

3 Amir sponsors ceremony for Informatics Award



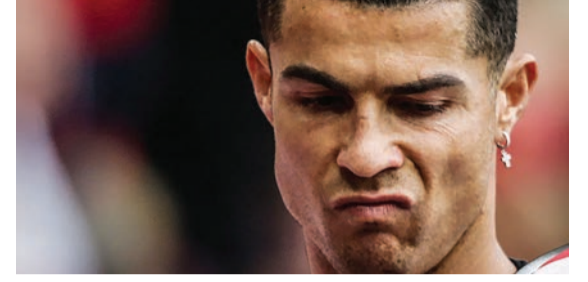
8 NIC holds financial analysts conference for Q3 2022 results



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15 Ronaldo to leave Manchester United with 'immediate effect'



Green Falcons soar to victory

King declares public holiday as Saudis celebrate shock win over Messi's Argentina



DOHA/RIYADH: Saudi Arabia pulled off one of the greatest upsets in World Cup history on Tuesday, roaring back to beat Lionel Messi's Argentina 2-1 and set the tournament in Qatar alight. Copa America champions Argentina came into the match on a 36-match unbeaten streak and appeared to be on their way to a straightforward victory after Messi stroked home an early penalty.

Lionel Scaloni's team could have put the game beyond Saudi Arabia's reach in the first half but had three goals chalked off for offside. Saudi Arabia, ranked 51st in the world, equalized early in the second half through Saleh Al-Shehri, silencing the hordes of Argentina fans. But just minutes later the Green Falcons were in front when Salem Al-Dawsari rifled an unstoppable shot into the top corner after a delightful piece of trickery.

Argentina laid siege to the Saudi goal as the minutes ticked away but Saudi goalkeeper Mohammed Al-Owais proved unbeatable and the final whistle sparked scenes of jubilation. Defeat is a bitter blow for Argentina, who were one game away from equalling Italy's all-time record of 37 matches unbeaten.

Saudi King Salman declared a national holiday after the football team's stunning World Cup win. The monarch "orders that tomorrow, Wednesday, be a holiday for all employees in the public and private sectors, as well as male and female students at all educational levels", the Al-Ekhbariya channel said on Twitter. The move comes in the middle of final exams in the Gulf nation, indicating that they will have to be rescheduled.

Celebrations erupted throughout the capital Riyadh after the final whistle blew, with fans forming impromptu dance circles and waving the sword-embazoned national flag from the windows of speeding cars. Al-Ekhbariya posted pictures of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, celebrating after watching the game with a group that included energy minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman.

Continued on Page 6

News in brief

38 killed in central China fire

BEIJING: Thirty-eight people were killed and two were injured in a fire at a factory in central China, state media said Tuesday, with authorities blaming workers for illegal welding. The fire broke out at a plant in Anyang city in Henan province on Monday afternoon. Rescue services first received reports of a fire at 4:22 pm at Anyang Kaixinda Trading Co. Ltd and was extinguished by around 11 pm local time. — AFP

Dubai airport traffic returns

DUBAI: Passenger traffic at Dubai international airport returned to pre-pandemic levels in the third quarter, officials said on Tuesday, with volumes nearing 18.5 million at the major aviation hub. Dubai, the world's busiest airport for international passengers before the COVID-19 pandemic, had 18,455,938 visitors in the three months to September, the biggest number since 17.8 million in the first quarter of 2020. — AFP

Morocco bus crash kills 11

RABAT: At least 11 people died and 43 were injured Tuesday when their bus overturned on a highway in northern Morocco, authorities said. The vehicle overturned a few kilometers from the city of Taza in the country's mountainous northeast. Authorities have opened an enquiry into the disaster. — AFP

MPs hail Amir's 'historic' pardon

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Lawmakers on Tuesday hailed the amnesty granted by HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to political prisoners,

describing it as historic as large sections will benefit from the pardon. "This is a historic amnesty," said MP Adel Al-Damkhi, adding it will include large sections of prisoners jailed over political opinion offenses, including those imprisoned at the Central Jail over such offenses and those convicted and living abroad for years. Damkhi said the Amiri pardon represents a "true national reconciliation", adding the amnesty is fair and just as it covers broad cases and not only persons.

MP Abdullah Fahhad thanked HH the Amir and HH

the Crown Prince for issuing the amnesty, saying it has made the leadership more popular than any time before. Seven MPs - Saud Al-Asfour, Falah Al-Hajeri, Shuaib Shaaban, Osama Al-Zaid, Shuaib Al-Muwaizri, Hamad Al-Mudlej and Fahhad - greatly welcomed the Amiri pardon, saying it will put an end to an issue that had been the cause for social and political crises. Also, MPs Obaid Al-Wasmi, Hamed Al-Bathali and Khaled Al-Otaibi all hailed the Amiri amnesty as a great positive development for the country.

Continued on Page 6

MoH mulls hiking delivery charges

KUWAIT: Three years after a decision by health ministry to increase delivery fees for expats registered in the health insurance system at government hospitals, medical sources revealed charges will be reconsidered and may increase in light of the pressure facing the maternity hospital, especially since a new maternity hospital is current-

ly under construction. Sources told Kuwait Times that charges could increase by 50 to 75 percent after a study is completed and approved, pointing out that the final decision of acceptance, rejection or postponement will be clearer at the beginning of the new year. Currently, fees collected from non-Kuwaiti patients registered in the health insurance system, amounts to KD 100 dinars for normal childbirth and KD 150 dinars caesarean section.

The fees for natural or cesarean delivery include delivery charges, ultrasound examinations, laboratory tests and medicines, but not hospital stay. For instance, the fee for a private room is KD 100 per day. "These fees are

imposed due to the high costs of health services in terms of medical staff and equipment, as well as a wide gap in delivery fees between the government and private sectors," the sources explained.

"The study calls to separate delivery charges from fees for ultrasound examinations, laboratory tests and medicines, as well as doubling the price of a private room," the sources added. It is estimated that the total number of births at health ministry hospitals exceeds 20,000 annually among expatriates, while those of Kuwaiti women does not exceed 8,000, as most Kuwaitis prefer giving birth at private hospitals.

