weight.

Under a longstanding status quo, non-Muslims can visit the site at specific times but are not allowed to pray there.

The UAE, "strongly condemned the storming of Al-Aqsa Mosque courtyard by an Israeli minister". The US ambassador to Israel, Tom Nides, said Washington "has made it clear to the Israeli government it opposes any steps that could harm the status quo in the holy sites". Lying in the walled Old City of Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem, the compound is administered by Jordan's Waqf Islamic affairs council, with Israeli forces operating there and controlling access.

After his visit, Ben-Gvir vowed to "maintain the freedom of movement".

Ben-Gvir was accompanied by units of the Israeli security forces, Waqf guards said.

Secretary-General of the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) Dr Nayef Falah Mubarak al-Hajraf condemned the provocation by the Israeli minister, QNA reported.



A man walks near Al-Aqsa Mosque compound in Jerusalem, yesterday.

In a statement, al-Hajraf expressed his regret for the practices carried out by the Israeli occupation authorities that undermine international peace efforts and contradict international principles and norms on respecting religious sanctities.

GCC secretary-general stressed the firm stance of the GCC council to stand by the Palestinian people, to support all efforts aimed at ending the occupation, and to reach a just and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian issue in a way that enables the Palestinian people to establish their independent state on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The Organisation of Islamic Co-operation (OIC) has also strongly condemned the minister's storming of the courtyards of Al-Aqsa under the protection of the Israeli forces, QNA added. It deemed such practices as provocation for all Muslims' feelings and a flagrant violation of the relevant international resolutions.

Jordan's foreign ministry

spokesman Sinan Majali said Amman summoned the Israeli ambassador, to "convey a protest message about the recklessness of the Israeli national security minister in storming the blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque". Saudi Arabia condemned the "provocative practices" of Ben-Gvir.

And Iran called the visit a "violation of international regulations and an insult to the values and sanctities of the Muslims," with a foreign ministry spokesman warning of a response from "Muslim nations". While Ben-Gvir has visited the compound numerous times since entering parliament in April 2021, his presence as a top minister is highly significant.

A controversial visit in 2000 by then opposition leader Ariel Sharon was one of the main triggers for the second Palestinian intifada, or uprising, which lasted until 2005.

The Palestinian foreign ministry called Ben-Gvir's visit a "serious threat". Basem Naim, a senior Hamas official, last week warned such a step would be

"a big red line and it will lead to an explosion". Yesterday, Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem deemed it a "crime" and vowed the mosque compound "will remain Palestinian, Arab, Islamic".

Hamas rules the Gaza Strip and in May 2021 an 11-day war broke out between Palestinian fighters based in the territory and Israel, after violence at Al-Aqsa Mosque.

Hundreds of Palestinians and dozens of Israeli police were wounded in the preceding clashes across east Jerusalem, initially sparked by restrictions on Palestinians gathering and eviction threats against residents.

During this period, Ben-Gvir rallied his supporters in Israeli settler homes in east Jerusalem, which has been occupied by Israel since the Six-Day War of 1967.

The foreign ministry of Egypt - which serves as a key mediator in Gaza - warned "of the negative consequences of such actions on security and stability" in the Palestinian territories and the wider region.

Tunisia opposition says hit by politically motivated probes

AFP
Tunis

The main coalition against Tunisian President Kais Saied said yesterday his administration was using the judiciary to close down opposition to his rule, after several inquiries were opened against its members.

In July last year, Saied sacked the government, froze parliament and seized far-reaching executive powers, later grabbing control of the judiciary, moves opponents said aimed to install a new dictatorship in the birthplace of the Arab Spring uprisings.

Ahmed Nejib Chebbi, president of the National

Salvation Front, said he and three other members had been summoned for investigation after a complaint by another opposition figure from outside the alliance, Abir Moussi.

Moussi's complaint came after Chebbi last month accused her of trying to reinstall a dictatorship similar to that of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali who was forced from office in the country's 2011 revolt. "In just 24 hours, without the complaint even being examined, a decision was already taken to prosecute us," Chebbi told journalists yesterday. He said the speed of the proceedings showed the complaint was being "instrumentalised" by authorities.

"It's a shoddy piece of judicial theatre and one we won't take part in," he said.

Three years on, Iran vows revenge for slain commander

AFP
Tehran

The killing of a top Iranian general three years ago in a US drone strike will be avenged, President Ebrahim Raisi vowed yesterday at a commemoration attended by thousands.

Then-US president Donald Trump ordered the strike which assassinated General Qassem Soleimani, 62, on January 3, 2020.

Soleimani commanded the Quds force, the foreign operations arm of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, and has been lionised by Iranian authorities.

He was one of the country's most popular public figures, who spearheaded Iran's Middle East operations and was seen as a hero of the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war.

"We have not forgotten and will not forget the blood of martyr Soleimani," Raisi said at Tehran's Grand Mosalla mosque, where the throng waved Iranian flags and held pictures of the slain commander.

The "murderers and perpetrators" of his killing should know that "revenge for the blood of martyr Soleimani is certain and they will not sleep easily", he added.

Soleimani died with his

Iraqi lieutenant Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis in the strike near Baghdad airport.

Days later, Iran retaliated by firing missiles at bases in neighbouring Iraq housing American and coalition troops. No US personnel

were killed but Washington said dozens suffered traumatic brain injuries from the blasts.

Amid the heightened tensions Iran also accidentally downed a Ukrainian passenger jet on January 8, 2020,

killing all 176 people aboard. The Pentagon said at the time that Soleimani had been "actively developing plans to attack American diplomats and service members in Iraq and throughout the region."



Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi alongside commander of the Quds Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Esmail Qaani (left) and head of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Hossein Salami (right) attend a commemoration ceremony in the capital Tehran, yesterday.

QATAR FUEL ADDITIVES COMPANY LIMITED
QAFAC

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

The Tender Committee of QAFAC invites qualified local suppliers to participate in the following Tenders in accordance with QAFAC tendering procedures:

No.	Tender No.	Description	Collection Fees Qrs.	Tender Bond Qrs.	Bid Closing Date
1	2000008307	Three (3) Years Call Off Contract for Supply of Winter Jackets	300/-	Qrs. 10,000/-	24 th January 2023
2	QTC/133/22	Supply, Installation, Commissioning of Fully Automated Boom Barrier at QAFAC Plant in Mesaieed	300/-	Qrs. 22,000/-	24 th January 2023

Interested companies are invited to collect the above tender documents as follows:

- **Collection Date** : From **Wednesday, 04th January 2023** (QAFAC working days from Sunday to Thursday only)
- **Collection Time** : 08:00 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.
- **Location** : The Gate, Bay Tower 2, 13th Floor, West Bay, QAFAC
- **Tender Fees** : As shown above, (**non-refundable**) can be paid at QAFAC Doha Office
- **Validity** : Offers must be valid for 120 days from closing date.
- **Bid Bond** : Offers must include a Bid bond issued from a local bank and valid for 120 Days from closing date.
- **Authorization** : Tenders will be issued to authorized company personnel with the following:
 1. Official authorization on Company Letter Head,
 2. Proper Identification,
 3. Copy of Company's Commercial Registration.

AL KHALIJ CEMENT COMPANY
INVITATION TO SUBMIT A BID

SER. NO.	Tender NO.	DESCRIPTION	QUANTITY	Document's Fees	Deadline of Bid Submission Date
1	AKCC/PROC/T01/23	Supply of Raw Granulated Blast Furnace Slag (GBFS)	50,000 Tons	100 QR	23/01/2023

General conditions:

- 1) Tender Documents can be collected from Qatari Investors Group head office at below address:
Qatari Investors Group
Lusail, 1st Floor, Zone No: 69 / Street No: 223
P O Box 22504, Doha, Qatar
TEL. 974 44747000
FAX 974 44860976
- 2) Documents fees should be paid by cash during collection of documents and non refundable
- 3) Offers validity should be 60days from BID CLOSING DATE
- 4) Offers should be sent in sealed envelope on order before January 23, 2023 at 12 PM. Any offer after this date and time will be automatically rejected.

Tanzania president lifts six-year ban on opposition rallies

AFP
Dar es Salaam

Tanzania's President Samia Suluhu Hassan yesterday lifted a ban on opposition rallies imposed in 2016 by her strongman predecessor, in an overture to political rivals seeking the restoration of democratic traditions.

Hassan has been under pressure to break with the hardline policies of John Magufuli, who died in 2021 after six years of heavy-handed rule in a country once seen as a democratic beacon in East Africa.

Magufuli came to power in 2015 as a no-nonsense man of the people but presided over a sustained crackdown on political freedoms, earning the nickname "Bulldozer" for his refusal to brook any dissent.

Early in his tenure, he banned political rallies, saying it was time for work, not politics. But critics said the ban applied only to opposition groups, with the ruling party free to assemble, while rival gatherings were violently broken up by police and their officials thrown in jail.

In 2018, police fired live rounds to disperse a rally by the Chadema opposition party, and its leader Freeman Mbowe was later charged with unlawful assembly and inciting violence.

Addressing party leaders invited to State House yesterday, Hassan announced that the "ban on political rallies is now lifted".

"The government will be responsible for ensuring security during rallies, but I urge all politicians to also practise civilised politics," she said.

"You are all free to criticise the government wherever you see challenges, so that we address them for the benefit of our people."

Mbowe, who spent seven months in prison under Hassan on terrorism charges, was cautious.

"It is good that the president has allowed political meetings, but we are now waiting to see the implementation by other government officials," he said.

Zitto Kabwe, another opposition leader, said the decision was a first step towards greater political reforms.

"I am exhilarated! This is the right that was snatched by the state through an illegal presidential decree. President Samia has cleaned up the mess. It is a normal thing but huge," he said in a WhatsApp message.

The opposition hoped that Hassan, a ruling party stalwart herself, and deputy president at the time of Magufuli's sud-



Tanzania President Samia Suluhu Hassan.

den death, would turn the page on the autocratic-style rule of her predecessor.

There was early optimism when Hassan, the country's first female president, reached out to rivals, reopened banned media outlets, and reversed some of Magufuli's most controversial policies.

Those hopes were dimmed with Mbowe's arrest in July 2021, and observers say more needs to be done to reform the country's battered reputation.

"President Suluhu should definitely go beyond this announcement. There has to be concrete action to restore a fair democratic playing field in Tanzania," said Oryem Nyeko, a researcher on Tanzania for Human Rights Watch.

Hassan said yesterday she was committed to "reconciliation and reforms" including a long-awaited rewriting of the constitution, a key opposition demand.

"More legal reforms are coming soon to ensure that the rights of all parties are accommodated," she said.

Hassan has battled division within her Chama Cha Mapinduzi party since taking office, shuffling her cabinet three times in 2022 as internal fissures broke into the open.

She has accused rivals inside the government of trying to damage her leadership, and last year suspended a party-owned newspaper for publishing a story saying she would not run in elections set for 2025.

Volunteer militia blamed in new Burkina bloodshed

AFP
Ouagadougou

Twenty-eight bodies were found in northwest Burkina Faso at the weekend, the government said, as rights campaigners blamed a volunteer militia created to support the army's battle against militants.

Attacks targeting the security forces and civilians have increased in recent months, especially in northern and eastern regions bordering militant-torn Mali and Niger.

"The government was informed of an incident at Nouna...during the night of December 30-31," a government statement said late Monday.

Preliminary reports "indicate 28 people killed," it said, adding that an investigation had been opened in order to shed "full light" on what had happened, and urging calm.

But a rights group called the Collective of Communities against Impunity and Stigmatisation (CISC) pointed the finger at the Volunteers for the Defence of the Fatherland (VDP) — a civilian auxiliary force that supports the military in its seven-year-old fight against militants.

"Armed civilians claiming to be" VDP have been "freely carrying out

organised looting and abuses targeting civilian populations on the basis of appearance and stigmatisation," the CISC said.

The public prosecutor in Nouna, Arnel Sama, said in a statement that "most of the victims, all of them males, were shot dead."

The landlocked West African country is one of the poorest and most volatile nations in the world. Since 2015, it has been grappling with an insurgency led by militants affiliated with Al Qaeda and the Islamic State group that has killed tens of thousands and displaced around 2mn people.

The VDP, set up in December 2019, comprises civilian volunteers who are given two weeks' military training and then work alongside the army, typically carrying out surveillance, information-gathering or escort duties.

