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Amir grants amnesty to political prisoners

Scholarship allowances increased by 50% • Grilling filed against public works minister



HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: An Amiri decree was issued on Monday granting a special amnesty to an unspecified number of mainly Kuwaiti political prisoners who had been convicted to years of jail terms for violating freedom of speech laws. Deputy Premier and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Barrak Al-Sheetan said the decree was issued immediately after it was approved by the Cabinet during its weekly meeting on Monday.

He said the decree stipulates to grant an amnesty to a number of Kuwaiti citizens jailed for committing crimes from

Nov 16, 2011 until the end of 2021. The minister said a special committee headed by him and including the attorney general and interior ministry undersecretary will start meetings on Thursday to prepare the lists of names of the prisoners to be pardoned under the decree.

The minister did not provide details on how many prisoners will be pardoned and the timeframe for the work of the special committee. Based on the decree, the amnesty will cover prisoners who were convicted for carrying out acts of aggression against a foreign country that could threaten Kuwait's security. It also includes those jailed for spreading

false news about the internal situation of Kuwait that could undermine the position of the country.

The amnesty will also include prisoners jailed for publicly insulting the authority of HH the Amir by any means, whether in writing or in speech. It will also include those convicted for misusing their phones to threaten others or the security of the state. Several months ago, HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah issued a decree pardoning a number of opposition political leaders, many of whom had been living in exile in Turkey, and a number of other prisoners in the coun-

try. The government also promised its meeting to increase allowances of students on scholarships by 50 percent from April 2023. The decision was made on the directives of HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah on the importance of providing all kinds of support to students on scholarships and creating an appropriate living environment for them, the Cabinet said on Twitter.

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News in brief

Qatar-China ink 'longest' gas deal

DOHA: QatarEnergy announced a 27-year natural gas supply deal with China Monday, calling it the "longest" ever seen as it strengthened ties with Asia at a time when Europe is scrambling for alternative sources. The state energy company will send four million tons of liquefied natural gas annually from its new North Field East project to China Petroleum and Chemical Corporation (Sinopec), it said. The deal "marks the longest gas supply agreement in the history of the LNG industry", said Saad Sherida Al-Kaabi, Qatar's energy minister and QatarEnergy's chief executive. — AFP

Egypt lauds ties with Turkey

CAIRO: A day after the Egyptian president shook hands with his Turkish counterpart for the first time in Qatar, the presidency in Cairo on Monday heralded a new "beginning" in ties with Ankara. Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi and Recep Tayyip Erdogan "confirmed the depth of historical ties between the two countries" during their brief encounter in Doha, spokesman Bassam Radi said in a statement, signaling Egypt is finally ready to bridge their nine-year rift. — AFP

WHO identifying pathogens

GENEVA: The World Health Organization said on Monday it was thrashing out a new list of priority pathogens that risk sparking pandemics or outbreaks and need to be kept under close observation. The WHO said the aim was to update a list used to guide global research and development (R&D) and investment, especially in vaccines, tests and treatments. As part of that process, the UN health agency is convening over 300 scientists to consider evidence on more than 25 virus families and bacteria. They will also consider the so-called "Disease X" - an unknown pathogen that could cause a serious international epidemic. — AFP (See Page 6)

162 killed in shallow quake in Indonesia

CIANJUR, Indonesia: A shallow 5.6-magnitude earthquake killed at least 162 people, with hundreds injured and others missing, when it toppled buildings and triggered landslides on Indonesia's main island of Java on Monday, officials said. Doctors treated patients outdoors after the quake, which was felt as far away as the capi-

tal Jakarta, left hospitals in the West Java town of Cianjur without power for several hours.

"I regret to inform that 162 are dead, 326 are injured with most of them sustained fractures from being crushed in ruins," Ridwan Kamil, governor of worst-hit province West Java, told a press conference in a video seen by AFP. He said most of the victims were children. Adam, spokesman for the local administration in Cianjur town, who like many Indonesians goes by one name, confirmed the toll to AFP.

Indonesia's national disaster mitigation agency, BNPB, still lists the toll at

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CIANJUR, Indonesia: Wounded survivors of an earthquake are treated in the yard of a hospital on Nov 21, 2022. — AFP

FIFA: 2.95m World Cup tickets sold

DOHA: Nearly three million World Cup tickets have been sold, FIFA said Sunday, as the governing body's president revealed the tournament had helped push revenues over the past four years to a record \$7.5 billion. A FIFA spokesman told AFP that 2.95 million tickets had been sold up to Sunday's opening day. The start of the World Cup has led to a surge of interest in the 64 matches over 29 days despite negative publicity over Qatar's hosting. Queues

have built up outside the FIFA ticket center in Doha and fans report long waits to get onto the official online ticket platform. Qatar has already overtaken Russia 2018, when just over 2.4 million tickets were sold. The spokesman said Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United States, Mexico, Britain, United Arab Emirates, Argentina, France, India and Brazil were the top markets.

FIFA president Gianni Infantino told a conference earlier that the world body's four-year revenues were estimated to hit \$7.5 billion by the end of the year. Revenues are more than \$1 billion higher than predicted four years ago.

Infantino told the 211 member associations that the "amazing figures" came "in spite of Covid, in spite of different crises around the world". — AFP



DOHA: Iran supporters wave their national flag bearing the word "woman" as they cheer during the Qatar 2022 World Cup match between England and Iran at Khalifa International Stadium on Nov 21, 2022. — AFP

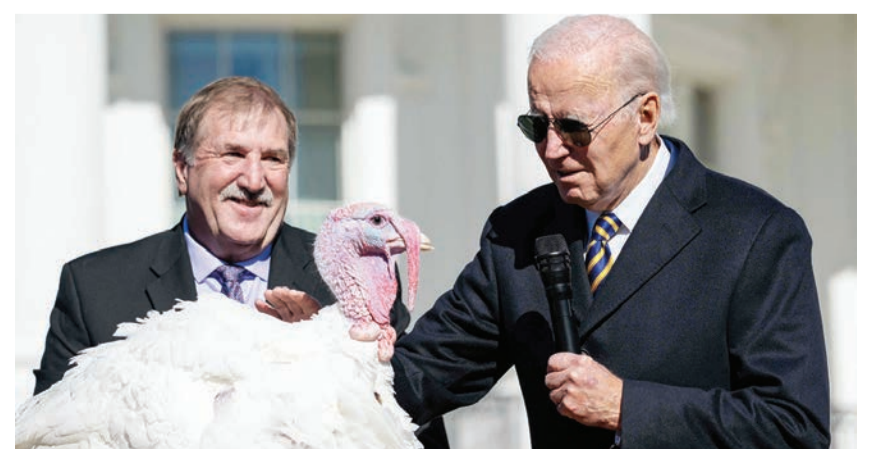
Biden turns 80, but no party at White House

WASHINGTON: For the first time in history, a sitting president turned 80 years old in the White House on Sunday but did not celebrate in any public way. It wasn't until mid-afternoon that First Lady Jill Biden posted an affectionate message, with two photos of the couple dancing in tuxedos and gala attire. "There's no one else I'd rather dance with than you. Happy Birthday Joe! I love you," Jill Biden tweeted.

It was the sole mention from the White House of the birthday, and with no public event scheduled no indication emerged of how, or even if, the president would celebrate his birthday. Just a day earlier, the Biden family hosted a large-scale fete at the White House - the wedding of Biden's granddaughter Naomi, which was closed to the press. Biden does have an important matter to discuss with his family in the coming days - whether he will seek re-election in 2024.

He said at a press conference Nov 9 that he "intends" to run, and said he and his wife will "sneak away" for a week at some point between Thanksgiving and Christmas to decide with his family.

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WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden pardons Chocolate, the national Thanksgiving turkey, as he is joined by National Turkey Federation Chairman Ronnie Parker on the South Lawn of the White House on Nov 21, 2022. — AFP



Local

Kuwait PM receives leader of UK House of Commons

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah received on Monday at Seif Palace visiting Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons Penny Mordaunt, and her accompanying delegation, with the attendance of Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Barrak Al-Shaitan.

The meeting was attended by the head of His Highness the Prime Minister's Diwan Abdulaziz Dekheel Al-Dekheel, Undersecretary of His Highness the Prime Minister's Diwan Sheikh Khaled Talal Al-Khaled Al-Sabah, and Head of His Highness the Prime Minister's Office Hamad Bader Al-Amer. —KUNA



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah receives at Seif Palace visiting Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons Penny Mordaunt and her accompanying delegation on Monday. —KUNA

Abused and assaulted women forced to drop cases in Kuwait

With advent of social media, violence against women gets more noticed

By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: Violence against women by men in Kuwait has become noticeable after the advent of social media, as witnesses record incidents to use as evidence to support abused women at police stations. But many battered women give up their rights after reporting their husbands, brothers or fathers at police stations, and this is due to many reasons. Kuwait Times discussed with lawyer and activist Niveen Maraafi the reasons that battered women drop their complaints, despite the possibility that they could be exposed to another attack that could leave them injured, suffer from mental health issues or in some cases get killed.

Maraafi stressed the main reason that leads women to withdraw their cases is local traditions that pressure women to obey their husbands and justify violence against them. "In addition, the family pressure that is on these women is not easy. The

family take advantage of her children and exploit her maternal affection to urge their mother to drop the complaint against the male abuser, their father for an example. Her rights then will be completely forfeited, especially as she is exposed to more abuse," she said.

Maraafi pointed out there are several methods abusers use in order to make battered women withdraw their complaints -one of them is blackmailing her with her children. "When the woman withdraws the case, no action will be taken from the police side to follow up with the victim to make sure she is safe, as the case will be completely closed and end at that point," she explained.

Regarding the role of laws set to protect women from abusers, she explained there are some laws in Kuwait subject to local traditions that lead to dropping cases. "Despite the danger to the victim that is clear to the authorities, if she withdraws the case, there is nothing they can do," Maraafi said. Pointing

out that many abuse cases against women and dropping of complaints is part of their misunderstanding of religion. "The concept of Islamic law the way people explain by themselves is totally wrong, as it is forbidden in Islam for men to abuse their wives. The evidence of this is the wife has the right to divorce her husband due to harm, according to sharia laws," she added.

Meanwhile, from a legal point of view, Maraafi suggested a couple of solutions that can contribute to protecting women from their abusers after withdrawing cases. "There should be specialized authorities that follow up the criminal complaint without the woman's intervention in the event of the case's withdrawal, in addition to holding abusers accountable. Also, not shelving the case once the woman withdraws it and following up with her," she said. "Besides this, they should allow concerned authorities to have the right to intervene in the victim's case till the end."



Patients Helping Fund provides wheelchairs

KUWAIT: As part of cooperation between the Patients Helping Fund Society, the social development department and Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah Health City, the society provided wheelchairs for the elderly who frequent Jumana bint Abi Taleb School. The society

holds awareness programs in schools, such as "My school lives up to my health", as it gives priority to promote health awareness among various groups in Kuwait, in addition to helping patients with nearly KD 9 million annually.

The society participated with Munira Al-Ayyar Health Center in Kaifan on International Diabetes Day on Nov 17, 2022. The society contributed to promoting health awareness by distributing publications including a pamphlet on how to use medicine, nutrition advice, diabetes guide, diet food and how to avoid diabetes complications and other related topics.



Kuwait one of largest donors to UNICEF

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development stated that the State of Kuwait is considered one of the most prominent and largest donor countries to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), with contributions amounting to KD 77 million (equivalent to \$250 million) since 2010 to date.

This came during a speech delivered by the Director General of the Kuwait Fund for Economic Development, Marwan Al-Ghanim on Monday, during the celebration of honoring the United Nations Organization. The United Children's Fund of the Kuwaiti Fund and in celebration of the Diamond Jubilee and its development efforts in improving the living conditions of generations of children in several regions in the world.

"Kuwait has a clear footprint in supporting children directly by providing financial support to organizations specialized in motherhood and childhood, as UNICEF has become one of the most important recipients of grants from the State of Kuwait due to its pioneering role in the field and its activities in child protection and well-being," Al-Ghanim said.

The Kuwait Fund has provided UNICEF with seven grants, amounting to approximately 6 million dinars to finance the organization's projects in different regions, in addition to providing a separate grant of KD 1.2 million to the organization to support the response plan during the COVID pandemic in Syria within the program to support the future of Syria.

He explained that "the coming period will also witness the provision of a new grant of 615 thou-

sand dinars which is in the process of being approved by the Board of Directors of the Fund to finance the renovation of schools in Lebanon as part of the investment project in the infrastructure for children and youth education."

Al-Ghanim expressed his welcome to the International Children's Day, which falls on November 20 of each year, reviewing some of the contributions of the State of Kuwait represented by the Kuwait Fund for Development in the field of promoting the rights and well-being of children in developing countries through a variety of activities. "The fund's commitment to developing the strategic partnership with the organization in order to support child protection efforts and achieve the ultimate goal of providing an environment that is healthy and safe for the world's underprivileged children," he added.

On her part, the UNICEF Regional Director in the Middle East and North Africa, Adele Khadr, expressed her thanks and gratitude for the Kuwaiti support for children during 60 years of development work, through which it contributed to improving the living conditions of generations of children around the world. "The profound impact of the Fund's loans and grants has been in the sectors of education, health, agriculture, irrigation, transportation and communications, as well as improving indicators related to childhood, such as the death rate and disease prevalence rates," she added.

She also renewed her thanks to the Fund for the success of the projects it funded during the past five years, which resulted in a strategic shift in joint work and direct partnership during response to crises threatened children and their proper development, which was embodied in 10 projects that addressed famine in Somalia, Nigeria, South Sudan and Yemen, as well as supporting health programs in Syria, Lebanon and Yemen and building health systems in the Gaza Strip to protect children and their families from pollution and diseases. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Marwan Al-Ghanim being honored.



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Local

'Escaping to vast desertescapes': Kuwait camping season begins

Business owners raise prices of camping equipment and tents



KUWAIT: Camping tents are pitched in deserts away from the bustle of the city. Camping is an ideal opportunity to escape on the weekends from crowded places.

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: The camping season has begun, and many people took the opportunity to escape to vast desertescapes and open-air spaces away from the bustle of the city and closed commercial complexes. Kuwait Municipality had announced that the camping season began on Nov 15 and will continue until March 15. Speaking to Kuwait Times, Haya Adnan, a Kuwaiti, said the camping season is considered the best period in Kuwait. Haya and her family believe it is a great opportunity to enjoy the country, especially after Kuwait's hot and dry summer.

She added camping is an ideal opportunity to escape on the weekends from crowded places, noting the camps allow visitors to get away from annoying work pressures and engage in several activities, including barbecuing, team sports, horse riding and others.

On the other hand, Abdullah Nourani, a Kuwaiti, said prices have gone up this season, alleging business owners are taking advantage of people who need to enjoy this time of the year. "Some commercial businesses raised prices of camping equipment and tents. Also, this season there are fewer offers on camping supplies than the years before," he said.

Mishaal Ali, a commercial camp owner, said price hikes are due to inflation and increases in production costs. "The effect of the pandemic is still affecting some stores. The closure of the tent market had caused great financial hardship for hundreds of families who live on income from this sector," he pointed out. He said rentals of small camps that include tents and facilities such as bathrooms, cooking and barbecue equipment, electricity, and other



amenities range between KD 30-50 per day, adding prices of large camps may reach KD 120 depending on the level of service and facilities.

Kuwaiti Talal Al-Fadhli said one-day rentals are not reasonable, noting that these prices do not include most facilities and bouncy castles for children. "Prices are expensive. Traveling is cheaper than renting a one-day tent. The camp may cost more than KD 50 per day, while others may reach KD 400, depending on the equipment and services they provide," he said.

Fadhli affirmed that renting a camp in Kuwait comes with a lot of issues, such as a lack of cleanliness or uneven ground under the tent. "Most of the camps are subject to removal at any time because most of them are unlicensed. They are licensed as a camp, but not commercially licensed and are not allowed to rent out. There is always a fear that the municipality will arrive and remove everything that has been equipped and built," he said.

Fadhli indicated that the camp business is very profitable. "Let's do the math: Large camps usually have 80 tents and are set up for 12 weeks. Income without any services may reach at least KD 38,000, apart from renting buggies and entry tickets for children's areas. Also, prices are doubled during holidays and New Year's Eve, where one night costs KD 150," he calculated.

Hamedan, a salesman at the tent market, said prices of camping supplies vary between KD 50 and KD 300, depending on the quantity and the quality of chairs, tents, barbecue grills, charcoal and others.

The Municipality announced the opening of camp reservations in 34 locations identified for setting up spring camps for this season in the governorates of Jahra and Ahmadi. The cost of securing a campsite is KD 100 refundable by the Municipality, and KD 50 in non-refundable charges, provided the site is used by the same person to whom it is licensed to.

Obesity-related surgeries in Kuwait on rise

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Consultant internist, gastroenterologist and hepatologist Dr Wafaa Al-Hashash said there is a close link between sleeve gastrectomy and an increase in gastroesophageal reflux, adding that 40 percent of those who undergo the procedure had reflux within six months, ie around 2,000 people. She said the number of surgeries related to obesity conducted in Kuwait reached around 5,000 per year, and this places Kuwait in second place after Chile. She said 25 percent of patients who underwent gastrectomy had the stretta technique to treat gastroenterological reflux, ie around 1,250 persons had the stretta technique and the recovery rate is over 90 percent.

Dr Hashash said the stretta technique provides a safe non-surgical option to treat reflux. It is also suitable for patients who do not wish to change gastrectomy to bypass, adding that it is conducted using frequency waves and endoscopy of the lower esophageal valve, and there is no need to stay in hospital afterwards. Dr Hashash said there are different means by which reflux can be treated after gastrectomy, including using proton inhibitor drugs, which are medicines that help strengthen the lower esophageal valve and regulate the digestive system, in addition to following a nutrition system through which the person can get the required nutritious elements while avoiding foods that cause reflux. Hashash warned against ignoring reflux, because it can lead to esophagus infection, which can lead to cancer.



Italian Embassy hosts evening of opera in Kuwait

KUWAIT: With a highly acclaimed recital of opera arias performed by "Bel Canto d'Italia", the Italian Embassy in Kuwait celebrated the opening of the 45th edition of the Kuwait International Book Fair at Abdulhussein Abdulreda Theatre in Salmiya.

Arias by the main Italian composers (including Giuseppe Verdi, Giacomo Puccini, Gioachino Rossini and Vincenzo Bellini) as well as those by Mozart on texts (libretti) written by the Italian Lorenzo da Ponte, to confirm once again how the Italian has been over the centuries the language of music by excellence.

The Ambassador of Italy, Carlo Baldocci, said he was particularly pleased with the evening and emphasized the value of the group of artists present, highlighting how it also represents the opening of the new 2022-23 musical season of the Italian Embassy in Kuwait.

GCC conference on cancer opens in Sharjah

KUWAIT: The events of the fifth GCC conference for cancer began in Sharjah on Nov 21 under the sponsorship of Sheikh Dr Sultan Al-Qasimi, member of the Supreme Council and Ruler of Sharjah.

The conference was attended by health ministries in the GCC as well as the Gulf Union for Fighting Cancer, represented by Secretary General Dr Khaled Al-Saleh.