Saudi, Kuwait deny OPEC+ discussing oil output increase

RIYADH/KUWAIT: Saudi Arabia and Kuwait on Monday denied a report that oil producers were discussing a production increase for their next meeting, saying a cut approved last month would stay in place until the end of 2023. The Wall Street Journal reported earlier on Monday that Saudi Arabia, which co-leads the OPEC+ cartel along with Russia, and other members were considering

an "increase of up to 500,000 barrels a day".

But the official Saudi Press Agency said on Monday night that energy minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman "categorically denies" the report. "It is well known, and no secret, that OPEC+ does not discuss any decisions ahead of its meetings," SPA quoted Prince Abdulaziz as saying. Kuwaiti Deputy Prime Minister and Oil Minister Bader Al-Mulla also denied the report on Tuesday. In a statement to KUNA, the minister stressed the keenness of Kuwait to maintain the stability of the balance in the oil market.

The next OPEC+ meeting is scheduled for Dec 4. An increase in production would partially reverse the cut of two million barrels per day announced by the bloc in October. More oil out-

put would also come when prices are already falling. World oil prices plunged more than five percent on Monday, reaching the lowest levels since January, on forecasts of a hit to Chinese demand.

Saudi officials have vigorously defended the recent production cut in the face of criticism from Washington, saying it was driven purely by market conditions and could change as the market changed. Prince Abdulaziz reiterated that position on Monday. "The current cut of 2 million barrels per day by OPEC+ continues until the end of 2023 and if there is a need to take further measures by reducing production to balance supply and demand, we always remain ready to intervene," he said. — Agencies



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Local

Zain successfully concludes Dubai Roadshow startup accelerator tour

ZGI entrepreneurs met with execs from Google, Majid Al Futtaim Group, Wamda Capital

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, successfully concluded its Dubai Roadshow startup accelerator tour, featuring ten Kuwait-based businesses as part of the company's seventh Zain Great Idea tech startup accelerator program. The Dubai Roadshow was the first destination of Zain Great Idea's Regional Accelerator Program, featuring 10 out of 30 Kuwait-based startups that were selected by a judges panel consisting of innovation and entrepreneurship experts, representatives of venture capital firms, investors, and startup accelerators. The regional program is set to feature two more upcoming tours in Cairo and Riyadh.

The founders of the 10 businesses joined the three-day tour in Dubai, taking part in field visits, mentoring sessions, and orientation meetings with investors and executives from some of the region's biggest companies, accelerators, and innovation hubs. Special talks and gatherings were also held with prominent founders and entrepreneurs who shared their success stories, tips, and experiences with the participants.

The Dubai Roadshow featured a special session with Fadi Ghandour, Aramex Founder and Executive Chairman of Wamda Capital, the leading regional Venture Capital firm. The tour also featured visits to Google's MENA Innovation Hub, Majid Al Futtaim Group's Fintech Center, in5 Dubai integrated innovation platform, AstroLabs platform for tech ecosystems, and more.

The ten Kuwait-based startups are: Business4Sale: a business exiting platform, Bazaar Gate: a dropshipping e-commerce platform, Matrii: a mattress cleaning platform, Motery: an app for car sales and services, Punch: a loyalty cards app, Yuehli: an e-commerce app for mothers and kids, Phinests: a platform for creative freelance talents, Tdalal: a multi-solution platform for gifting needs, Enabill: a fintech platform for restaurant ordering and payments, and The Wish List: an online platform for fashion brands.

Zain recently inaugurated the all-new season of its renowned tech startup accelerator program in collaboration with Brilliant Lab. The program continues its mission to enrich the tech startup ecosystem in Kuwait and further push it forward towards expansion into the MENA region.

ZGI aims at taking entrepreneurs towards the best experiences that bring them sustainable growth, not only to help grow their businesses, but grow themselves as well. Zain always strives to leverage on its partners' ecosystem to connect its entrepreneurs with venture capital firms and business partners to help them put a steady first step in the business world.

Zain strongly believes in the crucial role played by private sector organizations in supporting social and economic sustainability projects. The company is committed to printing a positive impact through all its activities, and this has led it to embrace the most influential topics in the community, perhaps most importantly the support of youth, entrepreneurship, and innovation, not only in Kuwait, but across the entire region.



Fadi Ghandour with Zain's entrepreneurs.



ZGI members at Google's MENA office in Dubai.



The tour featured a visit to Majid Al Futtaim Group's Fintech Center.

Bangladesh-Kuwait relations hailed on Armed Forces Day

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: The Embassy of the People's Republic of Bangladesh in Kuwait held a reception on Monday on the occasion of the 51st Armed Forces Day of Bangladesh at Millennium Hotel. The reception was attended by members of the Bangladesh armed forces, diplomatic officials, ambassadors and the media. Ambassador of Bangladesh Maj Gen Md Ashikuzzaman said the relationship and bond between Kuwait and Bangladesh are inseparable and historically connected. "Kuwait has a special place in the hearts and minds of the people of Bangladesh. Kuwait and Bangladesh are strategic partners in different fields, including the military," he said.

Regarding visas, the ambassador noted that the embassy has received complaints about family, work, and tourist visas for Bangladeshi nationals. "We had a meeting with officials from the ministry of interior, who assured me that officially Bangladeshis are not restricted, but according to the rules and regulations of Kuwait, a worker needs to bring a 'no objection' certificate," he said. Ashikuzzaman revealed that recently the embassy brought 500 skilled nurses from Bangladesh, adding the nurses will begin work in mid-December. "We are also planning to have a ministerial-level meeting to discuss the current situation with the Kuwaiti side," he said.

