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Assembly forms panel to probe two defense deals

Lawmakers propose bill to naturalize 4,000 bedoons



KUWAIT: Lawmakers attend a session at the National Assembly on Dec 14, 2022. — KUNA

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The National Assembly on Wednesday approved a request by several lawmakers to form a parliamentary investigation committee to probe allegations of corruption in two multibillion-dollar defense deals. The committee will investigate allegations surrounding the \$8 billion deal to purchase around 30 Eurofighter warplanes and another \$1 billion deal to purchase 30 Caracal military helicopters from Airbus industries.

The two deals were signed several years ago, but many MPs have charged that they included graft and technical defects. The court is also looking into allegations of corruption over the Eurofighter deal. MP Adel Al-Damkhi last week threatened to grill Defense Minister Sheikh Abdullah Al-Ali Al-Sabah if he did

not cooperate with the Assembly to probe alleged corruption and violations over the Caracal deal. Kuwait has already taken delivery of most of the helicopters.

On Wednesday, Sheikh Abdullah said the ministry will cooperate with the investigation committee and provide all necessary information about the armament deals. Two weeks ago, MPs also agreed to launch an investigation into alleged graft in the so-called Army Fund, in which a former prime minister and defense minister stand accused of embezzling hundreds of millions of dinars from the fund.

The Assembly also agreed to form a parliamentary panel to investigate alleged violations in the distribution of industrial land and the renewal of industrial plots in violation of the rules.

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Young Iranians facing death over protests

PARIS: A doctor, rap artists and a footballer are among around two dozen Iranians who risk being hanged as Tehran uses capital punishment as an intimidation tactic to quell protests, rights groups say. The executions in the past week of Mohsen Shekari and Majidreza Rahnavard, both 23 and the first people put to death over the protests, sparked an outcry, especially as Rahnavard was hanged from a crane in public rather than in prison.

But campaigners warn that more executions will inevitably follow without tougher international action, with a dozen more people already sentenced to death over the protests and a similar number charged with crimes that could see them hanged. "Unless the political cost of the executions is increased significantly, we will be facing mass executions," said Mahmood Amiry-Moghaddam, director of the Norway-based Iran Human Rights group.

He accused Iran's leaders of using executions to "spread fear among people and save the regime from the nationwide protests". The largely peaceful demonstrations sparked by the death in September of Mahsa Amini, who had been arrested for allegedly violating Iran's strict dress code for women, are posing the biggest challenge to the Islamic republic since the 1979 revolution. There have been no reports of a slackening in protest activity in recent days, including after the executions, but the movement has been marked by phases of more and less intense demonstrations. Authorities describe those facing death sentences as "rioters" who are being judged in full accordance

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MoI finalizing visit visa rules

KUWAIT: The interior ministry has placed a copy of its plan to deal with procedures regarding granting visit visas on the Cabinet's agenda. Although the final decision is within its authority, it aims to inform the government of its executive plans - assigned to all

government agencies - as part of directions to deal with demographics.

"The mechanisms for dealing with granting visit visas indicates the decision will be issued by the interior ministry soon and will be implemented at the beginning of the new year," sources told Kuwait Times. "The draft decision includes a set of strict conditions for granting visit visas, including preventing the ability to transfer a visit visa to a work permit, as well as blocking all procedures facilitating this at the Public Authority of Manpower and the department of

residency affairs at the interior ministry," they said.

"A ministerial panel supported the interior ministry to double the fees for visit visas, and that dependents only include the wife and children. Parents will be considered dependents only for those who draw high salaries. A technical team is currently working on applying final touches to issue a decision on the conditions for granting visit and family reunion visas and present it to Interior Minister Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Sabah to take a final decision," sources added.

Palestine 'real winner' of World Cup

RAMALLAH: Morocco's support for the Palestinians during the Atlas Lions' historic World Cup run shows the cause has not been "buried", says Palestinian Football Association chief Jibril Rajoub. Like several other Arab nations, Morocco has agreed full diplomatic ties with the Zionist entity - but this has not stopped its players from making clear their loyalties regarding the decades-old conflict.

They unfurled a Palestinian flag on the pitch after their stunning Dec 6

upset victory against Spain, and also after beating Canada during the group stage. Moroccan players have also made pro-Palestinian social media posts during the tournament. Palestinians in the Zionist-occupied West Bank, Gaza and annexed east Jerusalem have - like much of the Middle East - embraced Morocco, the first Arab nation to reach a World Cup semifinals.

Ramallah sporting goods store owner Saeed Al-Ramahi said enthusiasm for the Moroccan team seemed unquenchable, with all of their jerseys sold out. "If I had 300,000 shirts, I would have sold them all in the last two days," he told AFP. That is despite Morocco joining the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain in establishing

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GAZA: Palestinian football fans wave Palestinian and Moroccan flags as they celebrate a Morocco win at the Qatar 2022 World Cup on Dec 10, 2022. — AFP

Tracking China COVID cases 'impossible'

BEIJING: China's top health body said Wednesday the true scale of coronavirus infections in the country is now "impossible" to track, with officials warning cases are rising rapidly in Beijing after the government abruptly abandoned its zero-COVID policy. Beijing's decision to scrap mass testing and quarantines after nearly three years of attempting to stamp out the

virus has led to a corresponding drop in officially reported infections, which hit an all-time high only last month.

But those numbers no longer reflected reality because testing is no longer required for much of the country, China's National Health Commission (NHC) acknowledged on Wednesday. "Many asymptomatic people are no longer participating in nucleic acid testing, so it is impossible to accurately grasp the actual number of asymptomatic infected people," the NHC said in a statement Wednesday.

That came after Vice Premier Sun Chunlan said new infections in the capital were "rapidly growing".

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BEIJING: People queue outside a fever clinic amid the COVID-19 pandemic on Dec 14, 2022. — AFP



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Kuwait pursues competition policy with highest standards

National policy 'required' to protect competitiveness

KUWAIT: Head of the national competition policy project at the Kuwaiti Competition Protection Agency (CPA) Mustafa Al-Mudhaf on Wednesday affirmed that the CPA spares no effort in following the international standards in the project. Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of "Promoting Competition Conference - Challenges and Ambitions," Al-Mudhaf said the CPA project is part of Kuwait's 2035 vision, aiming to turn the country into a financial and trade center, in accordance with the UN development goals.

The conference was organized by CPA in cooperation with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. The project also aims to increase local production and support economic growth for non-oil producing sectors, Al-Mudhaf added. It also focuses on creating a sustainable economy, enhance infrastructure and provide advanced medical care, he noted. Meanwhile, he said that competitiveness policy plays a role in

boosting innovation, enhance market quality and create more job opportunities.

Competitiveness

Meanwhile, a number of economic experts said on Wednesday that a national policy to protect competitiveness is much needed to fend off monopoly, boost quality of products and decrease prices for consumers. In a dialogue session on the sidelines of the "boosting competitiveness... challenges and ambitions" conference, experts agreed that governments must enforce fairness in the market to encourage positive competition to protect the rights of producers and consumers.

Delivering his speech to the conference - organized by the Kuwaiti Competition Protection Agency (CPA) in collaboration with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) - acting head of the economic affairs department at the CPA Dr Nasser Al-Shammi

affirmed the importance of detailing strategies and mechanism for fair competition.

Policies must concern development of economic infrastructure and the government's role in operating the main sectors in the country to achieve the fair competition, he affirmed. The CPA had begun a national policy to issue commercial permits and this is the starting point for the overall plan to protect competition in Kuwait, he affirmed. Head of Egyptian Competition Authority (ECA) Dr Mohammad Montaz displayed to the conferees his country's efforts within protecting competition.

Being partial in competition required a commitment to providing top quality for products without interference, he said. He noted that various government entities must also cooperate to ensure that all have an equal opportunity in any economic market. He went on to say that, legislations must also fair competition without overstepping the rights of both producers and consumers.

Chairman of Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) competition committee Frederic Jenny noted that protecting competition could not occur without cooperation between government entities. The public sector should also be in harmony with the private sector in terms of boosting fair competition, he stressed. Any entity claiming to protect competition must be transparent towards the masses, he said, adding that monopoly should not be tolerated in the market.

Director of Competition Commission at the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) Willard Mwemba said that Africa was eager to reach parity in competition via coming up with rules and regulations to counter monopoly and boost fair competition. The complexity of rules and legislations concerning economy is a matter that concerns the world and efforts should be geared towards simplifying them, he said. — KUNA

News in brief

Man jailed for assault

KUWAIT: The Court of Appeal has ordered an Egyptian expatriate to spend five years behind bars for physically assaulting an underage girl in Farwaniya. The Egyptian has admitted the crime during investigations. He claimed he met the girl while standing in line during an event. The court has previously sent the defendant to a medical committee to check his health status, but has refused his claim of being mentally disabled.

'Drop of blood = life'

KUWAIT: Director of societal volunteering office Khadeeja Abdulsamad has lauded the achievement of blood donation campaign that was organized by family development department themed - "A drop of blood = life," in partnership with PHF volunteer team. She said the campaign achieved its goal of meeting the needs of some cases of rare blood groups, and thanked donors headed by Director General of Hawally Security Directorate Ziyad Al-Khateeb. The one-day campaign started from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm at the family development department in Rumaithiya.

Arab-Chinese relations

CAIRO: The Arab League affirmed Wednesday keenness on developing Arab-Chinese relations to achieve joint interest and face mutual challenges. This came in a speech of Assistant Secretary General and Head of the Social Affairs sector at LAS Ambassador Haifa Abu Ghazaleh, at the opening of the dialogue session under the slogan, communication between Chinese and Arab civilizations in context of collaborating to build Chinese-Arab community for a joint future. Abu Ghazaleh affirmed intent on holding a successful Chinese-Arab forum, as it had contributed, since its beginning in 2004 to boosting relations, facilitating the transmission of cultures, and initiating dialogue. This session held, she added, is held under exceptional circumstances of COVID-19 pandemic, such circumstances, Abu Ghazaleh stressed, enforced notion of connectivity between nations, and underlines importance of international collaboration in facing crises and catastrophes. The session revolves around solidarity, tolerance, respect of civilizations, their unique social system, Abu Ghazaleh illustrated, describing cultural diversity as a source of development for the humanitarian community. — Agencies



KUWAIT: Photos show participants at the first Nazaha forum organized by the National Kuwaiti Nazaha Society to mark International Anti-Corruption Day.



Nazaha holds forum for Anti-Corruption

KUWAIT: Participants at the first Nazaha forum organized by the National Kuwaiti Nazaha Society to mark International Anti-Corruption Day discussed the swift government action in three different sectors including the media and education sectors, ending with improving global indicators which could be based on misinformation or falsified.

Head of the society Mohammed Al-Otaibi said the recommendations reached by participants and attendees will be given to the Cabinet, Anti-Corruption Authority and other supervision authorities to pursue their procedures. The discussion's first section is related to the integrity of the media, stressing the importance that media outlets must conform to their national duty and stay away from disinformation, while the second stresses the importance of education as a pillar of society. In the third section, the discussion stresses on the importance of boosting international anticorruption ratings, Otaibi clarified.

Media recommendations by Madhi Al-Khamis and Dr Rashid Al-Helfi include: (1) Activating cooperation between the anti-corruption authority and other government entities with all media outlets. (2) Reviewing the license of media companies, which have now exceeded 400 companies, some of whom spread misinformation and ruin Kuwait's reputation. (3) Invitation for financial and administrative organization for media outlets. (4) Connecting media outlets with a special organization supervised by the information ministry.



Ministry coordinates efforts in safeguarding medical supplies

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Health is keen on providing medicine and supplies to the public and is coordinating efforts with the private sectors in this regard, said Minister Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi. Speaking at National Assembly session, Minister Al-Awadhi addressed parliamentary concerns regarding the lack of medicine and supplies in the country, noting that the ministry is working diligently to monitor the situation and making sure that the strategic stockpiles of medicine are adequate and sufficient.

He pointed out that it would be advisable to nationalize the production of medicine to bolster the country's medical supplies. New mechanisms for importing medicine and signing contracts with companies and providers must be set in motion to ensure the rights of both suppliers and consumers, he noted. He revealed that the decrease stockpile of certain medicines was not something new, adding that it occurred during the pandemic and post-pandemic.

The ministry will work on measures to prevent such happenings from reoccurring, he affirmed. The ministry devised short and long-term plans and other state entities to tackle the situation, leading to the formation of a committee dedicated to this important issue. The committee began work on providing neces-

sary stockpiles of medicines and supplies within a period of six months, the minister said.

Revising contracts with importing companies and dealers was also tabled and studied by the committee to determine the cause of the problem. He affirmed that measures were taken to ensure that supplies were adequate and that the budget dedicated to purchasing medicine was not squandered.

Minister Al-Awadhi revealed that 117 health clinics and four hospitals have been digitally linked when it came to supplying medicine to prevent a decrease in stockpiles. He added that the capacity of medicine and medical supplies storages at clinics and hospitals were boosted to ensure that medicine were made available.

The ministry is currently working on methods to determine where dispensed medicine and supplies were heading, he revealed. He said that on November 22, the ministry and several state entities had set a committee to import medicine, battling the price rise of certain medicines and food supplement. Al-Awadhi stressed that the ministry would continue to make sure that Kuwaitis and residents alike would be able to access their need of medicine and services for the upcoming period. — KUNA

Authorities urged to establish center for treatment of birds

KUWAIT: President and team members of the birdwatching and protection team of Kuwait Environment Protection Society asked concerned authorities to establish a center for rehabilitation and treatment of birds. "Whenever a team member sees an injured bird and attempts to treat it, he cannot find an official place. This has happened several times, and the last incident was last month (on November 23, 2022), when Dr Mohammad Al-Matrouk, while in Jahra Nature Reserve, saw a greater spotted eagle on the beach that was unable to fly as water began to surround it," Team President Mohammad Shah said.

He said the bird's leg seemed to be stuck in a net, so "I took the bird out and it did not have any injuries, which means it had



Dr Mohammed Al-Matrouk with a falcon



Mohammed Shah

a health condition such as poisoning, etc. We took the bird to the reserve management, but they refused to accept it because there is no vet to treat it. We then took it to the zoo, but they also refused to receive it because they were afraid of bird flu," Shah said.

"We were told to take it to either Abdaliya reserve of KOC or the Scientific Center, because there is an agreement between KFAS and the Environment Protection Authority, so it was handed to the Scientific Center. So it is necessary to have a rehab center for birds, because of such incidents," Shah added.



Local

Percentage of child obesity hits 35% in males; 28% in females

Diabetes linked to child obesity

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Childhood obesity is a serious problem around the world, especially in Kuwait, putting children and adolescents at risk for poor health. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), more than 1 billion people worldwide are obese - 39 million of them are children, and the number is still increasing.

Speaking to Kuwait Times, Nutritionist Shaikhah Al-Mesbah revealed that the percentage of child obesity has reached up to 35 percent in males and 28 percent in females. "We are seeing children's diabetes developing because of an increase in obesity. This is type 2 diabetes - we usually see it in adults, but now we are seeing it in children. This type of diabetes is related to a person's lifestyle, including unhealthy habits and a sedentary lifestyle," she said.

Mesbah indicated that parents are role models in healthy eating for their children, noting that to

change the eating habits of children, parents have to change. "Parents are role models. Whatever parents eat, the children will eat the same because children imitate their parents. If the parent is obese, the child is likely to be obese, mostly because of the child learning the same food habits. So if the parents want their child to be healthy, it is better to start with themselves. The parents should try to change their lifestyle, be healthier and exercise more," she said.

"The first food that should be introduced to babies should be vegetables instead of sweet foods. This is done to make children get used to vegetables, as well as not be addicted to sugars and have a sweet tooth. Unfortunately, some parents provide children with excess candies, chocolate and soda. Start teaching them young, develop healthy habits, and this will help them to be healthy when they grow up, and lead to a healthier society," she said.

Mesbah advised parents to make children get used to eating three meals a day instead of avoiding



Shaikhah Al-Mesbah

of healthy meals, the child will be more likely to eat healthy," she explained.

The availability of candies and chocolates makes the child desire them more, she stressed, adding children will eat snacks and neglect their meals or even neglect to eat any healthy food. Instead, parents must provide healthy snacks like fruits, slices of

meals and snacking all day. "Those meals should be adequate in protein, fruits, vegetables, dairy and healthy grains. The caregiver is responsible for providing healthy cooked meals. Food should be cooked healthily, with no fried foods, and not very calorie-dense meals. Also, if the child participates in the preparation and cooking

vegetables, nuts and popcorn, and make healthy snacks always available and accessible.

"Children will benefit a lot from joining a gym or a sports group, especially a sport that they like and enjoy. This will help them become busier with something beneficial, instead of having too much free time and eating a tremendous amount. Being active will help them maintain a normal weight, and have a healthier, fit body," Mesbah said.

Mesbah called out to parents to encourage and motivate their children, pointing out that blaming children for their unhealthy eating habits will lead to an unhealthy relationship with food, where the child will not feel good about themselves and might eat unhealthy foods behind their parents' backs or even binge eat. "Instead of blaming children for their food habits and trying to make them feel guilty, it is better to encourage and motivate. Motivation and encouragement lead to good results in terms of the child enjoying eating healthy and most importantly continuing to be that way," she said.



KUWAIT: Lawmakers discuss at the National Assembly on Wednesday. MPs endorsed final accounts of many government, affiliate and independent authorities for the fiscal years, 2018-2019 and 2019-2020. — KUNA photos

NA endorses final accounts for govt departments

KUWAIT: The National Assembly on Wednesday endorsed final accounts of many government, affiliate and independent authorities for the fiscal years, 2018-2019 and 2019-2020. Thirty-nine MPs voted in favor and 12 voted against out of the present total 51 legislators.

The departments, final accounts of which have been approved, are the Public Authority for Minors Affairs, the Public Authority for Food and Nutrition, the Public Authority for Youth, the Kuwait Fire Force, the Public Authority for Civil Information, the public authority for publication of the Quran, Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority, Al-Zakat House, Kuwait News Agency, the Public Authority against Corruption, the Public Authority for Disability Affairs, the Public Authority for Roads and Transportation, the Capital Market Authority, the Public Authority for the Assessment of Damages resulting from the Iraqi Aggression.