Dr Saleh hailed the GCC scientific collective, which is evident in the GUFC's aim to strengthen and encourage scientific efforts, especially in the field of cancer. "The association hopes to continue its successful cooperation with the private sector for its achievements that positively reflect on societies and Gulf people, who have proved they are advanced



SHARJAH: Dr Khaled Al-Saleh and Minister of Health Ahmad Al-Awadhi

societies and the human is at their core," Saleh said.

A private meeting was held after the opening to discuss the need for the region to have a centralized cancer research resource, attended by the ruler of Sharjah and GCC health ministers. Dr Saleh hosted the special meeting, which involved discussion

about the weakness of research budgets in the GCC, especially in the field of cancer. They stressed on the importance to build such a center to decrease migrators, adding it is necessary to boost the budget for scientific research and increase Arab and GCC research staff.

Legalese

Capital punishment in Kuwait

By Fajer Ahmed

local@kuwaittimes.net



In the last week, there has been a lot of discussion about capital punishment in Kuwait and whether capital punishment is inhumane or not. Also, there has been what seems to be some international pressure that some may perceive as interference, from the EU. Regardless of what my or your opinion is and how you see capital punishment, I just wanted to take the time to explain its legalities.

What is the process of capital punishment?

1. The process of capital punishment is lengthy. It has to go through three trials, and all judges in each trial have to agree on capital punishment. A higher authority must then sign on it.

2. If the accused person has no money for a lawyer or does not appeal, a lawyer is assigned to them. The appeal must be made in the first trial, so that the accused person gets three fair trials.

Who can get capital punishment? What are the crimes punishable by capital punishment in Kuwait?

- Murder, which is deliberate, premeditated by ill will (article 150 + article 151).

- Any person that kidnaps another person using force or threat or with the intent to kill, hurt or rape (article 180).

- Sexual intercourse with a female without her consent and the accused was related to the girl, or was her teacher, caretaker or servant (article 186).

- Sexual intercourse with a female with her consent but the female is not mentally stable and the accused knew this or if the girl was under 15 years of age, and in both cases the accused was related to the girl, or was her teacher, caretaker or servant (article 187).

- Capital punishment found in other Kuwaiti laws, like national security crimes (treason, for example).

- For growing, selling, buying or importing or exporting drugs, the accused might get capital punishment. The following usually has to be present to get capital punishment:

- 1) The drug is cocaine, heroin, acetyl dihydrocodeine or codeine.

- 2) The accused is a public employee.
- 3) A minor was used to help with the drugs crime.

- 4) It's the accused second time convicted of either growing, selling, buying or importing or exporting drugs.

Who is exempt from capital punishment?

1. Anyone that has mental issues or is not mentally fit.

2. Anyone under the age of 18 at time of the crime.

3. Any woman with young children.

Local

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News in brief

Kuwaitization policy continues

KUWAIT: In response to a parliamentary question from an MP who asked if there is any Kuwaiti consultant at the Ministry for National Assembly Affairs, Ammar Al-Ajmi said: "The answer to the question is connected to something that happened before my start at the ministry, as non-Kuwaiti consultants were contracted during the previous government. We are going to continue the Kuwaitization policy in employment to develop the nation."

Support for food security

KUWAIT: At the instruction of Municipality Affairs Minister Abdulaziz Al-Mojel, the Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources is going to provide agricultural support for the fiscal year 2021-22 to the tune of KD 2,153,300 in the budget of the fiscal year 2022-23 after the approval of the finance ministry. "The quick response to requests by the authority is within the political leadership and minister's strategy to provide for the need of farmers and continue supporting them to achieve local sufficiency to achieve food security," vice manager of Agricultural Affairs Nasser Taqi said.

Rajaan inheritors' request rejected

KUWAIT: In a decisive ruling, a court rejected a complaint by the inheritors of deceased accused Fahad Al-Rajaan to halt the sale of properties in a public auction. The inheritors claimed that their complaint is legitimate and after the death of the accused, the complaint against him became void and it is not permitted to sell his property. They also claimed that there are faults in the procedures taken in the auction.

Kuwaiti Food Bank launches second phase of feeding

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Food and Relief Bank announced Monday, the launch of the second phase of the (feeding) endowment project, whose proceeds are spent on projects of feeding food, water and caring for orphans inside Kuwait. The general supervisor of the project, Fahd Al-Kandari, said in a statement to Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that the project, since its inception, has achieved financial sustainability for the endowment thanks to the efforts of philanthropists and the support of companies and donors, expressing his hope that it will continue at the same level at this stage.

Al-Kandari added that the next step is to coordi-



KUWAIT: Fighter jets of the British Red Arrows, officially known as the Royal Air Force Aerobatic Team, decorated Kuwait's sky on Monday roaring overhead with dazzling colored smoke trails. A large number of people gathered in the seaside along the Arabian Gulf Road to watch the air show as the planes, including Hawk jets, streaked across the skies. The show marked the anniversary of the distinctive Kuwaiti-British relations at diverse levels. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Kuwait DM lauds British Red Arrows parade

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Defense Ministry's Assistant Undersecretary Sheikha Dr Shamayel Al-Sabah on Monday lauded the British Royal Air Force parade in

Kuwait, with the Red Arrows flying over Arabian Gulf Street. Speaking to Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) and Kuwait TV, she said that the State of Kuwait has a long-lasting relationship with the UK, adding that they are looking forward to further collaboration.

On her part, British Ambassador to Kuwait Belinda Lewis called on people to attend the activity and gaze upon the Red Arrows fleet. She added that the team, along with Kuwait Airways will meet with schoolchildren to spark their interest in sciences, technology, engineering and mathematics. She indicated that this diplomatic meeting between the two sides is an oppor-

tunity to discuss the special British-Kuwaiti relations and joint air force efforts. Defense and Security first secretary at the UK's embassy, Peter Bowman, said, in a statement to KUNA, he was proud of the Red Arrows parade in Kuwait. Squadron Leader Tom Bould stated prior to the show that they were ready to put on an exceptional parade, adding that he had already flown in Kuwaiti skies back in 2017, and he was quite excited to see the city from above. British Embassy had invited spectators to attend the show Monday at 3.45 until 4.30, on Arabian Gulf Street between Kuwait Towers and the Green Island. —KUNA

Social media a key realm for promotion of drugs: Experts

Speakers sound alarm bells during seminar at Kuwait University

KUWAIT: Social media have become a key realm for promoting narcotics and amphetamines targeting youth, an expert warned on Sunday. Dr Ayed Al-Hmaidan, an internationally accredited drugs expert, said the dealers share a common goal: increasing intensity of addition for securing the largest number of clients.

"These criminals seek to reach their objective with no regard whatsoever to hazards the drugs cause in the clients' brain and health," he said, addressing a seminar held at the Sociology Faculty of Kuwait University, themed "don't try it." Dr Hmaidan cited several reasons for resorting to the drugs: such as weak faith, wrong belief that they enhance physical strength, bad companions, available money for youngsters, traveling with no company of parents or some trusted persons, desire among some students to study for long hours.

Addicted persons should voluntarily seek help at



KUWAIT: Dr Ayed Al-Hmaidan speaks during the seminar.



KUWAIT: Some drugs are on display at the seminar. —KUNA photos

addiction treatment institutions. In absence of such will, next of kin and some government authorities can report

about the case on the hotline: 1884141 or on the emergency number 112. —KUNA



The Kuwait Food and Relief Bank officials

nate with the relevant authorities to complete the project's progress in its second phase, by donating through the website and platforms of the Kuwait Food and Relief Bank. He stressed that the brother-

hood and interdependence inherent in Kuwaiti society will speed up the completion of the endowment (feeding) and complete the charitable and humanitarian work in the country. —KUNA

Kuwait Library celebrates Egypt's ancient civilization

KUWAIT: A number of academics and history researchers celebrated on Sunday the 200th anniversary of the ancient Egyptian decoding language and the 100th anniversary of the discovering Tutankhamen's tomb at the Kuwait National Library. The celebration was organized by the Arts Faculty at



Dr Abdullah Al-Hajri

Kuwait University in cooperation with the Egyptian Embassy in Kuwait, under the slogan "The Golden Year of Ancient Egyptian Civilization".

Egyptian ambassador to Kuwait Osama Shaltout in a statement to KUNA, praised the depth of the Egyptian-Kuwaiti relations, the role of National Council for Culture, Arts and Literature and the Faculty of Arts at Kuwait University, and their permanent cooperation, adding that Kuwait is a cultural beacon.

In a speech he delivered during the ceremony, Shaltout said that the Egyptian civilization is a leading civilization in its arts, antiquities, science, and human interaction, adding that it was the first civilization in the ancient world to create signs and letters as rules for writing. He stressed the keenness of the ancient Egyptians to record their history and the events they witnessed, noting that with this step "Egypt became the first country in the world to have a written history".

The Dean of the Faculty of Arts at Kuwait University in the history department Dr Abdullah Al-Hajri indicated that Champollion opened the door for new sciences after its announcement, concerned with studying all aspects of the political, social, economic and religious civilization of the Pharaonic era. A number of history professors, Dr Sultan Al-Duwaish, Dr Khaled Al-Nouri and Dr Ahmed Saeed, presented important aspects of the Egyptian civilization, speaking about the discovery of the Rosetta stone, the discovery of the tomb of King Tutankhamen, the Egyptian inscriptions and writings, and the Egyptian antiquities found in the land of Kuwait. The lecture and the celebration were moderated by Professor of History at Kuwait University Dr Al-Sayed Ahmed Mahfouz and the General Coordinator of Culture and Arts at the Egyptian Embassy Dr Ibrahim Salam. —KUNA



DWC prepares plan for new cultural season

KUWAIT: In accordance with its new season's program Diplomatic Women's Committee-Kuwait

(DWC) board members has recently paid a visit to Grand Hyatt Hotel. The members of the committee were received by the management of the hotel at the presence of Ambassador of the Republic of Sierra Leone, the Ambassador of the Republic of Kenya, the spouses of many ambassadors to the state of Kuwait.

During the meeting, Narjis Al-Shatti, DWC adviser, has presented the plan for the committee's new cultural season of the year

2022-23 consisting of historical, cultural, social, and recreational events through its general theme "Let's Discover" including an introduction to the landmarks and institutions of the State of Kuwait.

The management of Grand Hyatt Hotel has prepared an interesting presentation and toured DWC members in the hotel's premises. By their turn, members of the committee expressed their gratitude to the hotel and presented a commemorative shield to its management.



Malaysia's Anwar in talks with arch-rivals

Britain appeal hearing to rule on 'IS bride'

US vows firm commitment to Philippines

MANILA: The United States has an "unwavering" commitment to the Philippines, US Vice President Kamala Harris told the country's president Monday during a visit aimed at countering China and rebuilding ties that were fractured over human rights abuses in the Southeast Asian nation.

Harris is the highest-ranking US official to visit Manila since President Ferdinand Marcos took power in June, signalling a growing rapport between the longtime allies after years of frosty relations under his Beijing-friendly predecessor Rodrigo Duterte.

She also met with her Philippine counterpart Sara Duterte, the daughter of the former leader whose deadly drug war sparked an international investigation into alleged human rights abuses. "We stand with you in defence of international rules and norms as it relates to the South China Sea," Harris told Marcos at the start of talks in the presidential palace in Manila.

"An attack on the Philippine armed forces, public vessels or aircraft in the South China Sea would invoke the US mutual defence commitment... that is our unwavering commitment to the Philippines."

Marcos said he did not "see a future for the Philippines that does not include the United States." The United States has a long and complex relationship with the Philippines—and the Marcos family. Marcos's dictator father ruled the former US colony for two decades with the support of Washington, which saw him as a Cold War ally.

Relations between the two countries soured under the foul-mouthed Duterte. In 2016, Duterte

called Barack Obama a "son of a whore" over warnings he would be questioned by the then US president over his controversial drug war.

Washington is now seeking to bolster its security alliance with Manila under the new president. That includes a mutual defence treaty and a 2014 pact, known by the acronym EDCA, which allows for the US military to store defence equipment and supplies on five Philippine bases.

It also allows US troops to rotate through those military bases. EDCA stalled under Duterte but the United States and the Philippines have expressed support for accelerating its implementation as China becomes increasingly assertive.

"We have identified new locations and have begun a process with the Philippines to finalise those," a US official told reporters on condition of anonymity ahead of Harris's meeting with Marcos.

On Tuesday, Harris will visit the Philippine island province of Palawan, which lies along hotly contested waters in the South China Sea. China claims sovereignty over almost the entire sea, while the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia and Brunei have overlapping claims to parts of it. Beijing has ignored a 2016 international tribunal ruling that its claims have no legal basis. Harris will meet members of the Philippine Coast Guard on board one of its two biggest vessels and deliver a speech.

US commitment

Harris's trip to the Philippines is part of US efforts to remove any doubt about its commitment to the Asia-Pacific as China aggressively expands



MANILA: US Vice President Kamala Harris meets Philippines President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr at Malacanang Palace on Nov 21, 2022. — AFP

its regional influence. It comes after Harris and US President Joe Biden met separately with Chinese President Xi Jinping last week.

Harris reinforced Biden's message that "we must maintain open lines of communication to responsibly manage the competition between our countries" while speaking to Xi on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum in Bangkok, a

White House official said.

While her trip to Palawan would likely annoy China, the United States had more to gain from sending a message of reassurance to the Philippines, said Greg Poling, director of the US-based Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative. "The Philippines will be much more reassured than China will be irritated," Poling said. — AFP

Tehran again strikes Kurdish groups in Iraq

ARBIL, Iraq: Iran again launched deadly missile and drone strikes overnight to Monday against Iranian Kurdish opposition groups based in Iraq whom it accuses of stoking unrest inside the Islamic republic.

One Kurdish peshmerga fighter was reported killed in mountainous northern Iraq, where two of the groups said their bases had been targeted in the latest such barrage

of aerial attacks in recent months. Iran has been shaken by over two months of protests sparked by the death of Kurdish-Iranian woman Mahsa Amini, 22, after her arrest for allegedly breaching the strict dress code for women. Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) has repeatedly struck Kurdish dissident groups based in Iraq, whom it labels "separatist anti-Iranian terrorist groups". One of the groups, the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (PDKI), said it was hit with missiles and suicide drones in Koya and Jejnikan, near Arbil, the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan.

"A member of the peshmerga was killed in an Iranian strike" in the Koya area, said party official Ali Boudaghi. "These indiscriminate attacks are occurring at a time when the terrorist regime of Iran is unable to stop the

ongoing demonstrations in (Iranian) Kurdistan," said the PDKI, the oldest Kurdish party in Iran.

The Iranian Kurdish nationalist group Komala said it was also targeted. "Our HQ was once again attacked by the Islamic regime tonight," it said on Twitter. "We've been carefully prepared for these types of attacks & have no losses for the moment." The autonomous Kurdistan region's government condemned the strikes in a statement, saying: "The repeated violations that undermine the sovereignty of Iraq and the Kurdistan region are unjustifiable."

The Guards charged that the Kurdish groups are backed by "the global arrogance", code for archfoe the United States. It said it had targeted their "headquarters and conspiracy centres" in Iraq and that "the terrorists were struck and suffered heavy casualties".

The US Central Command, which oversees US military operations in the Middle East, condemned the "illegal" Iranian strikes near Arbil. "Such indiscriminate and illegal attacks place civilians at risk, violate Iraqi sovereignty, and jeopardise the hard-fought security and stability of Iraq and the Middle East," said CENTCOM chief General Michael Kurilla.

In Tehran, Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani stressed that the Islamic republic "desires that there be no threat to Iran's security from Iraqi territory". He said that during two meetings last month, "we insisted with the Iraqi authorities and the Kurdistan region on the fact that this region should not be a place of transit of material and weapons to be used in the unrest. "So far, those expectations have not been met." — AFP



> Kids play with water guns during national celebrations (2015).

Go ahead. Forward it. ➡

International

Turkish president Erdogan says mulling ground operation in Syria

Ankara considers YPG to be a PKK-affiliated terror group

ISTANBUL, Turkey: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Monday he was mulling going beyond air strikes and launching a ground operation in Syria following a deadly rocket strike on a Turkish border town.

Erdogan also renewed warnings that those attacking Turkey will pay dearly, a day after Ankara's forces launched air raids on bases of outlawed Kurdish groups in northern Syria and Iraq. "There is no question that this operation be limited to only an aerial operation," Erdogan told reporters on returning to Turkey from Qatar where he attended the FIFA World Cup opening.

"Competent authorities, our defence ministry and chief of staff will together decide the level of force that should be used by our ground forces," Erdogan said. "We have already warned that we will make those who violate our territory pay," he added.

Erdogan spoke after a rocket strike from Syrian territory killed at least three people, including a child, in a border Turkish town. That strike came a day after Turkey carried out air raids against the bases of Kurdish militant groups in northern Syria and Iraq which it said were being used to launch "terrorist" attacks on Turkish soil.

The overnight raids mainly targeting positions held by Syrian Kurdish forces in northern and northeastern Syria killed at least 31 people, according to the British-based monitoring group the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR).

The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), among those attacked, said Turkey launched new air strikes on Monday. The Turkish raids, codenamed Operation Claw-Sword, came a week after a blast in central Istanbul killed six people and wounded 81.

'70 planes and drones'

Turkey has blamed that attack on the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The blast, the deadliest in five years, revived bitter memories of a wave of nationwide attacks between 2015 and 2017. The PKK has waged a bloody insurgency there for decades and is designated a terror group by Ankara and its Western allies.

But it has denied involvement in the Istanbul explosion. Strikes also targeted PKK bases in northern Iraq's mountainous regions of Kandil, Asos and Hakkurk, and bases of the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), in Ayn al-Arab (called Kobani in Kurdish), Tal Rifaat, Jazira and Derik regions in Syria, Ankara's defence ministry said.

Ankara considers the YPG to be a PKK-affiliated terror group, Erdogan said consultations were ongoing on the strength of Ankara's military response and added that the weekend strikes were carried out by "70 planes and drones" who "penetrated 140 kilometres (87 miles) into northern Iraq and 20 kilometres into northern Syria."

An SDF spokesperson told AFP that Turkish airplanes launched on Monday fresh strikes near Kobani, a claim confirmed by the SOHR. A strike hit a regime forces position, according to the SDF. Since the rocket attack in the morning, there has been an exchange of artillery fire between Turkish forces backed by Syrian proxies and the SDF, according to an AFP correspondent.

Erdogan also revealed he had had "no discussion with (US President Joe) Biden or (Russian President Vladimir) Putin on the subject of the operation."

Turkey's latest military push could create problems for its complex relations with its Western allies—particu-



ANKARA, Turkey: Ministry of National Defence of Turkey on November 20, 2022, Turkey's Defence Minister Hulusi Akar (R) chairs a new air operation in northern regions of Iraq and Syria with members of the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) command level at the Turkish Air Force Operations Centre in Ankara. —AFP

larly the United States, which has relied mostly on Syrian Kurdish militia forces in its fight against IS jihadists.

Turkey has often accused Washington of supplying Kurdish forces with weapons. Russia for its part backs pro-Damascus militia in the region. —AFP

Britain appeal hearing to rule on 'IS bride'

LONDON: A woman who lost her British citizenship after joining the Islamic State group in Syria will on Monday have her case reviewed, with her lawyers arguing that she was a "victim of trafficking". Shamima Begum is one of hundreds of Europeans whose fate following the 2019 collapse of the so-called Islamic State caliphate has proved a thorny issue for governments.