Maj Gen Khaled Ali Al-Kandari, Assistant Chief of Staff for Administration and Manpower of Kuwait Armed Forces, congratulated the Embassy of Bangladesh. "It is an honor and privilege to be here to celebrate with our friends the anniversary of Armed Forces Day. Bangladesh and Kuwait have

enjoyed excellent relations for decades," he said. "In 1991, the People's Republic of Bangladesh had a supportive stand with Kuwait during the liberation, which strengthened ties between both countries. Since then, the defense operation has continued to grow in multiple levels, where defense officials have been meeting to enhance and see new perspectives for operations, and are also considering enhancing collaboration to professional military teams," he pointed out. Kandari indicated that Bangladesh and Kuwait seek to maintain the security of both countries' peoples and land. "We have much in common: where we have the same defense principles that will hopefully continue to contribute to regional and international security stability."

Brig Gen Md Hasan Uz Zaman, Defense Attache of Bangladesh in Kuwait, said the Armed Forces Day on November 21 holds special importance not only for them, but also for the people of Bangladesh. "It signifies the paramount importance of comradeship, togetherness and jointness in arms to fight collectively against the enemy. On this day, we pay homage to our war heroes and martyrs. The day inspires the members of the Bangladesh armed forces to renew their oath to protect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of their motherland Bangladesh."

On the professional development of Bangladesh Armed Forces, Hasan mentioned that following the dream of the Father of the Nation, the Bangladesh armed forces are being modernized under the "Forces Goal 2030". "As professional armed forces, Bangladesh proudly holds the top position among all troop-contributing countries under the banner of the United Nations for world peace. Under a bilateral agreement, the Bangladesh military contingent has been deployed in Kuwait since 1991 and supporting the Kuwait armed forces by engaging deeply in constructive and development works of Kuwait. Our armed forces are the symbol of pride, trust and confidence. Its contribution in nation building activities, disaster management and internal security duties are proudly acknowledged by every citizen of Bangladesh," he said.



KUWAIT: Bangladeshi and Kuwaiti officials attend a reception on Monday on the occasion of the 51st Armed Forces Day of Bangladesh. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Fates in front of the burning car at Kuwait Intl Rally (2018).

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Local

Amir sponsors Informatics Award ceremony



KUWAIT: HH the Amir's representative, HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, with the Informatics Award winners.



Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal was given a commemorative gift. —KUNA photos

KUWAIT: Under the patronage of HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and in the presence of HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, a ceremony was held at Bayan Palace on Tuesday to honor Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah Informatics Award winners. Addressing the event, Head of the Award Board of Trustees Sheikha Ayda Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah said

the three-decade prize is proof of digital excellence for individuals and institutions, and highlights pioneers who have been seeking diligently to develop a sustainable digital world based on innovative ideas and enlightened will.

She voiced much appreciation and gratitude to the country's leadership for their farsightedness, wisdom and fervent efforts for the sake of national

development and modernization. Also speaking during the ceremony, Saudi Minister of Hajj and Umrah Tawfiq Al-Rabiah thanked and appreciated HH the Amir and the organizers for their relentless support and encouragement, as well as their interest in the world of technology and innovation.

He boasted that the awarding of the Saudi ministry of hajj and umrah during the event is a source

of pride and honoring and reflects his efforts, backed by the Saudi leadership. The minister expounded on the kingdom's streamlined procedures for pilgrims this year at the behest of the Saudi King and Crown Prince. HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah handed the awards to the winners, and was given a commemorative gift on this occasion. —KUNA

PM receives KDIPA officials

KUWAIT: HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, in the presence of Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Barrak Al-Sheetan, received Tuesday Director General of Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority Sheikh Dr Mishal Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. The meeting was attended by Deputy Chairperson of KDIPA Wafa Al-Qatami and board members. They handed the premier a copy of the seventh annual report of KDIPA's 2021-2022 financial year. The meeting was also attended by Undersecretary of HH the Prime Minister's Diwan Sheikh Khaled Talal Al-Khaled Al-Sabah and Head of HH the Prime Minister's Office Hamad Bader Al-Amer. — KUNA



KUWAIT: HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah receives KDIPA's Director General Sheikh Dr Mishal Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and board members. — KUNA

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Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: The British Royal Air Force's (RAF) aerobatic team, the "Red Arrows", escorts a Kuwait Airways plane during an airshow on Nov 22, 2022. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

News in brief

Kuwait to strengthen supply chains

KUWAIT: Commerce and Industry Minister Mazen Al-Nahedh underlined on Tuesday state efforts aiming to ensure an adequate supply of key staples, in light of mounting global concerns over food security. These efforts also include putting in place a business environment that is conducive for foreign investment, Nahedh, who doubles as state minister for communications and information technology, said as he held talks on the matter with a visiting delegation from the United Arab Emirates. The talks mainly revolved around economic and trade issues, in addition to challenges facing both sides, according to a Kuwaiti commerce and industry ministry statement. — KUNA

Woman jailed for fake sick leave

KUWAIT: The criminal court sentenced a Kuwaiti woman to seven years in jail and a 19-workday fine for faking sickness for 19 days. The woman was ordered to pay KD 500 in bail in order to avoid jailtime.

Speaker meets UAE delegation

KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Ahmad Al-Saadoun received on Tuesday at his office Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs and Minister of State for Housing and Urban Development Ammar Al-Ajmi. The minister accompanied a delegation of the UAE National Defense College, headed by Brig Mohammad Al-Jabri. The reception was attended by UAE Ambassador to Kuwait Dr Mutar Al-Neyyadi. — KUNA

An independent voice of Kuwait to many Americans

KUWAIT: Reconnaissance Research's Deputy CEO Yousef Alghusain welcomed former US ambassador to Kuwait and Iraq Douglas A Silliman at the onset of the latter's five-day visit to Kuwait, where he is expected to meet with some Kuwaitis. Alghusain said: "Ambassador Silliman played a major role in the launch of Reconnaissance Research. He is a key figure in our portfolio of close friends." He added: "Ambassador Silliman last visited Kuwait in 2019, when he inaugurated the center's maiden event (the US role in Kuwaiti-Iraqi relations), where he along with a number of ambassadors, businessmen and academics had a fruitful discussion."