Others are the Public Institution for Social Security, the Public Authority for Labor Force, the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training, Kuwait University, the Public Authority for Partnership between the Private and Public Sectors, Kuwait Municipality, the Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources, the National Assembly, the Credit Bank of Kuwait, the National Fund for Small and Medium Enterprises, the Central Bank of Kuwait, the Environment Public Authority,



the Public Authority for Housing Care, Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research. The assembly also approved the final account of the state financial administration for the 2019-2020 fiscal year. The parliament speaker lifted the complementary session.

In another development, the National Assembly approved amending the penal code whereby specifying penal responsibility for the legal personality in corruption cases. The 55 MPs present in the session voted in favor of the bill in the first reading after concluding discussion of a report by the committee

of legal and legislative rights regarding the bill for amending Law 31/1970 that modifies some terms of the Law 16/1960.

The law explanatory memo adds a chapter titled "the penal responsibility of the legal personality," incorporating a set of penalties against the legal personality, with exemption of government departments, in the cases he (or she) may commit a corruption offense. The relevant laws, applicable on the legal personalities is also applicable of regular personalities. —KUNA

Kuwait envoy and Director of IOM discuss migration

GENEVA: Kuwait permanent envoy to the United Nations and related international organizations in Geneva ambassador Nasser Al-Hein and the Director General of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Antonio Vitorino discussed Wednesday the geopolitical challenges facing migration worldwide. This came during a meeting between ambassador Al-Hein and Vitorino at the headquarters of the Kuwaiti mission to the United Nations in Geneva.

In a statement to KUNA, ambassador Nasser Al-Hein said that climate changes witnessed around the world and its impacts on humanity led tens of thousands of people to migrate in search of new livelihoods and a safe life. He explained that the State of Kuwait is keen to enhance permanent communication with the International Organization for Migration to find out about the developments of global migration currents and the challenges faced by various geographical regions.

He also stressed Kuwait's keenness to dialogue with the relevant United Nations organizations to clarify its positions, based on the constants of its foreign policies. Earlier this week, Kuwait delegation in Geneva discussed with the Regional Director of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Dominique Bourgeon the latest developments in the global food crisis and the implications of geo-strategic changes on it, especially with the high energy prices and inflation, which is reflected automatically on the food market internationally. —KUNA



Kuwait permanent envoy to the UN in Geneva Nasser Al-Hein with Director General of the IOM Antonio Vitorino.

'Reflections of health development on the cancer patient'

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The Secretariat General of Gulf Federation for Cancer Control organized a workshop on "reflections of health development on the cancer patient" in cooperation with the National Campaign for Cancer Awareness (CAN) and support from Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS). The workshop was held at CAN's training center and moderated by nuclear medicine consultant and CAN executive committee member Dr Iman Al-Shimmari.

GFFCC Secretary General Dr Khalid Al-Saleh said the goal of the workshop is to shed light on the importance of presenting high quality health services to achieve comprehensive health coverage, and that caring for the individual is the quality base as recommended by WHO to achieve the goals of sustainable health development. He said there are many obstacles that face health services and providers, adding that developed countries are still suffering from a nearly 15 percent rise in hospital spending due to the lack of completion of comprehensive healthcare, while in developing countries, the rate exceeds 30 percent.

Dr Saleh said due to a lack of quality services, hospitals in low-income countries suffer from around 10 percent of hospital patients getting infected, while in rich countries the percentage is nearly 7 percent, adding the low quality of health services hinder the



KUWAIT: Participants are pictured during a workshop on "reflections of health development on the cancer patient" in cooperation with the National Campaign for Cancer Awareness (CAN) and support from Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS).

improvement of healthcare in countries regardless of their income levels. Director of Health Promotion Department Dr Abeer Al-Bahouh spoke about the importance of supporting patterns of a healthier

lifestyle to prevent diseases, while Dr Sarah Al-Abdelhadi from the central department of primary healthcare spoke about the integral role of primary healthcare in improving health security.

EPA foils attempt to smuggle diesel

KUWAIT: Kuwait Environment Public Authority (EPA) announced Wednesday the seizure of eight companies and factories that tried to smuggle 80 containers carrying about two million liters of diesel. In a statement to KUNA, Director of the Chemical Safety Department at the EPA Dr Mishaal Al-Ibrahim said that samples of materials carried in the containers, showed petroleum derivatives, diesel in particular, which is subject to the supervision of the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation.

Dr Al-Ibrahim explained that the companies and factories were penalized, according to Article (23) of the Environmental Protection Law, related to the management of chemicals, which stipulates the examination, audit and conformity of the exports in Kuwait. The article stipulates that "the approval of the concerned authorities must be obtained when importing or exporting hazardous materials and chemicals, the permission is required to complete examination, conformity and audit procedures from the concerned authorities or from companies qualified for this purpose."

The executive regulations of this law specify the regulating procedures and requirements, the required records and the responsibilities of the concerned authorities towards them, he added, "indicating that the penalty for this article reaches KD 10,000. He affirmed the continuation of coordination between the EPA, the General Administration of Customs, and the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation to take the necessary legal measures against those who manipulate the country's savings. —KUNA

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News in brief

Weather related troubles

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Interior on Wednesday urged motorists and sea goers to be aware of the turbulent weather. The ministry is reachable for help on the phone number: 112. Sea goers in distress can contact the Coast Guards on 1880888 to get aid.

Kuwait crude oil up

KUWAIT: Kuwait crude oil surged \$3.62 during Tuesday's trading sessions to reach \$78.71 per barrel compared with \$75.09 pb the day before, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said Wednesday. West Texas Intermediate also rose \$2.22 to \$75.39 pb and Brent crude gained \$2.69 to \$80.68 pb.

Kuwaitis in Portugal

KUWAIT: Kuwait Embassy in Portugal urged its nationals on Tuesday to be vigilant and follow the local authorities' instructions in light of the heavy rains and torrential rains. The embassy appealed to the Kuwaitis to contact it at: 00351916666645, in case of any assistance or inquiry.

Extension of UNRWA mandate

CAIRO: The Arab League has welcomed the resolution of the UN General Assembly to renew the mandate of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) for three years until January 2026. The resolution, recommended by the UNGA Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization Committee), was passed yesterday by a majority of 157 votes, said the League's Assistant Secretary-General and Head of the League's Palestine and Occupied Arab Territories Dept. Saeed Abu-Ali. He welcomed the results of the vote, calling on donor countries scale up financial support to UNRWA by signing multi-year funding agreements to help the agency provide basic services to more than 5.7 million Palestinian refugee in five areas of action. —From KUNA

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: A waiter serves a meal to a customer at a restaurant at Mubarakiya market in the centre of Kuwait City. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Arab League underscores importance of women's input in peacemaking processes

CAIRO: The League of Arab States (LAS) affirmed on Wednesday the significance of women's participation in peacemaking and mediation processes. This was in a speech by the Assistant Secretary General and Head of the Social Affairs sector at the Arab League Ambassador Haifa Abu Ghazaleh, at the opening of the dialogue session on the institutionalization of the work of the Arab Women Mediators Network in Cairo. The Arab region is still suffering from conflict, occupation and instability, in which women pay the highest price for its consequences, she mentioned.

There are deliberations that require the active participation of women in mediation to resolve conflicts, achieve security and build peace, who are more familiar with conflict-related violence that befall them and the damages resulting from it,

and more aware of the needs of children, she said. In this regard, she underlined that women's contribution enhances the opportunity to formulate balanced and sustainable solutions, leading to the prevention, protection, relief and recovery of all components of society.

Considering the conflicts in the Arab region, fair solutions for women and girls cannot be formulated without women's involvement, she stated, as she regrets to say that women are still largely excluded from partaking in mediation processes, and their capabilities in achieving security and building peace in the region are still untapped. She referred to LAS' positive attitude regarding the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda regionally, according to a comprehensive long-term vision, in collaboration with the UN Women Regional Office for the Arab States.

LAS seeks to regionally improve the field of women, security and peace by raising public awareness and supporting national government agencies to implement global agendas and develop national plans, Abu Ghazaleh stressed. The launch of the Arab Women Mediators Network is a serious initiative to decode and support the relentless and discreet efforts of women in mediation for peace at the national, regional and international levels, she stated.

LAS is keen on joining the Arab Women Mediators Network in the Global Alliance of Regional Women Mediator Networks, which consists of five regional networks in addition to the Arab Network, so that women can share their own experiences in conflict prevention and peaceful settlement, and learn from the lessons of women in the various regional networks, she pointed out.

LAS, in collaboration with the UN Women's Commission, has been working on providing three phases of the capacity-building program directed to members on gender and mediation, in cooperation with the Dutch Clingendael Foundation in the first phase, the Geneva Centre for Security Policy for the second phase, and the Cairo International Center for Conflict Resolution, Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding in the third stage, she added.

Representatives of regional and international organizations, representatives of Arab countries, members of regional networks, peace mediators and several experts specialized in the field of mediation, women, security and peace will partake in the two-day dialogue session. Kuwait will be represented before the session by Advisor for Human Rights Affairs at the Kuwaiti Ministry of Foreign Affairs Sheikha Jawaher Ibrahim Al-Duaij Al-Sabah, as she is a member of the Arab Women Mediators Network. —KUNA



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French Ambassador lauds KU-CEFREPA cooperation

KUWAIT: France Ambassador to Kuwait Claire Le Flecher praised on Wednesday the distinguished cooperation between the French Research Centre of the Arabian Peninsula (CEFREPA) and Kuwait University (KU), which reflects the deep-rooted ties between Kuwait and France. Speaking on the sidelines of the exhibition organized by the French Department of the KU Faculty of Letters at Sabah Al-Salem University city, she said the event sheds light on the cultural, political, humanitarian and commercial ties between both countries for more than two decades.

A similar exhibition, hosted by the National Library of Kuwait last year, showcased rare documents for the first time, she recalled. KU Faculty of Letters' organization of such events reflects its deep awareness to spread cultural works and the care it offers to foreign languages, as well as its openness



Claire Le Flecher

to other cultures and people, the Tunisian ambassador to Kuwait Hashimi Ajili said. KU is always well known for organizing such distinguished cultural and scientific events, endorsing the cooperation between KU and CEFREPA, which transferred its headquarters from Yemen to Kuwait since few years, the diplomat added.

For his part, the Dean of KU Faculty of Letters Abdulhadi Al-Ajmi welcomed in his speech during the event the attending ambassador and audience. The Department of French language at KU is not only specialized in teaching language, but is also interested in searching in culture and knowledge, and is a window to the Francophonic cultures, Al-Ajmi added. He stressed on the importance of education in the French language, to take a closer look at the scientific, cultural, philosophic and literary works in this field, which contributes to bridging the gaps between peoples of both nations. —KUNA

Gold and Jewelry exhibition attracts thousands

KUWAIT: International Gold and Jewelry Exhibition, in its 18th edition, opened on Wednesday at Kuwait International Fairground with participation of more than 200 local and international vendors. CEO of Marketing and Merchandise within Kuwait International Fairs Basma Al-Duhaim stated to Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), that the exhibition, lasting for six days, is one the largest international congregations for the buying and selling of jewelry.

The exhibition offers an opportunity to business-people and entrepreneurs to market their products, display latest developments of market, connect with likeminded people and exchange expertise. Al-Duhaim forecasts that the exhibition will attract thousands of visitors. The event, she added, is the perfect place for jewelry aficionados to broaden their knowledge of jewelry especially as a number of global experts and famous international brands are present, enjoy the discounts provided and revel in a true shopping experience.

Al-Duhaim noted the role of the customs department in easing the process for vendors as they turned building four into a customs warehouse. Kuwait International Fair, established in 1971 and located in Mishref area, is one of the largest in the country, equipped with highest international standards and hosts more than 45 annual events. —KUNA

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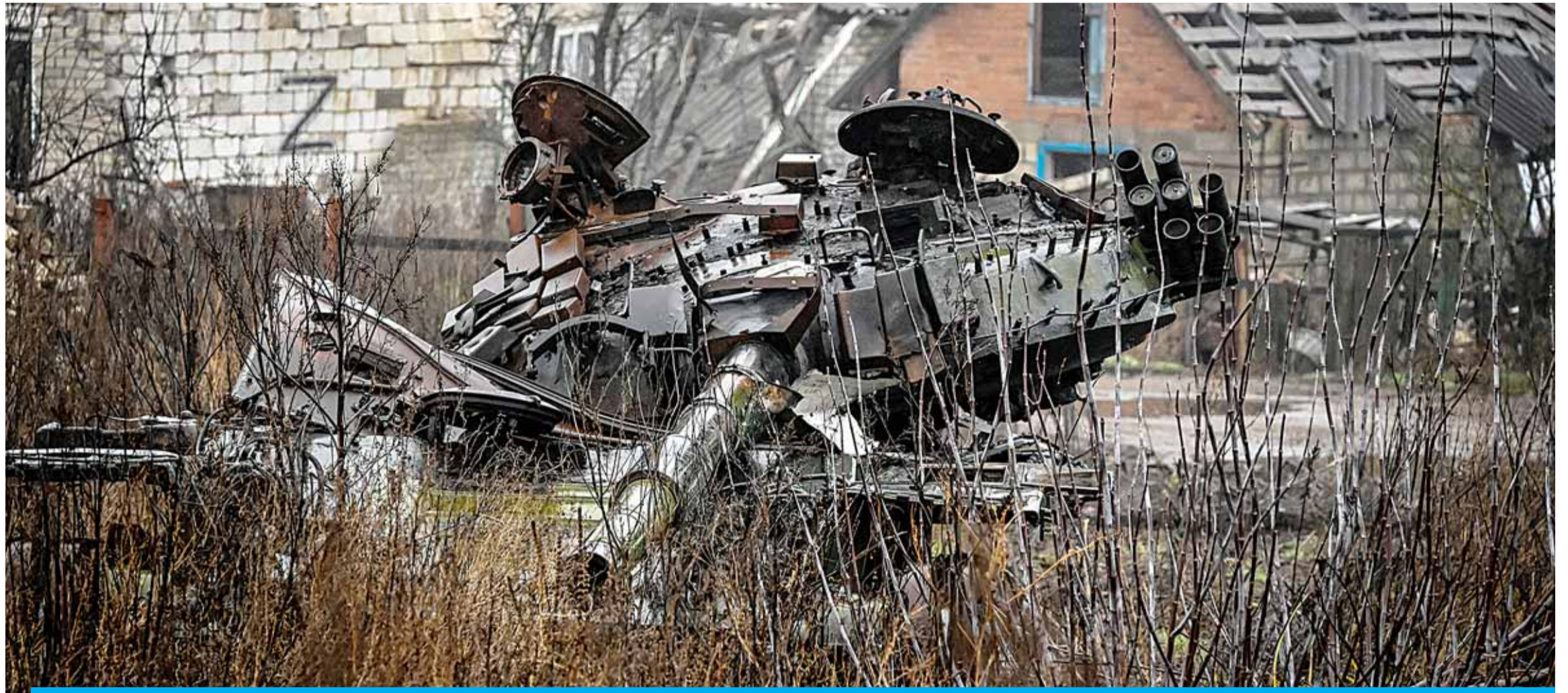


Fear persists 10 years after Delhi gang rape, murder

Denmark has a new government, six weeks after elections: PM

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KAMYANKA, Ukraine: Photo shows a destroyed tank on the outskirts of the village of Kamyanka near Izyum, Kharkiv region, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine. —AFP

Ukraine downs attack drones over Kyiv

40 to 50 percent of the country's grid was out of action because of Russia's strikes

KYIV: Ukrainian forces said Wednesday they had shot down an entire swarm of Iranian-made drones launched at the capital by Russian troops in their latest attack on Kyiv. Explosions rang out over a central neighbourhood in the early hours of Wednesday, the mayor said, and AFP journalists saw law enforcement and emergency service workers inspecting metal fragments at a snow-covered impact site.

"The terrorists started this morning with 13 Shaheds," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said, referring to the Iran-made weapons. "According to the preliminary information, all 13 were shot down by our Ukrainian air defence systems."

He added that residents of the capital, which has now been subjected to nearly ten months of air raid

sirens and frequent aerial attacks since Russia invaded the country in February, should stay alert to government warnings of incoming attacks.

Kyiv region officials praised the Ukrainian air defence and electronic warfare units for downing the latest wave of suicide drones. US ambassador in Ukraine Bridget Brink said following the morning attacks that Kyiv could continue to rely on Washington's backing. "More support is on the way," she wrote on Twitter.

'Fight through winter'

Mayor Vitali Klitschko announced on social media at 6:41 am local time (0441 GMT) that "explosions" had been heard in the central district of Shevchenkivsky and that emergency services

were responding. "Debris from downed drones hit one administrative building and four more residential buildings suffered minor damage. No one was injured," added Sergiy Popko, the head of the Kyiv regional military administration.

Since a series of key battlefield setbacks this summer and autumn, Russia has been pummeling critical infrastructure across Ukraine with missiles and drones, plunging millions into cold and darkness in winter.

Moscow last week also targeted Ukrainian energy infrastructure, piling pressure on the country's power grid, whose operators have for weeks been forced to implement rolling blackouts. Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmygal said this week that between 40 and 50 percent of the country's grid

was out of action because of Russia's strikes.

The latest round of attacks on Wednesday came one day after Zelensky issued urgent appeals to around 70 countries and international organisations at a Paris conference to help Ukraine withstand Russian attacks this winter.

In a video message from Kyiv, Zelensky said Tuesday that Ukraine needed assistance worth around 800 million euros in the short term for its battered energy sector. He also said that his country needs spare parts for repairs, high-capacity generators, extra gas and increased electricity imports. Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba called on Ukraine's allies to provide his country with more weapons to help it "fight through the winter" and sustain Kyiv's military advances. —AFP

US warns China, Russia are destabilizing Africa

WASHINGTON: The United States warned Tuesday that China and Russia were destabilizing Africa with their growing inroads as it rolled out the red carpet to the continent's leaders and pledged billions of dollars in support.

Forty-nine African leaders flew into the Washington cold for the first continent-wide summit with the United States in eight years as President Joe Biden seeks to use personal diplomacy to win back influence.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, at a panel with several African presidents at the start of the three-day summit, charged that US rivals had a different approach. Austin said China was expanding its footprint in Africa "on a daily basis" through its growing economic influence.