Commentators have long worried that the poorly-trained volunteers are easy targets for the militants — and may also dangerously inflame ethnic friction without proper controls.

The CISC said the weekend events in Nouna had begun with a reported "terrorist attack" on a local VDP headquarters. Armed men then carried out "deadly attacks in reprisal," it said. Victims said the assailants were VDP who were members of a tradi-

tional hunting community called the Dozo, according to the CISC.

CISC Secretary Daouda Diallo called on the authorities to pay "special attention" to the situation.

"Armed terrorist groups exploit these kinds of transgression to attract recruits among the public," Diallo warned. Three incidents of abduction and extrajudicial killings allegedly involving Dozo or VDP had occurred in the runup to the events at the weekend, CISC said.

Government spokesman Jean Emmanuel Ouedraogo said the "drama" at the weekend "unfolded at a time when Burkina Faso has launched an operation to mobilise the entire population in a united action in the fight against terrorism." In November, the authorities, backed by a patriotic campaign, launched a drive to recruit 50,000 VDP — 90,000 signed up.

The government is "fundamentally opposed to all forms of abuse or violations of human rights for whatever reasons," the statement said.

The VDP has been in the brunt of losses suffered by the security forces in the face of the militant campaign.

Hundreds of volunteers have died, especially in ambushes or explosions caused by improvised explosive devices (IEDs) planted along roadsides.

Vietnam rescuers try to raise concrete pillar with trapped boy

Vietnam yesterday mobilised soldiers and engineering experts to try free a 10-year-old boy trapped in a buried hollow concrete pillar on a construction site, AFP reported from Hanoi.

Rescuers hope to raise the pillar from its 35-metre-deep hole and cut the boy, named Thai Ly Hao Nam, out — though after three days trapped inside, it is not clear whether he is still alive. The youngster fell into the 25-centimetre wide shaft of the pillar, sunk as part of a new bridge in Mekong delta province of Dong Thap, on Saturday, apparently while looking for scrap metal. A wider 19-metre-long metal pipe has been lowered around the concrete tube in which Nam is trapped to allow them to remove mud from around the pillar and try to lift it out. Rescuers were softening and removing mud and water to

reduce pressure around the pillar before bringing it up — most likely later in the evening.

Around 100 soldiers and professional equipment have been deployed at the site, which has been sealed off from the public while the rescue effort goes on.

"The boy has been trapped inside the small pillar for four days, with assumption of multiple injuries. Hope for him to be alive is limited," said Doan Tan Buu, deputy chairman of the Dong Thap provincial people's committee.

Two days of rescue efforts have so far had no success. "We had tried our best to rescue the boy using on-the-spot measures and equipment," said Buu.

"We later had to report and asked for help from national levels and people with expertise," Buu was quoted by state-controlled *Tuoi Tre* newspaper.

Musician's app helps Kenyan creatives sell music, merchandise

Reuters
Nairobi

In pink trousers and a matching puffer jacket, Grammy-nominated Kenyan musician Bien-Aime Alusa gyrates on stage as he sings to a bank of swaying fans, many capturing the moment on their mobile phones.

When the curtain drops on the concert in Nairobi, Alusa keeps making connections and profit through a digital streaming and payment platform, HustleSasa, which he co-founded to help artists recover from revenues lost to the coronavirus lockdown.

HustleSasa, which officially launched in November 2021, allows the singer-songwriter and fellow creatives to stream music or sell branded merchandise, concert tickets, food, fashion and other services in one mobile phone application.

Artists or vendors sell their products directly to the market, with no set-up costs or monthly fees, and receive payment instantly via bank card or mobile money, avoiding expensive commissions charged by some apps.

"Our region has one of the lowest payout rates in the world from other streaming platforms, but on HustleSasa you are getting value for money in real time," Alusa said.

Glena Jiwani, who owns the fashion boutique Pink Savannah in the capital Nairobi, said it has allowed



File photo shows Willis Austin Chimano, Bien Aime Baraza and Savara Delvin Mudigi of Sauti Sol, a Kenyan Afro-fusion band perform during the Sol Fest Concert themed SolFest Class of 2022, at the Kenyatta International Convention Centre (KICC) in Nairobi, Kenya.

her to expand her business online, and keep tabs on stock and sales. "I did not even have a website but now it's so easy," she said.

Yaba, another Kenyan musician, said the app's streaming service allowed him to make more money and to connect directly to his audience. "As a musician who is fighting his way to the top, when it comes to streaming

it's not like the other platforms," he said at his studio in Rongai, western Kenya.

Alusa said he is in talks to spread operations across the continent, from Ghana to South Africa. "It's the future of ticketing, it's the future of selling merch, it's the future where we are going to have the power and future in our hands."

Almana Motors delivers 45 Hidromak mobile garbage compactors to the Ministry of Municipality and Environment

Almana Motors - Heavy truck section reinforced its commitment to the environment as a responsible corporate citizen by securing and delivering mobile garbage compactors for Qatar's Ministry of Municipality and Environment. Almana Motors Co., handed over 45 units of Hidromak mobile garbage compactors to the Ministry in order to support Qatar, in the achievement of sustainability goals.

The 45 units of Hidromak mobile garbage compactors were specifically procured by the Ministry to ensure that the Waste Management efforts of the ongoing tournament and as Dealers of Hidromak in Qatar, Almana Motors was delighted to ensure the delivery of the compactors at a special hand-over ceremony.

Ministry's head of maintenance and repair section Mr. Saleh Mosallam S A Al Marri and Almana Motors Co.'s director of sales and Almana Motors' Director of Sales and Marketing Mr. Amer Omar



embraces the call responsible corporate citizenship. That is why we are truly happy to partner with Qatar's Ministry of Municipality and Environment in the massive, laudable efforts they are making towards the largest sporting

Qatar's commitment towards the sustainability goals of this international sports tournament".

Mr. Amer Hassan further reaffirmed Almana Motors's unwavering commitment to provide complete

Senegalese journalist 'extremely strained' after hunger strike

AFP
Dakar

Senegalese journalist and prominent anti-government critic is "extremely strained" after a two-week hunger strike he launched in protest of his detention, his lawyer said.

Pape Ale Niang, head of the Dakar Matin online news site, was arrested on November 6 and charged with "divulging information likely to harm national defence". Niang, widely followed in Senegal for his regular columns on current affairs, was released on December 14 but sent back to prison a week later. He has been on a hunger strike since his latest imprisonment on December 20. "I pray that the irreparable

does not happen," Me Moussa Sarr said. The journalist has been at Dakar's main hospital since December 24, with doctors concerned about his condition for the past five days, according to a local press body.

The case against Niang arose after he wrote about abuse charges faced by the country's main opposition leader, Ousmane Sonko. He is accused of describing confidential messages about security arrangements for Sonko's interview with investigators, according to trade unions.

His detention sparked a wave of criticism from the press, civil society groups and Senegal's opposition, many of whom called for his release. Senegal has a strong reputation for openness and press freedom in troubled West Africa, but this status is in decline, according to Reporters Without Borders (RSF).



Hassan was present at the gathering to oversee the handover of the equipment to the Ministry of Municipality and Environment. Mr. Amer Hassan addressed those gathered at the ceremony saying, "It with pleasure that we step forward today to strengthen our relationship with Ministry of Municipality and Environment. As much as we are a homegrown, commercial establishment in Qatar, Almana Motors is also a corporation that unhesitatingly

event in the world. Our partnership with the ministry is one of mutual respect and deep appreciation. As the dealers in Qatar for Hidromak mobile garbage compactors we are fully aware of their capacity to make a real difference to the environment. As such, on behalf of Almana Motors, we are supplying these 45 units of Hidromak mobile garbage compactors, with utmost confidence that this specialized equipment will make a huge contribution to uphold

product and service support to the Ministry.

Almana Motors Co. is the official dealer in Qatar of automotive brands Ford, Lincoln and Ford Trucks. The dealership of Hidromak in Qatar is also represented by Almana Motors Co. through its heavy trucks division. Hidromak is a leading Turkish based manufacturer of waste management equipment.



McCarthy loses first vote for US House Speaker

Reuters
Washington

Republican Kevin McCarthy lost a dramatic first vote for Speaker of the US House of Representatives yesterday as hardline conservatives from his own party voted against him, leaving the new Republican majority in turmoil.

In an embarrassing beginning to what could prove to be a brutal showdown between hardliners and most House Republicans, McCarthy fell short of the 218-vote majority needed to succeed Democrat Nancy Pelosi as Speaker.

It was the first time in a century that the House had failed to elect a Speaker on the first vote.

House Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries outran McCarthy in the ballot by 212 to 203 votes, as 19 Republicans opted for a different candidate.

McCarthy's conservative Republican rival, Representative Andy Biggs, garnered 10 votes.

A majority of those voting, not a plurality, is needed to determine a Speaker.

Republicans won a narrow 222-212 majority in November's midterm election, meaning that



US House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) reacts as Representatives cast their votes for Speaker of the House on the first day of the 118th Congress in the House Chamber of the US Capitol Building yesterday in Washington, DC.

McCarthy — or any candidate for Speaker — will need to unify a fractious caucus to win the gavel.

Democrats hold a slim majority in the Senate.

McCarthy's hardline opponents are concerned that he is less deeply vested in the culture wars and partisan rivalries that have dominated the House — and even more so since fel-

low Republican Donald Trump's White House years.

Before the vote, McCarthy tried to persuade the holdouts in a closed-door party meeting, vowing to stay in the race until he gets the necessary votes, but many participants emerged from the gathering undaunted.

A protracted Speaker election could undermine House Republican hopes of moving forward

quickly on priorities including potentially damaging investigations of Democratic President Joe Biden's administration and family, as well as legislative priorities involving the economy, US energy independence and border security.

A few Republicans opted to vote for party figures not on the ballot, including for conservative leader Representative Jim Jordan and Lee Zeldin, a former House Republican who ran for governor of New York last year.

A standoff would leave the House largely paralysed and could force lawmakers to consider another candidate.

Incoming Majority Leader Steve Scalise and Jordan are seen as possibilities.

It was a disconcerting start to the new majority for McCarthy and highlights the challenges Republicans could face over the next two years, heading into the 2024 presidential election.

Their slim majority gives greater clout to a small group of hard-liners, who want to focus on dealing defeat to Democrats and pushing investigations.

It was not clear whether McCarthy, who has the support of a wide majority of his caucus, would have the support to over-

come the hard-line opposition and win the speakership.

McCarthy, who represents a California district in the House, has spent his adult life in politics — as a congressional staffer, then state legislator before being elected to the House in 2006.

As Speaker, McCarthy would be well placed to frustrate Biden's legislative ambitions.

But any Republican Speaker will have the tough task of managing a House Republican caucus moving ever rightward, with uncompromising tendencies and — at least among some lawmakers — close allegiances to former President Donald Trump.

Yesterday's vote marked the first time in 100 years that a nominee has not succeeded to the House speakership on the first ballot.

The record number of voting rounds to elect a House Speaker is 133 over a two-month period in the 1850s.

The Democrats have picked Jeffries to serve as minority leader after Pelosi, the first woman to serve as Speaker, announced that she would step down from her leadership role.

She will remain in office as a representative.

Winter storm threatens heavy snow in Midwest

More than a foot of snow could fall on the US Northern Plains and Upper Midwest over the next day, forecasters said yesterday, and the same storm threatened tornadoes and severe thunderstorms over parts of the South.

After dropping around a foot (30cm) of snow on parts of Nebraska and South Dakota, a powerful winter storm was moving eastward and could leave parts of southern South Dakota and Minnesota with another 12-18 inches (30-45cm), according to the National Weather Service (NWS).

The same system was causing heavy rain and a chance of tornadoes along the Central Gulf Coast.

Northern Mississippi was under a tornado watch yesterday, and "pea-sized" hail was possible, NWS said.

"It's all part of the same system. The heavy snowfall is occurring on the west to

northern side of the storm... and then the rainfall and severe weather is across the south," NWS meteorologist Allison Santorelli said.

Nearly 70 flights out of Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport were cancelled yesterday morning, according to flight tracker FlightAware, with travel expected to be disrupted during the period of heaviest snowfall through yesterday afternoon.