Begum, then 15, left her home in east London in 2015 with two school friends to travel to Syria, where she married an IS fighter and had three children, none of whom survived. She was later "found" by British journalists, heavily pregnant in a Syrian camp in February 2019 — and her apparent lack of remorse in initial interviews drew outrage.

Dubbed an "IS bride", she was stripped by the UK of her British citizenship, leaving her stranded and stateless in Syria's Kurdish-run Roj camp. Monday's hearing at the Special Immigration Appeals Commission (SIAC) follows a Supreme Court decision last year to refuse her permission to come to the UK to fight her citizenship case against the Home Office.

'Trafficked by Canadian spy'

Tasnim Akunjee, the Begum family lawyer, told AFP the hearing would be centred around whether she was "considered a victim of trafficking—notably whether the then home secretary (Sajid Javid) turned his mind to those issues when making the decision to strip her of citizenship".

A book published earlier this year by journalist Richard Kerbaj alleged that Begum, now 23, and her

friends were taken into Syria by a Syrian man who was leaking information to the Canadian security services.

Mohammed Al-Rashed is alleged to have been in charge of the Turkish side of an extensive IS people smuggling network. "It is now fairly well settled that she and her friends were transported across borders... by a Canadian asset of the Canadian security forces," Akunjee said.

"The very definition of trafficking is pretty well established by that," he added. Despite her initial comments, Begum has since expressed remorse for her actions and sympathy for IS victims.

In a documentary last year, she said that on arrival in Syria she quickly realised IS were "trapping people" to boost the caliphate's numbers and "look good for the (propaganda) videos".

Some 900 people are estimated to have travelled from Britain to Syria and Iraq to join the IS group. Of those, around 150 are believed to have been stripped of their citizenship. Human rights group Reprieve told AFP there were currently 20-25 British families, including 36 children, still in camps in Kurdish-controlled northeast Syria, where suspected relatives of IS fighters have been held. Other European nations have also been grappling with how to handle the return of their own nationals.

Hostile public opinion

Some countries, such as Germany and Belgium, have tried to carry out regular repatriation operations. Last month, Berlin said it had settled "almost all known cases" of German families in jihadist prison camps in Syria, claiming to have repatriated 76 minors as well as 26 women.

According to Belgium's federal prosecutor's office, in mid-2022 there remained "a few women and a few children" in the Syrian camps. Faced with hostile public opinion, however, France had been carrying out repatriations on a case-by-case basis.



LONDON: File photo shows Renu, eldest sister of missing British girl Shamima Begum, holds a picture of her sister while being interviewed by the media in central London. —AFP

But it picked up the pace in recent months after criticism from the European Court of Human Rights. Since July, Paris has repatriated 31 women and 75 children in two operations. Some 175 French children and 69 women are believed to still be in the camps.

Reprieve director Maya Foa told AFP that Begum had been "groomed online as a child and taken to Syria by a Canadian intelligence spy". "Most British women in northeast Syria were groomed, coerced or deceived by ISIS, which operated as a sophisticated trafficking gang."

Many were young girls at the time and were "held against their will and subjected to sexual and other forms of exploitation", she added. Speaking on Monday ahead of the hearing, UK Immigration Minister Robert Jenrick told Sky News it was a "fundamental principle" that "where people do things which undermine the UK interest to such an extent that it is right for the Home Secretary to have the power to remove their passport." —AFP

Schoolgirl murder horrifies France

BORDEAUX, France: A 31-year-old man has been charged over the abduction and murder of a schoolgirl in France, just a month after the killing of a girl in Paris caused outrage. The latest victim, a 14-year-old named Vanessa in French media, was snatched on her way home from school in the town of Tonneins last Friday in the rural Lot-et-Garonne region.

A local Frenchman, who spent the day smoking cannabis in his car, confessed to raping and strangling her before dumping her body in an abandoned building, local prosecutors said in a statement on Sunday.

While in custody, he said he had not planned the crime and did not know the victim, adding that "his acts were sexually motivated," the statement said. "This man is overwhelmed by the seriousness of his acts. For the moment, he will stay in his cell and will meet experts who are the best placed to explain what appears completely inexplicable," his lawyer, Alexandre Martin, told the BFM news channel.

The killer, named as Romain Chevrel, lived with his partner and has a one-month-old daughter. He was previously convicted for sexually assaulting children when he was aged 15. Murders of school children are extremely rare in France and the killing of a 12-year-old girl in Paris in October caused shock and anger.

The victim was abducted, sexually assaulted and murdered after school in a crime branded as "evil" by President Emmanuel Macron. The case kicked off a fierce political row because the alleged killer was a mentally disturbed Algerian woman, in France illegally and the subject of an expulsion order. —AFP

Amir grants amnesty...

Continued from Page 1

Meanwhile, opposition MP Hamdan Al-Azmi carried out his threat and filed to grill Minister of Public Works and Minister of Electricity and Water Amani Bugammaz on Monday, saying her appointment constituted a conflict of interests. The grilling claimed that Bugammaz acted as an advisor for a Turkish company undertaking the multi-billion-dollar Kuwait airport project. He added the project was delayed by one and a half years and the company was required to pay a delay fine of

KD 85 million.

The lawmaker charged that there is a concern over the minister's capability to collect the delay fine, because she had worked as an advisor for the company. The minister told the Assembly last week she stopped working for the company in April 2020, and that it was the engineering department of Kuwait University which assigned her to work as an advisor for the Turkish company.

MP Azmi also charged that the minister did not follow the rules in the appointment of a number of senior officials at the two ministries. The lawmaker said he filed the grilling to stop what he claimed are violations of public funds. Assembly Speaker Ahmad Al-Saadoun said he sent a copy of the grilling to the government, adding it will be listed on the Assembly's agenda for next week.

them. "I pulled my mother's hand, and we ran outside," he said. "I heard people screaming for help from all around me," Azhari told AFP. The majority of deaths were counted in one hospital, the head of Cianjur's local administration Herman Suherman said, with most of the victims killed in the ruins of collapsed buildings.

He told Indonesian media the town's Sayang hospital had no power after the quake, leaving doctors unable to operate on victims immediately. More health workers were urgently needed due to the overwhelming number of patients, he said. Locals rushed victims to the hospital in pickup trucks and on motorbikes, according to footage obtained by AFP.

They were placed in front of the facility as residents spread a tarpaulin on the road for the bodies. At another facility, Cimacan hospital, green tents were erected outside for makeshift treatment, according to an AFP reporter at the scene. Victims arrived covered in blood, while parents looked for their children. Kamil, the governor, said multiple landslides had cut off road access to some areas and bulldozers were being used to reopen them.

Shops, a hospital and an Islamic boarding school in the town were severely damaged, according to Indonesian media. Collapsed buildings and debris lined the streets in Cianjur. The town is situated in a hilly area where many houses are built with a mixture of mud and concrete. "The ambulances keep on coming," Suherman said. "There are many families in villages that have not been evacuated." —AFP

WHO identifying pathogens that can cause pandemics

GENEVA: The World Health Organization said on Monday it was thrashing out a new list of priority pathogens that risk sparking pandemics or outbreaks and should be kept under close observation. The WHO said the aim was to update a list used to guide global research and development (R&D) and investment, especially in vaccines, tests and treatments. As part of that process, which started on Friday, the United Nations' health agency is convening over 300 scientists to consider evidence on more than 25 virus families and bacteria.

They will also consider the so-called "Disease X" — an unknown pathogen that could cause a serious international epidemic. "Targeting priority pathogens and virus families for research and development of countermeasures is essential for a fast and effective epidemic and pandemic response," said WHO emergencies director Michael Ryan. "Without significant R&D investments prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, it would not have been possible to have safe and effective vaccines developed in record time." The list was first published in 2017.

It currently includes COVID-19, Ebola virus disease and Marburg virus disease, Lassa fever, Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS), Nipah, Zika and Disease X. For each pathogen identified as a priority, experts will pinpoint knowledge gaps and

research priorities. Desired specifications for vaccines, treatments and diagnostic tests can then be drawn up. Efforts are also made to facilitate clinical trials to develop such tools, while efforts to strengthen regulatory and ethics oversight are also considered. The revised list is expected to be published before April 2023.

The pathogen threat sessions come as the WHO prepares for the next round of talks towards a pandemic treaty. An intergovernmental negotiating body is paving the way towards a global agreement that could eventually regulate how nations prepare for and respond to future pandemic threats. They are due to meet in Geneva from December 5 to 7 for a third meeting to draft and negotiate a WHO convention or other kind of international agreement on pandemic preparedness and response.

A progress report will be presented to WHO member states next year, with the final outcome presented for their consideration in 2024. An initial draft text for the December meeting emerged last week. The Panel for a Global Public Health Convention, an independent coalition of statespersons and health leaders, said the draft did not go far enough, despite its bright spots. The panel said Monday that more should be done to establish accountability and clear timelines for alert and response to avoid damaging consequences when an outbreak emerges.

"Once an outbreak is detected, there are often a few critical hours to report, assess and act to stop the spread of a disease before it becomes virtually unstoppable," the panel said in a statement. "The current draft does not go far enough to call out the urgency needed to either prepare for disease X or known pathogens, or to respond at the early stage," it said. —AFP

162 killed in shallow quake...

Continued from Page 1

62. Due to miscounting, officials offered wildly fluctuating death tolls after an Indonesian stadium disaster last month. The BNPB said 25 people remained trapped under the rubble as the rescue mission stretched into the night. The agency said more than 2,000 houses were damaged and Kamil said more than 13,000 people were taken to evacuation centers.

"You can see it yourself, some got their heads, feet sewn outdoors. Some got stressed and started crying," Kamil said. Kamil said power had been partially restored by the evening, without specifying if that meant by generators or connection to a power grid. The afternoon quake was centered in the Cianjur region and local authorities earlier said as many as 700 had been wounded, warning the death toll could rise further. "Because there are still a lot of people trapped on the scene, we assume injuries and fatalities will increase over time," Kamil said as ambulance sirens blared in the background.

Agus Azhari, 19, was with his elderly mother in the family home when their living room was destroyed within seconds, parts of the walls and roof collapsing around

Biden turns 80, but no party...

Continued from Page 1

He promised to make his decision public in early 2023. Various recent polls say a majority of Americans do not want Biden to run again. While influential figures who are over 70 or even 75 years

old are ample in the American political landscape, the midterm elections have brought some initial generational change in the Democratic Party.

Rep Nancy Pelosi, 82, announced her decision Thursday not to run for a new term as speaker of the House of Representatives. Biden underwent a thorough medical checkup about a year ago, and the results concluded that he was "a healthy, vigorous" man who is fit to serve as president. But the rigors of the Oval Office also have made their mark on Biden, who walks now with a stiffer gait and suffers moments of confusion. —AFP

International

Malaysia's opposition leader Anwar in talks with arch-rivals despite anti-graft pledge

An agreement with UMNO would give Anwar an extra 30 seats for a simple majority of 112

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia: Malaysian opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim said on Monday he is in talks with the party of ex-premier Najib Razak, who is in jail for corruption, to form the next government after an inconclusive election.

Anwar's multi-ethnic coalition, which campaigned on an anti-corruption ticket, won 82 seats in Saturday's election, the most of any bloc but still short of the majority needed to form government. Malaysia, one of Southeast Asia's biggest economies, has had three changes of government in as many years, underscoring recent political instability.



Promise to fight corruption

Saturday's election offered no immediate solution to that impasse, only more of the political horse-trading that have characterised recent polls. "I am still very optimistic that we will be able to form a government, more transparent, more democratic and to safeguard the interests of the people in Malaysia," Anwar told a news conference.

Another bloc, headed by former premier Muhyiddin Yassin, has also claimed it has enough backing to form government with the support of the conservative Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS). Malaysia's king is poised

to break the stalemate. Parties have been told to submit their preferred prime minister and coalition partners to the king's palace, with a deadline extended to 2:00 pm local time (0600 GMT) Tuesday.

Anwar spoke after holding formal talks with the incumbent ruling bloc Barisan Nasional, which is dominated by Najib's graft-tainted United Malays National Organisation (UMNO). He said the talks with his old foes were predicated on him becoming the prime minister, a dream he has held for more than two decades.

An agreement with UMNO would give Anwar an extra 30 seats for a simple majority of 112. UMNO dominated Malaysian politics for decades but registered its worst election performance since independence in 1957.

'Court is court'

It also suffered a humiliating defeat in the 2018 election due to public anger over the 1MDB graft scandal that involved billions of dollars of state funds. Najib, who was at the centre of the scandal, is serving a 12-year jail term.

Anwar had campaigned on a promise to fight corruption, an issue that has come into sharper focus as Malaysians struggle with soaring food prices. Asked about pending corruption cases involving more UMNO leaders, he said he would leave it to the justice system.

"Court is court. The judiciary must be free from the executive," Anwar said. The apparent contradiction in Anwar seeking support from a corruption-tainted party was not lost on political observers.

"Anwar and his coalition must thread the discussion of a unity government carefully so as not to alienate its supporters," said Asrul Hadi Abdullah Sani, deputy managing director at BowerGroupAsia.



KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia: Malaysia's opposition leader and chairman of Pakatan Harapan (The Alliance Hope) Anwar Ibrahim (C) gives a press conference in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on November 21, 2022. — AFP

Big gains for Islamists

PAS became the largest party in Muhyiddin's bloc after Saturday's vote, triggering worries about its influence on national policy. The party, for example, forced the cancellation of an annual craft beer festival in the capital, Kuala Lumpur, in 2017.

Two women convicted of having lesbian sex were also canded in front of more than 100 spectators in a PAS-ruled state the following year. "I will see first if they abolish things like gambling and alcohol. I know in Islam, Muslims cannot do these but you cannot override non-

Muslims' enjoyment," said warehouse manager Leonard Tan, 56, adding that he would migrate if the business environment was affected.

"If the direction is to close the activities that bring in revenue, it will scare off investors," he said. Islamist conservatism has been creeping into Malaysian society and politics for years, with ultra-conservatives eroding its traditionally moderate brand of Islam. The majority of Malaysia's 33 million people are Malay and Muslim, but it is also home to substantial ethnic Chinese and Indian minorities. — AFP



UTTARKASHI, India: In this photograph taken on September 14, 2022, daily wage workers paste labels on the bottles with melt-water of Gangotri glacier which is the primary source of the pious river Ganges, at the Indian Post office in Uttarkashi. — AFP

India at 75: Hindu faith bottled and home-delivered

GANGOTRI, India: High in the Himalayas, where the mighty Ganges is still a frigid glacial stream, labourers fill jerry cans with its holy waters to be distributed to Hindus all over India. Buyers sparingly use the precious liquid to bless important occasions, from births, weddings, and funerals to festivals such as Diwali or the purchase of a new car.

"This is for every faithful Hindu who can't get here personally," said one of the workers in the pilgrimage town of Gangotri, giving his name as Ramesh. "It feels blessed to be part of a project that reaffirms our Hindu faith and delivers this divine water to all corners of the country," he told AFP.

The scheme is run by the Indian postal service and is one example of a raft of initiatives, from the symbolic to the gargantuan, launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi promoting Hinduism in the country 75 years after independence. The water is considered purest closest to its source so is collected in Gangotri, where the Ganges starts its roughly 2,500-kilometre (1,550-mile) journey across India, and trucked to a bottling plant 100 kilometres downstream.

After being left to settle for three or four days, it is filtered in tanks before workers decant it by hand into 250-millilitre plastic bottles. Bought over the counter at post offices around India, they cost just 30 rupees (\$0.37) each—customers can also order them online for home delivery at 321 rupees for a pack of four. Millions of the little containers have been sold since the scheme launched six years ago.

Hindu highway

Since winning elections in 2014, Modi has put Hinduism front and centre of his government in the officially secular nation of 1.4 billion. The core tenet of Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and its militaristic ideological parent the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, is that Hinduism is India's original religion.

This worries India's 210 million Muslims and other

minorities. Social media is rife with hate speech and attacks on Muslims and Christians have risen, activists say. Modi's biggest religious construction project is a grand temple being built in the ancient city of Ayodhya.

Hindu zealots destroyed a centuries-old mosque there three decades ago, triggering sectarian violence that killed more than 1,000 people—most of them Muslims. The government has also pushed a \$1.5-billion highway project in the northern state of Uttarakhand, which will make it easier for Hindu pilgrims to reach Gangotri and three other Himalayan temples.

The sites already receive hundreds of thousands of devotees each year, and environmental activists are concerned about building grand highways and tunnels in the ecologically sensitive region. Modi's government has made clear it will not let up on its vision, however, channelling money into researching the properties of cow urine—a sacred animal in Hinduism—and finding "proof" of legends in Hindu scriptures.

Some school textbooks have been rewritten to air-brush the role played by Muslims in Indian history, while Islamic-sounding names of cities have been changed.

Special delivery

These "dramatic initiatives... create an ethos of a majoritarian nation and sublimely reinforce the feeling that we now see ourselves as a de-facto Hindu country," said Hartosh Singh Bal, political editor of The Caravan, an Indian English-language magazine.

"Modi knows exactly what he's doing," he added. "If critics now raise concerns about minorities or injustice, they can be labelled as someone who's against such schemes delivering holy Ganges water—and shut them up." Recipients of the precious liquid, though, have no such concerns.

New Delhi postman Rupesh Kumar, 23, has made several deliveries of the holy water, including during the current auspicious festive period. He feels "additional responsibility" whenever he is carrying it to a customer for their ritual needs, he told AFP.

"We also used Ganges water in the family for all special and religious occasions," he said. "People are often very thankful and polite after I deliver these bottles to their homes." — AFP

China reports more COVID deaths, infections surge

BEIJING: China reported two new deaths from COVID-19 on Monday, both elderly Beijing residents, as several major cities persisted with strict virus curbs despite a much-touted recent loosening.

The last major economy wedded to a zero-COVID policy, Chinese authorities have continued to impose snap lockdowns, mass testing and lengthy quarantines in response to emerging outbreaks.

Despite the central government this month announcing its most significant easing of the measures so far, authorities in many areas have stuck to hardline curbs as the number of new cases has spiked. Monday's deaths involved a 91-year-old woman with a history of stroke and Alzheimer's disease, and an 88-year-old man with a history of cancer, bronchitis and stroke, local authorities said.

On Sunday, Beijing announced China's first COVID fatality since May, an 87-year-old man whose mild case worsened after he contracted a bacterial infection. New cases in the capital jumped to 962 on Monday from 621 the day before, as authorities maintained a patchwork of restrictions in an effort to extinguish emerging flare-ups.

Nearly 600 areas of the city are currently "high-risk", a designation that typically requires residents to isolate for several days in their housing units or move to state quarantine facilities. In some neigh-

bourhoods, schools have been ordered to move classes online and office employees told to work from home. Hardline curbs were also in place in cities including the southern industrial hub of Guangzhou—where tens of thousands of new cases have emerged in the past week—and northern Shijiazhuang, where officials have ordered residents in six districts to undergo mass testing.

Case spike

China recorded around 27,000 new domestic cases on Monday, according to the National Health Commission—a tiny fraction of its vast population but a steep increase for a country accustomed to figures in the dozens or low hundreds. While the zero-COVID policy has generally kept the number of new cases low, the approach has been tested in recent months by the emergence of virus variants that spread faster than officials can extinguish them.