"The troubling piece there is they're not always transparent in terms of what they're doing and that creates problems that will be eventually destabilizing, if they're not already," Austin said. Russia was "continuing to peddle cheap weapons" and deploying "mercenaries across the continent," he added.

"And that is destabilizing as well." But the Biden administration has been careful not to present Africans with an us-or-them choice, believing it is futile to try to turn the tide on China's massive infrastructure spending.



WASHINGTON: Democratic Republic of the Congo President Felix Tshisekedi speaks during the Conservation, Climate Adaptation, and Just Energy Transition Forum during the US-Africa Leaders Summit at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center in Washington. —AFP

Health and space cooperation

Biden plans to unveil \$55 billion for Africa over three years. In one of the first announcements, the White House said the United States would invest \$4 billion by the 2025 fiscal year to train African health workers, a rising priority for Washington since the COVID-19 pandemic.

The summit also brought in NASA, with Nigeria and Rwanda becoming the first African nations to sign the Artemis accords, a US-led bid for international cooperation on traveling to the Moon, Mars and beyond.

The Artemis accords, which already include European allies, Japan and several

Latin American powers, come as China rapidly expands its own lunar program and as tensions with Russia threaten its post-Cold War work with the United States on space.

China has rejected criticism of its role in Africa, with its ambassador in Washington, Qin Gang, saying the continent should not be a place for "major powers' competition." In Beijing, Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told reporters on Wednesday that Washington "should respect the will of the African people and take concrete actions to help Africa's development, instead of concentrating its efforts on smearing and attacking other countries." —AFP

solve parliament and rule by decree, had earlier told the court he would "never give up" his cause.

Castillo also called on police and the military to "stop killing" protesters who continue to demand his release and reinstatement, after violent clashes between security forces and demonstrators left seven people dead in recent days.

But Judge Cesar San Martin rejected his appeal for release following a virtual hearing. Castillo's demise was rapid after he had attempted to sideline parliament last Wednesday just hours before it was due to hold a third impeachment vote against him. Castillo and his family were being investigated for alleged corruption.

Congress went ahead with its vote and overwhelmingly decided to impeach him for "moral incapacity." He was provisionally

detained for seven days. Within hours Castillo's vice president, Dina Boluarte, a former prosecutor, was sworn in as his successor.

"I will never give up and abandon this popular cause that brought me here," the leftist Castillo said during Tuesday's hearing. "From here I would like to urge the armed forces and national police to lay down their arms and stop killing these people thirsty for justice."

He said his arrest was unjust and arbitrary. "I am not a thief, a rapist, corrupt or a thug," he added, before being interrupted by the judge who asked him to keep to legal arguments. Castillo's supporters began protesting almost immediately after his arrest, with demonstrations escalating on Sunday when two people were killed in clashes between demonstrators and security forces. —AFP

Four dead, dozens rescued in Channel small boat incident

LONDON: At least four people died when a small boat apparently packed with migrants capsized in freezing temperatures in the Channel overnight, the UK government said on Wednesday. Dozens of others were plucked from the waters of one of the world's busiest shipping lanes in a large-scale rescue operation involving UK and French emergency services.

UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak called it a "tragic loss of human life", just as he tries to tighten rules to prevent record numbers of migrants from

attempting the crossing. British media said earlier that 43 people were rescued, including more than 30 who had fallen overboard, with fears the death toll will rise.

Migrants have been intercepted regularly in the Channel in recent years, using small boats ill-suited for trips on the open sea. At least 27 people drowned while attempting to cross the Channel in a dinghy on November 24 last year.

The International Organization for Migration estimates that 205 migrants have been recorded as missing in the Channel since 2014. Nikolai Posner, from the Utopia 56 group helping migrants in northern France, said they received a voice message and location notification from a boat in distress at 2:53 am local time (0153 GMT). —AFP

Peru court denies ex-president's release appeal

LIMA: A court in Peru rejected on Tuesday an appeal by former president Pedro Castillo to be freed from detention on charges of rebellion and conspiracy, as officials warned protests demanding his release could spiral out of control.

Prosecutors late Tuesday filed a request to hold Castillo in pre-trial detention for 18 months, marking the formal start of the investigation against him, a prosecution source told AFP. Castillo, who was removed from office and arrested after attempting to dis-

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International

Denmark has a new government, six weeks after elections: PM

New govt to have 'a lot of compromises, but above all, a lot of ambitions'

COPENHAGEN, Denmark: Denmark will finally have a new government six weeks after inconclusive elections with a left-right alliance forged after tortuous negotiations, prime minister Mette Frederiksen said Tuesday.

The left-wing Frederiksen told reporters that the political alliance was "what our country needs", following a narrow election victory for her Social Democrats in legislative elections on November 1. "Both because of the crises we face — inflation, war in Europe — but also because we have to make decisions that force us to look at things differently," she said.

The new government team will be announced on Thursday, she said, "made up of the Social Democrats, the Liberals and the Moderates". She spoke to the press after informing Queen Margrethe of the alliance.

Frederiksen said the new government would have "a lot of compromises, but above all, a lot of ambitions". The monarch tasked her with trying to form a government in November, after individually meeting the leaders of Denmark's 11 other parties in parliament.

Beyond traditional politics

"We are in totally new and uncharted territory," Robert Klemmensen, professor of political science at Lund University, told AFP. "It's extremely surprising — no one thought it would be possible to form this government."

The last coalition government between the Social Democrats and the Liberals lasted just nine months, between 1978 and 1979. But the Social Democrats — used to leading minority governments — are by far the largest party with 50 seats out of the 179 in Parliament.

While her government was largely hailed for handling the COVID-19 pandemic, the November election was triggered by the country's so-called mink crisis. The affair erupted after the government decided in November 2020 to cull the country's 15 million minks over fears of a mutated strain of the novel coronavirus.

The decision turned out to be illegal, and the Social Liberal party propping up Frederiksen's minority government threatened to topple it unless she called early elections to regain voters' confidence. The Social Liberals paid a price for the gamble, losing nine of their 16 seats.

In contrast it was the Social Democrats' best election outcome in two decades, and allowed Frederiksen to enter negotiations from a position of strength. Frederiksen and her Social Democrats had said even before the vote that it wanted to govern beyond traditional divisions.

They had to negotiate with the main Danish party on the political right, the Liberal Party, and the newly-formed centrist party, the Moderates, created by former prime minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen. The Moderates won more than nine percent of votes and Rasmussen insisted he want-



KONGENS LYNGBY, Denmark: Danish Prime Minister and leader of The Social Democrats, Mette Frederiksen (C) together with the leader of The Moderates party Lars Lokke Rasmussen (R) and the chairman of Denmark's Liberal Party Venstre, Jakob Ellemann-Jensen (L) address a press conference to present a new government. —AFP

ed to be "the bridge" between the left and right. The far-right has heavily influenced Danish politics in recent decades — but three pop-

ulist parties together won just 14.4 percent of votes and have had little influence on the negotiations. —AFP

Iran arrests killers of Sunni cleric

TEHRAN: Iran has arrested the alleged killers of a Sunni Muslim cleric in the restive southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchistan as they tried to flee across the border, a prosecutor said.

Abdulwahed Rigi, who led prayers at Imam Hossein Mosque in the city of Khash and was seen as a moderate cleric, was kidnapped and killed on Thursday, the authorities said at the time.

"Agents involved in the assassination... were identified and captured," Mehdi Shamsabadi, chief prosecutor in the provincial capital Zahedan, was quoted as saying late Tuesday by the official IRNA news agency.

"They were arrested before crossing the border," he said, adding a pistol had been seized and that it was "clear that they had been planning other assassinations".

Shamsabadi accused the killers of seeking to stir trouble between Iran's Sunnis and its predominantly Shiite population.

He did not specify how many people were arrested, but IRNA put the number at three, citing the intelligence ministry.

Sistan-Baluchistan lies on Iran's far southeastern border with Afghanistan and Pakistan. It is home to the ethnic Baluch minority and had been the site of often deadly violence even before nationwide protests erupted in September over the death in custody of 22-year-old Iranian Kurdish woman Mahsa Amini.

The Islamic republic has been gripped by demonstrations since the September 16 death of Amini, after her arrest by the morality police in Tehran for allegedly violating the country's strict dress code for women.

Iran's top security body, the Supreme National Security



BERLIN: A woman takes a picture of the Brandenburg Gate illuminated with the words 'Woman, Life, Freedom' in various languages on Dec 13, 2022. —AFP

Council, said on December 3 that more than 200 people had been killed in the unrest, including security personnel.

Human rights groups based abroad say Iran's security forces have killed more than 450 people.

Meanwhile, Iranian authorities have imposed a 28-year sentence on jailed Belgian aid worker Olivier Vandecasteele, a spokesman for his family said Wednesday. The 41-year-old was arrested in Iran at the end of February and was at one point being held in Tehran's notorious Evin prison, reportedly suspected of spying.

Belgium and Vandecasteele's family insist he is innocent, effectively held as a hostage in Tehran's efforts to force Belgium to release an Iranian agent convicted of terrorism.

"The family are devastated," spokesman Olivier Van Steirtegem told AFP, after the Belgian government informed the family of the news. "Can you imagine? If there's no solution he could stay in prison until 2050. He'll be almost 70," he said, urging Belgium to find a way to revive a prisoner swap treaty. —AFP

Istanbul mayor's 'insult' trial resumes

ISTANBUL: Istanbul's popular opposition mayor faced new hearings Wednesday in a politically-charged trial that could bar him from seeking office months before next year's general election. Prosecutors want to sentence Ekrem Imamoglu to between 15 months and four years in jail over a remark he made after defeating President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's ally in a hugely controversial 2019 mayoral vote.

People who are sentenced to less than four years are rarely put behind bars in Turkey. But a conviction would disqualify Imamoglu—one of the brightest stars of Turkey's main secular party—from politics for the duration of the sentence.

Imamoglu would continue serving as Istanbul's mayor while his almost certain appeal wound its way through the courts. The mayor's team views the trial as Erdogan's personal vendetta against one of his biggest rivals.

"Despite everything, I want to trust the judges, the prosecutors and the decision makers," he said on the eve of Wednesday's third hearing in the trial. The case stems from an offhand remark Imamoglu made to reporters a few months after defeating Erdogan's ally in a re-run election held after his first victory was annulled.

Officials reported discovering hundreds of thousands of "suspicious votes" after Erdogan refused to acknowledge Imamoglu's initial win in a city that he himself ran before entering national

politics two decades ago.

The decision backfired badly on Erdogan's Islamic-rooted party. Waves of protests and a groundswell of support from all political corners delivered Imamoglu an overwhelming victory in a re-run vote held that June.

Imamoglu let his frustration at the entire episode spill over a few months later by calling the people who annulled the first vote "idiots". Prosecutors have charged the mayor with the crime of "insulting" public officials. Imamoglu has not personally attended the hearings and there has been no indication of how long the trial might last.

Divided opposition

Imamoglu's potential disqualification from politics comes with Turkey's opposition parties still arguing about who should stand against Erdogan in next June's presidential vote. The Istanbul mayor is among a handful of opposition leaders that polls show could beat Erdogan in a head-to-head race.

Erdogan's domination of Turkish politics has been shaken by an economic crisis made worse by his unconventional approach to interest rates. But more recent polls show Erdogan's ratings beginning to recover thanks to his widely-praised handling of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

This puts even more pressure on the opposition to put aside their personal rivalries in the election campaign. Imamoglu's CHP party is headed by Kemal Kilicdaroglu—a leftist former civil servant who generally performs poorly in opinion polls.

The CHP has been holding round-table talks with five smaller allies about a single candidate who would not split the anti-Erdogan vote. Those talks have been mired by arguments over policy and general unease about fielding Kilicdaroglu instead of someone more likely to beat Erdogan. —AFP

Assembly forms panel to...

Continued from Page 1

The Assembly also passed an amendment to the penal code to include what is called a juridical person, a non-human legal person like corporations, government bodies, non-governmental organizations or international organizations in corruption

Young Iranians facing death...

Continued from Page 1

with the country's sharia law. But activists express alarm over the use of vaguely worded sharia legal charges against protesters, such as "enmity against God," "corruption on earth" and "armed rebellion", all of which are capital crimes in Iran.

Amnesty International currently confirms 11 cases of death sentences issued against individuals over the protests, and another nine cases where individuals have been charged with crimes that could see them given the death penalty. One young protester, Sahand Nourmohammad-Zadeh, was sentenced to death over charges — which he denied — that he did no more than tear down highway railings and set fire to rubbish bins and tyres, the rights group said.

Mohammad Ghoabdlou, aged 22, was sentenced to death on charges of running over police officials with a car, killing one and injuring several others, Amnesty said, adding it had "serious concerns" he was subjected to torture and other abuse in jail. Saman Seydi, a young Kurdish rapper, was sentenced to death on charges of firing a pistol three times into the air during protests, the group said, adding it had received information he had also been subjected to torture to extract forced confessions.

Before his arrest, Seydi had posted material on Instagram in support of the protests, while his rap songs

cases in courts.

MPs said the amendment fills a big loophole in laws designed to fight corruption, which target only human beings and not legal entities. Since its inauguration in October, the National Assembly has passed a number of laws to fight corruption.

Meanwhile, five lawmakers submitted a draft law requiring the government to grant Kuwaiti citizenship to up to 4,000 stateless people or bedoons in 2023. Some 120,000 bedoons have been living in Kuwait for decades and claim the right to Kuwaiti citizenship, but authorities say a majority of them or their ancestors entered Kuwait illegally to claim nationality.

had also been critical of the authorities. Hamid Ghare-Hasanlou, a doctor, and his wife Farzaneh Ghare-Hasanlou were on their way to the funeral of a killed protester when they were "caught up in the chaos" of a fatal assault on a member of the Basij militia, Amnesty said. Hamid Ghare-Hasanlou was sentenced to death and his wife to 25 years in prison, with the court relying on incriminating statements from his wife which Amnesty said were coerced and later retracted by her in court. Her husband was tortured in custody and hospitalized with broken ribs, it said.

Mahan Sadrat, another young man Amnesty had been concerned about, was granted a stay of execution after a conviction based on allegations he had drawn a knife to attack an individual, his lawyer said Wednesday. Those who face the death penalty after being charged with capital crimes include Toomaj Salehi, 32, a prominent rapper who was charged "solely in connection with critical music and social media posts," Amnesty said, adding that he had been tortured in detention.

The professional footballer Amir Nasr-Azadani, 26, is in a similar position after being charged over the deaths of three security officials in November in the city of Isfahan, it said. The world union of professional footballers FIF-PRO said it was "shocked and sickened" by the reports he faces death.

Campaigners are seeking to highlight all individuals facing the death penalty in the hope that increased scrutiny on specific cases can help spare lives. But they warn the executions often come with little or no advance notice. Rahnavard was hanged just 23 days after his arrest and shortly after a last meeting with his mother, who was given no inkling her son was about to be put to death. Activists were also unaware of Shekari's case until his execution was announced by state media. —AFP

Palestine 'real winner' of...

Continued from Page 1

full diplomatic ties with the Zionist entity in 2020 under deals brokered by then US president Donald Trump.

Rajoub, the Palestinian top football official, said this proves the enduring support for the Palestinian cause. "The World Cup reveals the lie that the Palestinian cause has been buried by the recent normalization agreements" said Rajoub, who is also the secretary general of Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas' Fatah movement. Palestinians condemned those normalization deals as "a stab in the back" and a betrayal of the decades-old Arab League position against recognizing the Zionist entity until it agrees to the establishment of a Palestinian state with its capital in east Jerusalem.

Arab states did however secure diplomatic gains through the agreements. In Morocco's case, that included the Trump administration recognizing Rabat's sovereignty over the disputed territory of

Western Sahara, in defiance of the international community's long-standing call for a referendum to decide its status. Rajoub described the World Cup, including the Moroccan gestures and the widespread expressions of Palestinian solidarity across Qatar, as "a slap in the face to the idea of normalization".

The leading Palestinian public polling group, in a study released Tuesday, argued that "the World Cup in Qatar helps restore Palestinian public trust in the Arab world after years of disappointment". "The vast majority of the Palestinians say they have now regained much, or some, of the lost confidence in the Arab peoples in light of the solidarity with Palestine expressed by the fans during the football games," said the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research. Rajoub called Palestinians the "33rd team" to qualify for the tournament in Qatar.

Hazem Qassem, a spokesman for Gaza's rulers, the Islamist armed group Hamas who are backed strongly by Qatar, said the World Cup has affirmed the importance of the Palestinian cause "on the international scene". The Zionist entity is home to hundreds of thousands of Jews of Moroccan descent and some in the country have celebrated the side's stunning performance ahead of its semi-final match against France on Wednesday. —AFP

Tracking China COVID cases...

Continued from Page 1

Chinese leaders are determined to press ahead even though the country is facing a surge in cases that experts fear it is ill-equipped to manage. Millions of vulnerable elderly are still not fully vaccinated and underfunded hospitals lack the resources to deal with an influx of infected patients.

Authorities said on Wednesday they would begin allowing some vulnerable groups, including those 60 and older, to receive a second booster shot six months after their first. A line of about 50 people stretched out the door of a fever clinic in Beijing on Wednesday, with multiple residents telling AFP they were infected with

COVID. "Basically, if we are lining up here, we are all infected. We would not come here if we weren't," one person waiting in line said. "I'm here with a senior member of my family, he's had a fever for nearly 10 days in a row now, so we are coming to do a checkup on him."

Restaurants, shops and parks are now allowed to reopen but residents are not finding the path to living with the virus straightforward. Many with symptoms have opted to self-medicate at home, while others are staying in to protect themselves from getting infected. Businesses are also struggling as COVID-19 rips through the population and hits their staffing.

As a result, the capital's streets are largely empty. "Basically I follow the requirements of the Beijing government, that the elderly should stay home and go out as little as possible," said one resident in his 80s who declined to give his name. He said he wasn't too worried because he thought Omicron was mild but told AFP he thought "there shouldn't be complete relaxation and freedom". —AFP

International

Fear persists 10 years after Delhi gang rape and murder

How can anybody do this to another human being?