Meanwhile, in California, the northern coast was hit by heavy rain over the weekend and might see flooding when another heavy rain storm arrives on Wednesday and Thursday.

Paired with high winds, residents should be prepared for downed trees and power outages, Santorelli said.

More than 21,000 homes and businesses had power knocked out by early yesterday, data from poweroutage.us showed. (Reuters)

Cuban migrant influx forces Florida national park to close

AFP
Washington

Dry Tortugas National Park, a group of islands west of Florida, will remain closed until further notice due to a growing number of boats arriving from Cuba, US authorities announced on Monday.

The remote park, known for its historic Fort Jefferson, sits almost 70 miles (110km) west of Florida's southernmost city of Key West, and is just over 100 miles north of the Cuban capital Havana.

The park "will temporarily close to public access while law enforcement and medical personnel evaluate, provide care for and coordinate transport to Key West for about 300 migrants who arrived in the park over the past couple of days," the US National Park Service said in a statement.

"Like elsewhere in the Florida Keys, the park has recently seen an increase in people arriving by boat from Cuba and landing on the islands of Dry Tortugas National Park,"

the statement added.

Cuba, which is experiencing its worst economic crisis since the 1990s, has seen a record number of its residents fleeing to the United States over the past year, though most arrive in the country via land through Mexico.

Thousands nonetheless make the risky journey by boat to Florida, where many are intercepted by the US Coast Guard or detained by authorities upon landing.

From the beginning of October through late December 2022, the US Coast Guard detained more than 3,700 Cubans.

An untold number have died attempting the sea crossing, including five in October when their boat collided with another operated by Cuban border guards.

The Dry Tortugas National Park statement said that when migrants arrive, "first responders provide food, water and basic medical attention until the Department of Homeland Security arrives and takes the lead."

It said the park is expected to be closed for several days.

Migrants from Mexico



Asylum-seeking migrants cross the Rio Bravo river, the border between the United States and Mexico, in El Paso, Texas, as seen from Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, on Monday.

AFP
Bogota

Colombia's National Liberation Army (ELN) rebels yesterday denied the president's assertion that they had signed a ceasefire agreement with the government.

President Gustavo Petro had announced over the weekend a six-month ceasefire with the five largest armed groups in the country, including the ELN, which has held peace talks with the government.

But the guerrillas said in a statement: "The ELN Dialogue Delegation has not discussed any bilateral ceasefire with the Gustavo Petro government, therefore no such agreement exists."

Negotiations between the government and the ELN, the country's last recognised rebel

group, have been under way since November.

"We have said several times that which is discussed and agreed at the negotiating table in which we participated. A unilateral government decree cannot be accepted as an agreement," said the ELN.

A first round of peace talks since Petro came to power in August concluded in Caracas on December 12 but no ceasefire was agreed.

Another round of talks is due to take place in Mexico, although no date has yet been set.

The ELN said that despite its denials, it was "ready to discuss a bilateral ceasefire."

Last month the rebels announced a unilateral ceasefire from Christmas Eve to January 2. The government then called on other groups to join the truce.

Canadian held over threats to parliament, US and China embassies

An Ottawa man has been arrested and charged for making "terrorism-related threats" to Canada's parliament and the US and Chinese embassies, federal police said yesterday.

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police anti-terrorism squad said in a statement that the suspect had posted numerous threats on Twitter.

"The threats targeted Parliament Hill, the Department of Defence, the Embassy of the People's Republic of China, as well as the Embassy of the United States of America in Ottawa," it said.

Daniel Houde, 19, faces several charges including uttering threats to cause death or bodily harm, and to "burn, destroy or damage" property.

He is scheduled to appear in court on January 18. (AFP)

Rally driver Block dies in accident

US rally driver and YouTube star Ken Block was killed when the snowmobile he was riding overturned on a steep slope in Utah, his racing team and US media reported. TMZ Sports reported that Block, 55, was riding a snowmobile when it "suddenly upended" and landed on top of him.

Waste not, want not: Santiago's poorest neighbourhood plants recycling seed

AFP
Santiago

Every morning, trucks collect potato and avocado skins, orange peels and other food scraps that residents of Santiago's poorest neighbourhood leave hanging in bags on their front doors or in tree branches or place in special bins.

For nearly two decades, the residents of La Pintana have been pioneers of recycling in Chile — South America's largest garbage generator.

Under a project started in 2005, the commune of 190,000 people enthusiastically gather their plant-based food waste, which is then turned into compost to help green their community.

In La Pintana, where 15% of people live in poverty, 50% of the community's organic waste is collected for recycling — a figure that puts to shame the 0.8% achieved by Chile as a whole, according to environment ministry data.

"They do a lot with it (the waste): they produce compost and it is used for the community itself, for the squares and

gardens," La Pintana resident Jose Vera told AFP as he left two large cardboard boxes filled with scraps on the sidewalk, proud of his contribution.

"It is also a saving (for the municipality) because they no longer have to buy" fertiliser or pay landfill fees, he said.

Chile generates some 1.13kg (about 2.5lb) of waste per person per day — the highest output in South America, according to World Bank data.

And in terms of recycling, it is far from achieving even Latin America's low average of 4% of solid municipal waste processed.

But La Pintana, one of the first neighbourhoods of Chile's deeply socially unequal capital to adopt such a project, now collects some 20 tonnes of organic waste every day.

It is delivered to a local plant that turns the scraps into natural fertiliser for the town's own municipal nursery, and others.

The municipality estimates to be saving some \$100,000 per year — money that can go to other community projects.

"There has been a change in people," since the project started, resident Vera said.

"They are now concerned about recycling and no longer

put the vegetables with the garbage."

La Pintana's nursery, built on what used to be an unsightly landfill, yields some 100,000 plants of 400 different species every year.

These are planted back in La Pintana, one of the areas of Santiago with the fewest green spaces per inhabitant.

The nursery uses about a tonne of humus — a dark organic matter created when plant material decomposes — every year, according to project member Cintia Ortiz.

All of it is obtained from La Pintana's plant waste.

"This humus, the benefit it gives us, is that it is organic... thanks to the community and the workers," Ortiz told AFP.

In addition, "as we can keep the plants well-nourished, we do not have to use chemicals."

Planting flowers outside a municipal sports center, municipal worker Jeanette Gonzalez told AFP the project "brings us joy. The town is improving."

"When we took over it was a town where every 200 meters there was a landfill," Claudia Pizarro, mayor of La Pintana since 2016, said of the trail-blazing project, which has re-



Municipal staff collects organic material which will be sent for a vermiculture recycling process, in the commune of La Pintana in Santiago, Chile.

ceived several international awards.

"It is a virtuous circle: people see that where there used to be a landfill there is now greenery and everything is flourishing,

and they stop throwing garbage there," she added.

There have been spillover benefits too: more than half of the municipal nursery's 15 staff are former inmates doing com-

munity work in lieu of serving prison time.

Chile's Environment Minister Maisa Rojas recently proposed a bill to reproduce the project in the rest of Chile.

Hong Kong court allows cardinal to attend Benedict funeral: source

AFP
Hong Kong

A 90-year-old Hong Kong cardinal arrested last year under the city's national security law received court permission yesterday to attend the funeral of former pope Benedict XVI, a source told AFP.

Cardinal Joseph Zen, one of Asia's highest-ranking Catholics, had his passport confiscated by authorities after he was arrested last May over a now-disbanded fund that helped pro-democracy protesters.

Zen is among the scores of pro-democracy supporters facing legal threats in Hong Kong. Magistrate Peter Law ruled at a

closed-door hearing yesterday that Zen could leave the city for five days and that his passport should be temporarily returned, a source with knowledge of the decision told AFP, asking not to be identified. The funeral for former pontiff Benedict, who died on New Year's Eve, will be led by his successor Pope Francis in the Vatican on Thursday.

Benedict elevated Zen to the Catholic church's College of Cardinals in 2006. Hours before the Tuesday hearing, Zen published an article praising the former pontiff as a "great defender of truth" and for his contributions to the Chinese church. "He could not accept any compromise," Zen wrote, referring to a letter Benedict wrote in 2007 asking

China's Communist government to respect religious freedom. Zen has in recent years accused the Vatican of "selling out" China's underground Catholic community, after Pope Francis sought to improve ties with Beijing.

The cardinal was among five pro-democracy campaigners arrested last May for "collusion with foreign forces", an offence

under the national security law that carries a sentence of up to life imprisonment. The group were trustees of the 612 Humanitarian Relief Fund, which was set up in 2019 to raise funds to support the legal and medical needs of arrested pro-democracy protesters. In November, the group were fined after a court found they had failed to properly reg-

ister the fund. The trustees have lodged an appeal to a higher court.

While Zen was arrested under the draconian national security law he has not yet been charged with any crimes under it. Like many of those arrested under that law, or still under investigation, he was forced to forfeit his passport after his arrest.

China slams 'unacceptable' Covid curbs on its travellers

AFP
Beijing

China called the mounting international restrictions on travellers from its territory "unacceptable" yesterday after more than a dozen countries placed fresh Covid curbs on visitors from the world's most populous nation.

The United States, Canada, Japan and France are among the countries insisting all travellers from China provide negative Covid tests before arrival, as concerns grow over a surge in cases. China's steep rise in infections comes after Beijing abruptly lifted years of headline restrictions last month, with hospitals and crematoriums quickly overwhelmed.

But Beijing has pushed ahead with a long-awaited reopening, last week announcing an end to mandatory quarantines on arrival in a move that prompted Chinese people to plan trips abroad. "Some countries have taken entry restrictions targeting China," foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning told a regular briefing. "This lacks scientific basis and some practices are unacceptable," she added, warning China could "take countermeasures based on the principle of reciprocity". Asked about China's reaction, France's Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne defended the new rules. "I think we're performing our duty in asking for tests," Borne told Franceinfo radio. "We will continue to do it."

The rules imposed affect all travellers coming from China - not just Chinese nationals - while Beijing continues to restrict inbound visitors and not issue visas for tourists or international students. Countries



Patients are treated in the emergency department of a hospital in Beijing.

including the United States have also cited Beijing's lack of transparency around infection data and the risk of new variants as a reason to restrict travellers.

As health workers nationwide battle a surge in cases, a senior doctor at one of Shanghai's top hospitals said 70% of the megacity's population may now have been infected with Covid-19, state media reported Tuesday.

Chen Erzhen, vice president at Ruijin Hospital and a member of Shanghai's Covid expert advisory panel, estimated that the majority of the city's 25m people may have been infected. "Now the spread of the epidemic in Shanghai is very wide, and it may have reached 70% of the population, which is 20 to 30 times more than (in April and May)," he told Da-jiangdong Studio, owned by the Communist Party mouthpiece

People's Daily.

Shanghai suffered a grueling two-month lockdown from April, during which more than 600,000 residents were infected and many were hauled to mass quarantine centres. But now the Omicron variant is spreading rampantly across the city. In other major cities, including Beijing, Tianjin, Chongqing and Guangzhou, Chinese health officials have suggested that the wave has already peaked.

In neighbouring Zhejiang province, disease control authorities said yesterday that there had been 1m new Covid infections in recent days and that the province was entering a peak plateau.

Chen added that his Shanghai hospital was seeing 1,600 emergency admissions daily - double the number prior to restrictions being lifted - with 80 percent of

them Covid patients. "More than 100 ambulances arrive at the hospital every day," he was quoted as saying, adding that around half of emergency admissions were vulnerable people aged over 65.

At Tongren Hospital in downtown Shanghai, AFP reporters saw patients receiving emergency medical attention outside the entrance of the overcrowded emergency ward yesterday. The corridors overflowed with dozens of elderly patients lying on beds crammed together, hooked up to IV drips.

At another hospital, AFP witnessed an exchange between a woman and an older man, both jostling for a drip. "I was here first," she said. "I'm here to get a needle too." Chinese officials are now readying for a virus wave to hit the country's underresourced



Health workers guiding travellers arriving from China in front of a Covid-19 testing centre at Incheon International Airport, west of Seoul, yesterday.



rural interior, as millions of people prepare to travel to their hometowns for the week-long Lunar New Year public holiday beginning January 21. National Health Commission official Jiao Yahui admitted that dealing with the expected surge in rural areas would be an "enormous challenge".