Alghusain commended Ambassador Silliman as being an active expert in the region's affairs and challenges, thanks to his long practical experience of working in Kuwait and Iraq, and his career at the US State Department since 1984, as well as his current work as president of the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington (AGSIW).



Douglas A Silliman



For his part, Silliman said: "It was my great pleasure to return to Kuwait after three years to renew old friendships and make new ones. In Kuwait I found some new optimism about the possibility of positive reform following elections and the formation of the new government. I hope that we will see cooperation between the government and parliament to put in place laws and policies that will position Kuwait well to deal with the most serious issues of the future - regional security, climate change, and sustainable development."

He continued: "I have a strong attachment to Reconnaissance Research, and have met its founder, Abdulaziz Al-Anjeri, numerous times while in Washington DC just few weeks ago." He added "The last time I was in Kuwait in 2019 I had the



KUWAIT: Reconnaissance Research's Deputy CEO Yousef Alghusain meets former US ambassador to Kuwait and Iraq Douglas A Silliman.

honor of being a keynote speaker at their inaugural event. It was an enlightening and very well executed event by an excellent institution."

Ambassador Silliman concluded: "Reconnaissance Research has succeeded in establishing itself as an independent voice of Kuwait to many Americans and members of the international community. They have put together a number of well-researched analytical reports as well as high quality events. We will continue to work together."

CONDOLENCES

Kuwait Times management and staff convey our deepest condolences to our colleague

Ashraf Barakah

and his family members on the sad demise of his

Brother

May Allah the Almighty bestow His mercy on his soul



US, China defence chiefs meet in Cambodia

Russian, US pressure mounts on Turkey over Syria threat

Indonesia quake toll jumps to 268

'I had to free us by digging, nothing is left and there is nothing I could save'

CIANJUR, Indonesia: The death toll from an earthquake on Indonesia's main island of Java jumped to 268 on Tuesday, as rescuers searched for survivors in the rubble and relatives started to bury their loved ones. As body bags emerged from crumpled buildings in Indonesia's most populous province, West Java, rescue efforts turned to any survivors still under debris in areas made hard to reach by the mass of obstacles thrown onto the roads by the quake.

"I just lost a brother 10 days ago. Now I've lost another brother," said his sister Siti Rohmah as she sobbed uncontrollably. "I kept waiting, hoping he would survive and that nothing bad would happen to him." One of the dozens of rescuers, 34-year-old Dimas Reviansyah, said teams were using chainsaws and excavators to break through piles of felled trees and debris to find survivors. "I haven't slept at all since yesterday, but I must keep going because there are victims who

because of severed road links and temporary power outages in parts of the largely rural, mountainous region. Those who survived camped outside in near-total darkness surrounded by fallen debris, shattered glass and chunks of concrete. Doctors treated patients outdoors at makeshift wards after the quake, which was felt as far away as the capital Jakarta. One father carried his dead son wrapped in white cloth through the streets of his village near Cianjur.

Others searched for their missing relatives in the chaos. Rahmi Leonita's father was riding a motorbike to Cianjur when the quake struck. "His phone is not active. I am in a state of shock now, I am very worried but I am still hopeful," said the 38-year-old, tears falling down her face as she spoke.

'Nothing I could save'

At a shelter in Ciherang village near Cianjur, evacuees sat on tarpaulins stretched over the cold morning ground. Nunung, a 37-year-old woman, had pulled herself and her 12-year-old son out of the rubble of their collapsed home. "I had to free us by digging. Nothing is left, there is nothing I could save," she told AFP from the shelter, her face covered in dried blood. The devastation caused by the quake was made worse by a wave of 62 smaller aftershocks that relentlessly shook Cianjur, a town of about 175,000 people.

The Geological Agency of the Indonesian Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources said in an analysis posted online Monday that the soil make-up of the area could have exacerbated the impact of the quake.

It said the area's "undulating to steep hills" were made up of "weathered" and "young" volcanic debris. "These... deposits are generally soft, loose, unconsolidated and strengthen the effects of shocks, making them prone to earthquakes," it said.

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and Russian President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday joined Canadian and French leaders in offering their condolences. Indonesia experiences frequent seismic and volcanic activity due to its position on the Pacific "Ring of Fire", where tectonic plates collide.

A 6.2-magnitude quake that shook Sulawesi island in January 2021 killed more than 100 people and left thousands homeless. — AFP

38 killed in central China fire

BEIJING: Thirty-eight people were killed and two were injured in a fire at a factory in central China, state media said Tuesday, with authorities blaming workers for illegal welding. The fire broke out at a plant in Anyang city in Henan province on Monday afternoon, news agency Xinhua reported.

Rescue services first received reports of a fire at 4:22 pm (0822 GMT) at Anyang Kaixinda Trading Co., Ltd, according to state media. "After receiving the alarm, the municipal fire rescue detachment immediately dispatched forces to the scene," state broadcaster CCTV said.

It added that the fire was extinguished by around 11 pm local time. Footage from the scene shared by CCTV showed thick plumes of black smoke from the fire, with at least two trucks in position to battle the flames.

In addition to the dead, two were sent to hospital with injuries that were not life-threatening, the state-run People's Daily said. Authorities said "criminal suspects" had been taken into custody in connection with the fire.

CCTV then reported, citing local officials, that a preliminary investigation had found the fire was caused by "electric welding in which workers violated safety measures". Chinese President Xi Jinping issued a directive later Tuesday, ordering officials to "go all-out in treating the injured... (and) strictly pursue accountability in accordance with the law".

He added that officials must "comprehensively investigate and rectify hidden risks to firmly prevent and curb the occurrence of major accidents", noting a recent string of accidents in Henan and neighbouring Shanxi province.—AFP



CIANJUR, Indonesia: Rescue workers carry the body of a victim in Cianjur on November 22, 2022, following a 5.6-magnitude earthquake that killed at least 268 people, with hundreds injured and others missing. — AFP

The epicentre of the shallow 5.6-magnitude quake on Monday was near the town of Cianjur where most of the victims were killed, hundreds were injured and dozens feared trapped as buildings collapsed and landslides were triggered. The death toll jumped dramatically again later on Tuesday from 162 to 268, Suharyanto, the head of Indonesia's national disaster mitigation agency, or BNPB, told a press conference. At least 151 people remain missing and more than 1,000 have been injured, said the official, who like many Indonesians goes by one name.