NEW DELHI: Ten years ago the brutal gang rape and murder of a young woman on a Delhi bus horrified the world and shone a spotlight on high rates of sexual violence in India. Jyoti Singh, 23, and a male friend boarded a bus on the evening of December 16, 2012.

Savagely attacked, tortured with an iron rod and dumped at the roadside, Singh survived long enough to identify her attackers, earning herself the nickname "Nirbhaya"—"fearless". But the student died from her injuries in a Singapore hospital 13 days later. It sparked huge protests that forced authorities to promise to do more to protect women. In 2020 four of the six attackers—one died in jail, another was a juvenile—were hanged. But a decade after the assault many women are still scared to travel at night in India's capital, a sprawling metropolis of 20 million people. AFP talks to the victim's mother, the chief police investigator at the time, an activist, and a young woman commuter.



'I don't think anyone is afraid of the law'

The mother

"Obviously the pain doesn't go," Singh's mother Asha Devi told AFP. "She was in so much pain during the 12 to 13 days that she was alive," she said in her modest two-bedroom Delhi home. "How can anybody do this to another human being? Because my daughter struggled to even breathe."

Since the attack Devi has become a prominent campaigner on women's safety, counselling survivors' families, helping their legal battles and protesting for justice. The 57-year-old, who with her husband has set up a fund for rape survivors, sits next to a glass cabinet full of mementos of their daughter and awards for their efforts. "My daughter's suffering gave me the

strength to fight this battle," she said. The case led to tougher punishments for rapists, more CCTV cameras and street lights, and safety marshals on some buses. There are now also centres for rape survivors for legal and medical help. But Devi said that sexual assaults remain all too common and that "nothing has changed" when it comes to seeking justice. "If any incident happens, either the parents are blamed or the girl. No one questions the boy or talks about his mistake. 'Why was the girl out at night?' they ask."

"There are still so many cases, such horrific cases," Devi said. "I don't think anyone is afraid of the law." India registered 31,677 rape cases last year, an average of 86 a day, according to the latest official criminal statistics—a near-13 percent increase on 2020. In a patriarchal society, daughters are often considered a burden thanks to the persistence of the dowry tradition. In rural areas, where 70 percent of Indians live, the problem is deeper. Girls who wear jeans, use mobile phones or go out with boyfriends are often seen as sexually permissive. Life for lower-caste girls and women is particularly dangerous. "The change has to come first in society and families so that daughters are considered as daughters and not a burden," Devi said.

The cop

The chief police investigator in the case—herself a woman—interviewed Singh in her hospital bed. "She understood that she had been hurt and that she would have a limited time to survive," said Chhaya Sharma, now 50. "Don't spare them," Singh, whose attackers had left 13 bite marks on her body, told her. "The way she was interacting with me was very confident, despite the pain and trauma she was going through," Sharma said.

"She was very determined about the fact that she wanted these persons caught." The policewoman, who has gone on to become joint commissioner of police for Delhi's eastern district, hugged her mother and promised her she would get justice for her daughter.

Often, rapists and victims are known to each other. In this case, "you're looking for a needle in the haystack." "Out of 370 buses, we had to find the cor-



NEW DELHI: Photograph shows women passengers travel in a women only compartment inside the Delhi metro in New Delhi. Ten years ago the brutal gang rape and murder of a young woman on a Delhi bus horrified the world and shone a spotlight on high rates of sexual violence in India. — AFP

rect bus," Sharma told AFP. "We were walking a very tight rope and a very thin line." Sharma said that when the attackers were arrested, they showed no remorse.

"I felt that they did it without even feeling anything. That was the sickest part." The case was a watershed moment, she said, insisting Delhi should not be seen as a "rape capital". But sexual violence has remained a major issue, she said, and women still need to take precautions. Sharma's own daughter is now studying in college, and she "knows what she has to do" to try to protect herself from danger.

The activist

Hopes were high in 2012 that women's safety would improve, said Yogita Bhayana, an activist with the People Against Rapes in India (PARI) organisation. "I really thought this might be the last case, that Nirbhaya might be the last case," Bhayana told AFP.

"But unfortunately this did not happen and we kept getting cases and things were very slow, (legal) procedures were very slow. Even till today, every single day our helpline gets five or six similar cases," she said.

The passenger

Lashita is a 19-year-old student who declined to give her full name. About to get the metro home after dark from central Delhi, she said does not feel safe on the train and uses the women-only carriage. "Groping is the new 'good afternoon' in the metro," she told AFP. Women have to be careful "because men are not going to stop", she added.

Travelling late "really bothers my parents because they obviously have safety concerns in mind," she said. "Maybe I am delusional enough to believe that nothing bad could happen to me, but it's a sad reality that everyone has to be careful." — AFP

HK police wrong to ban Tiananmen vigil, court rules

HONG KONG: Hong Kong police's decision to ban a Tiananmen vigil last year was unlawful, a court ruled on Wednesday, as it overturned the conviction of jailed democracy activist Chow Hang-tung.

The ruling is a rare rebuke of authorities in a city where the public commemoration of Beijing's deadly 1989 crackdown has been virtually wiped out in recent years. Chow, a 37-year-old lawyer and prominent democracy activist, led a now-disbanded group that used to organise the city's annual candlelight vigils to mourn those killed in Tiananmen Square when China sent troops to crush democracy protests.

Police have banned the last three vigils citing the coronavirus and security fears and the courts have already jailed activists who defied those bans, including Chow. Pro-democracy media tycoon Jimmy Lai is also among those behind bars for defying the various bans on the vigils, in his case for the 2020 event.

Chow was jailed for 15 months in January for writing articles urging the public to "light candles to seek justice for the dead", which a lower court said amounted to inciting others to defy the ban. But High Court judge Judianna Barnes on Wednesday said police wrongly banned the vigil in 2021 as they did not "proactively and seriously consider" ways to facilitate a public gathering, as was required by law.

As the government failed to prove the ban was legally valid, Chow's articles would no longer constitute a crime and her conviction was scrapped on appeal. Despite her court victory, Chow remains in custody as she faces further prosecutions including for national security charges which carry up to a decade in jail. Hong Kong was formerly the only place in China where mass commemoration of Tiananmen was tolerated but Beijing has been remoulding the city in its authoritarian image after huge and sometimes violent democracy protests in 2019.

Chow was arrested on the morning of June 4, 2021 when her articles appeared on social media and in a newspaper calling on residents to mourn Tiananmen victims. At the time, police warned that the vigil was banned due to the pandemic and that thousands of officers would be on standby to halt any "unlawful assemblies". But judge Barnes said on Wednesday that police failed to fulfil their duty under the law to take reasonable measures to facilitate public gatherings, such as imposing conditions on social distancing.—AFP



HONG KONG: File photo shows Hong Kong pro-democracy media tycoon Jimmy Lai arriving at the Court of Final Appeal to hear a decision on whether he will be granted bail. — AFP



SUVA: Election Commission officials prepare to open the ballot boxes for counting during Fiji's general election in the capital city Suva on December 14, 2022. — AFP

Fiji PM vows to respect result, as votes counted

SUVA: Fijian Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama on Wednesday vowed to respect an election that could end his 16-year grip on power, as his rival ex-coup leader took an early lead with a small fraction of the vote counted. Bainimarama, 68, seized control of Fiji in a 2006 putsch, but legitimised his grip on power with election wins in 2014 and 2018. Standing in the way of Bainimarama's third elected term is his chief political rival, Sitiveni Rabuka, a 74-year-old former military commander nicknamed "Rambo" after leading two coups in 1987. With just 70 of the more than 2,000 voting stations reporting, Rabuka's People's Alliance party had registered 4,450 votes, while Bainimarama's Fiji First party had 2,760 votes. Fiji now faces a nervous wait for a winner to be declared—ballots must be tallied from remote islands and highland villages. The final count is not expected for at least two days, although provisional returns will come more quickly.

The election is being seen as a test of the nation's fledgling democracy. Asked whether he would accept the outcome, win or lose, Bainimarama said "of course" as he cast his ballot in the capital Suva with his granddaughter in tow. He then lashed out at reporters, suggesting they ask "better questions." Rabuka said he would readily concede defeat if beaten, and Bainimarama should do the same. "I think he will not. So I'm hoping for a flood of votes in our favour, so that it makes any attempt at that course futile," he said.

"We cannot live forever, we cannot rule forever, so successions from an opposition party should be accepted." In a contested vote the military could be key. The country's top commander has said the armed forces would respect the election result.

Flooding kills more than 120 in DR Congo capital

KINSHASA: More than 120 people were killed Tuesday as the worst floods in years battered DR Congo's capital Kinshasa following an all-night downpour, authorities said in a provisional assessment. Major roads in the centre of Kinshasa, a city of some 15 million people, were submerged for hours, and a key supply route was cut off.

The death toll—which was first estimated in the late afternoon to be at least 55 — jumped to more than 120

Blake Johnson from the Australian Strategic Policy Institute said any arguments about the result would likely be dealt with through the courts, rather than another coup. "Should Rabuka win, this will be Fiji's first test at completing a peaceful handover of power in nearly two decades," he told AFP on Wednesday. "If Bainimarama refuses to accept defeat, we could see several legal challenges tie up the parliamentary and judicial systems for some time." Rabuka—who is also a former Fijian international rugby player and Commonwealth Games hammer thrower—has signalled that Fiji could loosen its ties with China if he is elected. Fiji has grown closer to Beijing under Bainimarama, who used a "look north" policy to stabilise the economy after Australia and New Zealand hit the country with heavy trade sanctions in retaliation for his 2006 coup.

Blackout

The buildup to the vote has been marked by a strict media blackout, preventing local journalists from covering any aspect of the election for 48 hours before voting day and until polls close. Suva's distinctive open-air buses blasted reggae and dance music as they carried voters to polling centres around the city. Office worker Dee Atama said that there was a need for change in Fiji, and that more should be done for younger voters.

"Something for the younger ones, because they will be the ones leading the future," she told AFP from a voting booth at a Suva school. Salesman Niraj Prasad, 50, said not everyone in Fiji favoured a change of government. "Some people say it's time for a change," he told AFP from a voting centre on the outskirts of Suva. "Probably this is a mixed feeling... it depends on what the government is doing." There are no reliable polls that give any indication about the outcome, but it is expected to be close. Fiji has a population of some 900,000 and is heavily reliant on its tourism industry—which was badly damaged by the COVID-19 pandemic. — AFP

by nightfall. The government has announced three days of national mourning beginning Wednesday, according to a statement from Prime Minister Jean-Michel Sama Lukonde's office. City police chief General Sylvano Kasongo told AFP that the bulk of people dead were on hillside locations where there had been landslides. An AFP reporter saw the bodies of nine members of the same family—including young children—who had died after the collapse of their home in the Binza Delvaux district.

"We were woken up at around 4:00 am (0300 GMT) by water entering the house," a relative said. "We drained the water out, and thinking that there was no more danger we went back indoors to sleep—we were soaked," he said. The family went back to bed and "just afterwards, the wall collapsed". Located on the Congo River, Kinshasa has seen a huge population influx in

News in brief

UN nuclear officials to visit Iran

TEHRAN: Iran said on Wednesday that officials from the UN nuclear watchdog would visit the country in the coming days with the aim of resolving "ambiguities" over claims of secret activities. The UN's Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency, or IAEA, has for months been calling on Iran to explain the presence of nuclear material at three undeclared sites. The issue has frustrated efforts to revive the 2015 Iran nuclear deal that has been on life support since the United States unilaterally withdrew from it in 2018 under then-president Donald Trump. "Agency officials will visit Tehran in the coming days," Mohammad Eslami, the head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, told reporters in Tehran.

Bomb kills 3 Iraq soldiers

BAGHDAD: Three Iraqi soldiers were killed Wednesday when a roadside bomb hit their vehicle in farmland north of Baghdad, the defence ministry said. There was no immediate claim for the bombing which targeted a patrol in the Tarmiya district, around 30 kilometres (20 miles) outside the capital. The area is a known hotspot for Islamic State group sleeper cells, who remain active five years after Iraqi authorities proclaimed victory over the jihadists. A lieutenant-colonel was killed in the blast along with two of his men, the ministry said. Three soldiers were also wounded, a separate security force statement added.

Serial rape suspect arrested

PARIS: French police on Wednesday arrested a suspected serial rapist dubbed "the predator of the woods" who is thought to have carried out at least five attacks from 1998 to 2008, a legal source told AFP. The 62-year-old was detained in the Seine-and-Marne region on the outskirts of Paris and faces possible charges of armed rape, kidnapping and holding someone against their will. Police have repeatedly appealed for help in identifying the individual behind a string of rapes around Paris and La Rochelle in the western Charente-Maritime region who used the same method in each case. "He acted without covering his face and his DNA was found in each case," chief investigator Philippe Guichard said in 2019 when police launched a public campaign to identify him. The victims were aged between 15 and 19 and were seized at knifepoint before being driven to wooded areas. — AFP

recent years. Many dwellings are shanty houses built on flood-prone slopes, and the city suffers from inadequate drainage and sewerage. A major landslide occurred in the hilly district of Mont-Ngafula, smothering National Highway 1, a key supply route linking the capital with Matadi, a port further down the Congo River and a crucial outlet to the Atlantic Ocean.

Lukonde told reporters at the scene that about 20 people there had died when "homes were swept away". Searches are continuing for survivors, he said. The highway should be reopened to small vehicles within the next day, but it could take "three or four days" for trucks, the prime minister said. The streets of the up-market Gombe district—home to government buildings and usually spared the problems affecting other areas of Kinshasa such as inadequate waste disposal and power supplies—were also inundated.—AFP

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2022

Business

KBA celebrates 40 years of leadership and excellence

Sheikh Ahmed Duaij Al-Sabah underlines KBA's pioneering role in realizing economic goals



KUWAIT: KBA Chairman, chairmen of boards of directors of Kuwaiti banks, CEOs and banking leaders during the 40th anniversary celebration of the Kuwait Banking Association (KBA) on Tuesday.

By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: Kuwait Banking Association (KBA) held on Tuesday a ceremony on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the establishment of the Association in the presence of the Governor of Central Bank of Kuwait, Chairmen of boards of directors of Kuwaiti banks, CEOs and banking leaders of local banks.

On this occasion, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Kuwait Banking Association, Sheikh Ahmed Duaij Al-Sabah praised the exemplary role that was played by the association during the past forty years, through which the association contributed in adopting many decisions supporting the role of the banking sector in the country.

In a press statement, Sheikh Ahmed added that the past forty years witnessed a growth in the role of the Association as it continues its path forward by focusing on the gains it achieved on the ground. "This is a focal point and a real starting point for implementing its future strategies," the statement said, stressing that these strategies took into account the large and successive changes that the banking sector is witnessing now locally, regionally and globally.

He indicated that the Banking Association did not hesitate to discuss current issues and express the visions of the banking sector. The association has been proactive in presenting future visions and proposals



Sheikh Ahmed Duaij Al-Sabah

on many important issues, "not only that concerns and affects the work of the banking sector, but also of economic issues in general and those that contribute to improving the business environment in the country."

Stressing that the Association is keen to follow up the issues of the banking sector on a daily basis, he said it included those issues related to various segments of the society, be it individuals, companies or government sectors.

"The Association devotes its efforts to the priorities of the banking sector and seeks to find appropriate solutions to the problems it faces, including coordination with government regulators and the legislative authority. In addition it holds interactive sessions with various entities on economic and financial issues that are presented to the association. These efforts have been taken by the Association in order to achieve the development of the banking sector and realize the goals of stability and economic growth within the framework of the state's plans and economic and mone-



KUWAIT: Chairmen of boards of directors of Kuwaiti banks, CEOs and banking leaders during the celebration.

etary policies," he added.

Sheikh Ahmed concluded his statement stating that the Association has made great efforts to shed light on the banking sector and its pioneering role in achieving economic aspirations through its various media platforms, foremost among them is the

Banks Magazine, which was and still is the voice of the bankers in the financial and economic sector within Kuwait and abroad. He also mentioned the great role which is being played by the social media in creating awareness about the banking sector among the public.



KUWAIT: The administrative council of the Kuwait Commercial Arbitration Center of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry holds meeting on Wednesday.

Kuwait Commercial Arbitration Center holds meeting

KUWAIT: The administrative council at the Kuwait Commercial Arbitration Center of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry held its last meeting of the year on Wednesday at the center's headquarters at the building. The meeting was headed by Abdullah Al-Shaya, the head of the administrative council and attended by members of the council.

The agenda of the council included discussion of the center's annual report in its financial, administrative, and organizational aspects, the possibility of achieving the planned goals for the year, and the statistics regarding arbitration cases displayed at the center for the year, which amounted to KD 3,640,897.

The meeting also discussed the plans for the upcoming year, its bases, aims, requests and ways to execute the plan, as well as the start of the new cultural season, a timed schedule of upcoming events.

The council discussed a media plan and the development of its administrative structure, as well as a request to improve the arbitration system for the better performance of the center. The meeting concluded with reviewing past decisions of the council and their outcome.

"The center witnessed, since the inception of the new headquarters a new phase which is signified by expanding the use of modern technology in all events and activities of the center. This included mustering of cooperation from different sectors through signing cooperation agreements that aims to distributing arbitration culture and activating it in legal and commercial fields," Al-Shaya said.

"The center is also planning to sign a number of agreements with government departments and unions, which include access to collaborative work in distributing the arbitration culture and providing training programs. This will significantly contribute to improve the investment and legal environment and help develop skills and expertise of the workers in these sectors," he added.

The center is keen to cooperate with different sectors in order to achieve its objective and raise the standards of arbitrators and legal workers, as well as to improve the environment.

Sudan inks \$6bn UAE deal for new Red Sea port

KHARTOUM: Sudan signed Tuesday an initial \$6 billion deal led by United Arab Emirates' AD Ports Group and Invictus Investment to build a vast new Red Sea port and economic zone. "The massive project, which is estimated to cost around \$6 billion, will give a strong boost to the national economy and will bring countless benefits for the whole country," said Sudan's Finance Minister Gibril Ibrahim during the signing ceremony.