"What we are most worried

about is in the past three years nobody has returned home for Lunar New Year but they finally can this year," Jiao told state broadcaster CCTV on Monday. "As a result, there may be a retaliatory surge of urban residents into the countryside to visit their relatives, so we are even more worried about the rural epidemic."

Marcos heads to Beijing, talks with Xi to include South China Sea

Reuters
Manila

Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr was set to fly to Beijing yesterday for a three-day visit, during which he is expected to discuss, among other things, Beijing's activities in the disputed South China Sea that Manila describes as illegal.

Speaking ahead of his flight, Marcos said he looked forward to meeting President Xi Jinping and that "the issues between our two countries are problems that do not belong between two friends such as the Philippines and China". This will be the second face-to-face meeting between Marcos and Xi after their November meeting in Thailand, and comes as the Philippines has raised concerns over reported Chinese construction activities and the "swarming" of Beijing's vessels in disputed waters of the South China Sea. Last week, a Philippine foreign ministry official said talks with Xi would include China's actions in the South China Sea.

China's foreign ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin on Friday did not mention the South China Sea but said the visit "will focus on an in-depth exchange of views on bilateral relations and regional and international issues of common concern". It will promote co-operation in agriculture, infrastructure, energy and culture to create a "golden era", Wang said.

Analysts expect Marcos to



The national flags of the Philippines and China are seen together near the Tiananmen Gate as Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr visits, in Beijing.

use the trip to help rebalance his country's foreign policy, which under previous leader Rodrigo Duterte moved closer to China and away from the United States. While the Philippines is a defence ally of the United States, under Duterte it set aside a territorial spat over the South China Sea in exchange for Chinese investment. Beijing claims much of the South China Sea, where about \$3tn in ship-borne trade passes annually, with the area becoming a flashpoint for Chinese and US tensions around naval operations.

In an address last May, Marcos

vowed he would not lose an inch of Philippine territory to any foreign power, drawing cheers from advocates of a 2016 arbitral ruling invalidating China's expansive claims in the South China Sea.

Since Marcos, the son of the late strongman who fled into exile in Hawaii during a 1986 "people power" uprising, came into office, he has twice met with US President Joe Biden abroad.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Vice President Kamala Harris also visited the Southeast Asian country last year and assured Manila that Wash-

ington would defend the Philippines if it were attacked in the South China Sea. Marcos is clearly "inching away from the extreme pivot to China", Renato Cruz De Castro, an international affairs analyst at De La Salle University in Manila, said.

But while De Castro expects the South China Sea issue to be brought up, he does not expect Beijing to alter its position. "At the end of the day, China's goal is to force us to accept the fait accompli, that they will be operating within our exclusive economic zone," De Castro said.

S Korea says talks under way over US nuclear operations planning

Reuters
Seoul

South Korea and the United States are discussing planning and implementation of US nuclear operations to counter North Korea, Seoul's presidential office said yesterday, although US President Joe Biden said there would be no joint nuclear exercises.

The statement came shortly after Biden said the United States was not discussing joint nuclear exercises with South Korea, seeming to contradict earlier remarks by South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol in an interview with a local newspaper.

Yoon's press secretary, Kim Eun-hye, said Biden "had no choice but to say 'No'" because he was simply asked if the two countries were discussing joint nuclear exercises, which can only be held between nuclear weapons states. "In order to respond to the North Korean nuclear weapons, the two countries are discussing ways to share information on the operation of US-owned nuclear assets, and joint planning and execution of them accordingly," Kim said in a statement.

A senior US administration official reiterated Biden's comment, saying that joint nuclear exercises with Seoul would be "extremely difficult" because South Korea is not a nuclear power, but that the allies are looking at enhanced information sharing, joint contingency

planning and an eventual tabletop exercise.

Both presidents asked their teams, after a meeting in Cambodia in November, to explore ways to address North Korea's recent actions and statements, which have caused "increasing concern," the official said.

"This is going to be done through a variety of ways, including as President Yoon said, through enhanced information sharing, joint planning and expanding the range of contingencies that we plan for, as well as training, and with the idea eventually leading up to a tabletop exercise," the official told Reuters. The timing of the planned tabletop exercises has not been finalised, but they would take place "in the not-too-distant future" and cover scenarios beyond nuclear situations, the official said.

"The idea is to also try and make sure that we're able to fully think through the range of possibilities based on the DPRK capabilities which they've demonstrated, as well as their statements," the official added, using North Korea's official name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. A National Security Council spokesperson said in a statement that the United States is committed to providing extended deterrence, and that the allies are working on "an effective coordinated response to a range of scenarios, including nuclear use by North Korea."

Yoon has pledged to strengthen American extended deterrence - the US military capa-

bility, especially its nuclear forces, to deter attacks on its allies - since taking office in May, in the face of evolving North Korean threats. Pyongyang defined South Korea as "undoubted enemy" and vowed to beef up its nuclear arsenal this year, after firing a record number of missiles in 2022 and fuelling tension by sending drones into the South in December.

Yoon said in the interview that joint nuclear planning and exercises would help clear doubts about the extended deterrence, with its existing concept "falling short of convincing" South Koreans. "The US countermeasures have not kept up with the North's advancing nuclear programmes, and the extended deterrence strategy is almost no different from when their nuclear capability was insignificant and weaker," said Go Myong-hyun, a research fellow at the Asan Institute for Policy Studies in Seoul.

But Kim Dong-yup, a professor at Kyungnam University, said the comment from Biden, who has sole authority to authorise the use of US nuclear weapons, suggests an American reluctance to share nuclear operations, given their sensitivity and security concerns.

"Given growing voices for tactical nuclear weapons, Washington could try to give reassurances and send more nuclear assets when we want, but they're unlikely to fully materialise President Yoon's push for greater extended deterrence," Kim said.

Tesla fined \$2.2mn for exaggerating EV driving range

South Korea's antitrust regulator said it would impose a 2.85bn won (\$2.2mn) fine on Tesla Inc for failing to tell its customers about the shorter driving range of its electric vehicles (EVs) in low temperatures. The Korea Fair Trade Commission (KFTC) said that Tesla had exaggerated the "driving ranges of its cars on a single charge, their fuel cost-effectiveness compared to petrol vehicles as well as the performance of its Superchargers" on its official local website since August 2019 until recently.

The driving range of the US EV manufacturer's cars plunge in cold weather by up to 50.5% versus how they are advertised online, the KFTC said in a statement yesterday. Tesla could not be immediately reached for comment. On its website, Tesla provides winter driving tips, such as pre-conditioning vehicles with external power sources, and using its updated Energy app to monitor energy consumption, but does not mention the loss of driving range in sub-zero temperatures. In 2021, Citizens United for Consumer Sovereignty, a South Korean consumer group, said the driving range of most EVs drop by up to 40% in cold temperatures when batteries need to be heated, with Tesla suffering the most, citing data from the country's environment ministry.

Last year, the KFTC fined German carmaker Mercedes-Benz and its Korean unit 20.2bn won for false advertising tied to gas emissions of its diesel passenger vehicles. The challenge for EV performance in extreme temperatures is widely known, though EVs are popular in markets like Norway, where four out of five vehicles sold last year were battery-powered, led by Tesla. A 2020 study of 4,200 connected EVs of all makes by Canada-based telematics provider Geotab found that most models had a similar drop in range in cold weather, primarily because the battery is also used to heat the car for the driver and passengers. At just above 20C, the average EV outperformed its stated range, but at minus 15 degrees the average EV had only 54% of its rated range, the study found. - Reuters



Rail staff start new year with week-long strike

AFP/Reuters
London

UK rail staff disrupted the New Year return to work yesterday in the latest strike action by workers in a range of sectors over the worst cost-of-living crisis in a generation. Britain is in the grip of its worst run of worker unrest since Margaret Thatcher was in power in the 1980s, as surging inflation follows more than 10 years of stagnant wage growth, leaving many workers unable to make ends meet. Repeated rail strikes have crippled the network in recent months while nurses, airport staff, paramedics and postal workers have also joined the fray, demanding higher pay to keep

pace with inflation that is hovering around 40-year highs, reaching 10.7% in November.

Normally bustling London train stations were quiet yesterday – the first normal working day of 2023 after the New Year break.

Network Rail, which operates the UK's rail infrastructure, warned travellers of "significantly reduced" train services or no services at all in some areas until Sunday.

Five days of strike action beginning yesterday were to include two 48-hour strikes by around 40,000 members of the RMT union.

The Aslef union will also strike tomorrow.

Writer Richard Roques told AFP that the stoppage was "really inconvenient" but that he recognised that the rail workers were defending their livelihoods.

Another, retiree Mike Farrelly, however, said he understood the government's position "in as much as that there's only so much money to go around".

"I consider that a lot of the strikers are reasonably well paid," he said, adding that health workers who should be regarded as a special case.

Transport Secretary Mark Harper urged the rail unions to return to the negotiating table.

"The trade unions decided they wanted to go on strike this week, which is deeply unhelpful, damages the rail industry, damages the interests of the people that work in it," he told Sky News. "I want to see them back around the table and we can try and hammer out a deal between the employers and the trade unions."

The RMT union, however, accused the government of intervening in negotiations in December to stop a deal.

Harper denies the claim.

RMT general secretary Mick Lynch said the minister had scuppered a potential settlement by insisting on the removal of guards from trains, in favour of driver-only operated trains.

The issue is a key one for unions.

"So that prevented any move forward on the issue and so that is the direct responsibility of the Secretary of State (Harper)," Lynch said from a picket line at London Euston railway station.

Despite escalating pay demands, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has pledged to fight calls for inflation-busting rises, insisting the govern-

ment must stick to more modest increases for public sector workers.

"The best way to help them and help everyone else in the country is for us to get a grip and reduce inflation as quickly as possible," Sunak told a watchdog panel of MPs late last year.

Lynch told AFP that the union was "really sorry that we have had to take this action, that it does impact them (the public) and we understand their frustration, indeed their anger. "But we believe some of that should be directed at the government."

Those striking in 2022 included rail, port, border force and postal workers along with lawyers, nurses and ambulance staff.

More stoppages are planned in the coming weeks.

Medical bodies say winter crisis costing lives

AFP
London

UK medical bodies have said that patients are dying due to inadequate care and urged the government to act as Britain's health service grapples with a winter crisis of strikes and soaring demand.

The public National Health Service (NHS) faced budget constraints for more than a decade before the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic left it severely stretched.

One in every five patients picked up by an ambulance in England last week took more than an hour to be admitted to emergency care, while tens of thousands waited more than 12 hours before receiving treatment there.

The Royal College of Emergency Medicine on Sunday said between 300-500 patients would die each week in emergency care, notably due to long waiting times.

Its vice-president stood by the prediction on Monday, rejecting suggestions that short-term factors had caused the crisis, after some hospital officials nuanced the claim.

"If you're at the front line, you know this is a longstanding problem... the sort of things we're seeing happen every winter, and it still seems to come as a surprise," Ian Higginson told BBC radio.

The British Medical Association (BMA) on Monday called the current situation "intolerable and unsustainable" as the NHS faces "incredibly high levels of demand" and said the government must act.

"It is just not true that the cost of resolving this mess cannot be afforded by this country. This is a political choice and patients are dying unnecessarily because of that choice," said BMA UK council chair Phil Banfield.

The government has attributed the strains on the NHS to the consequences of the pandemic and winter illnesses such as flu.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak in his New Year's message said his administration had taken "decisive action".

The government embarked on a policy of budget savings and has rejected salary hikes demanded by nurses.

Nurses went on strike for the first time last month.

India 'aims for \$17bn cut in food, fertiliser subsidies in 2023/24'

Reuters
New Delhi

India aims to cut spending on food and fertiliser subsidies to 3.7tn (\$44.6bn) in the fiscal year from April, down 26% from this year, two government officials said, to rein in a fiscal deficit that ballooned during the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic.

Food and fertiliser subsidies alone account for about one-eighth of India's total budget spending of 39.45tn rupees

this fiscal year, but reductions in food subsidies in particular may prove politically sensitive with elections looming on the horizon.

The government expects to budget around 2.3tn rupees for food subsidies in the coming fiscal year, compared with 2.7tn rupees for the current year to March 31, the two officials said.

Spending on fertiliser subsidies will likely fall to about 1.4tn rupees, according to one of the officials and a third government official.

That compares with nearly 2.3tn ru-

pees this year, the third official added.