The strategy has also stifled economic growth, isolated Beijing on the international stage and even sparked rare protests in a country where dissent is routinely crushed. Earlier this month, the government issued 20 rules for "optimising" zero-COVID, reducing quarantine times for overseas arrivals and simplifying a system for assessing the risk of transmission, among other tweaks.

Multiple Chinese cities then cancelled routine mass COVID tests in a move that added to hopes of an eventual reopening. But Asian markets fell Monday as Sunday's COVID death sparked fears officials would reimpose strict, economically painful restrictions. Hong Kong's Hang Seng Index fell nearly two percent—extending a sell-off at the end of last week—while Shanghai was also down. — AFP

Kazakh president Tokayev re-elected

ALMATY, Kazakhstan: Kazakhstan President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev was re-elected as leader of Central Asia's largest country in a landslide, months after deadly unrest, preliminary results showed Monday. Independent monitors criticised a lack of real opposition but regional power broker Russian President Vladimir Putin congratulated Tokayev's "convincing" win despite a cooling in their personal ties over Ukraine.

The 69-year-old, who came to power in 2019, received 81.31 percent of the vote, the oil-rich nation's electoral commission said. Final results were due to be announced within a week, after a tally of votes from



ASTANA, Kazakhstan: Members of a local electoral commission empty a ballot box at a polling station after Kazakhstan's presidential elections in Astana on November 20, 2022. — AFP

abroad. The outcome came as no surprise as Tokayev's five opponents were virtually unknown. None scored double digits and 5.8 percent of voters cast their ballot against all candidates. Turnout was just over 69 percent among 12 million eligible voters, election officials said.

"The people have clearly expressed their confidence in me and we have to justify it," Tokayev said as results emerged. The mission from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) however said the election lacked "competitiveness" and showed the need for legislative reforms. Rich in natural resources and located at the crossroads of important trade routes, Kazakhstan sank into chaos during protests over high living costs in January, which left 238 dead.

'No monopoly of power'

Tokayev—once a steady hand, if generally considered lacking charisma—showed a ruthless streak earlier this year by violently suppressing protests. While Kazakhstan has stabilised, tensions persist, as shown by the arrest last week of seven opposition supporters accused of an attempted coup.

Sunday's election was a chance for Tokayev to consolidate his grip on power. Hoping to turn over a new leaf after the unrest and tensions over the Ukraine war, Tokayev had said he was seeking a "new mandate of trust". And after voting early on Sunday in the capital Astana, he said "the main thing is that there is no monopoly of power". AFP journalists saw voters taking selfies in front of the polling stations in Astana and the economic hub of Almaty. Many said they would be "required" to show the photos when they returned to work on Monday. — AFP



LONDON, United Kingdom: In this file photo taken on March 5, 2010 Britain's Prince Charles (R) talks to South African President Jacob Zuma at Clarence House in London, on the last day of his State Visit to Britain. — AFP

S African appeal court orders Zuma back in prison

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa: An appeal court in South Africa said on Monday that former president Jacob Zuma was unlawfully given medical parole from a jail term last year and should return to prison to complete his sentence. Zuma, 80, had been handed a 15-month term in June 2021 for contempt of court, a move that triggered deadly unrest. But he served only two months before being given parole for medical reasons that remain unclear. Parole was granted by the head of

South Africa's prison service, despite an opinion by the service's medical committee that Zuma did not meet the required conditions. "This court has now determined that Mr Zuma's release on medical parole was unlawful," the supreme court of appeal said. "Mr Zuma in law has not finished serving this sentence. He must return to the Estcourt Correctional Center to do so," it said, referring to a jail northwest of the city of Durban. According to medical assessments cited in the appeal court's decision, Zuma has problems linked to high blood pressure, elevated levels of blood sugar and lesions of the colon.

Zuma, a prominent figure in the fight against apartheid, became president in 2009 and was forced to step down in disgrace by the ANC in 2018 following mounting corruption allegations. But he remains a revered figure among grassroots members of the ruling African National Congress (ANC), who perceive him as

a defender of the poor and oppressed.

When his jail term was announced, violent protests broke out that spiralled into looting, leaving 350 people dead. The order by the supreme court of appeal is unlikely to be the final word in the long-running saga, as Zuma still has recourse to the Constitutional Court, the highest judicial instance in the land.

The prison authorities last month announced that Zuma's 15-month term was now formally over. He has since made several public appearances, singing and dancing before his supporters, and launched a verbal attack on his successor, Cyril Ramaphosa, accusing him of graft and treason. Ramaphosa faces a crucial ANC conference next month, seeking re-election at a time when he is under pressure over allegations that he concealed a multi-million-dollar cash heist at his luxury farmhouse. — AFP

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 22, 2022



Best D&I Award



Best Women Development and Leadership Award.

Zain awarded the 'Best Diversity & Inclusion Strategy' in Middle East

Recognition at Informa's Future Workplace Awards 2022

DUBAI/KUWAIT: Zain, a leading mobile telecom innovator in seven markets across the Middle East and Africa, has been recognized as having the 'Best Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) Strategy' in the Middle East at the Future Workplace Awards 2022, held in Dubai on 15 November, organized by the UK-based Informa Connect, a member of the FTSE 100.

Zain also won the award for "Best Women Development & Leadership Program" at the gala event, solidifying the company's reputation as being one of the most progressive and inclusive companies to work for. Future Workplace Awards (formerly known as Middle East HR Excellence Awards) showcases the best human resources (HR) talent in the Middle East and honors HR professionals in government and the private sector for their outstanding contributions in creating a high performing workforce for the future.

Zain operates one of the most comprehensive D&I programs of any organization in the Middle East, which is now in its fifth year. Since its introduction, Zain's D&I initiative has become a key part of the fabric of the company, transforming how it hires, plans for succession, develops its people, and ultimately creates a vibrant and inclusive culture. The program focuses

on six key pillars: Gender Diversity (WE); Disability Inclusion (WE ABLE); Youth Empowerment Initiatives (ZY); Innovation & Entrepreneurship (Zainiac); Employee Well-being (BE WELL); as well as mentoring (REACH).

Zain Group Chief Diversity & Inclusion Officer, Maryam Saif commented, "To be recognized as an award-winning Diversity and Inclusion team is testament not only to how much we believe in our purpose, but how relentless we are to push for change within Zain. By nurturing a diverse and inclusive culture, through a series of carefully crafted programs and initiatives, we are beginning to observe significant evolution internally. We seek to harness the power of our

differences to position Zain as a global catalyst for change."

Zain's internal agenda seeks to promote innovation from within, with the ZY strategy based on critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration. Through

leadership roles against a background of just 14.5 percent when the program was first introduced. Our focus for Women at Zain is succession, development, and leaders who will be role models for entry level women in tech.

Thanking the judging panel of the Future Workplace Awards 2022 for the recognition of Zain's efforts in the important areas of diversity and inclusion, Saif added, "Zain will continue investing in its people as upskilling staff, mentoring, and guiding them, allowing them to feel part of something that is greater than themselves, and appreciating their individualism and talents, all help build strong workforces which organizations can ultimately harness and benefit from."

Zain's values, of Heart, Radiance and Belonging are ingrained into the company and the culture. It was imperative to integrate the strategy into the DNA of the company for it to be effective and thus Diversity & Inclusion at Zain is closely intertwined with these values, enabling the company to implement its programs and initiatives effectively. The two prestigious D&I awards follow Zain's recent recognition by Forbes magazine as Best Employer in Kuwait and among the top-10 companies to work for in the Middle East.

- Zain also recognized for implementing the 'Best Women Development & Leadership Program'
- Comprehensive D&I strategy reinforces the leadership's vision and focuses on values fundamental to nurturing an inclusive working environment



Lufthansa launches hiring drive as recovery gains pace

FRANKFURT: Lufthansa on Monday launched a drive to hire 20,000 employees, as the German airline giant recovers strongly from the coronavirus pandemic and seeks to tackle staffing shortages. The airline made huge losses when the virus brought global air travel to a halt but a rebound in demand has helped it return to profit this year.

Lufthansa said it was seeking the new hires in Germany, Switzerland, Austria and Belgium, with roles ranging from pilots and flight attendants to technicians and IT specialists. A spokesman said some of the roles were being newly created while some were replacements for people who had left.

"In order to be at the forefront of the industry, we

need dedicated and motivated employees for a variety of tasks and challenges," said personnel chief Michael Niggemann. According to figures published in October, Lufthansa had 108,000 employees at the end of September. It had 138,000 at the end of 2019, prior to the pandemic. The airline industry in Europe is scrambling to hire new staff to cope with the rebound in demand, after many quit or were let go during the pandemic.

Lufthansa, which cut thousands of staff during the pandemic, faced strike action by pilots and ground staff over the summer, due to worker shortages but also rising inflation.

The airline group subsequently agreed to pay hikes for staff in several different areas. In the third quarter, the airline group—which also includes Eurowings, Austrian, Swiss and Brussels Airlines—reported a healthy profit, and declared it had "left the pandemic behind". Lufthansa made huge losses in 2020 and 2021, and had to be bailed out by the German government, but it reported that its finances stabilized earlier than expected. —AFP

Kuwait's MoF reports KD 3bn deficit for 2021-22

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Ministry of Finance (MoF) announced on Sunday a KD 3 billion deficit (\$9.7 billion) in the fiscal year ended in March 31, 2022, a decrease of 72.2 percent compared with the last year. Non-oil revenue up by 38.5 percent compared to last year's closing accounts, the Ministry added in a press release which is highest non-oil revenue recorded in seven years.

Total revenue is up by 76.9 percent compared to last year's closing accounts, while wages and subsidies accounted for 76.0 percent of all expenditure, it said. Capital and infrastructure expenditure accounted for 12.0 percent of total expenditure, it stated.

The State's accounts recorded KD 18.6 billion (\$60.2 billion) in revenue, KD 21.6 billion (\$69.9 billion) in expenditure, a rise of .5 percent compared with the last year, it said. Oil revenue hit KD 16.2 billion (\$52.7 billion), an increase of 84.5 percent from last year, and the non-oil revenue reached KD 2.4 billion (\$7.7 billion), up 38.5 percent from last year, the release said. Average Kuwaiti crude selling price for the fiscal year hit \$80.7 per barrel, and average oil production reached 2.539 million barrels per day, it indicated. "Wages and subsidies posted KD 16.4 billion (\$53.3 billion), comprising 76.0 percent of all expenditure. Capital expenditure is KD 2.6 billion (\$8.4 billion), comprising 12.0 percent of all expenditure," it said.

Kuwait Minister of Finance Abdulwahab Al-Rasheed said: "Naturally the rebounding oil price in the second half of the fiscal year helped shore up Kuwait's revenue. Kuwait has one of the strongest sovereign balance sheets in the world, with one of the lowest sovereign debt to GDP lev-



els globally, and a strong rebounding economy". He added that the government is fully prepared to discuss the final account with the legislative authority and move forward in implementing solutions that are more realistic to develop public finances. The state's budgets and closing accounts must be ratified by the National Assembly in order to be considered final. — AFP

Business

Spain's rail competition heats up with new high-speed entrant

Arrival of third operator a 'historical step' and 'novel' in Europe

MADRID: Spain's high-speed rail market is heating up with a new operator starting passenger services on Friday, making the country the first in Europe with three players in the sector. The newcomers have pushed down prices and increased traffic on the high-speed network, which at around 4,000 km is the world's second longest after China's. Spain, a nation of around 47 million people, is the world's second most popular tourist destination after France.

Private operator Iryo, which is 45 percent owned by Italy's Trenitalia, made an inaugural trip on Monday from Madrid to Valencia on Spain's Mediterranean coast. It will begin passenger services on Friday with 16 daily return trips between Madrid and Barcelona, Spain's two largest cities, 500 km apart. Iryo will compete with French railway company SNCF's firm in the country, Ouigo, which has been operating since May 2021 and Spanish state-owned rail operator Renfe, which opened its first high-speed service in 1992.

The arrival of a third operator is a "historical step" and "novel" in Europe, said Carlos Lerida, a rail transport expert at the Autonomous University of Madrid. "Until now no high-speed rail network has operated with three competitors. Spain could serve as a model," he told AFP. Iryo, which is kicking off its operations in Spain with 20 trains, will in mid-December expand its services to include a Madrid-Valencia route.

In March 2023 it will start running trains from Madrid to Seville and Malaga in the southwestern region of Andalusia. Ouigo already operates trains along the Madrid-Barcelona and Madrid-Valencia routes and plans to start services to the Mediterranean port of Alicante as well as Andalusia next year. Spain's state rail infrastructure operator Adif in 2019 granted contracts allowing the firms to operate on these routes for 10 years.

Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez's government is keen to lower ticket prices for bullet trains to make greater use of the high-speed rail network. Transport Minister Raquel Sanchez said Monday that she wants to extend competition to other high-speed routes such as from Madrid to the northwest-



MADRID: Low-cost train Iryo is pictured on the day of its inaugural trip at Chamartin train station on Nov 21, 2022. — AFP

ern region of Galicia as well as to the northern region of Asturias.

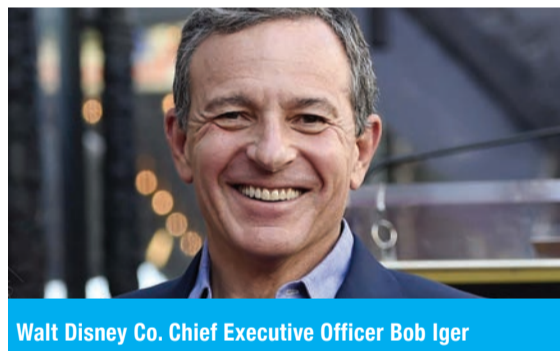
Last month she said greater competition will "democratize high-speed" rail travel and called Spain's model for the sector "revolutionary". Renfe responded to the arrival of Ouigo in May 2021 with the launch of a low-cost bullet train service called

Avlo. The company has also renewed its fleet of trains and improved the service it offers passengers on their journeys. Renfe has a seat sale offering the trip between Madrid and Barcelona for as little as seven euros.

"We see the arrival of competition as an opportunity not as a problem," a Renfe spokesman said. Average

prices for tickets on high-speed trains between Madrid and Barcelona have dropped by 25 percent since Ouigo started operating last year, according to Spain's competition watchdog CNMC.

Passenger traffic on the route has jumped by 47 percent and is up by 14 percent along Spain's entire rail network since May 2021, according to Adif. — AFP



Walt Disney Co. Chief Executive Officer Bob Iger

Disney boots CEO, brings back Bob Iger to lead company

NEW YORK: Disney ousted chief executive Bob Chapek on Sunday and announced that it had brought back former CEO Bob Iger to once again take the reins. The change, a dramatic turn of events for one of the largest media conglomerates in the world, was effective immediately, Disney said in a statement.

"We thank Bob Chapek for his service to Disney over his long career," Susan Arnold, chair of Disney's board, said. The board of directors decided that as the company "embarks on an increasingly complex period of industry transformation, Bob Iger is uniquely situated to lead."

Chapek spent two years as CEO, a period that saw Wall Street concerned about rising expenses at the company. Disney's stock has fallen 41 percent this year. Iger, who previously served as Disney's CEO for 15 years, increasing the company's market capitalization five-fold during that period, has pledged to return as CEO for at least two years, the statement said.

Iger, now 71, had promoted Chapek as his replacement in 2020 but the relationship soured and by early this year the two rarely spoke. "I am deeply honored to be asked to again lead this remarkable team... through unrivaled, bold storytelling," Iger said.

Under Iger's leadership, Disney acquired Pixar, Marvel, Lucasfilm and 21st Century Fox. It also opened its first theme park in China—the Shanghai Disney Resort—and launched the Disney+ and ESPN+ streaming services. Chapek upset many of Disney's 200,000 employees earlier this year with how he handled the "Don't Say Gay" law in Florida, where a Disney theme park is located. The law bars public schools from teaching learners in kindergarten through third grade about sexual orientation or gender identity. Chapek remained silent on the issue until pressure grew among Disney's employees.

The scandal prompted Florida to end Disney's self-governing status in its Orlando theme park, which comes into effect in June 2023. As recently as June, Disney's board had signaled that it still supported Chapek, offering him a contract extension of three more years.

Chapek oversaw a marked increase in Disney's total revenue to \$28.7 billion for the fiscal year, which ended October 1, 2022. But costs were also rising sharply and Chapek last week announced company-wide cost-cutting measures and said layoffs were likely.

After dealing with major challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic at the company, Chapek hit speedbumps in ramping up Disney's streaming services. Earlier this month, he reported an increase of 12.1 million subscribers to Disney+ — bringing its global total to 164.2 million. Disney's Hulu and ESPN+ also added one million and 1.5 million subscribers, respectively. — AFP

UK's Compass sees annual profits triple

LONDON: Britain's Compass, the world's largest caterer, on Monday said annual profits had tripled as companies switched to outsourcing meals in the face of soaring inflation and energy costs.

Profit after tax jumped to £1.1 billion (\$1.3 billion) last year also on easing pandemic curbs, Compass said in an earnings statement. That compared with a net profit of £357 million in 2021. Revenues surged almost 43 percent to £25.5 billion, as more companies decided to outsource their catering needs for the first time.

"The group's performance surpassed our expecta-

tations," said chief executive Dominic Blakemore, citing "strong" growth in new business. "Our clients are continuing to face operational complexities and inflationary pressures, which are driving increased outsourcing."

Compass has emerged "as a stronger and more resilient business" in the wake of the COVID pandemic, he added. With global inflation at the highest levels in decades on soaring energy and food bills, companies are attempting to save cash by outsourcing to contractors.

But Blakemore also cautioned over the "uncertain" economic outlook with the UK economy currently mired in a recession, according to the government. Yet Compass forecast that underlying operating profit would grow by more than 20 percent next year. Its share price sank by about three percent in morning deals on London's falling stock market as many investors opted to take profits from recent gains. — AFP

S African power supplier runs out of cash for diesel

JOHANNESBURG: South Africa's government was scrambling on Monday to find money to buy diesel and avoid severe nationwide power cuts, after the country's power utility said it had run out funds for the fuel. Minister for public enterprises Pravin Gordhan, held an urgent meeting with the board of state-owned energy firm Eskom on Sunday evening amid "serious concerns" over the situation, the ministry said in a statement.

"The (ministry) is urgently working with National Treasury and Eskom for it to find the money to buy supplies of diesel," the statement read. Eskom on Monday said it has run out of funds to replenish diesel reserves for the financial year ending on March 31, 2023, raising the spectre of months of severe outages. "The little stock we have is being preserved carefully for dire emergencies," spokesman Sikonathi Mantsantsa told AFP.

Scheduled blackouts, have burdened Africa's most industrialized economy for years with Eskom failing to keep pace with demand and maintain its ageing coal-power infrastructure. The outages reached new extremes this year, forcing the cash-strapped firm to burn more diesel than it could afford to make up for supply shortages, according to Eskom's Chief Operating Officer Jan Oberholzer.

"We do not have money to burn diesel anymore," Oberholzer said last week. The company has spent more than 12 billion rand (\$690 million) on fuel so far this year. Some municipalities were not paying for the electricity they consumed, adding to the firm's financial woes, he said. Eskom is struggling under a 400-billion-rand debt - half of which the government has pledged to take on. Blackouts are costing the country hundreds of millions of dollars in lost output, disrupting commerce and industry.