The Abu Amama port, to be built north of the existing key hub of Port Sudan, will include an industrial zone, an international airport, and an agricultural area covering over 400,000 acres, Ibrahim said. AD Ports Group is majority owned by ADQ,

among Abu Dhabi's sovereign wealth funds. Invictus Investment is headed by Osama Daoud Abdellatif, head of the Dal Group, Sudan's biggest conglomerate. The UAE's official WAM news agency said the deal gives the consortium the "right to develop, manage, and operate port and economic zone assets" in Sudan.

Tuesday's signing came a week after Sudan's military and civilian leaders inked an initial accord aimed at ending the crisis since last year's military coup. Sudan has been reeling from the crippling aftermath of the 2021 military power grab led by army chief Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan. The coup derailed a transition installed following the 2019 ouster of president Omar Al-Bashir.

On December 5, military leaders and multiple civilian factions signed the deal as the first component of a planned two-phase political process. The WAM news agency, calling Sudan "a major trading partner" of the UAE, said exports from Sudan to the UAE totaled \$1.86 billion in 2020, while the UAE exported \$1.14 billion of goods to Sudan in the same year. —AFP

HSBC to stop funding new oil and gas fields

LONDON: Banking giant HSBC on Wednesday said it would end financing for new oil and gas fields, a decision welcomed by environmentalists who nevertheless urged greater action from banks and government. In an annual update of its climate transition plans, the London-headquartered bank said it "will no longer provide new lending or capital markets finance for the specific purpose of projects pertaining to new oil and gas fields and related infrastructure".

HSBC added in a statement that it was "committed to supporting and financing the transition to a secure net zero future". Responding, Greenpeace UK's senior climate campaigner Charlie Kronick called the announcement "long overdue".

He added in a statement: "Banks have been funding climate chaos to the tune of billions of pounds. Now

one of the UK's biggest banks has realized that there's no place for new oil and gas in a world that is trying to tackle the climate crisis." Kronick called the announcement "an embarrassment for the UK government", which is "pressing on with new oil and gas licenses" as it looks to beef up energy security following the invasion of Ukraine by major fossil fuel producer Russia.

HSBC meanwhile said it would continue to provide finance and advisory services to energy sector clients at the corporate level, as long as their plans were in line with the bank's targets to cut emissions.

"HSBC's announcement sends a strong signal to fossil fuel giants and governments that banks' appetite for financing new oil and gas fields is diminishing," said Jeanne Martin, head of banking program at ShareAction. "It sets a new minimum level of ambition for all banks committed to net zero. We urge major banks like Barclays and BNP Paribas to follow suit." Martin meanwhile stressed that "HSBC's announcement only applies to asset financing, and doesn't deal with the much larger proportion of finance it still provides to companies that have oil and gas expansion plans". —AFP

Business

Vietnam factory workers laid off as West slashes imports

Consumers cut spending in Europe and US amid severe cost-of-living crisis

HANOI: Phan Thi Nhieu has spent a decade assembling shoes for worldwide brands such as Timberland and K-Swiss, but she is now among tens of thousands of Vietnamese factory workers laid off as Western consumers cut spending. Almost half a million others have been forced to work fewer hours as orders fall in the Southeast Asian country, one of the world's largest exporters of clothing, footwear and furniture.

The cost-of-living crisis in Europe and the United States—major markets for Vietnamese-produced goods—has seen the buying power of Western shoppers plunge. Women factory workers, who make up 80 percent of the labor force in Vietnam's garment industry, have been hit the hardest by the knock-on effect. Early last month, 31-year-old Nhieu—who lives in a nine-square-meter (100 square feet) room in Ho Chi Minh City with her two young sons and husband—was told she was no longer needed at Ty Hung Company, a Taiwanese shoemaker that supplies big Western labels.

"They told us they did not have enough orders," she said of Ty Hung's announcement that it would fire 1,200 of its 1,800 staff. "I was so, so shocked and so scared, I cried, but I can do nothing, I have to accept it." The job earned Nhieu just \$220 a month in an expensive city where the average monthly income is \$370, but the money was regular and a step up from the mushroom picking she did as a teenager in the heat of the Mekong Delta.

'Worse than COVID'

Now, with just two months' severance pay to survive on, Nhieu must feed her family on a few dollars a day, and her kids are struggling to get enough to eat. "We have no one to help us. I will have to get us through this on my own." Since September, more than

1,200 companies—mostly foreign businesses in the garment, footwear and furniture sectors—have been forced to sack staff or cut working hours, according to the Vietnam General Confederation of Labor.

Compared with last year, orders are down 30-40 percent from the United States and 60 percent from Europe, where inflation and energy bills have soared because of the war in Ukraine. More than 470,000 workers have had their hours slashed in the last four months of the year while about 40,000 people have lost their jobs — 30,000 of them women aged 35 or older, the confederation said.

Taiwanese giant Pouyuen, a Nike shoe producer, has put 20,000 of its workers on paid leave in rotation, while reports said Vietnam's largest foreign investor, Samsung Electronics, has started reducing its smartphone production at factories in the north. The situation is bleaker than during the Covid-19 pandemic, say workers, who were helped out with food donations when strict quarantine measures forced them to stay home—and were quickly in demand again once restrictions lifted at the end of 2021.

"It's not easy to find a new job like before (following the pandemic)," said Nguyen Thi Thom, 35, who was laid off from a South Korean garment firm that makes clothes for US retail giant Walmart.

No dream

Since her factory work finished, Thom, who has three young children, spends her days on the streets of a shiny new suburban district of Ho Chi Minh City, selling dried noodles, shrimp sauce and oranges to passers-by. The slowdown has come as a shock because export businesses in Vietnam were running at "their fullest capacity" for the first half of 2022, according to Tran Viet Anh, deputy head of Ho Chi



HO CHI MINH CITY, Vietnam: This picture taken on November 30, 2022 shows workers leaving their workplace at Taiwanese Ty Hung factory in Ho Chi Minh City. Almost half a million workers have been forced to work fewer hours as orders fall in the Southeast Asian country, one of the world's largest exporters of clothing, footwear and furniture.— AFP

Minh City's Business Association.

"At the start of the third quarter, due to global inflation, consumption demands have shrunk, leading to the suspension of orders... and huge stock surplus," he told AFP. But the downturn in Vietnam will likely only be temporary, Viet Anh added. A cut in production during the pandemic led to a shortage of goods in the first six months of 2022, and the situation will likely repeat a year on.

Viet Anh said that "2023 will be a period where we increase production to compensate".

Until then, women like Nhieu and Thom, who form the backbone of a low-paid workforce that has helped Vietnam become a key manufacturing hub seen as an alternative to China, must find another way to keep their families afloat. "I have never had the luxury of dreaming what I want from life. I have only one wish, of earning enough to survive," Nhieu said.— AFP

Boubyan brings Apple Pay to all of its customers

KUWAIT: Boubyan Bank announced Wednesday that Apple Pay is available to its customers in Kuwait. Apple Pay is a safer, more secure, and private way to pay that allows users to use their Apple devices to make payments in-store, online and in-app.



Abdulla Al-Tuwajri

Boubyan Bank's CEO - Consumer & Digital Banking, Abdulla Al-Tuwajri, stated: "Today we announce we are bringing Apple Pay to all our customers, which is an important step to enhance the use of Boubyan's digital services. This adds to Boubyan Bank's track record of offering innovative digital payment solutions and providing customers with state-of-the-art payment

technology for a seamless, secure, and convenient banking experience."

Apple Pay will allow customers to make payments easily. Customers can simply hold their iPhone or Apple Watch near a payment terminal to make a contactless payment. Every Apple Pay purchase is authenticated with Face ID, Touch ID, or a device passcode, as well as a one-time unique dynamic security code. Apple Pay is accepted in stores, restaurants, cafes, hotels, and many other places around the world. Security and privacy are at the core of Apple Pay. When customers use a credit or debit card with Apple Pay, the actual card



numbers are not stored on the device, nor on Apple servers. Instead, a unique Device Account Number is assigned, encrypted, and securely stored in the Secure Element, an industry-standard, certified chip designed to store the payment information safely on the device. Apple Pay is easy to set up. On iPhone, simply open the Wallet app, tap +, and follow the steps to add Boubyan's credit or debit cards. Once a customer adds a card to iPhone, Apple Watch, iPad, and Mac, they can start using Apple Pay on that device right away. Customers will continue to receive all the rewards and benefits offered by Boubyan's cards.

'Historically high'

"Although still at historically high levels, annual inflation eased slightly in November," noted ONS chief economist Grant Fitzner. "Prices are still rising, but by less than this time last year, with the most notable example of this being motor fuels."

Reacting to the data, finance minister Jeremy Hunt said "getting inflation down so people's wages go further" was his "top priority". Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's Conservative government insists that inflation-busting pay hikes would worsen inflation. Nurses meanwhile are set to walk out for the first time in their union's 106-year history on Thursday.

Inflation peak?

Britain remains on course for a long-lasting recession on fallout from the highest inflation in decades, despite this week's news that the country's economy

Microsoft seeks to bring Internet to millions in Africa

WASHINGTON: Microsoft announced plans Wednesday to bring Internet access via satellite to 10 million people, half of them in Africa, as part of efforts to bridge a digital divide with the developing world. At a summit with African leaders in Washington led by President Joe Biden, the technology leader said it would start the satellite project immediately with a priority on bringing Internet for the first time to parts of Egypt, Senegal and Angola.

Microsoft president Brad Smith said that the company has been impressed by its engineers in Nairobi and Lagos. In Africa, "there is no shortage of talent, but there is a huge shortage of opportunity," Smith told AFP.

In the partnership with satellite provider Viasat, Microsoft said it would also provide Internet in Guatemala, Mexico and more remote parts of the United States and also step up efforts in Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Smith said the biggest holdup to Internet access has been the lack of electricity, which is not reliable for around half of Africans.

"For people who don't go there or don't spend time thinking about Africa, it's hard for them to even imagine that because electricity in my view is the greatest invention of the 19th century," Smith said. "When you think about broadband, you cannot have access to the Internet at any speed without access to electricity," he said. He said Microsoft was focused on finding low-cost solutions in areas where both the Internet and electricity are absent. Smith said he saw wide support in Africa for bringing Internet access, saying many governments have leapfrogged over their Western counterparts in ease of regulation as the continent did not have the same "extraordinary web of licensing regimes" in place from the past. Ministries are often led by Africans with industry experience, "so they know how business works and they know how government works," Smith said.—AFP

grew in October. The government and BoE have each said they believe Britain is already in a recession that the bank expects to last all next year. While Wednesday's data "doesn't constitute a new trend, it is a move in the right direction and comes as inflation in the US, and the eurozone shows signs of cooling", said Fawad Razaqada, market analyst at City Index trading group.

The Federal Reserve and European Central Bank are both expected to announce less aggressive interest rate hikes in the next 24 hours compared with their recent monetary policy decisions. "Inflation may be past the peak but given that prices for UK consumers have scaled a mountain, there is still a vertiginous descent to navigate before it's back down to less dangerous levels," said Susannah Streeter, senior investment and markets analyst at stockbroker Hargreaves Lansdown.—AFP



LONDON: In this file photo taken on October 31, 2022 food is seen waiting in boxes for people to collect inside a food bank in Hackney, north-east London.— AFP

British inflation slows, remains close to 11%

LONDON: British inflation slowed more than expected in November but remained near the highest level in more than 40 years, official data showed Wednesday, as a cost-of-living crisis sparks fresh UK strikes. The consumer prices index eased to 10.7 percent last month, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said in a statement, against expectations of a drop to 10.9 percent. The ONS said motor fuel prices had risen at a slower pace than a year earlier. October's annual inflation rate had stood at 11.1 percent, the highest level since 1981, after energy prices and food bills soared across the world this year on supply constraints caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the lifting of pandemic lockdowns.

Wednesday's data comes amid crippling UK industrial action by public and private sector workers demanding higher wages. Railway staff were staging a two-day national strike due to end Wednesday, kicking off a month of walkouts involving professions from nurses to passport control and postal workers that spells Christmas misery for millions of Britons.

November's inflation data was meanwhile published on the eve of an interest rate decision from the Bank of England, which is widely expected to deliver its ninth hike in a row as policymakers try to tackle rampant prices. Economists expect the BoE will lift its key lending rate to 3.5 percent from 3.0 percent on Thursday, further squeezing Britons' disposable incomes with rising loan costs. Inflation is still running at more than five times the central bank's official target level of two percent.

US Fed expected to slow pace of rate hikes as inflation eases

WASHINGTON: US central bankers open the second day of a key policy meeting Wednesday, with mounting anticipation of a smaller hike to its benchmark lending rate as inflation showed signs of easing. The Federal Reserve has embarked on an all-out campaign to cool demand in the world's biggest economy, raising rates six times this year with interest-sensitive sectors like housing already reeling from tightening policy.

But there have been positive signs, with consumer inflation in the United States easing in November, according to government data released Tuesday. The consumer price index, a key gauge of inflation, logged its smallest annual increase in nearly a year, fueling optimism that the Fed could soon moderate its efforts. Households have been squeezed by red-hot prices, with conditions worsened by surging food and energy costs after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and fallout from China's zero-COVID measures. To make borrowing more expensive, the Fed has raised interest rates six times, including four bumper 0.75-point increases, bringing the rate to between 3.75 percent and four percent.

Analysts widely expect the Fed to adopt a smaller, half-point hike on Wednesday, with Ian Shepherdson of Pantheon Macroeconomics calling it a "a done deal" in an analysis.

While this marks a step down from earlier 0.75-point increases, it would still be a steep jump.

Shepherdson cautioned that Fed Chair Jerome Powell is "in no hurry to say what markets want to hear." "(Powell) is unlikely to deviate from his clear line that the Fed will do whatever is necessary to squeeze out inflation, and that some pain will be necessary," Shepherdson added.

'Not yet proof'

Recent easing in inflation data is welcome news to policymakers, but this is "not yet proof that inflation has sustainably cooled to levels consistent with the inflation target," cautioned economist Edoardo Campanella of UniCredit Bank in a note. The Fed has a longer-term inflation target of two percent. "The Fed will likely further slow the pace of rate hikes early next year to 25 basis points," Campanella added.

"However, with the labor market still very tight... and with broad financial conditions easing, the Fed will likely say that their job is not done," he said. Neil Saunders, managing director of GlobalData, added that the Fed is taking a "hawkish view on inflation" and will likely conclude further tightening is needed, based on the continued strength of underlying demand in the economy.

"As much as this action may have the desired effect, it will cool the economy at a time when it is already under pressure heading into 2023," said Saunders. The Fed's further rate hike will also mark "a new phase" in its tightening cycle, said Nationwide chief economist Kathy Bostjancic in a note Monday.

This comes as officials look to adjust policy now that it is "within the range considered restrictive." Financial markets will be watching for signals of how high rates might go, and "the path for rates beyond that peak," she added.—AFP

Business

Growth downgrade for China 'very likely' on COVID surge: IMF chief

More financing needed for climate fund: Georgieva

WASHINGTON: A lower growth forecast is "very likely" for China this year and next, with easing COVID-19 restrictions expected to bring a surge in infections and temporary difficulties, IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva told AFP Tuesday. Her comments on the sidelines of a panel about a newly-created IMF fund come as the world's second biggest economy grapples with soaring coronavirus cases, as it loosens virus controls after nearly three years.

While China's zero-COVID policy has battered its economy, "the easing of restrictions is going to create some difficulties over the next months" as well, Georgieva said. This is because a spike in infections will be inevitable, with more people temporarily unable to participate in the labor force. "But it is likely that as China overcomes this in the second half of the year, there could be some improvement in growth prospects," she said. The zero-COVID policy, characterized by snap lockdowns, international travel restrictions and mass testing, took a heavy toll on consumers and businesses, with demonstrations against the measures eventually erupting in major Chinese cities. The IMF earlier warned that tough virus restrictions have been especially hard on China's residents.

Chinese officials said Monday that COVID cases are surging in Beijing, with a sharp spike in people visiting hospitals across the capital city. Rising infections in smaller cities were also discussed on social media. The fund cut its growth projection for China in October to 3.2 percent this year—the lowest in decades—while expecting growth to rise to 4.4 percent next year.

But "very likely, we will be downgrading our growth projections for China, both for 2022 and for 2023," Georgieva said.

Adjusting policy

For now, the country has to adjust its COVID policy, such as by being more targeted with restrictions and boosting vaccinations, especially to elderly populations. There is also a need to use more antiviral treatments, Georgieva added. "In other words, retool the health system towards treating people rather than isolating, which has been the case for the last years," she said.

Global economic leaders last week hailed China's move away from its hardline virus strategy, with hopes that relaxation would also help to shore up a world economy struggling with fallout from the pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine. With 2023 set to be a "very difficult year" as well, Georgieva reiterated that the likelihood of further downgrades in IMF growth projections will be "high." Apart from challenges in China, the US and European Union are also expected to slow simultaneously, with projections for half of the European Union to be in recession next year, she said.

While Washington-based fund earlier said there was a one-in-four chance global growth would fall below two percent next year, Georgieva added Tuesday that this probability has gone up.

Climate fund

A new fund helping low-income countries tackle the impacts of climate change already has around

\$40 billion worth of commitments, but this is "nothing in comparison with the needs," IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva said Tuesday. Several countries have won loan deals from the International Monetary Fund's Resilience and Sustainability Trust (RST), but global leaders are urging that more be done to aid nations grappling with the costly fallout from climate change.

"If we do nothing to move financing... by 2030, 66 percent of carbon emissions will come from the developing world," Georgieva said in an interview with AFP. "If we want to succeed in our fight against climate change, it is paramount to move financing to where it would make a difference," she added, on the sidelines of a panel discussion on the RST. For now, the three countries that have crossed the finish line with RST financing are Costa Rica, Barbados and Rwanda, while a deal with Bangladesh is headed for further approval.

"The interest is very significant from both low-income countries and vulnerable middle-income countries, especially small island states," Georgieva said. She added that the IMF expects more members to commit resources "so we don't end up having to ration support for countries."

At the panel in Washington, Barbados Prime Minister Mia Mottley said long-term capital is needed for many issues, adding that debt sustainability metrics could be revisited.