"The focus is still on the search and evacuation of victims. That's the priority," he said. "When the emergency response ends, hopefully everyone has been found." At a burial in a village near Cianjur, relatives of 48-year-old victim Husein, who was killed while building a house when the quake struck, broke into hysterical wails before his body was lowered into the ground.

have not been found," he said.

Drone footage taken by AFP showed the extent of a quake-triggered landslide where a wall of brown earth was only punctuated by workers using heavy machinery to clear a road. President Joko Widodo visited the area on Tuesday, offering compensation for victims and ordering disaster and rescue agencies to "mobilise their personnel".

'State of shock'

Many of those killed were children, according to the head of Indonesia's national rescue agency Basarnas. "They were at school, at 1 pm, they were still studying," Henri Aliandi told a press conference.

Some of those dead were students at an Islamic boarding school, while others were killed in their homes when roofs and walls caved in on them. The search operation on Tuesday was made more challenging

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International

Russian, US pressure mounts on Turkey over Syria threat

There is no question that this operation be limited to only an aerial operation: Erdogan

ISTANBUL, Turkey: International pressure mounted Tuesday on Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan not to launch a threatened ground offensive against Kurdish fighters in Syria. Ankara launched a series of air strikes in Operation Claw-Sword on Sunday-hitting dozens of Kurdish militant targets across Iraq and Syria-and announcing that its military was once again "on the top of the terrorists".

The air raids followed a bombing in Istanbul that killed six people and wounded 81. Ankara blamed the attack on the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which is blacklisted as a terror group by the European Union and the United States. The Turkish leader has threatened a new military operation into northern Syria since May and upped those threats in the wake of this month's bomb attack. "There is no question that this operation be limited to only an aerial operation," Erdogan told reporters while returning home from the opening of the World Cup in Qatar.

The PKK, which has waged an insurgency against the Turkish state since 1984, denied any role in the November 13 bombing, which was the deadliest in five years after a spate of attacks in Turkey between 2015 and 2017.

The United States late Monday urged de-escalation and Russia said Tuesday it hoped Turkey would exercise "restraint" and refrain from "excessive use of force" in Syria. "We urge de-escalation in Syria to protect civilian life and support the common goal of defeating ISIS," US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said in a statement, referring to the fight against the jihadist Islamic State (IS) group.

"We understand and respect Turkey's concerns regarding its own security... We still call on all parties to

refrain from steps that could lead to seriously destabilising the situation," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

'Robust campaign'

"We hope to convince our Turkish colleagues to refrain from resorting to excessive use of force on Syrian territory," Alexander Lavrentyev, Russian President Vladimir Putin's special envoy on Syria, told reporters in the Kazakh capital Astana.

"Russia has for months... done everything possible to prevent any large-scale ground operation," Lavrentyev added. In return, Turkey asked its allies to stop supporting fighters from the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) who assisted the US-led campaign against IS.

"We tell all our interlocutors especially the United States that the PKK is equivalent to the YPG and we insistently demand that all support to the terrorists be stopped," Turkish Defence Minister Hulusi Akar told lawmakers. Turkey has launched three offensives into Syria since 2016 aimed at crushing Syrian Kurdish fighters, whom it charges are allied to the PKK. Erdogan has repeatedly called for a 30-kilometre (19-mile) "safe zone" to protect southern Turkey against cross-border attacks from Syrian territory.

At least three people, including a child, were killed in a Turkish border town on Monday by a rocket strike fired from Syria. Anthony Skinner, a Turkey expert and a political risk consultant, told AFP that conditions "are in place for a particularly robust campaign" against Kurdish militants ahead of Turkish presidential and parliamentary elections in June.

"Erdogan wants to bolster support for his AKP and its



AL-MALIKIYAH: Relatives mourn over the caskets of 11 people killed in Turkish air strikes during their funeral in Al-Malikiyah (Derik) in Syria's northeastern Hasakah province. —AFP

(nationalist) MHP allies, so he is playing the nationalist and security card. Hence the noise," he said. "Erdogan effectively used the security and stability cards in the run

up to the rerun of the general election in 2015. But his work is cut out now because of economic and socioeconomic pressures." —AFP

Strong quake rattles Solomon Islands, no injuries

HONIARA, Solomon Islands: A 7.0-magnitude earthquake struck the Solomon Islands on Tuesday, swaying buildings, hurling items off shelves and briefly knocking out power in parts of the capital Honiara.

There were no reports of serious injuries or major structural damage. "This was a big one," Joy Nisha, a receptionist with the Heritage Park Hotel in the capital, told AFP. "Some of the things in the hotel fell. Everyone seems OK, but panicky."

At one recently built mall, chunks of cladding were shaken loose, crushing the bonnet of a car and breaking the windshield. The roof of an annex at the Australian High Commission also collapsed, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese told parliament in Canberra, stating "there are no known injuries".

Australian Defence Minister Richard Marles said damage assessments were ongoing and it was too early to know what military assistance might be sent to help.

"We always stand ready to support our Pacific neighbours," he told AFP by phone from Siem Reap, Cambodia. "We will no doubt look at what the needs are... and go from there." An AFP reporter in Honiara said the shaking lasted for around 20 seconds.

Power was immediately knocked out in some areas of the capital and phone lines were also down. Across the city, people fled their homes and workplaces for higher ground, fearing a tsunami.

"I was really scared because this is the first time I felt this kind of earthquake," said a manager at the Pacific Casino Hotel, who asked not to be named. "The



HONIARA, Solomon Islands: Residents stay in the open in downtown of Honiara on November 22, 2022, as people rushed from their offices and fleeing to higher ground after a strong earthquake. —AFP

building was really violently shaking... It was really strong, it made you move side to side."