They have also angered the population, with lights going off every day, several times a day, sometimes for a few hours. In affluent neighborhoods, outages are met by the hum of power generators but in poorer areas residents have little alternative but to wait in the dark. On Monday the opposition Democratic Alliance party called on the government to declare a "ring-fenced state of disaster" on the power utility "to allow for an emergency reprioritisation of resources", adding the grid faced a "real risk of collapse". — AFP



BANGKOK: In this file photo taken on September 2, 2022 a market vendor speaks to a customer in Bangkok, Thailand's economy grew 4.5 percent in the third quarter, officials said November 21, with the return of international tourists helping to offset persistently high inflation. — AFP

Thai economy sees growth boosted by tourism revival

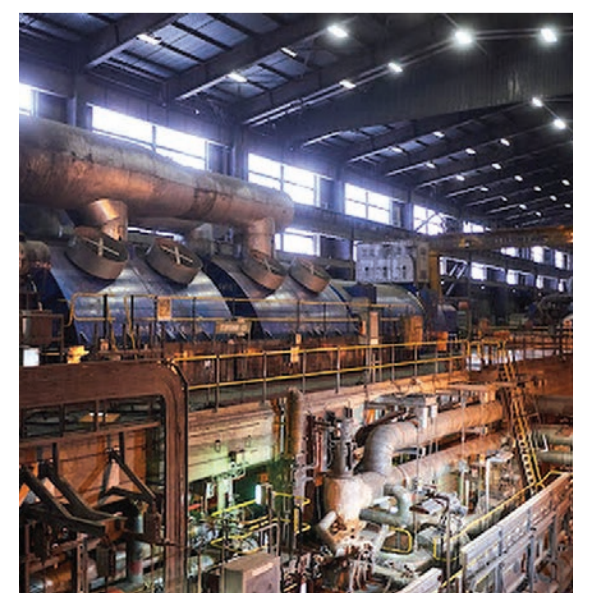
BANGKOK: Thailand's economy enjoyed healthy expansion in the third quarter, officials said Monday, with the return of international tourists helping to offset persistently high inflation. Southeast Asia's second-largest economy was battered by the pandemic, but the kingdom's reopening earlier this year saw the service sector record an 87 percent year-on-year increase, official data showed.

Thailand's National Economic and Social Development Council (NESDC) recorded a 4.5 percent year-on-year rise in gross domestic product in July-September, projecting this year's overall growth at 3.2 percent while forecasting 3.0/4.0 percent for 2023. "The service sector continues to grow due to tourism re-opening earlier in the year," said Danucha

Pichayanon, NESDC secretary-general, adding private consumption increased nine percent.

Thailand expects to generate around 570 billion baht (\$15.8 billion) in tourism revenue this year, officials said, after welcoming some 10.2 million visitors since reopening—still down from the roughly 40 million pre-pandemic. But Danucha said the signs of recovery were there, with the kingdom pinning hopes on China's potential relaxation of its strict COVID travel rules.

"We believe that China is likely to relax travelling restrictions in the second half of next year," he said. Chinese visitors had made up a huge part of the kingdom's tourism economy and accounted for some 28 percent of all arrivals, according to Bloomberg. Officials said they anticipated roughly 23 million tourists in 2023, predicting 1.2 trillion baht in generated revenue. However, the country-like many others—is still facing stubbornly high inflation, sitting just below six percent but off 14-year highs touched recently. "Inflation, the hike in interest rates and conflicts which have affected the energy prices remain factors that are impacting several countries," Danucha noted. — AFP



Business

Recession-hit UK needs more migrant labor: Business lobby

Britain faces a toxic mix of soaring inflation and shrinking growth

LONDON: Britain needs more migrant labor to boost productivity as it faces a toxic mix of soaring inflation and shrinking growth, the country's main business lobby group warned Monday. The verdict from the Confederation of British Industry came at its annual gathering in Birmingham, Britain's second biggest city. The CBI conference comes after the government of Prime Minister Rishi Sunak slashed spending and hiked taxes in a budget, despite admitting that the inflation-wracked economy had fallen into recession. "We come together, once more in extraordinary times," CBI director-general Tony Danker told delegates in Birmingham, central England.

"Britain is in the middle of stagflation-rocketing inflation and negative growth-for the first time that probably most of us can remember. "We know how to fight inflation. We know how to fight recession. But we don't really know how to fight them together." Sunak, who also addressed the CBI on Monday, took office one month ago after predecessor Liz Truss delivered an unfunded tax-slashing mini-budget that tanked the pound and sent UK borrowing costs soaring. UK inflation sits at a 41-year peak of 11.1 percent on rocketing food and energy costs in the wake of the Ukraine war.

Consumer prices have also raced higher as demand rebounds following the lifting of pandemic lockdowns. That has worsened a cost-of-living crisis for businesses and individuals, hit also by soaring interest rates as the Bank of England seeks to cool runaway inflation. The UK has forecast the economy to shrink 1.4 percent next year, hit also by fallout from Brexit which has resulted in foreign workers returning home.

"When you look at the (growth) data, the only thing holding it up, actually, is higher hours worked due to

higher immigration," Danker added on Monday. "People are arguing against immigration-but it's the only thing that has increased our growth potential since March. "Let's be honest-we don't have the people we need, nor do we have the productivity."

Focus on illegal immigration

Sunak, addressing the conference later on Monday, ducked the CBI's call for more legal migrant labor-and stressed that he was focused on curbing illegal migration. "The country's number one priority right now, when it comes to migration, is tackling illegal migration," he said. "When people see that happening, it undermines trust in the system, it doesn't seem fair that people are able to break the rules.

"That's what I'm absolutely determined to fix." He also told CBI delegates that last week's budget sought "to grip inflation and balance the books". "The best way to help people is by stopping mortgages, rents and food prices from spiraling out of control," Sunak said. "Re-establishing stability is the critical first step. But there is so much more we need to do," he added, stressing he wants to see more business innovation to boost economic activity.

He touted greater curbs on immigration-a key plank of the Brexit deal-and closer trade ties with Asia. But he added: "Let me be unequivocal about this: under my leadership, the United Kingdom will not pursue any relationship with Europe that relies on alignment with EU laws." The UK left the EU in full in January 2021, after years of political wrangling since the divisive referendum in 2016 to split from the bloc.

Brexit saw the UK withdraw from the European single market and customs union, while free move-



BIRMINGHAM: Britain's Prime Minister Rishi Sunak delivers a speech at the Confederation of Business Industry (CBI) annual conference at the Vox Conference Centre in Birmingham on November 21, 2022. —AFP

ment between member states and the jurisdiction of European courts ended. But a deal between London and Brussels maintained largely tariff-free trade with its remaining 27 members. Sunak's comments follow a Sunday Times report that "senior government figures" were planning to "put Britain on the path towards a Swiss-style relationship" with the EU. Switzerland has far closer ties with the bloc through bilateral agreements allowing access to the single market, a high degree of free movement and by paying into EU coffers.

The report, and comments last week by finance minister Jeremy Hunt, who voted to remain in the EU,

that he was eager to remove the "vast majority" of trade barriers with the EU. That has sparked unease among eurosceptic members of the ruling Conservative party. "The government has got to focus on what it needs to do, rather than trying to reopen a settled debate about Europe," former Tory leader Iain Duncan Smith told The Sun.

Bad deals?

The backlash stirred memories of the febrile aftermath of the referendum about how best to deliver Brexit. Former prime minister Boris Johnson, a staunch critic of his predecessor Theresa May's plan for Swiss-style ties, eventually won the argument with his harder version of Brexit. He won a landslide election victory in December 2019 on a vow to "get Brexit done", having negotiated his own 2019 divorce deal. However, three years on, the UK is in a deep economic crisis and criticism of both Johnson's agreement and the whole Brexit project is increasing. Amid decades-high inflation and forecasts of its longest ever recession, a new YouGov poll last week suggested 56 percent of people now think it was wrong to leave the EU.

Some 32 percent were still in favor. The Office for Budget Responsibility watchdog assessed that Brexit had had a "significant adverse impact" on UK trade, in comments backed by the Bank of England. The OBR blamed Brexit for reducing overall trade volumes and denting trading relationships with the bloc. The gloomy economic news was compounded by London losing its prized status as the biggest European stock market to Paris. Brexiters promised to strike trade deals around the world, including with the potentially lucrative United States market.—AFP

CBK bonds and related Tawarruq

KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) announced the most recent issues of CBK bonds and related Tawarruq at a total value of KD 240 million for three months with rate of return at 4.125 percent.—AFP

Markets rattled by fears of fresh China COVID curbs

LONDON: Asian and European stocks mostly fell Monday, with investor sentiment hit by renewed COVID concerns in China amid warnings that markets would remain lacklustre for some time. Shares headed lower as China's first coronavirus death in six months sparked fears officials would reimpose strict, economically painful restrictions to fight outbreaks across the country.

"The bear market is not over, in our view," Goldman Sachs strategist Peter Oppenheimer said. "The conditions that are typically consistent with an equity trough have not yet been reached. We would expect lower valuations (consistent with recessionary outcomes), a trough in the momentum of growth deterioration, and a peak in interest rates before a sustained recovery begins." Oil prices also slid on fears over energy demand in China, the world's second biggest economy.

"There are concerns China may tighten COVID curbs further after the first COVID-related death in almost six months was reported, and a city near Beijing enforced a slew of restrictions," said market analyst Fawad Razaqzada. "Traders are also concerned by continued weakness in crypto prices in the wake of FTX's collapse," he said. The death of an 87-year-old man in Beijing on Sunday came as infections across the country spiked, testing authorities' plans to loosen their grip by lowering quarantine times for foreigners and cancelling mass tests.

Two further COVID deaths were recorded on Monday, both elderly residents from Beijing. The news threw a spanner in the works for investors who had grown hopeful of a gradual reopening of China's economy. Hong Kong's Hang Seng Index fell nearly two percent, extending a sell-off at the end of last week. Shanghai was also down along with most Asian markets, but Bangkok, Tokyo and Wellington ended higher.

Nevertheless, global markets have enjoyed a broadly healthy November thanks to signs of China easing and indications of slowing US inflation that fanned optimism the Federal Reserve would start to slow its pace of interest rate hikes. But several officials soon lined up to warn that more needed to be done to get inflation back down from four-decade highs to more bearable levels.—AFP



Risk of nuclear accident looms over Ukraine plant

ZAPORIZHZHIA: Fresh explosions over the weekend at Ukraine's Russian-controlled Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant have once again heightened fears of an accident at Europe's biggest atomic plant. Here is a look at the state of the plant in southern Ukraine and the risks associated with renewed shelling and the pressure placed on personnel.

What is the plant's state?

Moscow took control of the site on March 4 shortly after the beginning of its invasion. Since early August, the situation at the plant has deteriorated with Moscow and Kyiv blaming each other for shelling around the facility. This weekend, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) reported around a dozen strikes. "Whoever it is, stop this madness!" IAEA head Rafael Grossi said.

Grossi, who has warned of the possibility of a "nuclear catastrophe", has been in talks with Moscow and Kyiv to set up a security zone around the plant. The Vienna-based UN nuclear watchdog has several experts on site. Describing the strikes as "deliberate, targeted", he said the latest shelling came "dangerously close to... key nuclear safety and security systems at the plant... We are talking meters, not kilometers". Among places that were damaged is a radioactive waste and storage building, the IAEA said, adding radiation levels at the site remain normal.

The risks of strikes

"A direct impact on the reactors, on associated facilities in particular the spent fuel areas, where the spent fuel is located, could have very serious consequences," Grossi warned in September. The containment of each of the six Russian-designed reactors is "fairly robust", Tariq Rauf, a former IAEA official, told AFP. He added that after the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster in Japan "a lot of remedial measures and back up supply" have been put in place. "But of course, none of these things was designed to survive a war," he warned.

The other risk is a prolonged power outage. Normally, the plant's systems are powered by four 750-kilovolt lines. A neighboring thermal power station can supply power through backup lines. Shelling has repeatedly damaged the lines, necessitating repairs by Ukrainian engineers, and at times forcing the operator, Ukraine's Energoatom, to temporarily resort to generators. The plant has 20 emergency diesel generators, with supplies for around 15 days of operation.

Fukushima-style scenario?

Electricity is essential to run the pumps ensuring the circulation of water and the constant cooling of the fuel of the reactor cores, as well as that in the storage pools. "A long-lasting total loss of electrical supply would lead to core melt accident and radioactive releases into the environment," according to the French Institute for Radiological Protection and Nuclear Safety (IRSN). This would be similar to what happened in Fukushima in 2011, but there a deadly tsunami put the emergency generators out of service, causing a "very quick loss of power", said the IRSN's Karine Herviou.

Moreover, "these are not the same models: the volume inside the containment enclosures is greater so that any rise in pressure would be slower", she told AFP. Zaporizhzhia's six reactors are currently all in shut down mode. In the event of an accident, "the consequences will be less serious" the longer a unit has been shut down, Herviou added. Before the start of the war, the plant used to supply 20 percent of Ukraine's electricity.

What is the risk?

Energoatom head Petro Kotin told AFP in September that Russian forces had tortured staff at the nuclear power station, and that at least two people had been killed. He has also said that plant employees had been kidnapped "periodically". Russian troops have also taken over the plant's emergency crisis centre, raising questions how well a critical situation would be dealt with, according to Herviou. "This centre is essential so that the Ukrainian teams can monitor the state of the installations, take the necessary measures to limit the consequences of any accident, request external reinforcements, alert the populations," Herviou told AFP. The IAEA has repeatedly denounced the working conditions, calling them "increasingly difficult and stressful" last month, warning this too risks a nuclear accident.—AFP

France slashes unemployment benefits

PARIS: The French government said Monday that jobseekers would see the amount of time they can claim benefits cut by 25 percent from next year as part of a contested reform designed to help fill vacant positions. Under the current rules, anyone under the age of 53 can claim a maximum two years of compensation after losing their job, while the over-55s are eligible for three years.

By reducing the time by a quarter from February 2023, Labor Minister Olivier Dussot said Monday he hoped that 100,000-150,000 people would return to the labor market earlier than expected next year. "We're keeping one of the most generous systems in Europe," he added in a comment designed to reassure workers worried about their rights being eroded.

The new regime was made possible by a law passed by parliament last week that gave the government powers to change the unemployment system by decree, depending on the state of the labor market. The idea proposed by President Emmanuel Macron is that benefits would be available for longer during economic downturns and restricted during times of labor shortages. Despite high inflation and the impact of the war in Ukraine, France's unemployment rate has fallen steadily to 7.3 percent amid complaints from many employers that they are unable to find people willing to fill vacancies.

The head of the Medef business association, Hubert Mongon, hailed the change as "going in the right direction" in encouraging people back to work. All of France's trade unions have opposed the changes, which are part of centrist President Emmanuel Macron's pro-business agenda designed to reduce the country's chronic high unemployment and high levels of public spending. Macron made reaching full employment - which would mean bringing the unemployment rate down to around 5.0 percent - one of the pledges of his successful bid for a second term in presidential elections in May.

The unemployment system changes drew support from the rightwing Republicans opposition party which helped pass the legislation last week, a rare moment of compromise in the divided and hung National Assembly. Macron has been under pressure to give impetus to his second term, which was severely undermined when his allies failed to win a majority in parliamentary elections in June that saw major gains for the far-right and hard-left. The previously supportive centre-right Le Point magazine questioned this week if Macron was a "Zombie President" in a front-page article.—AFP



Tesla recalls 321,000 vehicles in US for tail light problem

NEW YORK: Tesla has recalled more than 321,000 vehicles in the United States because of a tail light issue, in the latest trouble to hit the electric vehicle giant led by controversial billionaire Elon Musk. It is the latest of multiple Tesla recalls in the United States in recent months, including one for just over 40,000 vehicles for a possible problem in the electric power steering system. "In rare instances," the rear lights on affected cars light up intermittently because of a software problem, the company said in a document to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA)

dated November 15 but made public this weekend.

Brake lights, backup lights and turn signals are not affected. Tesla plans a free remote software update to fix the problem on the affected Model 3 and Model Y 2020-2023 cars. The company explains in the document that it was alerted to the problem by customers mainly outside the United States in late October, and confirmed its origin on November 7. The automaker said it was not aware of any incidents or injuries related to the problem.

Tesla already made several recalls in the United States this year to remotely modify potentially problematic features. At the end of September, the company recalled more than one million vehicles because of a risk of injury in operating the car windows. Musk credits the massive success of the Model 3 with proving that electric cars are the future, he told a Delaware court this week as he defended his \$50 billion pay package as CEO of the company.—AFP



Horseman and hero: Who is Argentina's 21st century gaucho?

Riders in berets, espadrilles and traditional neck scarves stand out against a dust cloud enveloping a melee of hundreds of horses as they expertly herd the animals. The riders are gauchos, deft horsemen who occupy a special place in the Argentine psyche, somewhere between legend and reality. Every year, thousands of people from all over the country flock to San Antonio de Areco for the Festival of Tradition on December 6.



Detail of a gaucho's knife during the 83rd Tradition Festival in San Antonio de Areco, Argentina.

The city is just 120 kilometers (75 miles) from the capital Buenos Aires, but a different world altogether—a world of horses, pampas (grassland plains) and gauchos who wear daggers in their belts

and play folk songs on guitars around campfires. Every December 6, Argentina celebrates its national day of the gaucho.

And 2022 is special, marking 150 years since the publication of the poem "El Gaucho Martín Fierro" by José Hernández—a 2,314-verse ode to Argentina's version of the cowboy. Translated into dozens of languages, the poem tells the melancholic story of a 19th century gaucho, including his life of nomadic freedom in the expansive pampas and the discrimination he suffered due to his mixed-race origins.

Rebelling against authority and the advance of the city and fences, the character is a cattle thief and brawler.

He is also courageous, loyal and generous, making the gaucho "a kind of rebel 'avenger' in the minds of the poor classes," historian Ezequiel Adamovsky of Argentina's CONICET research council told AFP.

The poem sparked a romanticized obsession with the Argentine horseman and a literary genre that saw dozens of gaucho-themed books "devoured" by rural and working-class readers in particular, he said.

Political appropriation

Years later, under a conservative government, Fierro received an extreme

makeover, with the anti-establishment rebel becoming a patriotic figurehead of the military, no longer just a popular idol. In 1913, "El Gaucho Martín Fierro" was declared Argentina's "national poem."



A gaucho rides a horse during the 83rd Tradition Festival in San Antonio de Areco, Argentina.

Then, at the start of the 20th century, Fierro became white in the retelling of his tale rather than of mixed race.

It was a time that "the elites of the nation pushed the outlandish but enduring vision of a white, 'European'

Argentina," said Adamovsky, an expert on how the image of the gaucho has been massaged through history even as it was elevated to a national symbol. In Adamovsky's Spanish-language book,

munists fighting the class struggle, "Peronists" representing the demands of rural workers and nationalists have all since claimed the gaucho for their own. In San Antonio de Areco, modern-day gauchos herd horses and break them in, showing off their skills to adoring crowds in a world far from folklore and fantasy. Well-kept horses are mounted with ease by children and octogenarians alike.

"The gaucho, the man of the field, continues and will continue to exist," said Victoria Sforzini, the city's director of heritage. "It is impossible to replace the work done on horseback," she said, noting that with the territory's diverse topography and vegetation, "there are places where cars cannot go."