"Every dollar of debt is not equivalent. A dollar of debt to build a school does not give me the same rate of return as quickly as a dollar of debt to build a geothermal facility," she said. World Trade



WASHINGTON: The easing of COVID-19 restrictions in China is expected to bring temporary difficulties, said International Monetary Fund chief Kristalina Georgieva. —AFP

Organization Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala also stressed at the event the importance of supply chains when it comes to building resilience in developing countries. "Supply chains for certain products are highly concentrated. Eighty percent of vaccines are exported from 10 countries," she said, adding that similar situations may apply to items like solar panels and chips.

"Why can't we... diversify manufacturing... so we have supply chains that are global, and diversified, and more resilient?" Okonjo-Iweala said. —AFP

India's Paytm to buy back shares after 75% stock rout

MUMBAI: Indian mobile payments giant Paytm will launch a share buyback, it said Tuesday, offering investors little more than a third of what they paid just over a year ago in the country's then-biggest IPO. Paytm's shares have nosedived 75 percent since its \$2.5 billion flotation in November 2021, demonstrating the risks of overpriced share offers in loss-making tech firms.

Its market debut came in the midst of an IPO frenzy in Asia's third-largest economy last year, with start-ups attracting billions of dollars in investment in a bright spot in the COVID-battered economy.

But the shares nosedived 27 percent on their first day of trading due to concerns about losses, dropping further in subsequent months before settling to trade at a quarter of their IPO value. Paytm said it will buy shares back at 810 rupees (\$9.80) each, a steep 62 percent discount to the IPO price of 2,150 rupees, but a 50 percent premium on Tuesday's closing price.

Founder Vijay Shekhar Sharma, once named India's youngest billionaire, has dropped off Forbes' list of 100 richest Indians after his personal net worth — \$2.4 billion at the IPO price—eroded in line with his company's stock price. The stock collapse raises concerns for Paytm's biggest shareholders, which include Softbank, Alibaba, Berkshire Hathaway and Canada Pension Plan Investment Board, many of which are also grappling with a global tech stock meltdown.

"We value our shareholders and their journey with us in the public markets," Sharma said in a statement, promising that the \$103 million buyback "will be immensely beneficial for our stakeholders and will drive long-term shareholder value". The firm remains deeply in the red, reporting a net loss of 5.7 billion rupees in the quarter ended September 30, despite a 76 percent jump in revenues.

But in a disclosure to stock exchanges, it insisted it was "on a clear path to deliver cash flow profitability". Paytm's platform was launched in 2010 and quickly became synonymous with digital payments in a country traditionally dominated by cash transactions. —AFP

Once a star, Ghana battles economic crisis

ACCRA: The packing machine at Nakobs' Pac factory in the outskirts of Ghana's capital Accra is running at full pace, churning out sachets of treated drinking water. But all is not well at Nakobs'. Like other small businesses in Ghana these days, owner Daniel Tekyi is struggling.

With inflation at over 50 percent, the currency worth half what it was last year, fuel prices doubling and debt payments gobbling up more than half the government's revenues, Ghana is battling its worst economic crisis in decades. Ghana signed a \$3 billion bailout deal with the International Monetary Fund on Tuesday in a bid to shore up public finances, but economic stability is still a way off.

"It would be better for us to close the factory," said Tekyi. "We really don't know when this crisis is going to end." Once applauded as a rock of economic stability and security in a region plagued by coups and jihadist wars, Ghana has

Confidence falls among Japan's major manufacturers

TOKYO: Business confidence fell slightly among Japan's largest manufacturers for the fourth straight quarter, a closely watched Bank of Japan survey showed Wednesday. Optimism grew among non-manufacturers, however, and both readings beat market expectations. The BoJ's quarterly Tankan survey—considered the broadest indicator of how Japanese businesses are faring—showed that major manufacturers still feel much more upbeat than during the depths of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Confidence among large manufacturers stood at plus seven, down slightly from plus eight three months earlier. A positive figure means more manufacturers see business conditions as favourable than those that consider them unfavorable. Economists had forecast plus six for Wednesday's reading. "Weak demand in overseas markets including China, which was hit by its zero-COVID policy, was a headwind for manufacturers," chief economist Saisuke Sakai of Mizuho Research & Technologies, told AFP. The reading has been falling since April after nearly two years of improving sentiment, which had plunged to minus 34 in June 2020 as COVID-19 restrictions pummeled the economy.

Among large non-manufacturers, business confidence improved to 19 from a previous reading of 14, the Tankan showed. Market economists had forecast

ADB cuts developing Asia growth outlook on China slowdown

MANILA: The Asian Development Bank trimmed its economic growth forecast for developing Asia on Wednesday, with China's pandemic lockdowns, slowing global demand and the Russian invasion of Ukraine seen as limiting the region's prospects. The Philippines-based lender cut its 2022 forecast to 4.2 percent, down marginally from a 4.3 percent projection made in September.

Prospects for 2023 also grew dimmer, it said in a report, which lowered the region's growth forecast to 4.6 percent from 4.9 percent. "Recovery in developing Asia is expected to continue but lose some steam," the ADB said, referring to the 46

steadily lost investor confidence.

Like much of the continent, Ghana slowly emerged from the pandemic only to face the fallout of the war in Ukraine and the surge in fuel and food costs. Facing a crunch in payments, President Nana Akufo-Addo this year reversed course from his "Ghana Beyond Aid" concept and entered talks with the IMF for a bailout.

Already, the government has announced a 2.5 percent increase in VAT and a freeze on public worker hires to help cut costs and hike revenues. A debt restructuring is underway. With an IMF team in Accra, Finance Minister Kenneth Ofori-Atta promised the credit deal, debt swap and a reform package would restore investor confidence and steer the economy out of "grave times".

But many Ghanaians are bracing for potential austerity before any stability returns, with the impact of new taxes and spending cuts. How Ghana's government emerges may also have political fallout. Elections are two years away with Akufo-Addo stepping aside and ruling New Patriotic Party or NPP allies already jostling for position for primaries in early 2023.

The government has to find ways to mitigate any impact from reforms, especially on public sector employment and high taxes, economist Daniel Anim Amartey said. "If that is not done,



TOKYO: Business confidence fell slightly among Japan's largest manufacturers for the fourth straight quarter, a closely watched Bank of Japan survey showed Wednesday.

plus 16. For non-manufacturers, "the government's tourism campaign subsidies as well as loosening of border controls prompted recovery in demand," Sakai said, noting that recent indicators showed a solid recovery in consumption. "On the whole, the economy is not in bad shape, but looking ahead, the prospect of a global economic slowdown is a risk," said Shinke Yoshiki, chief economist of Dai-ichi Life Research Institute.

developing member economies that as a whole grew 7.0 percent last year. Chinese lockdowns, the Ukraine war and slowing demand from developed economies for manufactured goods were the main causes, it said.

"Multiple risks abound as the three main headwinds could worsen, along with geopolitical risks and climate change," it added. Surging consumer prices in the United States and other advanced economies could prompt central banks to further tighten interest rates, while the Ukraine conflict could further stoke inflation, it added.

With its tough COVID restrictions and unstable property market, China, Asia's largest economy, is now forecast to grow 3.0 percent this year and 4.3 percent in 2023, compared with 3.3 and 4.5 percent, respectively, in the bank's September forecasts.

This assumes a gradual easing of the country's zero-COVID policy. Beijing announced last week a nationwide loosening of its coronavirus restrictions, allowing home quarantine for confirmed cases and

it could be politically fatal," he said.

Dimmed star

Ghana's economic story was brighter a few years ago. Before the pandemic, the West African state was a star with fast growth rates, growing oil production and strong investor interest. But its high level of debt was a looming problem. Since the start of the year, its cedi currency has lost half its value, which has helped increase its debt burden by \$6 billion, with warnings Ghana risked a default.

A major part of the IMF agreement is bringing the country back to debt sustainability through a restructuring, calling on investors to exchange bonds for new ones maturing later.

IMF approval of the \$3 billion loan will depend on its success. Officials say they have the means to help offset any impact on local banks or pension funds—major holders of domestic bonds. But Ghana's major labor movement, the Trades Union Congress, is already rumbling over the deal's potential impact on workers' pensions. Opposition National Democratic Congress has been quick to blame Akufo-Addo's government for ballooning debt, even trying and failing to censure the finance minister.

"No matter how the IMF program turns out and how they can turn the corner, the records will show

Sakai agreed and said that inflation, fuelled by high energy costs and the weak yen, would also continue to weigh on Japan's economy. Inflation hit a four-decade high of 3.6 percent in October, ramping up pressure on Japan's central bank to move away from its ultra-loose monetary policies. The government in October pledged to spend \$260 billion on a stimulus package to cushion the economy from the impact of inflation and the lower yen. —AFP



An employee sorts packages for delivery at a logistics center in Donghai county, in China's eastern Jiangsu province on December 13, 2022. —AFP

ending large-scale lockdowns. On a positive note, developing Asia will grow faster this year and next than the rest of the world, while suffering the least from spiking inflation, the report said. —AFP

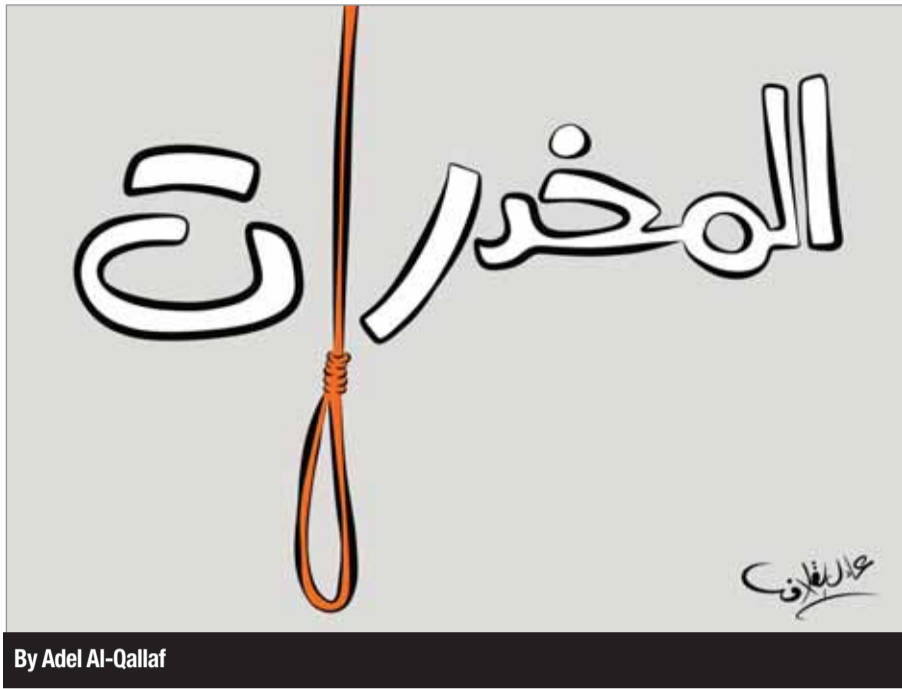


ACCRA: A vendor displays clothes for sale at the Makola market in Accra, Ghana. Ghana is battling its worst economic crisis in decades. —AFP

that they took us to 40 percent inflation, the records will show the market was closed to us, the markets will show the cedi depreciated 54 percent," said NDC lawmaker Isaac Adongo.

Akufo-Addo's government spent heavily on social programs such as free high schools. But his ruling New Patriotic Party says the crisis is all about external shocks—COVID and Russia's war in Ukraine.

"Assuming COVID didn't happen, what would our story be?" NPP communications director Richard Ahiagbah told AFP. —AFP



By Adel Al-Qallaf



By Bader Al-Mutairi



By Ahmed Bashir



By Tariq Bastaki

Kuwaiti artists highlight drugs' lethal impacts through caricatures

Kuwaiti caricaturists have been highlighting the lethal impacts of drugs through eye-catching caricatures. The caricatures aim to send messages that drugs have devastating health, social, moral and economic impacts, as well as serve to raise awareness about importance of fighting drugs and addiction. — KUNA



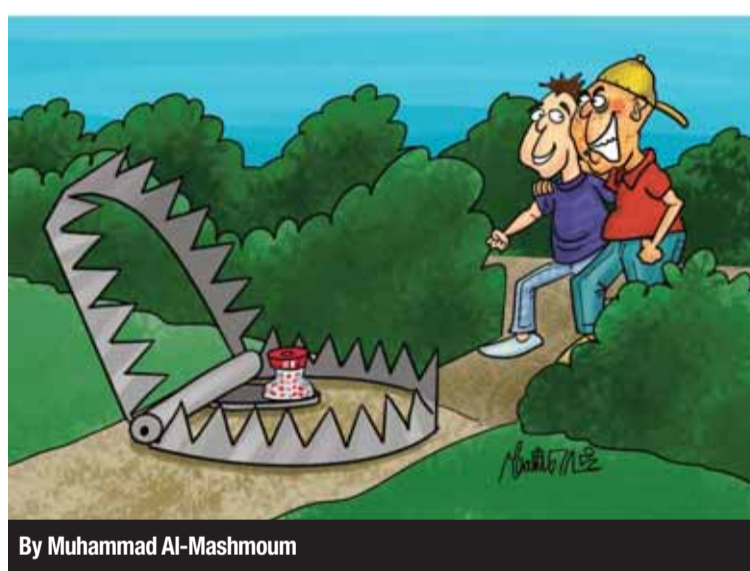
By Muhammad Al Thalab



By Msalam Al-Zamil



By Mohammed Al-Qahtani



By Muhammad Al-Mashmoum



By Mona Al-Tamimi

Litvinenko's widow praises TV portrayal by David Tennant

The widow of Alexander Litvinenko, the dissident former Russian security agent poisoned with radioactive polonium, on Tuesday praised British actor David Tennant's portrayal of her husband in a new TV drama. "When I saw what David did, it's unbelievable. It's

really unbelievable. It makes me feel very grateful," Marina Litvinenko said of the performance by Scottish actor known for roles including Dr Who in the BBC science-fiction series.

Marina Litvinenko was speaking at a question-and-answer session at the Royal Television Society, a video of which was posted online Tuesday, ahead of the first episode of the "Litvinenko" drama series on ITVX on Thursday. She said she had agreed to the series because she felt that it would be "very, very close and very accurate". The portrayal of her husband was "not simply a job" but "very much from the heart", she said.

The series has received a poor review from The Guardian newspaper, however, whose critic said Tennant's Russian accent reminded him of Portuguese football manager Jose Mourinho. Marina Litvinenko said she hoped the series would remind people of the events in 2006 when her husband died from severe radioactive poisoning in London, accusing President Vladimir Putin in a letter written from his deathbed.

"It will be very good to remind people of what happened," she said, drawing a link between the daylight poisoning and Russia's aggression towards Ukraine. "I see a very strong link between what hap-

pened in 2006 and what is happening now in 2022," she said, giving the view that the Kremlin's strategy "started then, maybe even earlier, but people just didn't want to see this".

Britain says Litvinenko died after drinking tea laced with the radioactive isotope Polonium 210 at a hotel, in a case that sparked global outrage and has weighed on relations between London and Moscow ever since. One of the prime suspects in the 2006 killing, Andrei Lugovoi, still serves as a Russian lawmaker. The other, Dmitry Kovtun, died in June this year from an illness related to Covid.

The Strasbourg-based European

Court of Human Rights ruled in September that Russia was responsible for the killing of Litvinenko, a verdict swiftly rejected by Moscow. British police identified Lugovoi and businessman Kovtun as prime suspects after they both met Litvinenko at a central London hotel. But attempts to extradite them failed and they both rejected the charges, with Lugovoi also claiming parliamentary immunity. The murder has previously been dramatized in an opera called "The Life & Death of Alexander Litvinenko", staged in the UK in 2021. — AFP



A handout picture released by the Qatar Foundation shows women taking a selfie in front of an artwork entitled "Come Together", by South Korean artist Choi Jeong-hwa, at Education City Stadium in Al-Rayyan, west of Doha, on Dec 13, 2022. — AFP photos



An artwork by British artist Tony Cragg, entitled "Elliptical column".



An artwork by Spanish artist Jaume Plensa.



Some belongings of the late Jordanian King Abdullah



Items kept at the Parliamentary Life Museum

PARLIAMENTARY LIFE MUSEUM IN JORDAN: DEMOCRATIC STORY OF KINGDOM



Formal suit used to be worn by the Jordanian monarch at inauguration of parliamentary sessions



Hall of the first Jordanian parliament (1947)

The Parliamentary Life Museum, Jordan's old house, has been an important milestone in the history of Jordan, which is celebrating its centennial this year. The museum, built on Amman mountain, was used for meetings of the legislative assembly in early 1940s. It served as the National Assembly in 1942-78. The then National Assembly witnessed on May 25, 1946 an independence announcement by King Abdullah the First, ibn Al-Hussain. It also witnessed oath taking by late Kings Talal bin Abdullah and Hussain bin Talal. The Parliamentary Life Museum aims to instill values of democracy, dialogue and belonging among the Jordanian people. — KUNA



Central telephone that had been used at headquarters of the first parliament



Facade of the Parliamentary Life Museum

Polish fish farm fights 'myth of Russian caviar'

With Moscow blacklisted since it invaded Ukraine, Europe's main producer of caviar wants to put an end, once and for all, to the delicacy's traditional association with Russia. "For most people, caviar means Russia, but that hasn't been the case for a long time now," said Agata Lakomiak-Winnicka, marketing and sales manager for Poland's Antonius Caviar.

Based in the northeastern village of Rus, the company is one of the world's top makers of the luxury food, having produced 42 tons of black caviar last year - more than any one firm in Italy or France and almost as much as those in China. "We used to get clients who couldn't locate Poland on a map. Today we're on a whole different level," Lakomiak-Winnicka said.

The company exports mostly to the United Arab Emirates, the United States, France and Denmark and also supplies Michelin-starred restaurants around the world. Retail prices range from 1,200 to 2,400 euros (\$1,275-2,550) for sturgeon caviar and up to 8,000 euros for the albino kind. The company's challenge now, one faced by producers worldwide, is the battle against "the myth of Russian caviar". "Take any box of caviar that reads 'Russian tradition' or 'Russian method' and you'll see that 99 percent of the time it doesn't actually come from Russia," Lakomiak-Winnicka said.



Tin cans with caviar of different colors by Antonius Caviar are presented at a fish farm in Rus.