Dozens of staff and guests fled the building to the relative safety of the car park, hoping not to be hit by debris on the way out. The nation's attorney general, John Muria, posted images on social media of office files that had spilled from several large metal cabinets.

Aftershocks

The quake struck at a relatively shallow depth of 15 kilometres, just off the southwest coast of Guadalcanal island, according to the US Geological Survey. A tsunami warning was issued for an area of the Solomons coast within 300 kilometres (185 miles) of the epicentre, but the UN-backed Pacific warning centre later said the threat had "largely" passed.

As nightfall approached, power was starting to return to Honiara, but local authorities urged caution. "We expect aftershocks so people should stay alert around buildings and tall structures because of the size of the earthquake," said David Hiba Hiriasia, director of the Solomon Islands Meteorological Service. —AFP

pare 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 which could threaten Kuwait's security. It also includes those jailed for spreading false news about the internal situation of Kuwait, which 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, in addition to those convicted for misusing their phones to threaten others or the security of the state. Several months ago, HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf issued a decree pardoning a number of opposition political leaders, many of them had been living in exile in Turkey, and a number of other prisoners in the country. The government had also promised to pardon more political prisoners, which has been the main demand of a majority of MPs.

"Nothing is impossible for Saudi Arabia... The future is here and we are the future," 35-year-old Tareq Al-Shammari said at the Mrsool Park stadium, as fans stormed the pitch and belted out chants and songs around him. "We have people who love football and we adore it," said Sultan, wearing a white thobe (gown) and a green-and-white scarf. We are investing in infrastructure and we have all the capabilities to compete with European countries."

"I'm so, so, so happy," said a fan who gave her name as Bayan. "No one from Saudi expected that, but they did it." Riyadh prepared for an all-night party as congratulations poured in from high-ranking Saudi officials. Messi is no stranger to Saudi Arabia, having been named a tourism adviser to the kingdom as it tries to tempt visitors from abroad. Yet Saudis on Twitter were quick to gloat over his loss, with one meme showing a man in a white robe roasting a goat - representing Messi, sometimes referred to as the Greatest Of All Time or GOAT - over an open fire. —AFP

UN denounces 'hardening' of Iranian response

GENEVA, Switzerland: The United Nations on Tuesday denounced Iran's increasingly harsh and deadly crackdown on mass protests that have been rocking the country for more than two months. "UN Human Rights Chief Volker Turk says the rising number of deaths from protests in Iran, including those of two children at the weekend, and the hardening of the response by security forces, underline the critical situation in the country," spokesman Jeremy Laurence told reporters in Geneva.

"We urge the authorities to address people's demands for equality, dignity and rights, instead of using unnecessary or disproportionate force to suppress the protests," he said. "The lack of accountability for gross human rights violations in Iran remains persistent and is contributing to the growing grievances."

His comments came after Iranian security forces on Monday intensified their crackdown in western Iran's Kurdish-populated regions, directly shooting at protesters, using heavy weapons and killing a dozen people over 24 hours, rights groups said.

The Kurdish-populated provinces of western and northwestern Iran have been hubs of protest since the death in custody of 22-year-old Kurdish woman Mahsa Amini on September 16, after she was arrested by morality police in Tehran.

Hundreds killed

The demonstrations sparked by Amini's death have become the most serious challenge to Iran's clerical regime since the 1979 revolution. The UN rights office

said more than 300 people had been killed since the protests began, including more than 40 children.

The Norway-based Iran Human Rights (IHR) group on Saturday put the death toll at at least 378 people. There have been particularly intense anti-regime demonstrations in several towns in the last few days, rights groups say, largely sparked by the funerals of people said to have been killed by the security forces in previous protests. Laurence said sources had told the rights office that more than 40 people had been killed in mainly Kurdish cities in the past week. Two 16-year-old boys were among six killed over the weekend, he said.

"Significant numbers of security forces have also been deployed in recent days," he said, adding: "Overnight, we received reports of security forces responding forcefully to protests in several mainly Kurdish cities, including Javanrud and Saqqez."

Since the beginning, he said, "protesters have been killed in 25 of Iran's 31 provinces, including more than 100 in Sistan and Baluchistan".

Withholding bodies

Laurence voiced particular concern at "the authorities' apparent refusal to release the bodies of those killed to their families, or making the release of their bodies conditional on the families not speaking to the media or agreeing to give a false narrative on the cause of death."

He also pointed to the thousands of people "detained throughout the country for joining peaceful protests," adding that a growing number of Iranian celebrities and sports stars who had voiced support for the protests were being summoned and arrested.

Especially alarming, he said, was that so far six people connected to the protests had been handed death sentences. "We call on the authorities to release all those detained in relation to the exercise of their rights, ... and to drop the charges against them," Laurence said. —AFP

MPs hail Amir's 'historic'...

Continued from Page 1

An Amiri decree was issued 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 legislation governing freedom of speech. A government committee was set up immediately to look into the cases of prisoners who will be included in the amnesty. The panel is headed by Deputy Premier and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Barak Al-Sheetan and includes the attorney general and interior ministry undersecretary as members.

Sheetan said the decree stipulates to grant amnesty to a number of Kuwaiti citizens jailed for committing crimes, mostly political, between Nov 16, 2011 until the end of 2021. The minister said the special committee will start meetings on Thursday to pre-

Green Falcons soar to...

Continued from Page 1

Turki Al-Sheikh, an adviser at the Royal Court and head of Saudi Arabia's General Entertainment Authority, announced on Twitter that admission fees would be waived at major theme parks and entertainment centers in Riyadh on Tuesday.

Disbelieving Saudis formed impromptu dance circles and waved the sword-embazoned national flag from the windows of speeding cars in Riyadh on Tuesday after their team's sensational win over Lionel Messi's Argentina. As the final whistle blew in the group-stage shocker with a 2-1 scorecard that ended Argentina's 36-match unbeaten streak, fans watching on a big screen at a stadium in the capital sent shisha pipes flying as they rushed to celebrate.