So who are the gauchos of 2022?

Are they the riders who perform for tourists on day-long excursions from Buenos Aires? Are they the rural workers who still ply their trade on horseback today? Or are they like gaucho-descendant Julio Casaretto—a suburban mason who makes sure to go riding with his little girl on weekends. "Even if the fields recede, even if everything gets lost a little, it is in our blood," he said.— AFP

"The Indomitable Gaucho," the subtitle calls the gaucho "the Impossible Emblem of a Torn Nation."

Many sectors of Argentine society grasp the gaucho as a symbol. Anarchists rejecting state authority, com-



A gaucho falls from a colt at a rodeo exhibition during the 83rd Tradition Festival in San Antonio de Areco, Argentina.— AFP photos

Spain's high-speed rail competition heats up with new entrant

Competition in Spain's high-speed rail market is heating up with a new operator starting passenger services on Friday, making it Europe's first nation with three players in the sector. The new firms have pushed down prices and increased passenger traffic on the high speed network, which at 4,000 kilometers (2,500 miles) is the second longest in the world after China's. Spain is the world's second most popular tourist destination after France. Private operator Iryo, which is 45 percent owned by Italy's Trenitalia, made an inaugural symbolic trip on Monday from Madrid to Valencia on Spain's Mediterranean coast.

It will begin passenger services on Friday with 16 daily return trips between Madrid and Barcelona, Spain's two largest cities. Iryo will compete with French railway company SNCF's firm in the country, Ouigo, which has been operating since May 2021 and Spanish state-owned rail operator Renfe, which opened its first high-speed service in 1992. The arrival of a third operator is a "historical step" which is "novel" in Europe, said Carlos Lerida, a rail transport expert at the Autonomous University of Madrid.

"Until now no high-speed rail network has operated with three competitors. Spain could serve as a model," he told AFP. Iryo, which is kicking off its operations in Spain with 20 trains, will in mid-December expand its services to include a Madrid-Valencia route. And it March 2023 it will start running trains from Madrid to Seville and Malaga in the southwestern region of Andalusia. Ouigo already operates trains along the Madrid-Barcelona and Madrid-Valencia routes and plans to start services to the Mediterranean port of Alicante as well as Andalusia next year.

'Democratise high-speed'

Spain's state rail infrastructure operator Adif in 2019 granted contracts allow-

ing the firms to operate on these routes for 10 years. Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez's government is keen to lower ticket prices for bullet train tickets to make greater use of the high-speed rail network. Greater competition will "democratise high-speed" rail travel, Transport Minister Raquel Sanchez said last month, calling Spain's model for the sector "revolutionary".

Renfe responded to the arrival of Ouigo in May 2021 with the launch of a low-cost bullet train service called Avlo. The company has also renewed its fleet of trains and improved the service it offers passengers on their journeys.

Renfe has a seat sale underway with prices of a 500-kilometre (300-mile) trip between Madrid and Barcelona for as lit-

tle as seven euros. "We see the arrival of competition as an opportunity not as a problem," a Renfe spokesman said. Average prices for tickets on high-speed trains between Madrid and Barcelona have dropped by 25 percent since Ouigo started operating last year, according to Spain's competition watchdog CNMC.

'Underused' network

Passenger traffic on the route has jumped by 47 percent, and is up by 14 percent along Spain's entire rail network since May 2021, according to Adif. "The network was underused," the director general of Ouigo's Spanish branch, Helene Valenzuela, told AFP, adding this meant there was a "limited risk" in enter-

ing the market. The company spent 630 million euros (\$644 million) to launch its operations in Spain.

"Our main rivals are planes and cars, not other trains," said Valenzuela. "On a technical level, it is a challenge, because we have to organize the flow (of trains) in the stations. But on an economic level, it is an opportunity," she added. Competition in the high-speed rail sector has its limits. It works on "very busy lines" but it is "much more complicated" on other routes where it is harder for companies to cover their costs and make a profit," said rail transport expert Lerida.—AFP



Low-cost train Iryo is pictured on the day of its inaugural trip at the Chamartin train station in Madrid.— AFP photos



Low-cost train Iryo's staff members stand at the train's door on the day of its inaugural trip at the Chamartin train station in Madrid.

Elton John bids farewell to America with 'emotional' Los Angeles concert



US actors John Stamos (left) and Caitlin McHugh arrive for the "Elton John Live: Farewell from Dodger Stadium."



English singer Dua Lipa arrives for the "Elton John Live: Farewell from Dodger Stadium."

Clad in a sequined bathrobe, Elton John signed off the final US concert of his farewell tour Sunday with a typically flamboyant show in Los Angeles, the city that helped launch him to global fame half a century ago. John took to the stage of the Dodger Stadium—the baseball arena that played host to two of his most celebrated, career-defining shows in 1975 — for what he said was a "very special, very emotional" concert live-streamed on Disney+.

"As you know I am stopping touring and this will be my last concert in America and Canada," he announced. The 75-year-old British musician has had a long, deeply reciprocated love affair with Los Angeles. As portrayed in the hit 2019 biopic film "Rocketman," John's nascent career was given a stratospheric boost by his debut US show at the Troubadour nightclub in West Hollywood in 1970.

"You know what? I became successful first in America," John said on Sunday. "You bought the singles and the albums and the 8-tracks, the cassettes, the CDs. And more importantly you bought the tickets to the shows." Over the first half of the 1970s, John released countless hit songs, dominating the pop charts with tracks such as "Your Song" and "Tiny Dancer," and honed his extravagant on-stage persona.

That era culminated in two fabled nights in 1975 at Dodger Stadium, where he performed to a packed audience in a



US dancer/actress/singer JoJo Siwa arrives for the "Elton John Live: Farewell from Dodger Stadium," the last US performance by the British singer during his "Farewell Yellow Brick Road Tour," in Los Angeles. — AFP photos

bespoke, sequined version of the baseball team's uniform. In a nod to the past, John re-emerged on stage Sunday for the concert's encore dressed in a Dodgers-themed bathrobe and pearl-lined baseball cap.

"Be kind to each other, OK? And farewell!" he concluded, before launching into his anthemic "Goodbye Yellow Brick Road." The career-spanning set, featuring hits from "Crocodile Rock" to "Candle In The Wind," drew raucous cheers and

singalongs from about 55,000 fans, many dressed in feather boas, sunglasses and-of course-sequins inspired by the singer. Some held signs letting the singer know they had attended dozens or even hundreds of his concerts. "It makes me so happy to see you when you wear the most fantastic costumes and you've been to so many shows," said John.

'Long journey'

The Disney+ platform, which has recently moved into live-streamed events, is making a documentary about John, culminating in his current "Farewell Yellow Brick Road" tour. Already the third-highest-grossing in history, at over \$660 million according to Billboard, the tour still has about 60 dates across Australia, New Zealand and Europe ahead.

It began in 2018 but was postponed several times due to the pandemic and a hip injury suffered by John. He has not ruled out further solo shows when the tour ends in 2023. On Sunday, John was joined on stage by Dua Lipa, to perform their recent hit duet "Cold Heart," and Kiki Dee for their 1976 classic "Don't Go Breaking My Heart." He also brought out singer Brandi Carlile and Bernie Taupin, his long-time musical collaborator. "This is a very special night for me, a very emotional night for me," said John. "It's been a long journey." — AFP

Sonic the Hedgehog co-creator arrested over insider trading

The co-creator of classic video game series Sonic the Hedgehog has been arrested for alleged insider trading, according to public prosecutors in Tokyo. Yuji Naka, a 57-year-old programmer known for making Sonic and other major titles at Japanese game firm Sega, was arrested on Friday, a prosecution document obtained by AFP said. His alleged misdeed took place nearly three years ago, when Naka was an employee at "Final Fantasy" creator Square Enix, the Tokyo District Prosecutors Office document said.

Naka is accused of buying shares in

another game company, Aiming, when he knew they were going to release a new title jointly developed with Square Enix. He purchased 10,000 shares in Aiming for 2.8 million yen (\$20,000) in January 2020, according to the document, and the new game was announced the following month.

Prosecutors on Thursday arrested two other former Square Enix employees, also for alleged insider trading linked to Aiming. Naka was not immediately reachable for comment, but his fans expressed surprise and disappointment on social media. "Please tell me this isn't true. He brought Sonic to life... I'm so sad," one Twitter user wrote. "He worked on many great games. So disappointing," said another. On the website of the game studio that Naka founded called Prope, the programmer said he wanted to create "games that surprise and entertain children around the world." — AFP

Japan region taps toilet paper to help suicidal youth

Authorities in central Japan are trying an unusual new approach to tackle the country's longstanding suicide problem: printing messages of support on toilet paper. "Dear you, who might want to end it all," reads the toilet paper being used in an unusual new initiative to reach out to suicidal young people in the country. Suicide is a longstanding problem in Japan, and like many places, the country saw a spike in deaths by suicide during parts of the pandemic. The number of elementary, middle and high school-age students dying by suicide hit a new record of 499 in 2020, according to the health ministry.

Officials in Yamanashi thought printing reassuring messages and suicide-prevention hotline numbers on sheets of toilet papers might be an effective and discreet way to help distressed young people. "You're alone in the toilet. We felt that it's at moments like this when you might be more prone to thoughts of anguish", Yamanashi official Kenichi Miyazawa told AFP.



This handout picture shows toilet papers with reassuring messages and suicide-prevention hotline numbers printed on sheets. — AFP photos

The campaign involves 6,000 rolls printed with messages and phone numbers, which were distributed to 12 regional universities last month. Interspersed between illustrations such as a curled-up cat and an umbrella-holding woman looking up into the sky are messages crafted by a mental health professional that are intended to allay loneliness. "Dear you, spending painful days pretending to be okay for someone else", reads one message written in blue on the white paper. "You don't need to tell us everything... but how about just a little of it?" — AFP



This handout picture shows toilet papers with reassuring messages and suicide-prevention hotline numbers printed on sheets.



French film-maker Straub dies aged 89

Anti-conformist French film-maker Jean-Marie Straub died peacefully at his home in Switzerland on Sunday, the Swiss National Film Archive announced. He was 89. Straub was a peer of many greats from the French New Wave art film movement and received the Locarno Film Festival's lifetime achievement award. "I spoke to Mrs Straub at midday; he died at 6:00am this morning at his house in Rolle," on Lake Geneva in western Switzerland, Cinematheque Suisse spokesman Christophe Bolli told AFP. "He died peacefully."

Born in 1933 in Metz in northeastern France, Straub started out as an assistant to some of the great French film-makers of the age, including Jean Renoir, Jacques Rivette and Robert Bresson. He was close to New Wave standard-bearers Francois Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard.

In the 1960s, he left France for Germany, directing films in tandem with his then-wife Daniele Huillet. The couple challenged traditional narrative and aesthetic patterns. She died in 2006. Among their best-known films are "From the Clouds to the Resistance" (1979) and "Sicilia!" (1999). He eventually lived around the corner from Godard, who died in Rolle in September aged 91.

"We were very, very close to him. He also donated some of his films to us," Bolli

said of Straub. "We had done a lot of screenings with him and he came many times between 2018 and 2019. Afterwards, his health deteriorated."



French film-maker Jean-Marie Straub

In 2017 he was awarded Locarno's Leopard of Honour, putting him in the company of other recipients including Rivette, Godard, Ennio Morricone, Bernardo Bertolucci, Paul Verhoeven, Ken Loach, Terry Gilliam, Werner Herzog and John Landis. "Thank-you Jean-Marie for your generosity and your sharp outlook on the world, which is highly topical. We will watch over your legacy and make it shine," Cinematheque Suisse director Frederic Maire said. — AFP

Iran arrests two top actors who removed headscarves

Iran has arrested two prominent actors who expressed solidarity with the protest movement and removed their headscarves in public in an apparent act of defiance against the regime, state media reported Sunday. Hengameh Ghaziani and Katayoun Riahi were both detained after being summoned by prosecutors in a probe into their "provocative" social media posts and media activity, the state-run IRNA news agency said.

Iran's clerical leadership has been shaken by more than two months of women-led demonstrations sparked by the death in custody of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old woman of Kurdish origin who had been arrested by the morality police in Tehran. Authorities in the Islamic republic describe the protests as "riots" and accuse the country's Western foes of fomenting them.

Ghaziani, a vocal critic of the crackdown on protesters, was arrested for inciting and supporting the "riots" and for communicating with opposition media, IRNA said. The 52-year-old film star had already indicated she had been summoned by the judiciary, and then published a video on Instagram of herself removing the obligatory hijab.

"Maybe this will be my last post," she wrote late Saturday. "From this moment on, whatever happens to me, know that as always, I am with the Iranian people until my last breath." The video, which appears to have been filmed in a shopping street, shows Ghaziani bareheaded facing the camera without speaking and then turning around and binding her hair into a ponytail. In a post last week, she accused the "child-killer" Iranian government of "mur-

dering" more than 50 children.

'Voice of oppressed people'

Riahi was later arrested in the same probe, IRNA said. The actor, 60, who has appeared in a string of award-winning movies and is also known for her charitable work, had in September given an interview to London-based Iran International



Katayoun Riahi

TV, an outlet despised by the regime, without wearing a hijab.

She had expressed solidarity with the protests that have swept Iran since the death of Mahsa Amini, as well as opposition to the obligatory hijab. According to the judiciary's Mizan Online news website, Ghaziani was among eight people who were summoned by prosecutors over "provocative" material posted on social media.

They also included Yahya Golmohammadi, coach of Tehran football team Persepolis FC, who had strongly criticized players on Iran's national squad for not "bringing the voice of oppressed peo-

ple to the ears of the authorities".

The comment came after the national football team last week met President Ebrahim Raisi ahead of their appearance at the World Cup, which began Sunday in Qatar. Mizan said other prominent actors including Mitra Hajjar and Baran Kosari had also been summoned.

Earlier this month Taraneh Alidoosti,



Iranian actress Hengameh Ghaziani

one of Iran's best-known actors remaining in the country, posted an image of herself on social media without the mandatory headscarf. Alidoosti vowed to stay in her homeland at "any price", saying she planned to stop working and instead support the families of those killed or arrested in the protest crackdown. Iranian cinema figures were under pressure even before the start of the protest movement sparked by Amini's death. Prize-winning directors Mohammad Rasoulof and Jafar Panahi remain in detention after they were arrested earlier this year. — AFP

Sports

Djokovic finishes troubled year with 'satisfying' ATP Finals title

Serb sweeps past Ruud to win sixth ATP Finals crown

TURIN: Novak Djokovic said winning a record-equaling sixth ATP Tour Finals title on Sunday was a "deeply satisfying" ending to his troubled and truncated year. The Serb beat Norwegian Casper Ruud 7-5, 6-3 in Turin to match Roger Federer's record of six titles in the year-ending tournament for the top-ranked players.

The 35-year-old Serb, the oldest player to win the Finals, ended in style after a season in which he missed two majors because of his vaccine status. "It feels deeply satisfying and, at the same time, a huge relief because of the circumstances that I have been through this year, situations earlier this year, of course, with Australia," he said. "We don't need to go back. We know what happened." In January, Djokovic was detained and deported from Australia over his Covid non-vaccinated status and missed the Australian Open.

"That had an effect obviously on my start of the year. For the first several months, I was trying to find that balance game-wise but also mentally in order to be able to come back to the court and find that tennis level that I need." Djokovic was initially barred from returning to Australia before 2025 but earlier in the week the new government in Canberra said the nine-time Australian Open champion would be free to compete in January's tournament. "I don't know what the future holds but I know that what I hold in my mind is a huge hunger still to win trophies," said Djokovic.

The win in Turin, which also brings a cheque for \$4.7 million, came seven years after his last ATP Finals victory and will lift him from eighth to fifth in Monday's new rankings at the end of a season in which he also won Wimbledon. Carlos Alcaraz, who missed the finals injured, is number one. "In my

mind I always see myself as the best player in the world, of course," he said. "I'm not, I'm fifth. This week I probably am. Overall the rankings are showing who had the best year, and Alcaraz is the No. 1 in the world."

Djokovic and his wife brought his eight-year-old son and five-year-old daughter to Turin. "Extremely special for me," he said. "I don't get to have these moments on the tour with them so much." "I took both of my children, particularly my son, a lot to the tennis training sessions, warmups, matches. He was very loud, I must say. I was very surprised. I could hear his voice the entire time." "They both are now aware of what's going on, what the father is doing."

'Close points'

For the 23-year-old Ruud it was a third near-miss of the year. He also lost the finals of the French and US Opens. "In the end it's been disappointing to end up losing these big finals," he said. "Overall if you gave me an offer to end the year at No. 3, play the finals that I've played, at the first of January this year, I would probably sign the contract right away."

"I've overachieved compared to my own mind, so I'm very happy about that." Ruud has never taken a set from either Djokovic or his French Open final conqueror Rafael Nadal. "They have this sort of ability in them to step up when they really have to that I don't have," Ruud said. "They always seem to win the close points, the close sets." The American Rajeev Ram and Britain's Joe Salisbury took the doubles title with a 7-6 (7/4), 6-4 win over the Croatian pair of Nikola Pietrangeli and Mate Pavic. Ram and Salisbury lost in last year's final to French pair Nicolas Mahut and Pierre-Hugues Herbert. —AFP



TURIN: Serbia's Novak Djokovic celebrates after winning his men's single final match against Norway's Casper Ruud on November 20, 2022. —AFP

Verstappen revels in record win but warns of difficulties ahead

ABU DHABI: Max Verstappen may have dominated Sunday's Abu Dhabi Grand Prix and the 2022 season, but he was quick to warn his Red Bull team not to expect another year of runaway success in 2023. In the chaotic aftermath of a strategic race, in which tyre management and tactical decisions were decisive factors, the two-time champion made clear he did not expect to equal his own record-breaking feats. "It has been really enjoyable to work with the whole team to achieve something like this, this year," he said. "I know it is going to be difficult to replicate, but it also gives us some motivation to try and do well again."

Not only did Verstappen reel off an unprecedented 15 wins in a single season, but he did so with masterful authority as Red Bull won 17 races to clinch their first constructors' title since 2013. Mercedes' record run of eight constructors' championship triumphs was ended, after a disappointing year of only one victory, they finished third behind an inconsistent and undisciplined Ferrari.

The 'scarlet scuderia' took consolation in Charles Leclerc's clever drive, which included a 'dummy' pit-stop call from his team, to finish second, only eight seconds adrift of his Dutch rival and nemesis, to clinch second place in the drivers' and constructors' championships for himself and Ferrari respectively. Ferrari team chief Mattia Binotto, whose future has been in doubt, said it was an uplifting result for the team after a run of bungled operational performances in races this year. It also proved that Ferrari's car is very close in pure speed to the Red Bull and that, with few errors, they can mount a serious and direct challenge to the champions next year. "It's great for the team, great for the strategists and so great to have done a solid weekend," said relieved Binotto. "P2 is the balance of this entire season, not only this race. We certainly did a proper job. "Our dummy pit stop on the Red Bull was the right call. I am so happy for the team. When Ferrari is making mistakes, there is always so much criticism, but we know too that these guys can perform very well."