Russia boycott

Traditionally, caviar was made from eggs from wild sturgeon in the Caspian and Black seas with the best-known producers in Russia and Iran. But years of overfishing and pollution left the sturgeon at risk of extinction, and it is now a protected species. Most caviar today is produced on fish farms and has nothing to do with Russia. But consumers still associate the two - a challenge for those who out of solidarity for Ukraine no longer want to buy Russian.

"Because of the war... clients ask about the provenance of the caviar," said Wiktoria Yerystova-Rostkowska, who owns a Russian shop outside Warsaw.



"They want good caviar but it can't be Russian," she told AFP, adding that she sources hers from Germany. The EU and United States have banned Russian caviar as part of their sanctions against Moscow, but it was already practically impossible to buy due to restrictions to protect wild sturgeon.

Aquaculture

The green and black boxes of caviar are on display in the shop window. Featuring a drawing of the fish, the label reads "malosol" - the Russian for "lightly salted" and the name of the traditional method used to preserve caviar. Yerystova-Rostkowska said the boycott of Russian products has left her struggling to stay open. "It's no longer profitable. I'm down 80 percent in revenue," she said.

Lakomiak-Winnicka for her part sees the boycott as an opportunity. "It's a

chance to explain that caviar no longer comes from Russia," she said. It has been years since wild Russian caviar was available on the international market. "The Caspian Sea no longer has any importance in caviar production," said Antonius head Marek Szczukowski. "The vast majority of caviar sold around the world is derived from aquaculture," including in Russia, he added.

Sturgeon 'on vacation'

On the Antonius fish farm in Rus, thousands of sturgeon - some more than a meter in length - swim around in canals fed by the crystal clear water of a nearby river. The company initially farmed trout there, but because of climate change they switched to sturgeon, which prefer warmer water. "The sturgeon are on vacation here, like they're in Hawaii," Szczukowski said.

The caviar is harvested after the fish reach maturity, with the entire operation taking under 20 minutes. Workers extract the caviar, wash and salt it, then box it up. The label reads: "Proudly produced in Poland". It used to also include the word "Russian" - to denote the fish species - but from now on it will just say "sturgeon caviar". "At the express request of clients, we're changing the labels, leaving no room for doubt," Lakomiak-Winnicka said. — AFP



Workers separate female from male sturgeons at a fish farm in the northern Polish village of Patryki on Nov 4, 2022.



A worker holds a mature Russian female sturgeon at a fish farm in the northern Polish village of Rus on Nov 4, 2022. — AFP photos

Dirty Durban ocean waters vex South Africa tourist trade

Untreated sewage flowing into the Indian Ocean has hoteliers in tourist hotspot Durban up in arms as South Africa gears up for the holiday season. The city's sewer system was badly damaged by deadly floods - the worst in living memory - that hit the southeastern KwaZulu-Natal province earlier this year. In April, Durban shut all beaches after high levels of E.coli, a bacteria that can cause diarrhea, fever and vomiting, were found in the water.

Some started reopening in July but as of Wednesday, with the southern hemisphere's summer knocking on the door, water readings from four of about two dozen beaches still showed critically high levels of E. coli. Popular for its idyllic beaches and game and nature reserves, Durban-South Africa's third-largest city - is usually a magnet for both local and international tourists.

"The reaction from the municipality has been at a snail's pace," said Brett Tungay, a leader of hospitality trade group FEDHASA. "Resorts and hotels have taken a huge impact. And of course that then has knock-on effects on all the restaurants and tourism activities in the city." The floods, in which more than 400 people died, added to years of disrepair, according to Janet Simpkins, director of environmental group Adopt a River.

"Sewer lines and infrastructure have not been maintained. Upgrades have not been done. And so our entire sewer system is overburdened," she said. Earlier this month the opposition Democratic Alliance challenged the mayor to take a dip at a beach the party said was prematurely re-opened. Mayor Mxolisi Kaunda of the ruling African National Congress (ANC) did go for a swim, but at a different beach.

Authorities in eThekweni, the municipality that includes Durban, said this week they have been fixing sewerage pump stations and one of the water treatment plants causing the problem. "The repair work to our sanitation infrastructure is progressing very well," eThekweni spokesman Msawakhe Mayisela told AFP. "There is a huge likelihood that all beaches will be open soon." — AFP



Lego designer Samuel Tacchi from France, 34, shows a few designs at the Lego campus in Billund, Denmark on Nov 29, 2022. — AFP photos



Resident historian Signe Wiese holds examples of the first Lego bricks.



Examples of the first Lego bricks are displayed at the Lego Museum.

INSIDE A LEGO FACTORY, WHERE CHRISTMAS WISHES COME TRUE



Wiese points to some of the first Yo-Yos created by Kristiansen.



Examples of Lego figurines are displayed at the LEGO Museum.



As a boy, Samuel Tacchi was crazy about Lego cranes. Now he designs them, under cloak-and-dagger secrecy, at the Danish group's headquarters where Santa has filled his sacks for decades. At its ultra-modern flagship building in Billund, a visit to the offices where the design work is done is out of the question - the company is fiercely protective of its trade secrets. But Tacchi, a 34-year-old Frenchman, lifts the veil a smidgen on the creative process, standing at a display featuring some of the brand's colorful toy kits.

"I always start with a little sketch on paper about what I have in mind", says Tacchi, who designs for the Lego Technic series. "Then I start to build the technical layout: the drive train, steering, and starting to build with the function. And then I dive into the styling. Then afterwards we dive into the computer."

His office is a child's dream come true, chock-a-block with Lego Technic pieces. "We have an elements shelf behind our backs. It's easy to reach and fix some elements, build them together and see if (our idea) works," he says. In his seven years with the company, Tacchi has helped create around 25 kits.

From start-up to multinational

A family-owned company, Lego employs more than 20,000 people around the world - more than a quarter of them in Billund, which is also home to its oldest factory. Here, in a huge hall where robots move about like in a choreographed dance, hundreds of thousands of pieces are manufactured each day. Colorful plastic is molded into familiar shapes: Bricks, figurines, hair, dragon wings and tyres (Lego is reported to be the biggest tyre manufacturer in the world).

Sorted and stored by model in large crates in an adjoining warehouse, the pieces are then sent to other factories to be included in kits. While everything is made of plastic today, the toy empire was founded by a carpenter very conscious of the quality of the wood he used. In 1932, in the middle of the Great Depression, Ole Kirk Kristiansen began making wooden toys, winning the favor of

Danish children with his yo-yos.

"He sold the yo-yo to every child in Billund and... (when every child had one) he couldn't sell anymore. But he still had them laying around," explains Signe Wiese, Lego's resident historian. "So instead of throwing them out or just leaving them, he reused them. He split the yo-yos in half and he used them for wheels on wagons."



Early Lego bricks are displayed next to a patent certificate at the Lego Museum.

Four years later, having given up on carpentry, he named his new company "Lego", a contraction of the Danish "Leg godt", which means "Play well". With a shortage of raw materials after World War II, Kirk Kristiansen gradually turned towards plastic and invested his life savings in an injection molding machine. "He was really fascinated with the technology and the machinery and the material itself," says Wiese. "So for him, it seems to have been a pretty easy decision, in spite of the fact that everyone was actually advising him against it."

The idea for the bricks came later. Initially they were made without Lego's famed "clutch power"-the mechanism that makes it possible to click the bricks together. The design was patented in 1958, paving the way for an endless catalogue of figures, shapes and kits. Now, Lego is the biggest toymaker in the world, ahead of Japan's Bandai Namco and US groups Hasbro and Mattel, according to market analysts Statista. This year, Lego says its catalogue of toys is bigger than ever before, but refuses to disclose the exact number. Another trade secret... — AFP



Items and toys are displayed at the Lego Museum.



Working tools for making wooden toys by Ole Kirk Kristiansen, the founder of Lego, are pictured in the Lego Museum.

Sports

Celtics edge Lakers as Bucks pile road misery on Warriors

NBA-leading Celtics thwart furious Lakers' late rally

News in brief

American businessman Foley seals Bournemouth takeover

LONDON: American businessman Bill Foley completed his takeover of Premier League club Bournemouth for a reported £120 million (\$148 million) on Tuesday. Foley's Black Knight Football Club group have purchased a controlling share in the club after Bournemouth's previous owner Maxim Demin opted to sell his 100 per cent stake. Foley will assume the role of Bournemouth chairman and attend the Cherries' next home match against Crystal Palace on December 31. The 77-year-old, who also owns the NHL ice-hockey franchise Vegas Golden Knights, previously visited Bournemouth in October to watch their 2-1 win against Leicester. "I have tremendous respect for the passion and support the Bournemouth community shows for this club and believe that connection to the community is the foundation for success of any sports team," Foley told the club website. "We will move forward with an 'always advance, never retreat' approach that has defined all of my endeavors."

Uganda football team pulls out of CHAN tournament

KAMPALA: Uganda's national football team, the Cranes, has pulled out of the African Nations Championship tournament due to a lack of funds, a senior official told AFP on Wednesday. The tournament is due to be held in Algeria next month but the Ugandan team will not be participating because of the government's failure to provide the promised funding, said Moses Magogo, president of the Federation of Uganda Football Associations. "A hard decision was taken to pull the Cranes out of CHAN finals because without funds there is no other available option," Magogo said. "It's a very disappointing situation especially (for) the players, the coaches that have made this journey to the finals and to the fans but this is a decision we took... painfully" he added. The finance ministry did not respond to an AFP request for comment. This is not the first time Uganda is pulling out of sporting engagements due to financial constraints.

NBA renames MVP trophy after great Michael Jordan

NEW YORK: The NBA is renaming its annual regular-season Most Valuable Player award after legendary star Michael Jordan - who claimed the honor five times with the Chicago Bulls. The league unveiled the newly designed Michael Jordan Trophy on Tuesday, along with five other reimagined trophies named after league pioneers that will now be presented to the National Basketball Association's end-of-season award winners. Jordan, a six-time NBA champion, won five MVPs in his 15-season career, tied for second-most behind Kareem Abdul-Jabbar who won six. The NBA's Social Justice Champion award is named for Abdul-Jabbar. Other renamed awards announced Tuesday are the Hakeem Olajuwon Trophy for the Defensive Player of the Year, the Wilt Chamberlain Trophy for Rookie of the Year, the John Havlicek Trophy for Sixth Man of the Year and the George Mikan Trophy for Most Improved Player. The NBA also announced a new award for Clutch Player of the Year, named after Jerry West, who played in nine NBA Finals and remains the only player to win Finals MVP while losing the series.

Capitals' Ovechkin scores milestone 800th NHL goal

WASHINGTON: Alex Ovechkin became just the third player in NHL history to score 800 goals with a hat-trick on Tuesday for the Washington Capitals in a 7-3 win over the Blackhawks in Chicago. The Capitals captain joined Wayne Gretzky and Gordie Howe as the only players in league history with 800 goals. Ovechkin scored his 798th goal just 24 seconds into the first period to put the Capitals up 1-0. He scored No. 799 with a power-play goal near the right post to make it 2-0 at 8:14 of the first. He reached the milestone at 6:34 of the third, coming up with a loose puck and firing into an open net to push the lead to 5-2. Gretzky tops the all-time goals list with 894. Howe, the first to reach 800 goals in February 1980, finished with 801. Ovechkin's 800th goal sparked celebrations at United Center, the Capitals bench clearing as teammates swarmed "Ovi" in congratulations. "It is pretty amazing," Capitals coach Peter Laviolette said. "When you see it from a different bench, you focus on figuring out how to stop (Ovechkin) and how to keep him in check." —From AFP

LOS ANGELES: Jayson Tatum and the NBA-leading Boston Celtics thwarted a furious late rally by the Los Angeles Lakers on Tuesday to win 122-118 in overtime and snap a two-game skid. The Celtics bounced back from defeats to the Golden State Warriors in San Francisco and the Clippers in Los Angeles, but they needed every ounce of energy and will to avoid their first three-game losing streak this season.

"Oh, man, last game of the road trip, we've been going for, like, 13 days, second night of a back-to-back," Tatum said. "But we found a way. We needed that," added Tatum, whose 44 points included a game-tying turnaround jumper over LeBron James that sent the contest to overtime. "We found a way to get back on track."

Jaylen Brown added 25 points and grabbed 15 rebounds and Marcus Smart scored 18 points for the Celtics, who appeared headed to victory when they took a 20-point lead on Tatum's floater with 6:57 left in the third quarter. But the Lakers, with 37 points from Anthony Davis and 33 from James, roared back, putting together an 18-0 run from late in the third that was capped by a James three-pointer that put Los Angeles up by four with 8:55 remaining in the fourth quarter. The Lakers pushed their lead to 13 points before the weary Celtics were able to respond.

Russell Westbrook put the Lakers up by four with two quick baskets to open overtime, but the Celtics scored on four straight possessions to take the lead for good. "It was big," Tatum said of the win, which pushed Boston's league-best record to 22-7. "(It) showed the character of our team." The Milwaukee Bucks stayed on the Celtics' heels atop the East, improving to 20-7 with a 128-111 victory over reigning champions Golden State. The Warriors, coming off their convincing victory over the Celtics, again found themselves inexplicably struggling on the road.

They fell to 2-12 away from home, 14-14 overall, in a testy encounter between the last two NBA champions that saw the frustrated Warriors assessed five technical fouls. Three of those came in the first quarter, when Stephen Curry was furious at the lack of a foul call when he was shooting a three-pointer and head coach Steve Kerr continued the argument to earn a "T". "I was already mad at several non-calls in the paint," Kerr said. "I



LOS ANGELES: Dennis Schroder #17 of the Los Angeles Lakers reacts as he is fouled between Jaylen Brown #7 and Jayson Tatum #0 of the Boston Celtics during a 122-118 loss to the Celtics at Crypto.com Arena on December 13, 2022. —AFP

felt like we were on the bad end of things to start the game. And then Steph Curry gets hit on the head on a three-point shot.

"That needs to be called," Kerr said. Trailing by 14 early in the second quarter, the Warriors pulled within six before the Bucks closed the first half on a 6-0 scoring run on the way to a 12-point halftime lead. The third quarter brought no relief, the Bucks jumping to a 26-point lead midway through the period. Milwaukee, led by 30 points and 12 rebounds from Antetokounmpo, out-scored the Warriors 48-30 in the paint and out-rebounded them 55-37.

Embiid powers 76ers

Elsewhere, Joel Embiid scored 31 points and James Harden and Tobias Harris added 21 apiece as the 76ers thumped the Sacramento Kings 123-103 in Philadelphia. The 76ers took control with

80 points in the first half and were never threatened after the interval. Two nights after his 53-point outburst in a win against Charlotte, Embiid connected on 10 of 16 shots from the floor to lead the Sixers to their third straight victory. The Utah Jazz ended the New Orleans Pelicans' seven-game win streak, downing the Western Conference leaders 121-100.

Malik Beasley scored 21 points off the bench to lead the Jazz, draining five of their 15 three-pointers. It was an emotional night in Houston, where head coach Stephen Silas returned to the sideline two days after the death of his father, three-time NBA champion and longtime NBA coach Paul Silas. The Rockets handed the reeling Phoenix Suns a fifth straight defeat, 111-97. The injury-plagued Suns got more bad news in that department as starting center Deandre Ayton and guard Cameron Payne both left the game with injuries. —AFP

2nd Arab Masters Tennis Tournament starts 20th Dec

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The 2nd Arab Masters Tennis Tournament will start on December 20th. The draw will be held the day before said President of Kuwait and Arab Shooting Federations Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Abdallah Al-Sabah in a press conference which was held at Kuwait Tennis Federation premise.

Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber said the top two players in each country are allowed to participate in the tournament provided that they are ranked by ATP - making it the strongest among tournaments at the Arab level. He said participating countries will be Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain in addition to host country Kuwait.

The organizing committee allocated a total of \$87,000 in prize money: \$75,000 for singles and \$13,000 for the doubles. The singles first place winner will receive \$25,000 and second place will receive \$10,000. He said this is the first time such prizes will be given and thanked the sponsors who made it possible. President of KTF and ATF said the tournament is a good opportunity for players to improve their levels as each player will have two matches per day - one in singles and one in doubles.

The tournament is being held at this time of the year because the internationally ranked players are on break and can participate. Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber hoped the tournament is held each year and hoped a number of fans will be at the stands to support their players. The main goals of the event is to show the progress tennis has made in the Arab world.

The first and second place winners will be given wild cards to participate in Dubai and Qatar open, which is a good motivation for players to participate and work hard. Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber said "we will try our best to support Arab players, as the ATF is

New Olympic sports had high rate of injuries

PARIS: Athletes competing in the newly introduced Olympic sports of BMX freestyle, karate and skateboarding suffered some of the highest rates of injuries at the Tokyo Games, new research showed Wednesday. The three new events were among the top five with the most injuries at the 2020 Summer Olympics, which was held in 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Boxing and BMX racing had the highest rates, with 27 percent of competitors getting injured, according to a study carried out by researchers from the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Next came the new events of BMX freestyle, which had 22 per-



KUWAIT: Top officials and players pose for a group during the press conference at Kuwait Tennis Federation premise. The 2nd Arab Masters Tennis Tournament will start on December 20th. —Photos by Yasser A-Zayyat



headquartered in Kuwait, and we hope to see a top ranked Arab player as Ons Jabeur did reach the number 2 in the world."

KTF Deputy Chairman Abdelsamad Al-Aryan said the tournament will be officiated by 26 internationally recognized umpires and linesmen, led by referee Abdelraouf Abdelsalam and thanked all organizing committees for their efforts. KTF secretary general Faleh Al-Otaibi said the tournament will be in favor of

the national team as the host country has the right to participate with more than two players.

He said the participating Kuwaiti players are Gulf Champion Essa Qabazard, Ali Al-Shatti, Hussein Al-Shatti, Bader Antar and Yaqoub Mohammad. Al-Otaibi appreciated the efforts of Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber to make the organization of the tournament possible and ensure the valuable prize money for the ranked players.

cent of its athletes injured, followed by skateboarding with 21 percent and karate with 19 percent, said the study published in the British Journal of Sports Medicine. Other new events had fewer injuries, including sport climbing with a rate of 15 percent, surfing with 13 percent and 3x3 basketball with 11 percent.