Iran enriching uranium to 60% at Fordo plant

TEHRAN: Iran said Tuesday it had begun producing uranium enriched to 60 percent at its Fordo plant, an underground facility that reopened three years ago amid the breakdown of its nuclear deal with major powers. The move was part of Iran's response to the UN nuclear watchdog's adoption last week of a censure motion drafted by Western governments accusing it of non-cooperation.

"Iran has started producing uranium enriched to 60 percent at the Fordo plant for the first time," Iran's ISNA news agency reported, a development then confirmed by Atomic Energy Organization of Iran chief Mohammad Eslami. An atomic bomb requires uranium enriched to 90 percent, so 60 percent is a significant step towards weapons-grade enrichment.

Iran has always denied any ambition to develop an atomic bomb, insisting its nuclear activities are for civilian purposes only. Under a landmark deal struck in 2015, Iran agreed to mothball the Fordo plant and limit its enrichment of uranium to 3.67 percent, sufficient for most civilian uses, as part of a package of restrictions on its nuclear activities aimed at preventing it covertly developing a nuclear weapon.

In return, major powers agreed to relax sanctions they had imposed over Iran's nuclear program. But the deal began falling apart in 2018 when then US president Donald Trump pulled Washington out of the agreement and reimposed crippling economic sanctions. The following year, Iran began stepping away from its commitments under the deal. It reopened the Fordo plant and starting enriching uranium to higher levels.

In January 2021, Iran said it was working to enrich uranium to 20 percent at Fordo. Several months later another Iranian enrichment plant reached 60 percent. President Joe Biden has expressed a desire for Washington to return to a revived deal and on-off talks have been underway

since April last year. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said late last month that he saw little scope to restore the deal, as Iran battles nationwide protests sparked by the September death in morality police custody of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old Kurdish woman.

The heavily protected Fordo plant around 180 km south of Tehran was built deep underground in a bid to shield it from air or missile strikes by Iran's enemies. Archfoe the Zionist entity has never ruled out military action if it deems it necessary to prevent Iran developing a nuclear weapons capability. The Zionist entity is widely suspected to hold the region's sole if undeclared nuclear arsenal, although it has consistently refused to confirm or deny that it is nuclear-armed.

The implementation of the 2015 deal was overseen by the International Atomic Energy Agency but the UN watchdog's relations with Iran have declined sharply in recent months. The IAEA board of governors passed a resolution on Thursday criticizing Iran for its lack of cooperation. "We warned that political pressure and resolutions wouldn't change anything and that the adoption of a resolution would draw a serious response," said Eslami. "That's why the production of uranium enriched to 60 percent began at Fordo from Monday."

The ISNA news agency said that the step at Fordo was one part of Iran's response. "As well, in a second action in response to the resolution, Iran injected (uranium hexafluoride) gas into two IR-2m and IR-4 cascades at the Natanz plant," it said, referring to an older enrichment facility. The UN watchdog has been pressing Iran to explain the discovery of traces of nuclear material at three sites it had not declared, a key sticking point that led to the adoption of an earlier censure motion by the IAEA in June.

In a report seen by AFP earlier this month, the IAEA said Iran's stockpile of enriched uranium stood at 3,673.7 kg as of Oct 22, a decrease of 267.2 kg from the last quarterly report. This included significant stockpiles of uranium enriched to higher levels - 386.4 kg to 20 percent and 62.3 kg to 60 percent. The IAEA complains that the ability of its inspectors to monitor Iran's stepped up nuclear activities has been hampered by restrictions imposed by Iran. —AFP

International

US defence secretary and China defence chief meet in Cambodia

Talks were productive without backing away from their core positions

SIEM REAP, Cambodia: US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin met his Chinese counterpart Wei Fenghe in Cambodia on Tuesday, with both sides describing the talks as productive without backing away from their core positions. The rival powers have clashed over a host of issues including Taiwan, security and human rights, but there have been attempts to lower the temperature since a rare summit between the leaders of both countries last week.

US President Joe Biden and Chinese leader Xi Jinping tried to cool the rhetoric but the differences were clear — and the exchange between their defence chiefs was similar. A senior US defence official said the talks between Austin and Wei on the sidelines of a conference of defence ministers in Siem Reap were “productive” and “professional”.

“Both sides agreed that it’s important that our countries work together to ensure that competition does not veer into conflict”, but “competition remains the defining feature of the relationship”, the official told journalists.

Austin sought the “reopening of a number of military-to-military dialogues and mechanisms to help manage that competition responsibly”, the official added.

That was a reference to procedures and exchanges that were scrapped after US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan in August despite furious warnings and threats from Beijing. The US official said Austin and Wei had a “lengthy exchange” on Taiwan during the meeting, which lasted for an hour and a half.

A Chinese defence ministry spokesman described the meeting as “sincere, in-depth, practical and constructive”. “Both sides acknowledged that both militaries should earnestly implement the important consensus reached by both heads of state, maintain communication and contact, strengthen crisis management, and work hard to uphold regional peace and stability,” the spokesman said. “China attaches importance to developing bilateral military relations, but the US must respect China’s core interests.”



Lengthy exchange on Taiwan

Red line

China claims Taiwan is a part of its territory to be taken one day, by force if necessary. Wei said in the meeting that Taiwan is a red line for China, the spokesman said. “Taiwan is China’s Taiwan, it is a matter to be resolved by the Chinese people alone, and no external forces have the right to interfere.”

Beijing lashes out at any diplomatic action that might lend Taiwan legitimacy and has responded with growing anger to visits by Western officials and politicians.

It reacted to Pelosi’s Taiwan visit with its largest and most aggressive exercises around the island since the 1990s. Austin told Wei that US policy towards Taiwan has not changed and that Washington still opposes unilateral changes to the status quo on the island.

Russia, North Korea

Austin and Wei also discussed other issues including Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and North Korea, according to a readout by Pentagon Press Secretary Brigadier General Pat Ryder. “Secretary Austin discussed Russia’s unprovoked war against Ukraine and underscored how both the United States and (China) oppose the use of nuclear weapons or threats to use them,” Ryder said.