Canada's Svensson wins first PGA title at RSM Classic

WASHINGTON: Canada's Adam Svensson won his first PGA Tour title on Sunday, sinking clutch birdie putts on the 16th and 17th holes to capture the RSM Classic by two strokes. The 28-year-old from British Columbia fired a bogey-free, six-under par 64 to win a back-nine shootout by finishing 72 holes on 19-under 263 at Sea Island Golf Club on St. Simons Island, Georgia. "It's not even real right now. I'm just so happy," Svensson said. "I put so much work in. To win on the PGA Tour means everything to me."

England's Callum Tarren also fired a 64 to share second on 265 with Americans Sahithi Theegala and Brian Harman. Svensson, whose breakthrough came in his 70th PGA start, was among four sharing the lead before he rolled in a tension-packed 18-foot birdie putt at the 16th hole. "I just tried to make no bogeys," Svensson said. "I didn't even look at the scoreboard until maybe 16. I just said if I make no bogeys, I'm putting well, so that's what I did. It's just



ABU DHABI: (Front row, left to right) Red Bull Racing's team principal Christian Horner, Red Bull's Mexican driver Sergio Perez, Red Bull Formula One team advisor Helmut Marko and Red Bull's Dutch driver Max Verstappen celebrate with their team after the Abu Dhabi Formula One Grand Prix on November 20, 2022. —AFP

Hot pursuit

The 'false' call to pit came on lap 34 when Leclerc was told to 'box, opposite Perez'. The two had started the race level on points in a duel for second in the championship and after the first round of pit stops Perez was second, behind Verstappen, with Leclerc in hot pursuit. Ferrari's radio call to their Monegasque driver prompted Red Bull to pit Perez for a second time, leaving Leclerc out on track committed to a one-stop strategy. Perez fell to sixth as Leclerc took second, 20 seconds ahead with 24 laps remaining. In a nail-biting finish, Perez struggled to pass rival cars and finished 1.3 seconds adrift at the flag. "I can say it now, we dummed him and made him think we were going to pit," said Leclerc. "He took it and went for a second stop so we did everything perfect and I am very proud of our execution."

"For the team, it was a good performance in terms of race

unbelievable."

He followed by sinking a testy downhill putt from just beyond 10 feet at the par-3 17th. "I was feeling pretty good over them," Svensson said of his dramatic putts. "That one at 17 I didn't think was going to go in. Somehow the golf gods let it in." Svensson punctuated the feat with a fist pump and made a routine par at 18 to claim the crown. "It has been an up and down journey. I've had lows. I've had highs. But I just kept believing in myself and here I am," Svensson said.

"Two years ago I made a decision to give it 100%. There was no going back or I was quitting because I was going the wrong way. It was a good choice," Svensson, ranked 174th, had a best prior PGA finish of sixth in July at the Barbasol Championship. Harman, trying to become the host resort's first resident to win the event, sank a five-foot birdie putt at the 16th to match Svensson and Tarren for the lead on 17-under. Theegala sank a 20-foot putt at the par-3 17th for his fourth birdie in six holes to create a four-way tie at the top, setting the stage for Svensson's heroics.

Svensson sank a 30-foot birdie putt at the fourth hole and a 20-footer at the eighth. He followed with a 36-footer for birdie at the 10th and sank a 16-foot birdie putt at 11 to seize the lead alone at 17-under. Svensson, who opened with a 73 at the Plantation course to share 108th, is the

with the lowest scoring average for the season. It has been a true return to form this year for Ko, who began the season with a victory at Boca Rio in January and then captured the BMW Championship in South Korea in October.

"This year has been an incredible year. I really could never ask for more to win so early in the season and then to have won in Korea and then win the last event of the year," said Ko who plans to get married during the off-season. "I couldn't have drawn it up any better. There has been so many exciting things in my life that have been going on." Ko's second Player of the Year award follows her triumph in 2015 and the 25-year-old could now secure her place in the LPGA Hall of Fame next season.

"This will be my last win as a single lady. So I wanted to do this for my family," she said. "This has been one of the most consistent and solid years I've had." The South-Korean born Ko ended the tournament on 17-under 271

management. It was such a difficult season - problems with reliability, strategy and tyre management - but we have potential in the car. "Now we must focus on the next step to find the race pace. It's something Red Bull seems to have more than us." After two disappointing years in the doldrums, Ferrari scored four wins on their way to second and, if the operational frailties are repaired, appear to have the potential to trouble Verstappen. "I do think it will be a lot closer," admitted Verstappen. "People are understanding the cars a lot more and over time the teams will edge closer." "We know that we have to keep pushing over the winter and trying to find performance and more understanding." His Red Bull team boss Christian Horner said he expected Mercedes, who showed signs of revival in the second half of the season, to return as a competitive force. "We don't underestimate them," he said. "They will be back as a real force and a threat." —AFP



GEORGIA: Adam Svensson of Canada poses with the trophy after putting in to win on the 18th green at Sea Island Resort Seaside Course on November 20, 2022. —AFP

first winner since Jon Rahm in 2020 to shoot 73 or worse in the first round. He's also the first to rally from beyond 100th after 18 holes to win since England's Ian Poulter at the 2018 Houston Open. The 2022-23 PGA Tour season will shut down until January's Tournament of Champions in Hawaii. —AFP

for the week, with Maguire's even-par round of 72 leaving her 15-under. Maguire went into the final round level with Ko after a magnificent 9-under round of 63 but was unable to reproduce that form. Bogeys on the fifth and 14th ultimately cost the Irishwoman and her birdie on the 17th proved to be too little too late.

"It was an incredible week, a really great way to round off the season and if you would have offered me second at the start of the week I would have grabbed it with both hands," said Maguire. "It would have been nice to have played a little better today but it was really tough out there. The wind was strong, it was cold, the greens were tricky. I didn't play as well as Saturday but I grafted away and had some key up and downs to keep me in it." Sweden's Anna Nordqvist finished third after shooting 67 on Sunday. England's Georgia Hall also shot 67 to share fourth alongside South Korean Lee6 Jeong-eun. —AFP

McIlroy wins Race to Dubai as Rahm takes World title

DUBAI: Northern Ireland's Rory McIlroy cemented his place as the European number one by winning the Race to Dubai for the fourth time in his career on Sunday with Spain's Jon Rahm sealing a third DP World Tour Championship. World number one McIlroy, 33, closed with a four-under-par 68, which was good for a solo fourth place and clinch the Race to Dubai crown after a gap of seven years. McIlroy emulated Henrik Stenson, the only other golfer to win the FedEx Cup and Race to Dubai in the same season in 2013.

With England's Matt Fitzpatrick and New Zealand's Ryan Fox unable to win the tournament, the path became easier for McIlroy when he finished ahead of both players. "This means a lot. Obviously, this is my fourth one, but it's been a while. I've won three FedEx Cups since the last time I won The Race to Dubai," said McIlroy. "I was a model of consistency the whole way through the year. A lot of top finishes. I think my worst finish of the European Tour events I played this year was 12th at the start of the year in Abu Dhabi."

"Would have been nice to get one win in there at the end of the year here. But Jon obviously played an incredible tournament and fully deserved it. "I am excited for 2023," Rahm, who turned 28 this month, started with three straight birdies and even though he followed up with a bogey on the fourth hole, there was never any question about his dominance as a five-under par 67 round gave him a two-shot win with a 20-under par total. England's Tyrrell Hatton (66) and Sweden's Alex Noren (67) were tied for second at 18-under par 270.

'Feels very special'

For Rahm it was also a record fifth Rolex Series title for the world number five, who will not move from his current world ranking. The win came with a cheque of \$3 million. The Spaniard, making his fourth appearance at the Earth course of Jumeirah Golf Estates, dropped just four shots over the whole week, he certainly wasn't happy with the way he drove the ball, especially in the last two rounds.

On Sunday, he had to hit at least three magical recovery shots - including one on the first and another on the 18th. "This feels very special. I said that I feel like I'm defending the title from three years ago because I couldn't come and defend. Very proud of myself for that and how well I've done, especially on the weekend," said the 2021 US Open champion.

"It's pretty unusual for me to win a tournament driving it as bad as I did. To have the other parts of my game carry me to my win, it's something special. "I managed it really well, and I felt really comfortable on the greens and made a couple of clutch putts. For a year where I've been hearing how 'bad' my putting has been, it feels amazing to get it done like that." The 2022-2023 season of the DP World Tour starts next week with a doubleheader - the Joburg Open in South Africa and the Australian PGA Championship in Brisbane. —AFP



NAPLES: Lydia Ko of New Zealand poses for a photo with the Vare Trophy, the Rolex Player of the Year trophy and the CME Globe trophy after winning the CME Group Tour Championship on November 20, 2022. —AFP

Ko wins LPGA Tour Championship and Player of the Year

MIAMI: New Zealand's Lydia Ko won the season-ending LPGA Tour Championship on Sunday, holding on for a two stroke victory over Ireland's Leona Maguire that also secured her the Player of the Year prize. Ko, who also won the tournament in 2014, pocketed the record \$2 million prize for victory at Tiburon Golf Club in Naples Florida with her two-under round of 70 in blustery conditions.

The 19th victory on the tour for Ko, also secured her back-to-back Vare Trophy awards, given to the player



'Nightmare start': Qatari press pans team for loss

Empty seats tell story as WCup party falls flat

DOHA: Qatari media laid into a "weak" performance by the national team on Monday after the hosts' much-heralded World Cup debut ended in a tame 2-0 defeat by Ecuador. Any buzz from the opening ceremony soon fell flat as Qatar shipped two goals in the first half, with thousands of fans leaving Al Bayt Stadium well before the game had finished.

While Qatar's press praised the opening ceremony, which included US actor Morgan Freeman and a severely disabled Qatari man, they were critical of coach Felix Sanchez's team. "The Maroons stumbled," wrote Al Raya newspaper, adding: "Our players didn't perform as needed." Al Watan said: "Our national team skipped the opening."

"Our national team paid the price for its weak start," Al Watan added. "Our team was not at their best, even not their usual (standard)," it said. "It seems that the weight of responsibility and the pressure of the World Cup and the opening were an obstacle to the performance of all players." It was a grim evening for Qatar's team, the Asian champions who had been preparing for their big moment for years, backed by no-expense-spared facilities and coaching.

Ecuador had a goal disallowed for a barely visible offside before Enner Valencia scored a penalty and then a sublime header. Qatar barely threatened at the other end, finishing with zero shots on target. "It was always going to be a tall order for Qatar but the manner in which they crumbled against Ecuador would have disappointed the home fans," said the Gulf Times, an English-language daily. "Ecuador — 44th in the FIFA rankings — are only six places above Qatar, but last night they showed they are miles ahead of the Asian champions."

The Qatar Tribune praised the "extraordinary" opening ceremony but lambasted a "nightmare start" by the team, highlighting the "nervousness" of goalkeeper Saad Al Sheeb. Al Sharq said fans walked out "because they couldn't bear seeing the loss". But it added: "Fans should support the team in the next game against Senegal until the last moment." The Peninsula said Qatar, the first hosts to lose their World Cup opener,



DOHA: People with flags arrive prior to the Qatar 2022 World Cup Group A football match between Senegal and the Netherlands at the Al-Thumama Stadium in Doha on November 21, 2022. — AFP

face a "daunting task" in qualifying from Group A, with games to come against Senegal and the Netherlands.

Empty seats

Meanwhile, thousands of empty seats told the sad story as Qatar's long-awaited World Cup debut ended in a bad case of stage fright on Sunday. Long before the final whistle at the spectacular Bedouin tent-inspired Al Bayt Stadium, the host nation's fans among the 67,372 crowd had started heading for the exits. The exodus began soon after Ecuador striker Enner Valencia headed his second goal shortly after the half-hour mark

against the outclassed World Cup hosts. As the second half wore on, swathes of unfilled seats could be seen throughout the arena as an evening that began with joyous celebrations and heady optimism ended with a whimper.

The downbeat finale was in stark contrast to the mood in the hours before kick-off at the stadium in Al Khor, 50 kilometers north of Qatar's capital Doha. Thousands of people arrived at the vast Lusail train station where the subway line built especially for this tournament at a cost of \$36 billion ends and spectators boarded a fleet of buses for the final leg of their journey.

The security forces appeared tense, aware that the eyes of the world are on this Gulf state, which many critics say should never have been awarded the World Cup.

Once the spectators arrived at the spectacular venue, camels and horses lined the road to the turnstiles. Carlos Alvear, an Ecuadoran who lives in Ecuador, said: "It's really special to be here. It's the first World Cup in the Middle East, it's historic and Ecuador is here for the opening match. "To be honest, it's all a bit bizarre. It's pretty quiet, even if there are more Ecuadorans than I thought there would be. But all these buildings look pretty empty."

'Trust in our team'

For a Qatari supporter who gave his name only as Abdallah, it was an exciting moment. "We have been waiting for this moment for 12 years," he said. "We have every confidence for this festival... We trust in our team. We have ambition but are realistic." He was confident of victory against the South Americans and predicted his team would be runners-up in their group and go through to the next round-where England could await.

"Today we will win, but we will be second behind the Netherlands. Then against England, we will win," he said with a smile. Danny, a supporter from the English city of Norwich, said he planned to "jump on the bandwagon today" and support Qatar. His friend who gave his name only as Abdul, from Sheffield in northern England, had brought a Qatari flag and was wearing a red top under his England shirt in case Qatar scored. Danny was staying in the shipping container accommodation set up for visiting supporters for two weeks and said it "isn't quite what he was expecting". Away from the opening match, thousands of Mexican and Argentine fans thronged the Corniche seafront promenade in the centre of Doha. Leopold Fes, a 65-year-old Belgian, said he was finding it difficult to accept the last-minute decision to ban the sale of alcohol at stadiums in the strict Islamic state. "I don't think it will be like other World Cups," he said. "No alcohol makes it strange. Football and alcohol go together for a lot of people." — AFP

Today's matches

FIFA World Cup 2022

Argentina v Saudi Arabia	13:00
Denmark v Tunisia	16:00
Mexico v Poland	19:00
France v Australia	22:00

France hope on Mbappe after Benzema's injury

DOHA: World Cup holders France will need Kylian Mbappe at his best in Qatar following the loss of Ballon d'Or winner Karim Benzema to injury, coach Didier Deschamps said on Monday. France begin their defense against Australia on Tuesday as they look to move on from a troubled build-up which saw several key players pull out injured. Benzema was then forced to withdraw over the weekend. The Real Madrid striker succumbed to a left thigh injury, although he played no part in France's 2018 triumph in Russia when Mbappe burst onto the world stage.

The Paris Saint-Germain striker was just 19 but scored four goals during that World Cup, including one in the 4-2 final win over Croatia. "He is still a young player, just a bit less than four years ago, but he already did very important things four years ago," Deschamps told reporters in Doha. "Since then he has become more mature and there is now even more recognition for him around the world. "He doesn't have any more responsibility within the squad than he did before, but he has always had the ability to make the difference and we will need that. "He has the ability to be decisive at any moment, unlike many other players." Mbappe, who turns 24 next month, will lead a French attack in which Olivier Giroud is now expected to start in the absence of Benzema. If four years ago in Russia Mbappe was still a teenager, he is now an established world-class talent and one of the best-paid athletes on the planet after turning down Real Madrid and agreeing a highly lucrative new contract to stay in Paris earlier this year.

Yet his last major tournament was disappointing, with Mbappe failing to score at Euro 2020 and missing the crucial penalty as France lost to Switzerland in a shoot-out in the last 16. However, France captain Hugo Lloris insisted: "It is hard to say just how good he can be. He seems focused but also relaxed and he is eager to play well and help the team." France also began their 2018 campaign against Australia and needed a late own goal to secure a 2-1 win. The Socceroos come into this tournament among the rank outsiders after needing a penalty shoot-out to beat Peru in a play-off to qualify. Graham Arnold's team is lacking players who are established at leading European clubs and Tuesday's game looks a mismatch, on paper at least. "Above all else I think they are a competitive team and they will have grown in confidence since beating Peru on penalties. In general that is the kind of thing that brings a team together," said Lloris. Deschamps confirmed that Manchester United centre-back Raphael Varane is fit to feature after recovering a leg injury. — AFP



DOHA: Argentina's forward Lionel Messi (center) and teammates take part in a training session at the Qatar University Training Site in Doha, on November 21, 2022. — AFP

Time running out for Messi but are stars aligning?

DOHA: Spain coach Luis Enrique said earlier this week it would be "unfair" if Argentina great Lionel Messi were never to win the World Cup. But the seven-time Ballon d'Or winner is running out of time and opportunities. Alongside Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo, the Qatar extravaganza will likely be the fifth and last World Cup for one of the two outstanding players of their generation - believed by many to be the two greatest footballers of all time. Unlike previous contenders for the title of greatest of all time - Brazil's Pele and Diego Maradona of Argentina - at least one, and maybe both, will never lift football's greatest prize.

Yet in the case of Messi, this may well be his best chance yet to win that elusive prize. He cut a distraught figure in 2014 after Argentina succumbed 1-0 to Germany in the final in Brazil, even briefly announcing his international retirement in 2016. He changed his mind and last year led Argentina to their first major title in 28 years, defeating hosts

Denmark 'in Qatar to win World Cup'

DOHA: Denmark coach Kasper Hjulmand said Monday that his team have come to Qatar to win the World Cup as they prepare for their Group D opener against Tunisia. The Danes reached the semi-finals of the European Championship last year despite losing their opening game after talisman Christian Eriksen collapsed on the pitch with a cardiac arrest. They come into the tournament on the back of a strong qualifying campaign and two Nations League wins over group rivals France. "Our dream is to win some-

thing. So when you go into a tournament this group of players has the quality to win, and I mean to win everything," said Hjulmand ahead of Tuesday's clash at Education City Stadium.

The Danes will likely be tussling for first place with world champions France, as the runners-up will almost certainly be playing Argentina in the second round. And Hjulmand, whose team also face Australia in the group stage, was bullish about his team's chances with Eriksen firmly back in the fold and in top form. "Are we favorites? No... but we can beat everyone on the day and we have a very strong self-confidence," added Hjulmand. "We have a very good group of players working together and the best way of winning everything is to dream big." — AFP

'He's a legend'

Argentina head into this tournament on the back of a 36-match unbeaten run as one of the clear favorites. Their group does not appear, on paper at least, the most taxing. They begin against Saudi Arabia on Tuesday, followed by clashes with Mexico and Poland. "Argentina are one of the favorites for the whole World Cup," said Poland forward Robert Lewandowski earlier this week. "They have not lost for 30-odd games, they're very dangerous opponents for everyone."

As the new darling of the Camp Nou in Barcelona, Lewandowski has been able this season to see first hand the legacy left behind by Messi in Catalonia. "He is a Barcelona legend. You see it all over the place being at the club," the Pole said. "He is Argentina's leader, one of the top players. We know who we're going to play against, it's a huge challenge." Lewandowski will likely be among the last players ever to play a World Cup match against Messi, along with the unfancied but confident Saudis.

Midfielder Abdullellah Al-Malki insists he will not be overawed by the occasion. "He's a legend and it's

a dream for any player to play against him, but we represent Saudi Arabia and we fear no-one," he said. Messi's predecessor as Argentina icon, the late Maradona secured his footballing immortality by inspiring the country to their second world title in 1986. Messi would desperately love to add World Cup glory to all his other accolades that include four Champions League crowns and 10 La Liga titles.