The officials declined to be named because the information was not public.

The finance ministry declined to comment, while the food and fertiliser ministries did not immediately reply to requests for comment.

A large part of the savings will come from the end of a Covid-19-era free food scheme, which will be replaced with a lower-spending programme, the first two officials said.

That will effectively halve the free rations available to the poor in a year with

a series of state elections, while general elections loom in 2024.

The government is eager to tame its fiscal deficit, which is targeted at 6.4% of GDP for the current fiscal year.

That is far above the average of 4-4.5% over the past decade, excluding the pandemic years when spending surged and the ratio peaked at 9.3%.

The government plans to shave at least half a percentage point from the ratio in 2023/24, the first two officials said.

The subsidy numbers will be an-

nounced on February 1, when Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presents the 2023/24 federal budget.

The three officials said the latest subsidies estimates for 2023/24 may be adjusted when a final round of discussions takes place, by mid-January.

The reduction in fertiliser subsidies is also driven by expectations of lower crude oil prices and the government's revised gas procurement policy for fertiliser companies, which came into effect earlier this month, two of the officials said.



Farmers inspect sunflowers on the outskirts of Bengaluru.

Yesterday

A traveller holds a dog next to an information board announcing the rail strike action at Waterloo Station in London.

Right: A woman tosses a flower onto a hearse transporting a coffin of one of the three Enghien Street shooting victims during a funeral service yesterday in Paris's northern suburb of Villiers-le-Bel.



A squirrel monkey gets curious during the annual stocktake yesterday at ZSL London Zoo.

Illegal migration to Spain decreased in 2022

AFP
Madrid

The number of migrants arriving illegally in Spain dropped by more than a quarter in 2022 over the previous year, mainly due to a fall in sea crossings, the interior ministry said yesterday.

A total of 31,219 people entered Spain without permission last year, down from 41,945 in 2021 – drop of 25.6% and a second straight yearly decline, the ministry said in its annual migration report.

The interior ministry credited "co-operation with countries of origin and transit" of migrants, and the reinforcement of the fight "against mafias that traffic people" for the fall.

Migrant arrivals by sea decreased across the country but the most significant fall occurred in Spain's Canary Islands in the Atlantic off northwest Africa.

The number of migrants who arrived by sea in the archipelago fell to 15,682 in 2022 from 22,316 in the previous year, about 30% less.

The Atlantic route from West Africa to the Canary Islands had been increasingly used by migrant smugglers since the end of 2019 after safer routes to Europe in the Mediterranean were closed.

Boats have headed to the Canaries from Morocco or even Mauritania, Senegal or further afield, raising the risk.

However, migrant arrivals by land in Spain's two North African enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla jumped by 24.1% in 2022 over the previous year to reach 2,289.

The two tiny territories have the EU's only land borders with Africa.

Tears, anger at Paris funeral for Kurdish shooting victims

AFP
Villiers-le-Bel, France

Thousands of Kurds from across Europe travelled to the Paris suburbs yesterday for the politically charged funeral of three of their own killed in a December attack in the French capital.

Buses were chartered to bring people from across France and some neighbouring countries to the ceremony in Villiers-le-Bel, north of Paris, local sources said.

Tears and cries of "Martyrs live forever!" greeted the coffins, wrapped in the flags of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and the Kurdish-controlled Rojava territory in northern Syria.

The huge crowd followed the funeral on giant screens erected in a car park, showing the coffins surrounded by wreaths beneath a portrait of imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan.

Police and security volunteers were on duty outside a hall hired for yesterday's proceedings.

A xenophobic gunman, William Malet, is suspected of killing two men and one woman in a December 23 attack on the Ahmet Kaya Kurdish community centre in Paris's 10th district.

His victims were Abdurrahman Kizil, singer and political refugee Mir Perwer and Emine Kara, a leader of the Movement of Kurdish Women in France.

Arrested after the shootings and formally

charged on December 26, 69-year-old Malet told investigators that he had a "pathological" hatred for foreigners and wanted to "murder migrants", prosecutors said.

Malet, a retired train driver, had a violent criminal history and had just left detention over a previous incident.

However, many Kurds in France's 150,000-strong community refuse to believe he acted alone, calling his actions a "terrorist" attack and pointing the finger at a "state sponsor".

"The anger of the people gathered today has again proven to us how much the Kurdish community believes these murders are political," said a spokesman for the Democratic Council of Kurds in France (CDKF).

Yesterday's funeral recalled another held

at the same spot almost exactly 10 years ago after three Kurdish activists linked to the PKK were shot dead, also in Paris's 10th district.

The suspect in the killings died of cancer in pre-trial detention.

The PKK, which has waged an almost four-decade armed struggle for greater rights for Turkey's Kurdish minority, is categorised as a terror group by Ankara, Europe and the United States.

Often described as the world's largest people without a state, Kurds originate in regions that are spread across Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran.

CDKF activists plan a march today in tribute to the December victims, on the street where the shootings took place.

Car stuffed with 23 members of a family stopped at Swiss border

Police said yesterday that they were "amazed" to find an SUV at the Swiss-German border crammed with 23 members of the same family. The seven-seater Seat Alhambra, carrying the members of an "extended family" on their way from Poland to the Swiss capital Bern, was stopped by a customs officer on Monday morning, according to German police. The Swiss official was "certainly amazed" by his discovery at the border between the German town of Weil am Rhein and the city of Basel, police said in a statement. The family, which included nine adults and 14 children, was briefly barred from entering Switzerland and the German authorities were "notified", added the statement. However, once all paperwork was completed, the family was allowed to enter Switzerland, but "not all in the Seat Alhambra", police said. The driver of the vehicle, a resident of Switzerland, could "expect to receive a fine" for carrying the passengers "completely unsecured" in his vehicle, German police said. -AFP

Denmark marks first year with no bank heists

Denmark has recorded its first year without bank robberies, as the use of cold hard cash has dwindled in recent years, the country's finance workers union said.

The increasingly cashless society has led banks to dial down their cash services, the union said in a statement on Monday, leaving little potential loot for intending robbers.

"It's nothing short of amazing. Because every time it happens, it's an extreme strain on the employees involved," Steen Lund Olsen, vice-president of the union, Finansforbundet, said in a statement.

"It's something you can't even begin to understand the emotional impact of if you haven't experienced it yourself," he added.

The union said there had been 221 bank robberies in 2000, which has slowly decreased to less than 10 a year since 2017. Denmark's central bank reported in March last year that the use of cash had nearly halved from 23% of payments in 2017 to 12% in 2021.

The coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic accelerated the abandonment of cash, said the bank. -AFP

Russians angry at commanders over Ukrainian strike that killed scores

AFP/Reuters
Moscow

Mourners voiced grief and anger yesterday at a rare public commemoration in Russia for the scores of soldiers killed by a Ukrainian strike on New Year's Eve.

Admitting its worst ever military losses from a single Ukrainian attack, the Russian authorities said on Monday that 63 servicemen were killed when a temporary deployment point was struck in Makiivka, a town in the eastern region of Donetsk partially held by separatists since 2014.

Ukraine has taken responsibility for the strike and says the toll could be much higher.

Russian bloggers say many of the victims were reservists recently mobilised into the army.

Much of the criticism was focused on the incompetence of Russia's top brass and not President Vladimir Putin who sent troops to Ukraine on February 24 last year.

Some 200 people laid roses and wreaths in a central square in the city

of Samara - where some of the servicemen came from - as an Orthodox priest recited a prayer.

Soldiers also fired a gun salute at the commemoration, where some of the mourners could be seen holding flags for the ruling United Russia party.

"It's very tough, it's scary. But we cannot be broken. Grief unites," Ekaterina Kolotvina, head of a group of army spouses, said at the ceremony.

Similar gatherings were reported in other cities of the Samara region including Tolyatti, home to Russia's largest carmaker AvtoVAZ.

The deaths sparked heavy criticism in Russia of the army's senior command, including from nationalist commentators favourable to the military intervention in Ukraine.

Russian military correspondents, who have gained influence in recent months, said hundreds could have been killed and accused Russia's top commanders of incompetence.

There have also been reports that the servicemen were quartered next to a munitions depot which exploded in the strike and that some had been able to use their Russian mobile phones -

giving away their location to Ukrainian forces.

TV footage showed a huge building reduced to rubble as cranes and bulldozers picked through concrete debris lying several feet deep.

"What conclusions will be drawn? Who will be punished?" Mikhail Matveyev, a member of the Russian parliament representing Samara, wrote on social media.

The Telegram account Rybar, which has around a million followers, said that it was "criminally naive" for the army to store ammunition next to sleeping quarters.

Putin had yet to react to the Makiivka strike, which comes during a holiday season before Orthodox Christmas which many Russians spend with their families.

At the gathering in Samara, Kolotvina, the wife of a general, said she had asked her husband to "avenge" the victims.

"We will crush the enemy together. We are left with no choice," she told mourners.

A little-known group, dubbed Soldiers' Widows of Russia, urged Putin to

announce general mobilisation.

The defence ministry said the strike was carried out by HIMARS rocket systems supplied to Ukraine by the United States.

These systems have allowed Ukrainian forces to strike much deeper into Russian-held territory and have been credited for a series of battlefield reversals for Russia in recent months.

Ukraine said it had faced waves of Russian drone and missile attacks since New Year's Eve, mainly targeting energy and other critical infrastructure.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said yesterday that he had spoken by phone with the leaders of Britain, Norway and the Netherlands and pointed to "the risks of escalation at the front".

He said that the Russian attacks were aimed at "exhausting our people, our anti-aircraft defences, our energy".

Zelensky did not mention the Makiivka strike in his nightly speech on Monday.

Ukrainian air force spokesperson Yuriy Ihnat told Ukrainian TV that 84 drones had been shot down in two Russian attacks since the New Year.

Ukraine's armed forces are organising mobile groups to hunt them down, using jeeps and other vehicles equipped with anti-aircraft machine guns and searchlights, Ihnat said.

The Russian defence ministry said that its strikes on the town of Masyakivka and the city of Kramatorsk in the east killed more than 130 "foreign mercenaries".

Russian strikes on the town of Druzhkivka in Donetsk killed one person and destroyed an ice rink, said Kyrylo Tymoshenko, deputy head of Zelensky's office.

The hardest fighting is raging around the city of Bakhmut in eastern Ukraine - a location with little strategic importance that Russian forces led by the mercenary group Wagner have been trying to capture for months.

Wagner chief Yevgeny Prigozhin, a businessman close to Putin, admitted in an interview that the fighting was tough and claimed Ukrainian forces had turned "each house into a fortress".

Prigozhin told state news agency RIA Novosti in the interview yesterday that his men were sometimes fighting "several weeks for a single house".

Germany rejects Polish demands for WWII compensation

AFP/Reuters
Warsaw

Germany has formally rejected a World War II reparations claim estimated to be €1.3tn (\$1.4tn), the Polish foreign ministry said yesterday.

Since coming to power in 2015, Poland's governing Law and Justice (PiS) party has championed the issue and evoked Germany's "moral duty".

Poland in September estimated the financial cost of World War II losses to be €1.3tn and sent a formal diplomatic note to Berlin demanding compensation.

Berlin has repeatedly rejected the claims, saying that Poland officially renounced such demands in a 1953 accord.

"According to the German government, the issue of reparations and compensation for wartime losses remains closed and it does not intend to enter into negotiations," the Polish foreign ministry said in a statement.

The German foreign ministry confirmed that it had responded to a verbal note from Poland dated October 3" but did not give any details.

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock had rejected the demand during a visit to

Warsaw in October, saying that the issue is for Berlin a closed chapter.

"This answer, to sum it up, shows an absolutely disrespectful attitude towards Poland and Poles," Arkadiusz Mularczyk, Poland's deputy foreign minister, said in an interview with the Polish Press Agency. "Germany does not pursue a friendly policy towards Poland, they want to build their sphere of influence here and treat Poland as a vassal state."

The Polish foreign ministry said meanwhile it "will further continue to seek compensation for German aggression and occupation in 1939-1945".

Also yesterday, Warsaw said it had called on the United Nations for support in its efforts to receive war reparations.

Polish conservatives argue their country was forced to sign the 1953 accord by the Soviet Union.