The study's lead author Torbjorn Soligard, who works in the IOC's medical and scientific department, told AFP "it is important to note that more than half the injuries recorded did not lead to any time lost from competition". IOC researchers have tracked injuries and illnesses in every Olympics since the 2008 Beijing Games. More than 11,300 athletes from 206 national teams were monitored in Tokyo, with more than a thousand injuries recorded.

Overall, nine percent of athletes in Tokyo suffered an injury, comparable to eight percent at the 2016 Rio Games, 11 percent at the 2012 London Olympics and 10 percent in Beijing. Tokyo saw the lowest rate of sickness ever recorded at an Olympics-it was conducted under strict Covid-19 restrictions-with 3.9 illnesses per 100 athletes, compared to 5.4 in Rio and



MUNICH: Britain's Sasha Pardoe competes during the Women's Park BMX Cycling Freestyle event at the European Cycling Championships in Munich, southern Germany. —AFP

7.2 in London. "This might largely be attributed to the extensive countermeasures put in place to mitigate Covid-19, effectively reducing transmission of COVID-19 and all respiratory infections," the study's authors said. —AFP

Messi magic: Pakistanis go mad for Argentina

Fireworks lit up the night sky

LYARI: Thousands of Pakistanis in a Karachi neighborhood once synonymous with gang violence and poverty will mass together to roar on Argentina in the World Cup final on Sunday. People poured through the labyrinth streets of Lyari in the early hours of Wednesday to watch Lionel Messi and his Argentina side on a giant screen beat Croatia 3-0 in the semi-final.

Wearing Argentina shirts, some broke into song and dance after the South Americans sealed their spot in the decider in Qatar against France or Morocco. Fireworks lit up the night sky. "Most of the youth are inspired by them," Tahir Khan, a 40-year-old football coach, told AFP of Argentina's World Cup stars. Messi is inevitably the favorite-but they also like his Paris Saint-Germain team-mate Neymar of Brazil.

"I see most of the youth wearing Messi or Neymar jerseys. Even at Eid they wear their jerseys... instead of traditional dress," said Khan. Residents have brought the World Cup to Lyari, painting life-size murals of their favorite players, hanging flags and bunting, and keeping track of progress on bracket boards marked on walls. The appreciation of Argentina-but also of fierce rivals Brazil-is not purely about their football skills. "The Latin American countries are not as (developed) as the European countries but their players are acknowledged all over the world," Khan said.



KARACHI: Pakistani football fans dance as they watch the live broadcast of the Qatar 2022 World Cup football semi-final match between Argentina and Croatia in the Lyari neighborhood of Karachi on December 14, 2022.



KARACHI: Fireworks explode over Pakistani football fans watching the live broadcast of the Qatar 2022 World Cup football semi-final match between Argentina and Croatia in the Lyari neighborhoods of Karachi. —AFP photos

Argentina or Morocco?

In one battle for Lyari years ago, gangs infamously used rocket-propelled grenades and assault rifles to fight security forces, with the crossfire shutting schools and businesses. But the worst of the violence has abated and an increase in security has led to flowering creativity. The neighborhood now clings fiercely to its reputation for producing footballers, iron-chinned boxers, and, most recently, socially conscious rappers. There is good-natured banter between adopted Argentina and Brazil fans. "We relate to the Brazilians' (skin) colour and style,

that is why we like Brazil the most," said 45-year-old Shahid Saleem. "My own favorite team is Argentina but my two sons are staunch supporters of Brazil. Quarrels between father and sons is a daily routine." Now a fresh argument looms over Lyari: whether to back Argentina or Morocco if the underdogs stun holders France to reach Sunday's final.

Morocco would be the first Muslim nation to make it to a World Cup final—a source of great pride for

Pakistani football fans. "Earlier we supported Brazil but they were knocked out of the tournament so now we are supporting Marrakesh (Morocco) as it is a Muslim country," said Abdul Ghafoor, 20-year-old laborer and football fan. Saleem summed up the dilemma for many. "The prayers of all of Lyari are with Morocco and hopefully they will make it to the final," he said. "(But) I am an Argentina fan, so from this side I will pray for Argentina." —AFP



LUSAIL: An Argentina supporter kisses a replica of the World Cup trophy during the Qatar 2022 World Cup football semi-final match between Argentina and Croatia on December 13, 2022. —AFP

Messi has chance to match Maradona

DOHA: Lionel Messi will get his date with World Cup destiny, and the chance to emulate Diego Maradona, after Argentina's emphatic 3-0 win over Croatia on Tuesday took them through to the final in Qatar. It is 36 years since Maradona dragged Argentina to their second and most recent World Cup triumph in Mexico, the crowning moment of his dazzling but often troubled career.

Messi came to this World Cup admitting it would surely be his last at the age of 35 and therefore his final opportunity to lift the trophy that escaped him in 2014, when Argentina were defeated by Germany in Brazil. The sense that Messi was building up to this moment was apparent in his displays for Paris Saint-Germain in the months before the tournament and he has performed at this World Cup like a player with no more time to waste.

Sixteen years after making his World Cup debut as a teenager, Qatar has witnessed Messi finally score in the knockout stages of the tournament, and he has done so in three straight games. On Tuesday he scored his 11th World Cup goal, overtaking compatriot Gabriel Batistuta, who previously held the Argentine record. He has now equaled former German player Lothar Matthaeus' record of 25 World Cup appearances.

Messi's performance against Croatia at Lusail Stadium was typical of his late career - a player who saves energy and spends long periods on the fringes of the game. Yet for his country he is a captain who can still inspire and who always looks capable of creating something when the ball comes to his feet. Goalkeeper Dominik Livakovic, who had been the hero in shoot-outs in the previous two rounds, had no chance of stopping Messi's first-half penalty.

Messi then sent Julian Alvarez away to make it 2-0 late in the first half with a first-time ball on a counter-attack. But he saved the best moment for midway through the second half with a magnificent assist, twisting and turning to make a fool of Croatia's Josko Gvardiol before teeing up Alvarez to score again. "In the past 15 years he's probably been the best player in the world and today he was very good again," admitted the Croatia coach, Zlatko Dalic.



DOHA: Argentina supporters wear t-shirts displaying portraits of Argentina's forward Lionel Messi and late football legend Diego Maradona at Lusail Stadium on Dec 13, 2022. —AFP

"The greatest"

Messi is now level with Kylian Mbappe as the Qatar World Cup's leading scorer, with five goals, but his assist was further confirmation of how the former Barcelona player has evolved with age. The PSG version spends much of his time creating goals for Mbappe, and now for Argentina he is doing the same for the exciting young striker Alvarez.

"Sometimes it seems like we say Messi is the greatest just because we are Argentine, but I think there is no doubt about it," said coach Lionel Scaloni. "I am privileged to coach him and be able to watch him. It's thrilling." Argentina's run to the final has not been entirely down to Messi - their vast and passionate support turned the semi-final effectively into a home game, with fans filling Lusail with the sound of their anthem "Muchachos". Scaloni has built a capable team around their one true great, taking Argentina into the final of the first World Cup since the death of Maradona. Argentines may feel that it was meant to be, and Qatar will surely be delighted too.

Just over a year after he ended his long association with Barcelona and signed for Qatar-owned PSG, Messi's presence will light up the final in Doha. But, depending on the outcome of Wednesday's second semi-final between France and Morocco, it could be his club teammate Mbappe blocking his path to glory. —AFP

Messi mania fans outside stadium

DOHA: Nicolas Montez could tell from the roar coming from inside the Lusail Stadium that Lionel Messi had scored the opening goal in Argentina's World Cup semi-final triumph on Tuesday. One of thousands of ticketless fans stood outside, the Argentinean said it would never have been so loud for anyone else. "If it was Croatia, there would have been silence. Everyone in there is for Messi," added the 29-year-old who wore the number 10 Messi shirt in Argentina's sky blue and white colors that is seen everywhere in Doha.

"This is the first Argentina game I could not get a ticket for," said Santino Rosa, another Albiceleste fanatic. "I am miserable not to be inside. But at least being here I know before the others that goals have been scored - and it is even better if Messi has one." More than 35,000 Argentine fans are reported to have been in Qatar for the World Cup and many have stayed to see out the campaign and be in the city if Messi does finally win the trophy. Many could not get tickets for the semi-final. Messi fanatics - from his home country and South Asian migrant workers - gathered at big screens across Doha.

Ticket solidarity

Argentinean fans have set up WhatsApp groups to track available tickets and even find accommodation for those in need. "If we hear of a ticket we try to help oth-

ers," said Montez. "But it was difficult for today, there were many disappointed fans and it will be even worse for the final." The crowd outside the stadium grew as the match wore on.

Local families with children, all wearing the blue and white shirts or Argentine flags painted on their cheeks, also stared up at the stadium with the hard core who travelled from South America. Some watched the game on mobile phones. Street traders started to gather selling Argentina and Croatia scarves for 50 riyals (\$13), but struggled to find buyers. Fifteen year-olds Aisha and Haya carried sky blue and white pom-poms to go with their shirts and waved their arms furiously as Julian Alvarez's goals were announced by further eruptions inside the stadium.

"We only really discovered football with the World Cup but we know Messi is special," said Aisha. "It is impossible to get tickets now but we will be out again for the final," added Haya. Thousands of people walked past the stadium to go and watch the match on a giant screen on Lusail Boulevard. The FIFA Fan Festival near the Doha seafront closed its gates before the game started when it reached its 40,000 capacity.

Tens of thousands of migrant workers gathered at more than 10 fan zones set up for them around the edge of Doha. Argentina are firm favorites with the foreign laborers whose treatment by Qatar has been in the spotlight in the runup to the World Cup. And Argentina shirts have become the most popular fashion accessory of the World Cup whether in Doha's upscale shopping malls or the industrial zone. While official shirts can cost \$90 or more, fakes can be bought for as little as three dollars in some backstreet stores. —AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9

Clinics

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

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

CHANGE OF NAME

I, ABUZAR SAMIM AHMAD ANSARI holder of Indian Passport No. T7644912 having permanent address Maharashtra, India - 421302, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as Given name: ABUZAR SHAMIM AKHTAR and Surname: ANSARI. (C#2817) - 14-12-2022

I, ABDUL (Current name in passport), holder of Indian National Passport Number S3692812 having permanent address house no. 20 TRIPOLLOYA GATE KOTAWALA BAG RATLAM MADHYA PRADESH PIN CODE 457001 India residing in Kuwait at present hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as under Given Name ABDUL KADAR and Surname ALOT WALA. (C#2815) - 13-12-2022

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Argentina overwhelm Croatia, book 2nd WCup final in 8 years

Messi, Alvarez fire Argentina into World Cup final



LUSAIL: Argentina's forward #09 Julian Alvarez (center) celebrates with Argentina's forward #10 Lionel Messi (left) and Argentina's defender #26 Nahuel Molina after scoring his team's second goal during the Qatar 2022 World Cup football semi-final match between Argentina and Croatia on December 13, 2022. — AFP

DOHA: An inspired Lionel Messi scored from the penalty spot and Julian Alvarez struck twice as Argentina beat Croatia 3-0 on Tuesday to reach their second World Cup final in eight years. The two-times world champions, backed their passionate, singing followers at the Lusail Stadium, produced their best display of the tournament to ensure they will meet the winners of Wednesday's semi-final between holders France and Morocco in Sunday's final.

Messi, 35, who suffered defeat to Germany in the 2014 final, is desperate to crown his extraordinary career by winning his first World Cup and a third for Argentina after wins in 1978 and 1986. And after getting his team on the way to victory with a perfectly struck first-half penalty he made sure of the win by brilliantly creating the third goal. "It's crazy, we did it, we did it, we're going to play one more final, once again Argentina is in a World Cup final," said Messi, after celebrating in front of the massed ranks of South American supporters who have travelled to Qatar.

"Seeing all these people, this family, throughout the World Cup, what we have experienced is something incredible. We are going for the last game, which is what we wanted," he added. Croatia, runners-up in Russia four years ago, paid the price for some poor defending as they went out in the last four for the second time after their 1998 loss to France. "We lost the match. I have nothing to complain about regarding the boys. They gave their best during this whole tournament.... It is a deserved defeat," said coach Zlatko Dalic.

It was not until the 25th minute when the game showed signs of life with a low pot shot from outside the box by Enzo Fernandez but Croatia keeper Dominik Livakovic did well to get across and keep it out. It was a tight affair but then a simple lofted ball over the top from Fernandez caught out the Croatian defense, Alvarez latched on to it, knocking the ball past the advancing

Livakovic who collided with the striker and Italian referee Daniele Orsato pointed to the spot. The Croats protested, both the players on the field and the staff the bench, resulting in a red card for assistant coach Mario Mandzukic.

Livakovic guessed correctly but his dive was in vain as Messi's sweetly struck drive flew high into the net to put his side 1-0 up in the 34th minute. It was Messi's fifth goal of the tournament, making him joint top-scorer with France's Kylian Mbappe. His 11th career goal - in a record-equalling 25th World Cup appearance - also took him past Gabriel Batistuta as Argentina's all-time World Cup top scorer. Five minutes later, Argentina doubled their lead when, after a break from a corner, Messi's first-time ball found Alvarez inside his own half who set off on a long dribble goalwards.

With the Croatian defence backing off, Alvarez rode weak challenges from Josip Juranovic and Borna Sosa and then slipped the ball past Livakovic to send the heavily Argentine crowd into delirium. Alexis Mac Allister then went close with an angled header from a corner, forcing a fine save out of Livakovic to avoid a third. All Croatia could muster in response, before the break, was a low Juranovic cross-shot that Emiliano Martinez reacted well to.

Messi saved his best for last though, tormenting Josko Gvardial down the right, twisting and turning to leave the 20-year-old defender behind and pull the ball back to the clinical Alvarez who coolly slotted home his fourth goal of the tournament. Croatia's dream was over, their 37-year-old playmaker Luka Modric, so key to their outstanding record in the past two tournaments, taking the applause when taken off nine minutes from the end of what was surely his final campaign. "We're sad, we were hoping to play another final. It didn't happen. We have to congratulate Argentina and that's it," said Modric, who questioned the awarding of the penalty which changed the course of the game. The third-place match is all that remains for Modric and Croatia but the big prize remains within reach for Argentina, Alvarez and Messi. Now with a double attacking threat, confidence running through the squad and Messi in top form, they are peaking just in time for the biggest game of their lives. — AFP

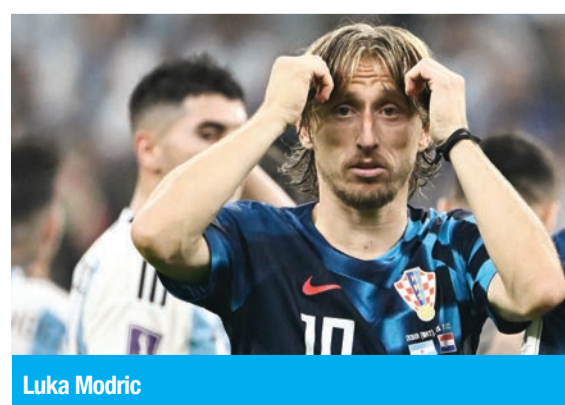


Lionel Messi

Modric's World Cup dream over

DOHA: Luka Modric is Croatia's greatest-ever player, but he was upstaged by arguably the best of all time, Lionel Messi, as Argentina crushed his World Cup dreams in Qatar on Tuesday. After orchestrating his country's run to a second straight World Cup semi-final, 37-year-old Modric's team were swept aside 3-0 by the South American side. Coach Zlatko Dalic boasted that Croatia - with Modric supported by Mateo Kovacic and Marcelo Brozovic - had "the best midfield in the world" after their shock quarter-final elimination of Brazil.

That midfield has enabled a nation of just under four million to consistently compete with the world's strongest teams, but they ran out of steam against a combative Argentina. "Argentina have an excellent team... and today they had four midfielders and closed the space and tried to play most of the game there,"



Luka Modric

said Dalic. Croatia had fallen behind in their win against Canada in the group stage and overcame both Japan and Brazil in the knockout rounds on penalties, having conceded the opening goal in both matches.

Few teams are as dogged or durable as Croatia, but two goals in five minutes, the first a penalty from Lionel Messi and the second a scruffy Julian Alvarez

strike, proved too great an obstacle to surmount. Dalic had played down concerns of tiredness after going to extra time in both the last 16 and quarter-finals, but there was a sense Croatia had little left in the tank once Alvarez made it 2-0. More Messi brilliance led to a second goal for Alvarez, and Modric was withdrawn nine minutes from the end for Lovro Majer - receiving warm applause from the capacity crowd of nearly 89,000.

Real Madrid midfielder Modric, who made his international debut way back in 2006, is surely in the final phase of his brilliant career. Croatia will play France or Morocco on Saturday in the third place play-off. They are also through to the last four of the Nations League, but that competition lacks the lustre of the World Cup and may not be enough to sway Modric to stay on.

The five-time Champions League winner, who has a record 161 caps for Croatia, will be almost 39 by the time Euro 2024 rolls around. "Perhaps this is the end of the World Cup generation for a couple of them who have reached a certain age," said Dalic, without specifying names. "It would have been excellent if they'd won the trophy as a crowning moment." — AFP



Argentina supporters cheer before the start of the Qatar 2022 World Cup football semi-final match between Argentina and Croatia on December 13, 2022. — AFP photos



Argentina's supporters celebrate at the end of the Qatar 2022 World Cup football semi-final match between Argentina and Croatia at Lusail Stadium in Lusail.



Argentina's defender #13 Cristian Romero, Argentina's defender #19 Nicolas Otamendi and Croatia's defender #06 Dejan Lovren fight for the ball during the Qatar 2022 World Cup football semi-final match.



A spectator reacts as fans watch the Qatar 2022 World Cup football semi-final match between Argentina and Croatia.



A helicopter carries a giant t-shirt of Argentina forward Lionel Messi over Rosario, Argentina, on December 13, 2022 during the Qatar 2022 World Cup semi-final football match between Argentina and Croatia.



Croatia's goalkeeper #01 Dominik Livakovic lies on the ground after fouling Argentina's forward #09 Julian Alvarez in the penalty box.