And he's not alone. "If Spain don't win the World Cup, I would like Argentina to win it because of Messi," Enrique, who coached Messi at Barcelona for three years, said on Twitch earlier this week. "It would be unfair for Messi to retire without winning a World Cup." There is a feeling that despite the recent retirements of attacking talents such as Sergio Aguero and Gonzalo Higuain, Argentina have a better balance in the squad than in previous years.

As well as Messi, fellow veteran Angel Di Maria and Lautaro Martinez provide thrust and trickery in attack. There is an industrious midfield including Rodrigo De Paul, Leandro Paredes and Alexis Mac Allister, and combative defenders in the mould of Cristian Romero and Manchester United revelation Lisandro Martinez, with the safe hands of Emiliano Martinez guarding the net. It really is now or never for Messi but there is a growing feeling in Argentina that this will be the international swansong a nation and a legend have long dreamt of. — AFP



DOHA: Denmark's coach Kasper Hjulmand meets with fans at Al Salliya SC in Doha. — AFP

Sports

Irving returns in Nets win as Warriors end road skid

Warriors sharp-shooter Thompson burst out of early-season slump

LOS ANGELES: The Brooklyn Nets marked Kyrie Irving's return from an eight-game suspension with a 127-115 victory over Memphis on Sunday as the NBA champion Golden State Warriors finally earned their first road win of the season. Irving, who was suspended by the Nets after his social media post linking to a movie condemned as anti-semitic sparked a furor, scored 14 points in 26 minutes on the floor. Kevin Durant led the Nets with 26 and Ben Simmons added 22 as seven Nets players scored in double figures.

That included Japanese reserve Yuta Watanabe, who made four of the Nets' 16 three-pointers on the way to 16 points. "It was great to have him get some minutes out there and for us to get a win while he's doing it," said Nets coach Jacque Vaughn, who said he expected Irving and the team to be able to focus on basketball going forward. "At the end of the day, now it's about hoopin'." Vaughn said of his message to Irving. "I used that word."

"From this day on that's what we're going to be about. Basketball is factual. You get the rebound, that's a fact. You box out, that's a fact. You make the shot, that's a fact. "So we're going to make this thing factual. It's about basketball and we're going to live in that space." The row surrounding Irving, who was suspended a week after his late October post for failing to offer an apology, came the same week that Vaughn took over after Steve Nash was sacked in the wake of the Nets' 1-5 start to the season.

They have now improved to 8-9, with former Rookie of the Year Simmons finally coming alive for the team he joined in a trade last season after his relationship with Philadelphia soured because of

struggles with a back injury and mental health issues. Simmons connected on 11 of 13 shot attempts for his first 20-point game since the 2021 playoffs for the 76ers—who will host the Nets on Tuesday.

Dillon Brooks scored 31 points for the Grizzlies, who were without dynamic star Ja Morant, Desmond Bane and Jaren Jackson. In Houston, Warriors sharp-shooter Klay Thompson burst out of his early-season slump with a 41-point performance in Golden State's 127-120 victory over the Rockets. Thompson drilled 10 of the Warriors 24 three-pointers, getting off to a blistering start as he scored half of the Warriors 40 first-quarter points.

The Rockets, last in the Western Conference, battled back to take a four-point lead at halftime, but Stephen Curry scored 16 of his 33 points in the third quarter as the Warriors reasserted themselves. The tenacious Rockets managed to edge ahead by one midway through the fourth, but Thompson's final three-pointer and a high-arching trey from Curry put the Warriors over the line in the closing minute. "Well, long overdue," Warriors coach Steve Kerr said, "but we're happy to get the win."

Nuggets stun Mavs

Denver's Michael Porter hit the game-winning three-pointer with 55.2 seconds remaining in Dallas, lifting the Nuggets to a 98-97 victory over the Mavericks. Denver reserve Bones Hyland led all scorers with a career-high 29 points as the Nuggets overcame the absence of two-time reigning Most Valuable Player Nikola Jokic, who was sidelined along with Jamal Murray by Covid concerns.

The Nuggets were boosted by an incredible



Kyrie Irving of the Brooklyn Nets

three-pointer from just beyond the half-court line by reserve Vlatko Cancar at the buzzer to end the first half. In fact, the shot came after the interval, as officials decided to replay the final two seconds of the second quarter when it was determined during the break that Dallas star Luka Doncic had stepped out of bounds as he rose for what was originally scored a three-pointer at the halftime buzzer.

In Los Angeles, the Lakers were in control

throughout a 123-92 victory over the San Antonio Spurs, despite the absence of superstar LeBron James for a fourth straight game with a groin injury. Anthony Davis scored 30 points and grabbed 18 rebounds for the Lakers and with the game in hand sat out much of the fourth quarter. Spurs coach Gregg Popovich was not on the bench, and the team said after he arrived at the arena that he was ill. —AFP

Eagles rally to beat Colts, Cowboys thrash Vikings

MIAMI: The Philadelphia Eagles returned to winning ways with a thrilling 17-16 NFL late comeback win at the Indianapolis Colts on Sunday. But another of the league's form teams, the Minnesota Vikings, suffered a crushing 40-3 defeat at home to a rampant Dallas Cowboys.

The Eagles, whose perfect start to the season ended after eight games with a defeat to Washington last week, were staring at the prospect of another loss as they began the fourth quarter 14-3 down. But quarterback Jalen Hurts found Quez Watkins with a 22-yard touchdown pass and, after a Colts field goal, Philadelphia (9-1) snatched victory with 1:20 to go, as Hurts rushed in for an eight-yard touchdown. Hurts ended with 190 passing yards, 86 rushing yards and the two touchdowns.

"That was a great win, it wasn't what you draw up but in this league it rarely is," said Eagles coach Nick Sirianni, who was offensive coordinator with the Colts before joining Philadelphia. "You keep seeing it, when we need a drive, when need some points, we can always lean on our offensive line and Jalen is always special with the ball in his hands," he said. The Vikings went into the day tied with the Eagles for best record in the league at 8-1, the meeting with the Cowboys billed as a clash of two of the best teams in the NFC.

But it was an utterly one-sided encounter. Dallas, quickly putting aside the disappointment of last week's loss to the Green Bay Packers, scored points on each of their first seven drives. "We just played a complete game, offense, defense. We knew we had to respond after last week and this was big for us," said quarterback Dak Prescott, who threw for 276 yards and two touchdowns to the outstanding Tony Pollard.

Running back Ezekiel Elliott also rushed for two touchdowns while Pollard rushed for 80 yards on 15 carries and also gained 109 yards on six receptions, using his running power to burst from deep to great effect. The combination of Elliott and Pollard proved too much for Minnesota. "They



INDIANAPOLIS: Zaire Franklin #44 of the Indianapolis Colts attempts to tackle Jalen Hurts #1 of the Philadelphia Eagles during the second half at Lucas Oil Stadium on November 20, 2022. —AFP

are dynamic, when we have them both out there, the defense doesn't know what is coming at them," Prescott said.

The 37-point margin was the biggest the Cowboys have enjoyed in 54 years. The loss also saw Vikings quarterback Kirk Cousins snap a streak of 39 consecutive games with a touchdown - the fourth best record since the NFL-AFL merger. The Kansas City Chiefs improved to 8-2 with a 30-27 victory over the Los Angeles Chargers. The Chargers led with 1:46 remaining, but Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes piloted a six-play, 75-yard drive capped by a four-yard touchdown pass to Travis Kelce that made it 30-27.

It was Kelce's third TD catch of the night and the Chargers' bid to claw back ended when Chiefs defender

Nick Fulton intercepted a pass by Los Angeles quarterback Justin Herbert. The Buffalo Bills, forced to move their home game with the Cleveland Browns to Detroit due to a snow storm, left Motor City with a 31-23 win. Browns quarterback Jacoby Brissett threw for 324 yards and three touchdowns but three field goals in the fourth quarter were enough to secure the win for the Bills, who had lost their previous two games.

Atlanta running back Cordarrelle Patterson set an NFL record with his ninth kick return touchdown, breaking the old mark he shared with Josh Cribbs and Leon Washington. Patterson raced up the middle of the field for a 103-yard touchdown in the second quarter in the Falcons' 27-24 triumph over Chicago. —AFP

Man Utd's Greenwood faces attempted rape trial next year

LONDON: Manchester United footballer Mason Greenwood will face trial next year on charges of attempted rape, controlling and coercive behavior, and assault, a judge said on Monday. Greenwood, 21, arrived at court in Manchester, northwest England, wearing a hoodie bearing the slogan "Fumer tue" (Smoking kills in French) with a dark suit.

At a short hearing at the city's Minshull Street Crown Court, the player spoke only to confirm his name and date of birth. Judge Maurice Greene set a start date of November 27, 2023, for the trial, which is expected to last 10 days. The footballer had his bail extended on condition that he does not contact witnesses or the complainant.

Greenwood spent two days remanded in custody in October after an alleged breach of bail conditions. He was first arrested in January over allegations relating to a young woman after images and videos were posted online. Within hours of the allegations surfacing online in January, Greenwood was suspended from playing or training with United and has not played for the club since. The attempted rape is alleged to have taken place in October 2021.

The controlling and coercive behavior relates to a period beginning in November 2018. He is alleged to have made threatening and derogatory comments towards the complainant, as well as accessing and monitoring her social media accounts. The charge of assault occasioning actual bodily harm is dated December 2021. All three charges relate to the same complainant. Greenwood did not enter any pleas and a further procedural hearing was set for February 10 next year. —AFP

Rangers sack Van Bronckhorst after a year in charge

GLASGOW: Rangers sacked manager Giovanni van Bronckhorst on Monday after just a year in charge at Ibrox. The former Netherlands captain led the Glasgow giants to the Europa League final in May, but failed to win the Scottish Premiership last season and leaves with Rangers nine points behind

Celtic in the title race. "I want to thank Gio for the hard work he has put in over the last 12 months and, especially, the achievements of taking the club to the Europa League final and winning the Scottish Cup last season," said Rangers chairman Douglas Park in a statement.

"Unfortunately, recent results have not met neither our nor Gio's expectations, and we have taken this difficult decision today. Everyone at Rangers wishes Gio every success in the future." Van Bronckhorst, who played for Rangers between 1998 and 2001, replaced Steven Gerrard in November last year when the latter departed Ibrox to take charge of Aston Villa.

Despite a positive start, Rangers let a six-point lead over Celtic slip away as Ange Postecoglou claimed the title in his first season in charge of the Hoops. That disappointment was diminished by a run to just Rangers' second European final in 50 years before losing out in agonising fashion to Eintracht Frankfurt on penalties in Seville. Rangers responded impressively just days later to win the Scottish Cup with a 2-0 win over Hearts at Hampden.

There was another notable European achievement early this season as Rangers beat PSV Eindhoven to reach the Champions League group stages for the first time in 12 years. But their return

to Europe's biggest stage turned into a nightmare as they recorded the worst ever performance by a side in the group stages with six defeats from six matches against Liverpool, Napoli and Ajax and a -20 goal difference.

Domestically there was also no respite for Van Bronckhorst either as Celtic romped to a 4-0 win in the only meeting between the sides so far this season in September. Further dropped points against Livingston, St Johnstone and St Mirren in Van Bronckhorst's final five league games in charge leave his successor with a mountain to climb to wrest the title back from Celtic in the final 23 league games of the season. —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

CHANGE OF NAME

That I am holder of passport NO. Z2816653 issued on 27/09/2014 and valid up to 21/09/2024 issued by RPO Kuwait, in which my name is mentioned JOHAR JOHAR that now I have changed my name from JOHAR JOHAR to JOHAR LOKHANDWALA that in future in all known to me with my new name as JOHAR LOKHANDWALA that the facts stated above are true & correct. (C#2447)

That I am holder of Passport No. S4698016 issued on 31/05/2018 and valid up to 30/05/2028 issued by RPO Kuwait, in which my name is mentioned HAKIMUDDIN. That now I have changed my name from HAKIMUDDIN to HAKIMUDDIN KAGDI. That in future in all known to me with my new name as HAKIMUDDIN KAGDI. That the facts stated above are true and correct. (C#2448) — 21-11-2022

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Saka, Bellingham sparkle as England crush Iran 6-2

Iran's players opt not to sing anthem at World Cup



DOHA: England's goalkeeper #01 Jordan Pickford runs for the ball during the Qatar 2022 World Cup Group B football match between England and Iran at the Khalifa International Stadium on November 21, 2022. — AFP

DOHA: England got off to a flying start at the World Cup by beating Iran 6-2 on Monday as their young stars Jude Bellingham and Bukayo Saka shone in Qatar. The Iranian players chose not to sing their national anthem before the match, in apparent support for anti-government demonstrations that have rocked their country for the past two months. The protests were triggered by the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini in morality police custody in September. Amini, an Iranian of Kurdish origin, died three days after she was arrested in Tehran over an alleged breach of the Islamic republic's dress code for women.

Despite a build-up to the game dominated by questions about the protests Iran made a dogged start before 19-year-old rising star Bellingham headed England into the lead after 35 minutes. Gareth Southgate's side galloped to a 4-0 advantage at Khalifa International Stadium with two goals from man-of-the-match Saka and a fine Raheem Sterling strike, before Iran belatedly fought back with Mehdi Taremi scoring.

England put the result beyond doubt as substitutes Marcus Rashford and Jack Grealish each net-

ted, before Taremi scored a consolation penalty in deep stoppage time. Iran coach Carlos Queiroz said the unrest in Iran had put his players under enormous strain. "You don't even imagine behind the scenes what these kids have been living in the last few days, just because they want to express themselves as footballers," Queiroz said.

Rainbow armband ditched

England captain Harry Kane had been expected to wear a rainbow-themed armband for the game, but hours before kick-off, the English, German and five other European federations said they were abandoning the plans for the "OneLove" insignia. The armbands have been widely viewed as a symbolic protest against laws in Qatar, where homosexuality is illegal. The seven teams said they felt they had no choice but to ditch the plan because of the risk their captains would be shown a yellow card or sent off on the orders of football's world governing body.

"FIFA has been very clear that it will impose sporting sanctions if our captains wear the armbands on the field of play," the federations of England, Wales, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, the

Netherlands and Switzerland said in a statement. They said they had been prepared to pay fines that would normally apply to breaches of kit regulations because they had "a strong commitment to wearing the armband". "However, we cannot put our players in the situation where they might be booked or even forced to leave the field of play," they said.

Ronaldo plays down row

Cristiano Ronaldo insisted that his recent row with Manchester United would not overshadow Portugal's preparations for their opening match with Ghana on Thursday. Ronaldo will spearhead Portugal's attack at what will likely be his last World Cup, fresh from blasting United's owners and coach Erik ten Hag in a TV interview. The 37-year-old has been reduced to a peripheral role at United this season and was suspended for a match after refusing to come on as a substitute against Tottenham last month. "I have no doubt that this recent episode, that interview, and other episodes with other players that happen sometimes, can sometimes shake the player but won't shake the team," Ronaldo told reporters at the Portugal camp. — AFP

Netherlands stun Senegal

DOHA: Late goals by Cody Gakpo and Davy Klaassen gave the Netherlands a 2-0 victory over African champions Senegal on Monday on their return to the World Cup stage. With Senegal missing injured star man Sadio Mane and the Dutch without their main attacking threat Memphis Depay at kick-off, the Group A encounter in Doha looked set to end in a goalless draw.

But with just six minutes remaining PSV Eindhoven forward Gakpo got up in front of Senegal goalkeeper Edouard Mendy to head in a floated Frenkie de Jong cross from the left. Substitute Klaassen then secured the victory deep in injury time, following up to score after Mendy had saved from Depay, who had also come off the bench. The result leaves the Netherlands level at the top of the group with Ecuador, who beat hosts Qatar 2-0 in the tournament's opening match on Sunday.

Louis van Gaal's side play Ecuador on Friday, while Senegal now face a must-win contest against Qatar. Senegal saw Bayern Munich superstar Mane - who came second in this year's Ballon d'Or - pull out of the squad with a leg injury on the eve of the tournament. His absence was clearly felt as the contest at Al-Thumama Stadium - played out to the backdrop of the non-stop drumming and dancing of the Senegal support, but also in front of a considerable number of empty seats - never lived up to its billing.

Everton midfielder Idrissa Gana Gueye came closest to scoring for Senegal with a strike on the half-volley from the edge of the box that was beat-



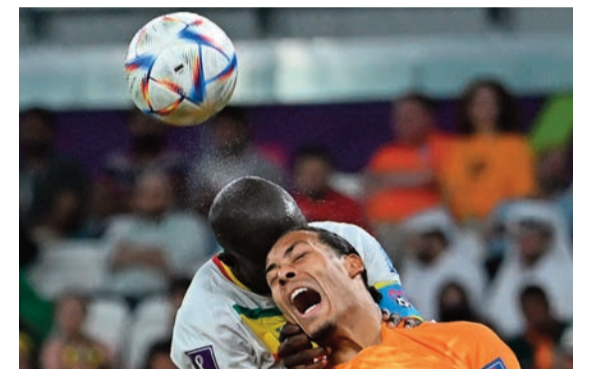
DOHA: Netherlands' midfielder #14 Davy Klaassen (left) celebrates after he scored a goal past Senegal's goalkeeper #16 Edouard Mendy during the Qatar 2022 World Cup Group A football match between Senegal and the Netherlands on November 21, 2022. — AFP

en away by Netherlands goalkeeper Andries Noppert in the 73rd minute. Noppert, the giant Heerenveen goalkeeper who was making his international debut, also excelled with saves from Boulaye Dia and Pape Gueye in the second half as the Netherlands played their first World Cup game in eight years.

The three-time runners-up were semi-finalists under Van Gaal in Brazil in 2014 before failing to qualify for the last World Cup in Russia in 2018. The Dutch team was captained by Virgil van Dijk, who was making his debut at a major international tournament on the occasion of his 50th cap.

With Matthijs de Ligt and Nathan Ake alongside him, they were mostly comfortable at the back but had created little going forward before Barcelona forward Depay - who scored 12 times in qualifying - came on for the final half-hour.

With Depay not able to start after spending two months on the sidelines, it fell to former Tottenham Hotspur striker Vincent Janssen to spearhead the Netherlands attack but he failed to make a major impact. Yet Gakpo finally broke the deadlock and, as Senegal pushed for an equaliser, Depay played his part in Ajax midfielder Klaassen's goal that clinched the points in the ninth added minute. — AFP



Senegal's defender #03 Kalidou Koulibaly (back) and Netherlands' defender #04 Virgil van Dijk jump for the ball during the Qatar 2022 World Cup Group A football match on November 21, 2022. — AFP photos



Iranian fans watch the Qatar 2022 World Cup Group B football match between England and Iran, on a giant screen at Tehran book garden on November 21, 2022.



Netherlands' fans are seen ahead of the Qatar 2022 World Cup Group A football match between Senegal and the Netherlands at the Al-Thumama Stadium.



Netherlands' fans attend the Qatar 2022 World Cup Group A football match between Senegal and the Netherlands at the Al-Thumama Stadium in Doha on November 21, 2022.



Senegal's supporters cheer during the Qatar 2022 World Cup Group A football match between Senegal and the Netherlands at the Al-Thumama Stadium in Doha.



England's forward #07 Jack Grealish fights for the ball with Iran's defender #02 Sadegh Moharrami during the Qatar 2022 World Cup Group B.