Some 6mn Poles, including 3mn Polish Jews, were killed during the war and Warsaw was razed to the ground following a 1944 uprising in which about 200,000 civilians died.

In 1953, Poland's then-communist rulers relinquished all claims to war reparations under pressure from the Soviet Union, which wanted to free East Germany, also a Soviet satellite, from any liabilities.



Ukrainian Veronika Nepomniashcha performs during the Yaskrava Arena Dnipro International Children's Circus Festival in Budapest.



Artists carry the Hungarian and Ukrainian flags during the Yaskrava Arena Dnipro International Children's Circus Festival in Budapest.



Ukrainian Maria Kravchenko rehearses before taking part in the Yaskrava Arena Dnipro International Children's Circus Festival.

Ukraine's young circus artists wow after training in bomb shelters at home

Reuters
Budapest

Young acrobats from circus schools across Ukraine dazzled audiences in Budapest this week when the city hosted a Ukrainian youth circus festival to showcase the talents of children forced by the war to train underground or without electricity.

After months of practice in their home cities of Kharkiv, Kyiv, Dnipro, Odesa and Donetsk, the children aged between 6-17 gave more than 30 performances alongside competitors from Hungary, Switzerland, Mexico and Italy at Budapest's Capital Circus.

"As these children are training in air raid shelters by candlelight from morning to night, [we thought] there must be a place where they can show their talent and knowledge," Budapest Circus director Peter Fekete said.

"We must give them faith that it is worth doing the work, it is worth the training, so we stopped our regular programme for two days this January and ... handed

over the circus to our Ukrainian friends," he added.

Circus artist Mariia Kravchenko, aged 13, from the eastern Ukrainian city of Dnipro, had trained for the circus festival in unheated shelters amid the Russian attacks.

"I trained in the circus in Dnipro but we have the war in Ukraine and I was training with air raid sirens and it was hard," she said with a faint smile, as she prepared to perform her hula hoop show dressed in Ukrainian colours with flowers in her hair.

The Yaskrava Arena Dnipro international children's circus festival was launched in 2010 by an NGO called Bright Country (Ukraine).

Before the war, it was held every year in December at the Dnipro State Circus.

Since it began, more than 1,000 young artists from all over Ukraine, as well as Lithuania, Hungary, Germany, Moldova and Poland, have participated in the festival.

Winners regularly advance to international festivals in France, Spain and Italy.

Czech farm to cull 220,000 chickens in country's largest bird flu outbreak

Czech authorities are preparing to destroy up to 220,000 hens on a poultry farm in the west of the country after bird flu was discovered there last week, in the biggest outbreak to date.

Bird flu was reported last Friday at the farm located 150km (90 miles) west from Prague, which can house up to 750,000 chickens, after an increase of deaths in one of three halls there.

The Czech Republic's State Veterinary Administration (SVS) said yesterday that since checks revealed the infection only in one of the halls, the majority of the flock could be spared.

"The whole (population of the) hall will have to be culled," said Petr Majer, SVS spokesman.

The infections come as countries try to limit the spread. Since November, Czech authorities have required poultry farms to keep flocks indoors.

Yesterday another case of bird flu was reported at a farm 68km south of Prague, where 12,000 chickens and 1,000 turkeys will be culled, CTK news agency reported.

Bird flu is pressuring already high food prices and triggering trade restrictions from countries that import poultry.

A record number of chickens, turkeys and other birds have died in outbreaks in the United States and Europe, and the virus is spreading in South America, Africa, and Asia.

The virus can be transmitted to humans in contact with poultry, but experts say the health risk to humans is low. -Reuters

Greece seeing shortage of medicines

Greece has asked the European Commission and EU neighbours for help to tackle a dire shortage of medicines, worsened by exports of locally made pharmaceuticals.

Health Minister Thanos Plevris wrote to the Commission calling for "stepped up pharmaceutical production" across the bloc.

Greece has been battling a shortage of essential medicines for months, including antibiotics and cough mixtures.

"It is imperative to adopt central policies across the EU as a whole to resolve this problem," Plevris wrote in a letter to EU Health Commissioner Stella Kyriakides.

Greece's pharmaceuticals agency (EOF) has banned the export of certain products in short supply and said part of the problem was linked to global supply chain issues. -AFP

Pakistan to shut malls, markets early to save energy

Reuters
Islamabad

Pakistan's government has ordered all malls and markets to close by 8.30pm, among other measures in a new energy conservation plan, the defence minister said yesterday as the country grapples with an economic crisis.

Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves barely cover a month's worth of imports, most of which are accounted for by energy purchases from abroad, with funds expected under an International Monetary Fund (IMF) programme delayed.

Minister Khawaja Asif told journalists that the cabinet-approved measures to

shut markets, including restaurants, are aimed at saving the cash-strapped country about 62bn Pakistani rupees (\$273mn).

He said that additional immediate measures included shutting wedding halls by 10pm daily.

Asif added that some market representatives had pushed for longer hours, but the government decided that earlier closure was needed.

He also said that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif had ordered all government departments to reduce electricity consumption by 30%.

The move comes as Pakistan struggles to quell default fears in domestic and international markets, with a \$1.1bn IMF bailout tranche stuck due to differences

over the ninth programme review, which should have been completed in November.

Other critical multilateral and bilateral financing avenues are also linked to the IMF programme, which means the South Asian nation of 220mn people is hard-pressed to meet external financing needs of over \$30bn up until June 2023, including debt repayments and energy imports.

Pakistan's total liquid foreign exchange reserves stood at \$11.7bn - \$5.8bn with the central bank - as of late last month, having fallen 50% in 2022.

Asif said that the energy conservation plan also included banning the production of energy inefficient bulbs and fans from February and July respectively.

He added Pakistan's peak summer elec-

tricity usage was 29,000 megawatts (MW) compared with 12,000MW in the winter, mainly due to the use of fans in hotter months.

Half of the street lights across the country will remain switched off as a "symbolic" gesture, the minister said.

Most of Pakistan's electricity is produced using imported fossil fuels, including liquefied natural gas, prices of which have sky-rocketed over recent months.

The government has tried to stabilise the economy by containing imports and decades-high inflation.

A fast depreciating currency has made imports more expensive while consumer prices saw a 25% year-on-year rise in the first half of the current fiscal year.

'Majority' of EU wants tests on passengers from China

AFP
Brussels

An "overwhelming majority" of the EU's 27 member countries want passengers coming from China to be systematically tested for the coronavirus (Covid-19) before departure, the European Commission said yesterday.

The consensus recommendation emerged from a meeting of EU health ministry officials held yesterday in Brussels.

A crisis meeting to be held today on the issue will decide what

co-ordinated measures will be applied across the bloc.

The gatherings were called in the wake of China deciding to lift its "zero-Covid" policy, which has sparked massive demand for flights to other parts of the world by Chinese citizens and residents who had been grounded for nearly three years.

The EU fears a sudden influx of passengers from China could bring Covid variants that may be able to evade current vaccines.

There are also concerns that China's data on infections is incomplete, partial and insufficient.

"The overwhelming majority of countries are in favour of pre-departure testing," a commission spokesman said after yesterday's meeting.

EU health commissioner Stella Kyriakides said the officials also agreed to recommend stepped-up monitoring of wastewater from flights and at airports to detect traces of Covid-19, and for member states to boost surveillance.

She emphasised the need for EU "unity" at the meeting to take place today.

Several EU countries including France, Spain and Italy have

already imposed testing requirements on arrivals from China pending a bloc-wide approach.

Beijing has reacted angrily to the increased restrictions, which are also being applied by the United States, Japan and Australia.

China has only recorded 22 Covid-19 deaths since December and has dramatically narrowed the criteria for classifying such deaths - meaning that Beijing's own statistics about the unprecedented wave are now widely seen as not reflecting reality.

Data compiled by the World Health Organisation (WHO),

upon which the EU relies, shows no fresh Covid-19 figures from China for over a week.

Earlier yesterday, the commission said an "offer stands" for the EU to provide Covid-19 vaccines and expertise to China.

A spokesman said Kyriakides had repeated the vaccine offer recently.

Many EU countries have a surplus of mRNA vaccines - especially the one made by BioNTech/Pfizer - that scientific studies have shown to be more effective against severe Covid-19 than the inactivated-virus ones China has developed and uses.



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Global recession: Momentum weakening across major economies

Bad news about the health of the \$100tn global economy keeps coming as the world has entered the new year with a weakened momentum.

From an economic perspective, for the pessimist, there is plenty to worry about 2023: Price shock, tight money, stalling recovery, war impact, strong dollar, housing bust, supply strains ... the list appears endless.

International Monetary Fund managing director Kristalina Georgieva has warned that the global economy faces "a tough year, tougher than the year we leave behind."

"We expect one-third of the world economy to be in recession," Georgieva said on January 1. "Why? Because the three big economies – US, EU, China – are all slowing down simultaneously."

The IMF already warned in October that more than a third of the global economy will contract and that there is a 25% chance of global GDP growing by less than 2% in 2023, which it defines as a global recession.

Data published on Saturday showed that China's abrupt reversal of its Covid Zero policy pushed economic activity in December to the slowest pace since February 2020 as the virus swept through major cities.

Purchasing manager index numbers for manufacturing showed negative readings across Europe, Turkey and in South Korea.

The world faces a recession in 2023 as higher borrowing costs aimed at tackling inflation cause a number of economies to contract, according to the Centre for Economics and Business Research.

The global economy surpassed \$100tn for the first time in 2022 but will stall in 2023 as policy makers continue their fight against soaring prices, the British consultancy said.

The global economy surpassed \$100tn for the first time in 2022 but is seen to stall in 2023 amid the fight against inflation

Indeed, this was supposed to be the comeback year for the world economy following the Covid pandemic.

Instead, 2022 was marked by a new war, record inflation and climate-linked disasters.

It was a "polycrisis" year, a term popularised by historian Adam Tooze.

Many countries are now grappling with cost-of-living crises because wages are not keeping up with inflation, forcing households to make difficult choices in their spending.

Above all, 2022 was the year of inflation.

Pandemic price pressures, dismissed as transitory, turned out to be enduring with Russia's war in Ukraine causing a fresh spike in food and energy costs.

Initially slow to react, the Federal Reserve and its fellow central banks were forced to play catch-up. They raised interest rates at the fastest pace in decades.

By the year's end, inflation appeared to be past its peak – but economies were stalling, as tight money began to bite.

While, still-tight labour markets have provided some support, recession risks are mounting into 2023 for some of the world's major economies, including the US and Europe.

The coming months are expected to see more rate increases – and a cooling in inflation, though perhaps not by as much as central banks would like. This year is likely to turn tougher for workers, with unemployment forecast to rise.

One striking feature of the world economy at the end of 2022 is the difficulty of seeing what's coming next.

In the period from the arrival of Covid to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, a much-cited gauge of policy uncertainty has been at the highest levels on record.

Make no mistake, 2023 is going to be eventful as well as crucial. Policy makers, businesses and investors need to prepare themselves to pursue different strategies to protect value and seize opportunities.

Amid a new order of surging uncertainty, being prepared could make the difference.

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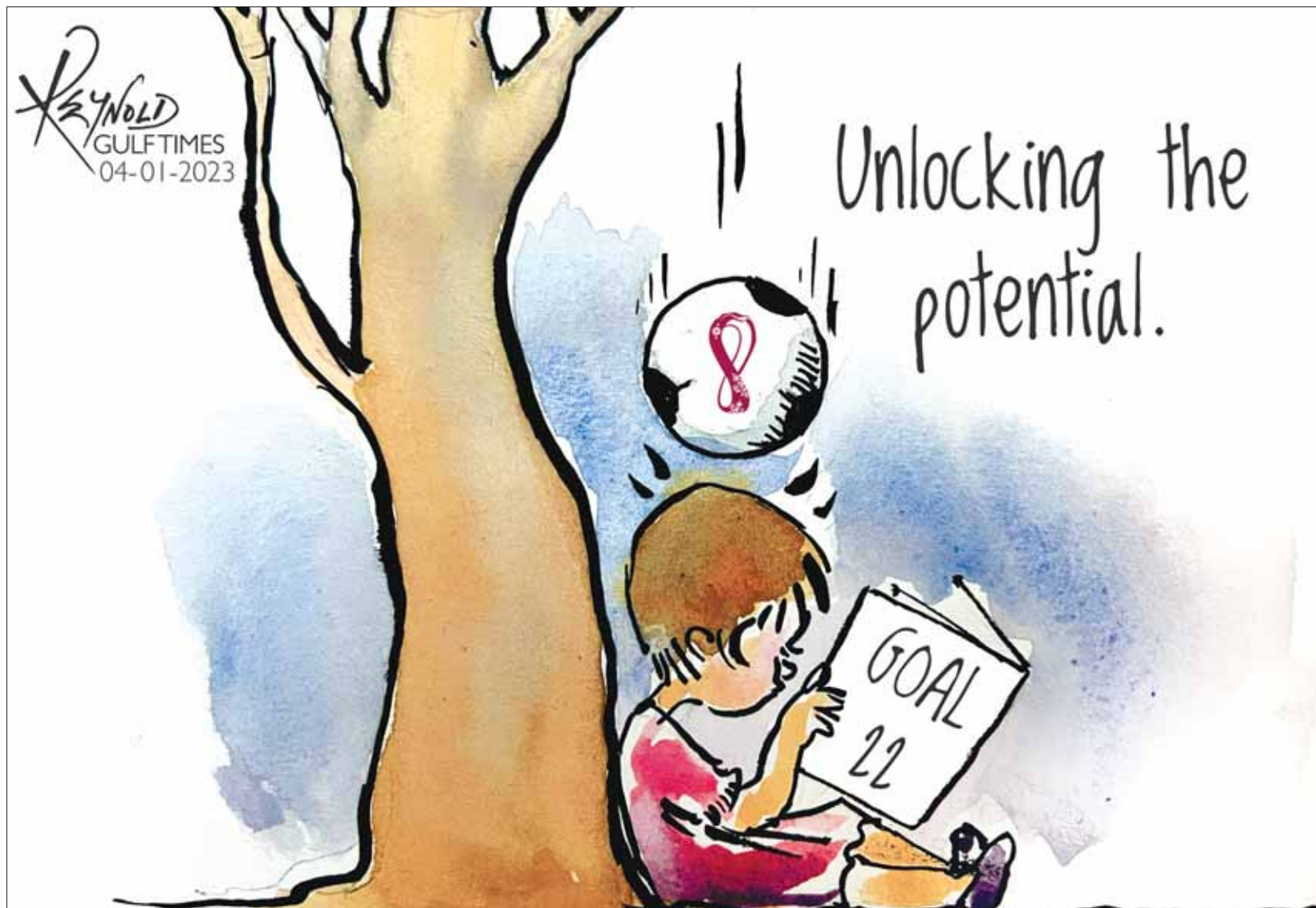
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Democracy's Achilles heel

By Koichi Hamada
New Haven

The United States has a much higher crime rate than Japan.

While the US population is about 2.6 times larger, it recorded 17.2 times more murders in 2019 – 16,425 compared to 950. Needless to say, Japanese tend to enjoy a sense of safety that undoubtedly contributes to our national happiness. So, on July 8, 2022, when former Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo was assassinated at a campaign rally, our world was shaken.

But such violence and lawlessness are incompatible not only with Japanese society; they are anathema to any healthy democracy. And it fits into a wider trend. In January 2021, the US witnessed its own shocking act of political violence, when supporters of then-President Donald Trump – at Trump's urging – stormed the US Capitol, in an effort to disrupt the certification of Joe Biden's election victory the previous November. There could be no more blatant attack on US democracy.

One might be tempted to dismiss the Capitol riot as a radical act by a relatively small group of extremists – a few thousand out of a population of 300mn. It would be even easier to minimise Abe's assassination. After all, it was committed by a single gunman with a highly personal motivation: he blamed Abe, who had ties to the

Unification Church, for his mother's financial ruin. His mother was a devout member of the Church, and she had continued to donate to it – donations that the gunman claims were forced – until the family went bankrupt.

But in both the US and Japan, the perpetrators of political violence have found sympathisers. The US Capitol insurrectionists have a large base of support, as a significant share of US Republicans – even candidates in the recent midterm elections – still believe the "Big Lie" that the 2020 election was stolen from Trump. It is a short leap from holding that belief to cheering those who aim to "right" the imagined wrong.

Some American cultural narratives can also feed vigilantism. The US Constitution's Second Amendment guarantees "the right of the people to keep and bear arms" because a "well-regulated militia" is "necessary to the security of a free state." This guarantee has not only been interpreted to prevent the introduction of reasonable gun-control laws; it has also nurtured the belief that taking up arms against the government is perfectly reasonable. The ironic result is an assault on "the security of a free state."

In Japan, there has also been sympathy for Tetsuya Yamagami, Abe's assassin. Yamagami's family had, indeed, suffered profoundly, and no-one should ever be compelled to donate to a cause. There is also a cultural tie here. One of the most popular Kabuki plays

– Kanadehon Chushingura ("Copybook of the Treasury of Loyal Retainers") – depicts the story of 47 master-less samurai exacting their revenge on the man who had driven their master to suicide. The samurai were executed for their vigilantism, though they come across as the heroes of the story.

To be sure, Yamagami's act will be fairly and strictly judged under Japanese law; it must not bring down Japan's political system. And in the US, the recent midterm elections showed that the power of Trump and his Big Lie has been weakened significantly, with Trump-backed candidates performing far worse than expected. As a result, while the Republicans won a narrow majority in the House of Representatives, it was the worst midterm election performance for a party not in control of the White House in a generation. US democracy lives to fight another day.

But the fact that the US has narrowly escaped capture by would-be authoritarians does not mean the threat to democracy has passed. Trump is planning his 2024 presidential bid, and there is no reason to think that, if he gains momentum again, the rest of the Republican Party will not fall back in line. Although the congressional January 6 Committee, which was charged with investigating the Capitol riot, recommended that Trump and his allies be barred from holding office, Republican opposition means that the recommendation is unlikely to be

heeded. In any case, Trump has plenty of imitators within the party.

The conventional wisdom, particularly in liberal circles, is that the arc of history always bends toward peace, tolerance, equality, justice, and democracy. But, as recent assaults on democracy have shown, there is no room for complacency. Those acting in their own self-interest, or in the name of an unjust, bigoted, or otherwise dangerous cause, will always try to resist. Progress must be driven by ideas, developed through political processes, and ultimately enshrined in institutions and policies.

Elections alone are not enough. Even under fair election rules, voters may choose a leader who blocks or reverses progress – say, by pursuing a policy agenda that benefits one group at the expense of another. From rolling back anti-discrimination protections to changing tax rules, elected leaders who are so inclined have no shortage of ways to perpetuate inequality. Progress, in all its forms, must be nurtured through the relentless efforts of the people.

As Japan and the US have learned firsthand, acts of violence can shape politics. But, if our democracies are to survive, such acts must not be allowed to do so in the ways their authors want.

– Project Syndicate
● Koichi Hamada, Professor Emeritus at Yale University, was a special adviser to former Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe.



A mob of Trump supporters fight with members of law enforcement at a door they broke open as they stormed the Capitol on January 6 in 2021.

Russian Muppets or American puppets?

By Nina L Khrushcheva
Moscow

Westerners have spent two decades wondering why the Russian people have fallen under the spell of Vladimir Putin. Diplomats, historians, economists, and pundits have all failed to provide a satisfying explanation. But where academics and strategists have failed, perhaps the denizens of Sesame Street, from Kermit the Frog to Elmo, might succeed.

It was 1996. My homeland was in the midst of “shock therapy” – the rapid liberalisation and privatisation of its economy by decree, after the Soviet Union’s fall – and I was at Princeton working on my doctorate. One day, a report about Russia on CNN caught my attention. Unusually, it was not about a killing or business takeover or an oligarch’s rise or fall – negative coverage delivered with a holier-than-thou tone that never failed to rankle. Instead, it is a seemingly positive story: the Muppets were headed to Moscow.

But listening to the CNN host’s arrogant commentary, my relief quickly gave way to frustration. The establishment of a Sesame Street in Russia was not, apparently, an example of cultural cross-pollination, enabled by the country’s opening. Rather, Miss Piggy and Big Bird would ensure that American democratic sensibilities took root in the hearts and minds of children across the vast post-Soviet space – not just in Russia, but also in Estonia, Ukraine, Georgia, and other former Soviet republics. I changed the channel.

A children’s television show, defined by its positive messages about learning and sharing, was being twisted into propaganda, presented as a form of pedagogical salvation, and used as yet another declaration of America’s Cold War victory. But Russia had its own rich culture, which included not only Tolstoy and the Bolshoi, but also Good Night, Little Ones! a Soviet children’s show as clever and warm-hearted as Sesame Street.

Fortunately, the team behind Sesame Street did not succumb to the attitude of moral superiority and cultural contempt that pervaded US news reports and was likely internalised by many ordinary Americans. On the contrary, according to a new book by Natasha Lance Rogoff – who, in the early 1990s, was an executive producer in charge of bringing the Muppets to Russia – the story of the show’s formation for Russian audiences was one of genuine cultural cooperation, not condescension or conquest.

In Muppets in Moscow: The Unexpected



Puppets Ernie (left) and Bert from Sesame Street are seen after they were donated to the National Museum of American History to the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History in Washington on September 24, 2013. (Reuters)

Crazy True Story of Making Sesame Street in Russia, Lance Rogoff does not shy away from the story’s political thread. She openly admits that USAID and then-senator Joe Biden “spearheaded congressional support for an international Sesame Street,” touting the Muppets as “ideal ambassadors to model democratic values and the benefits of a free-market economy to children in the former Soviet Union.” But she also explains that “translating Sesame Street’s ebullient and idealistic outlook to Mother Russia was not only incredibly difficult, but also incredibly dangerous.”

Lance Rogoff’s narrative includes bizarre, sordid, and all-too-human details about the morbid racketeering of the early post-Soviet

years, when journalists and businesspeople were murdered on spec and Miss Piggy could be embraced as a role model for the utterly ruthless. Her rationalising, normalising, and modernising of the post-Soviet system reminded me of David Remnick’s insights, in his 1994 book Lenin’s Tomb: The Last Days of the Soviet Empire, into how Mikhail Gorbachev’s perestroika transformed Russia.

Perhaps most important, Lance Rogoff shows that, even if Russia’s Sesame Street was fundamentally an American show, it was not about America. It certainly was not designed to serve as American propaganda. Instead, it depicted basic human values like friendship and communication – as much for the Russians and Americans who put the show together as for

viewers across the former Soviet Union.

Watching Sesame Street while on a visit to Moscow in 1996 – not long after seeing that CNN report – I was pleased to encounter a generous, sweet, and very well-produced show, which contained tie-in stories from the American original as well as unique stories with Russian puppets. The show’s creators had clearly worked hard to develop characters that would resonate with Russians, from the problem-solving orange monster Kubik to the imaginative pink Muppet Businka. Zeliboba – a fuzzy, red-nosed house spirit, dressed in a leaf-covered cloak – was probably the most interesting (and certainly the most polarising).

Lance Rogoff does sometimes fall prey to

cliché. There are too many “Boris and Natasha” moments, with Russians being depicted as cartoonish stereotypes – absurd, bumbling, affected, and heavily accented. For example, one of the female tycoons involved in the show, Irina Borisova, clicks toward a meeting late in Christian Louboutin stilettos. And the late Boris Berezovsky, who was approached for funding, calls “Bik Burd,” an “i-cone” of American culture, “as famous as Elvis Pray-esly!”

Nonetheless, Lance Rogoff deserves praise not only for her storytelling, but also for her perseverance and devotion, without which Russian Sesame Street would not have happened. That would have been a loss for Russian children. As Borisova explained when she decided to offer funding, “every self-respecting individual understands that it’s time to do something for Russian children, but unfortunately, very little gets done – except talk.” At a time when Russia was “changing so quickly” – and was “still very violent” – she believed that a “show like Sesame Street could model for our people how to live in a peaceful society.”

The key, as Lance Rogoff understood, was to show, not tell – to act in good faith, with decency and humanity, rather than delivering contemptuous, self-aggrandising lectures. In the 1990s, Russians were mimicking all things American. But they were also deeply conflicted, as reflected in the debates Lance Rogoff describes over Rachmaninoff and rock and roll. Russian culture is marked by extremes, and the oscillation between imitating Western models and violently rejecting them is no exception.

Russian children watched Sesame Street for nearly 15 years – until 2010. Lance Rogoff says it was taken off the air because Putin no longer saw any use for it. The fact that many other cultural collaborations were also ended at around the same time supports her case. Putin had decided that Russian culture must be of and by Russians – and only he could decide what Russianness meant.

In the 1990s, Russian society was so shattered by the breakdown of the communist order that it lost touch with its own values. But that did not mean it was going to become an American knockoff. Sesame Street worked because it embodied universal values. One wonders whether the Russian reality would be different today if more Americans had understood this. – Project Syndicate

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The next stage of the hot cold war

By Simon Johnson
Washington, DC

After a year of big surprises, led by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the global spike in inflation rates, and the collapse of cryptocurrency ventures, what kind of year will 2023 prove to be? This kind of short-run question is hard to answer, because repercussions of events spread so quickly and unpredictably across our globalised world. But the last 12 months highlighted one major trend that will shape what happens next, in 2023 and beyond: the decline of Russia.

Russian aggression is nothing new. Moscow has been invading other countries since the mid-1990s and has occupied parts of Ukrainian territory since 2014. But the brutality of Russia’s attacks since late February far exceeds what is acceptable to most countries. The most recent phase, destroying civilian energy infrastructure, is widely seen as amounting to a war crime. It is unlikely to change the course of the war, which Russia is losing.

In the bigger picture, Russia has again entered a period of secular decline, during which it will have limited access to Western investment, technology, or consumer goods. Russia’s empires have collapsed before, in 1917-18 and again when the Soviet Union imploded in 1989-91. In both cases, the collapse took a while to get going, and then proved quite complete. Of course, historically Russia has also been able to reassert control, using its own resources during the Civil War of 1917-22 and getting a lot of help from Western companies during the 1990s.

This time, too, we should expect a long struggle for power within Russia, implying serious existential risks for the world, including who ends up controlling Russian nuclear weapons. But the more direct economic impact will be reflected in the world energy market.

Demand for Russian fossil fuels is way down. Before its 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Russia produced about 10.8m barrels of oil per day, of which around 8m were exported (either as crude or refined products). The sharp decline in Russian economic activity means that more oil is available for export, but the European Union, the United States, and their allies are now buying crude from other suppliers – and the same will be true



Workers walk past oil barrels at a filling station in Chennai. (AFP)

for refined products from February 2023. The International Energy Agency predicts that Russian oil exports will fall to around six million barrels per day over 2023-24. Over the medium term, India might buy 1-2 million barrels and China could sop up the rest – assuming both countries want to become more dependent on a malevolent and unreliable partner.

Purchases by India, China, and a few others can still result in a lot of free cash flow and tax revenue for Russia. Whoever leads Russia will put much of these proceeds into building and buying weapons – including missiles with which it can hit a wide range of countries from long distance. Nato member countries are, one hopes, protected to some extent by the threat of retaliation, but Russia can be expected to engage in sabotage and other deniable attacks on Western energy infrastructure (and similar vulnerable strategic targets). Russia is on its way to becoming the best-financed pariah state ever.

During the Cold War, the Soviet Union was careful not to attack Western Europe and the US too directly (and vice versa). Instead, both sides used proxy wars and other forms of pressure. This time, however, we should expect much more direct confrontation. The Russian elite have boxed themselves into a corner, with a bizarre set of beliefs – right-wing nationalism on steroids – and long-range weapons. Giving ground – literally or metaphorically – to these extremists, will only embolden them to take more.

The need to limit over time how much

cash Russia can spend on aggression is why the price cap on Russian oil exports is so important. The evidence so far is that this is working as intended, enabling India and China to buy Russian oil at a big discount compared to world prices.

But further measures are needed, including accelerated investments in renewable energy to reduce world demand for oil. If we continue to depend on Russia and its allies in the OPEC+ cartel, the ability and temptation to disrupt our economies will be immense. There is now a pressing national security dimension to the energy transition.

High inflation in the 1970s had multiple causes, beginning with tight economies in the 1960s (and the Vietnam War). But the problems were exacerbated by two oil price shocks, in 1973 and 1979. Opec+ members understand that they have the power to do this again, at a time of their choosing – or the next time Russia asks for a favour.

Oil demand and supply are quite unresponsive to oil prices in the short run, but historically quite responsive over 5-10 years. In 2023 and beyond, the West needs to focus more intently on reducing demand for fossil fuels, particularly oil, and increasing the supply of alternative energy sources (outside the control of Russia and Opec). – Project Syndicate

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Will Netanyahu clip wings of new cabinet hawks?

By Dan Williams
Jerusalem

One is a pistol-packing ex-member of an outlawed Jewish militant group. The other is a religious fundamentalist. Both are West Bank settlers averse to Palestinians’ self-rule – let alone their hopes of statehood.

And as senior coalition partners to re-elected Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich will be within reach of the levers of power – a troubling prospect for Israel’s once-dominant secular-left and friends in the West.

Netanyahu turned to the ultra-nationalists after centrist parties boycotted him over his long-running corruption trial. He needs their support to stay in office as he argues his innocence in court. But he denies this spells pliability to their demands.

“I will navigate this government. The other parties are joining me. I’m not joining them,” Netanyahu told Al Arabiya on December 15, pledging to enforce “liberal rightist” policymaking.

Besides, he said, “a lot of them have changed and moderated their views, principally because with the assumption of power comes responsibility.”

There may be precedent in Avigdor Lieberman, a firebrand whose 2006 appointment as deputy prime minister triggered much the same response as Ben-Gvir’s rise: liberal warnings of civil war and, on Israel’s top TV satire, his lampooning as a Nazi.

Lieberman proved to be politically adaptable. He served in various coalitions – one of which included an Islamist party – and ended up in the current opposition, from which he has scorned Netanyahu’s new allies as “zealots and extremists.” Still, Lieberman could also play spoiler from the right. As Netanyahu’s foreign minister in a previous government, he would publicly promote a harder line on the Palestinians than the premier’s. In a later term, Lieberman resigned as Netanyahu’s defence minister in protest at a Gaza truce he deemed too lax.

Netanyahu’s conservative Likud party has now retained the defence and foreign ministries. But the optics around Ben-Gvir and Smotrich may yet prove combustible for him – for example, if either man visits or prays at Jerusalem’s Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, an icon of Palestinian nationalism.

Netanyahu’s previous 15 years as premier saw him feathering the nests of the hawks in his cabinet – or clipping their wings – as he deemed necessary. Back then, however, he had parties to his left to help him function as an ideological fulcrum.

“With all the parties in the incoming government situated to Netanyahu’s right, it will be difficult for him to replicate that role this time,” argued Yohanan Plesner, president of the Israel Democracy Institute

think-tank. “Does he want to?”

On Ben-Gvir and Smotrich’s calls for West Bank annexations, Netanyahu is on record as being in favour while also avoiding action on the ground that would risk escalating into confrontations with Washington or Arab partners.

Yet Smotrich did carve out a cabinet niche for himself overseeing settlements, which most world powers deem illegal for taking occupied land that Palestinians want for a state.

“He can be effective in multiplying and consolidating Israel’s presence in the West Bank,” said Amotz Asa-El, research fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute, noting Smotrich’s high pace of infrastructure-building as a former transport minister.

For Ben-Gvir, by contrast, this is the first stint in government. As police minister, he will focus on law-and-order issues important to a swathe of Israelis, Asa-El predicted – including crime-hit Arabs against whom Ben-Gvir once agitated.

“After legitimating his position in broader Israeli circles, he will proceed to the realms that not all agree on – namely the West Bank,” Asa-El said. But that may have to wait, as Ben-Gvir’s portfolio does not grant major powers in the West Bank, which is under the overall control of the military.

Arguably, Ben-Gvir, 46, and Smotrich, 42, can afford to shelve some of their agendas for this round with Netanyahu, 73.

“But that’s counting on restraint from people who come from very different ideological world-views than what we’ve seen in Israeli governments before,” said Daniel Shapiro, a former US envoy to Israel and now Atlantic Council distinguished fellow.

Ben-Gvir came up through the Kahane Chai group, which is blacklisted in Israel and the United States for its virulently anti-Arab doctrines. Smotrich’s advocacy of Jewish claims on the West Bank is informed by a doctrinaire faith.

Earlier generations of Israeli far-rightists in government “demonstrated an interest and capacity to engage in a genuine two-way dialogue with the United States and other international players, and seemed to recognise the limits on pursuing some of their most ideological positions,” Shapiro said.

“It remains to be seen whether that approach will characterise members of the incoming coalition.”

Alan Dershowitz, a prominent American-Jewish jurist who has advised US and Israeli leaders, said Ben-Gvir and Smotrich disavowed racism and homophobia in meetings with him this month.

“The word ‘balance’ came up a number of times” in their reassurances during the conversations, Dershowitz told Reuters.

“Obviously they were in some ways trying to get me to have a positive impression of them,” he said. “Let’s see what happens when I’m not in the room and the people in the room are pushing them to become more extreme. That’s the litmus test.” – Reuters



Rainy and cloudy conditions in Doha yesterday.
PICTURES: Shajji Kayamkulam and QNA



Met: More rain expected today

Rain emergency committee puts in extensive efforts in view of prevailing weather conditions

More rain is expected in the country today as the Qatar Met department has forecast thundershowers along with strong winds and poor visibility at times.

Offshore areas, too, are likely to see thundery rain today, besides windy conditions and high seas.

Doha and other places in Qatar experienced intermittent rain along with thundery conditions at times yesterday.

The Met department had recently said that there are chances of rain in the country until the end of the week.

Today's detailed forecast says the wind speed is expected to go up to 25 knots in both inshore and offshore areas, with the sea level rising to 8'.

It will be misty at first and partly cloudy to cloudy conditions are also expected today, the forecast says.

There is a chance of scattered rain that may become thundery.

Visibility, meanwhile, may drop to 2km or less in some places at times.

Cloudy conditions are also expected offshore along with scattered rain, which may turn thundery at times.

The temperature in Doha is likely to range from 16-19° Celsius today.

The Joint Committee for Rain Emergencies at the Ministry of Municipality has meanwhile intensified its efforts and readiness to deal with the rain.

This was done through active co-operation between the competent authorities in different municipalities across the country and the unified call centre at the ministry as well as other entities concerned in the country.

Since morning yesterday rain emergency teams in different municipalities, in co-operation with the competent departments at the ministry, have been exerting efforts to duly prepare the work teams and provide the equipment and mechanisms necessary to deal with any rainwater accumulation.

This is being done round the clock.

The mechanism for receiving any communication is implemented in co-ordination with the main operations room of the unified call centre through the number 184, in addition to the number 188 of the Public Works Authority (Ashghal).



Marmi festival thrills spectators

More qualifiers joined the list of winners at the competitions of the 14th edition of the Qatar International Falcons and Hunting Festival (Marmi 2023) yesterday at Sbkhat Marmi at the Sealine Area.

Six new falcons qualified for Al Tala'a (release of the falcons to hunt) and Haddad Al Tahadi (where the falcon has to hunt a homing pigeon within certain standards) competitions yesterday, the third day of the event, in addition to two from the first day of the competition.

The festival is organised by Al Qannas Qatari Society under the patronage of HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, and set to go on until January 28, drawing more local, regional

and international attention as one of the major festivals in its category, pioneered by Qatar to maintain and develop such heritage traditional sport.

Al Tala'a Committee head Mohamed bin Mubarak al-Ali said that the competitions of the third day had been exceptional, although the launch was a bit delayed due to rainy weather.

When the horizontal visibility became clear, the committee opted to make the distance of the houbara bustard birds shorter to ensure that binoculars and cameras can capture them clearly.

In the afternoon, the Hadad Al Tahadi competitions captured the attention of spectators as the local and international competitors

took part with their highly trained falcons.

Despite the drizzle, the falcons fiercely pursued their prey of homing pigeons, displaying their superb hunting skills.

However, some of the pigeons exhausted their hunters, with some eventually able to evade the hunt.

Haddad Al Tahadi Committee head Ali Sultan Nasser al-Humaidi said that this category of the competitions is exceptionally exciting, drawing excellent participation from falconers and homing pigeons owners from within and without the country.

He said that seven new falcons qualified yesterday for the higher rounds, taking the number of qualifying falcons in this category to 15 since the start of the festival.