Austin also expressed concern about “increasingly dangerous” behaviour by Chinese warplanes in the Asia-Pacific region, the readout added.

Austin called on China — Pyongyang’s main diplomatic backer — to “fully enforce” UN Security Council resolutions against North Korea over its weapons programmes. The defence chiefs’ meeting followed a brief exchange between Xi and US Vice President Kamala Harris at an Asia-Pacific summit in Bangkok.

That was followed by a meeting between Xi and US Vice President Kamala Harris at an Asia-Pacific summit in Bangkok on Saturday. — AFP



SIEM REAP, Cambodia: China’s Defence Minister Wei Fenghe arrives for a meeting with his US counterpart Lloyd Austin in Siem Reap on November 22, 2022. — AFP



KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim (C) waves as he leaves after meeting with Malaysia’s King at the National Palace in Kuala Lumpur on November 22, 2022. — AFP

Anwar says ‘no decision yet’ on PM impasse

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia: Malaysian politician Anwar Ibrahim said Tuesday there was “no decision yet” on the country’s next prime minister despite him and a rival being summoned to the king’s palace to break a post-election impasse. No clear winner emerged from Saturday’s election, leaving the nation of 33 million people in extended political limbo. Malaysia’s king, Sultan Abdullah Ahmad Shah, had summoned Anwar and his rival Muhyiddin Yassin in a bid to break the deadlock, but the two left without any answers. “There is no decision yet,” Anwar told reporters after meeting the king, adding that “no timeline” was set. Muhyiddin, who is backed by an Islamist party, later told reporters that since no bloc had enough numbers, the king asked him and Anwar to form a “unity government”. He said he told the king his bloc could not work with Anwar’s group. Anwar’s Pakatan Harapan coalition won the most seats at 82 in the weekend’s vote, on an anti-graft message—but fell short of the required majority.

The reformist leader held talks with his old foes at the graft-tainted outgoing coalition Barisan Nasional (BN), to get their support. But BN’s vice-president and caretaker prime minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob said they had decided not to support any bloc and preferred to become the opposition. A palace statement said the king will meet with BN members on Wednesday to get their views. “His Majesty called and advised all the people to be patient and calm until the process of forming a new government and the appointment of the 10th prime minister of Malaysia is completed,” the palace said.

‘Negative signal’

BN, the once-mighty political juggernaut, is dominated by ex-leader Najib Razak’s scandal-hit party, the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO). Several UMNO leaders are also facing corruption charges. Najib is serving a 12-year jail term for money laundering and abuse of power for his role in the massive 1MDB financial scandal. UMNO suffered its biggest defeat since Malaysian independence in 1957 at the recent polls, but had been courted by Anwar for its 30 seats.

Malaysia, one of Southeast Asia’s biggest economies, has had three changes of government in as many years. Asrul Hadi Abdullah Sani, deputy managing director at BowerGroupAsia, said the continuing impasse will send a negative signal to foreign investors and local businesses. “The new prime minister will have the difficult task of building a new coalition or a unity government that is able to decide on difficult and necessary economic policies,” Asrul told AFP. “With the parties and MPs divided over their choice of prime minister, the question now is whether Anwar or Muhyiddin are able to maintain a stable government and remain prime minister for the entire term.” — AFP

China coastguard take rocket debris from Filipino soldiers

MANILA, Philippines: Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos said Tuesday the country will ask Beijing to explain its “more benign” account of an incident involving Chinese coastguard taking rocket debris from Filipino soldiers in disputed waters.

A senior Filipino navy official on Monday accused the Chinese coastguard of “forcefully” seizing parts of a rocket fairing that landed in the waters of the Spratly Islands in the hotly contested South China Sea.

Beijing insisted the handover took place after “friendly consultation”. “The report of the Philippine navy and the report from China did not match,” Marcos told reporters. “I have complete trust in our navy and if this is what they say happened, I can only believe that that is what happened.” Marcos said Manila would send a diplomatic note to Beijing asking “why is it that their account is so different and it’s much more benign”. The South China Sea is a long-standing source of tensions between the two nations.

Beijing claims sovereignty over almost the entire sea and has ignored an international court ruling that its claims have no legal basis. The Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia and Brunei have overlapping claims to parts

of it. Marcos’s remarks came as US Vice President Kamala Harris wrapped up a visit to a Philippine island near the disputed sea in a show of support for the longtime US ally.

Harris said the United States “stands with the Philippines in the face of intimidation and coercion in the South China Sea.” Marcos has insisted he will not let China trample on the Philippines’ maritime rights-in contrast to his predecessor Rodrigo Duterte who was reluctant to criticise the superpower.

In Sunday’s incident, a Chinese coastguard vessel “blocked” a Filipino rubber boat towing an “unidentified floating object”, Vice Admiral Alberto Carlos said Monday. The Chinese coastguard vessel then deployed an inflatable boat team which “forcefully retrieved said floating object by cutting the towing line attached to the (Filipino) rubber boat”, he said.

The object was then taken to the Chinese coastguard vessel as the Filipino troops returned to their station, Carlos said. Philippine National Security Adviser Clarita Carlos said Tuesday the Filipino sailors “heard shots” apparently fired from an unknown location as they towed the object to the Philippine-garrisoned Thitu island. “With the way that the region, our region the Asia Pacific, is heating up, there might be a small mistake, a misunderstanding that could blow up,” Marcos warned. He said his planned visit to China in January could be an opportunity to find a way to avoid further incidents. “We want to have a mechanism, we have to find a way to prevent this from happening again,” he said. — AFP



LONDON: South Africa’s President Cyril Ramaphosa is greeted by Britain’s King Charles III and Britain’s Camilla, Queen Consort during a Ceremonial Welcome on Horse Guards Parade in London on November 22, 2022. — AFP

Ramaphosa leads in race for ANC president

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa: South African President Cyril Ramaphosa is firmly ahead in the race for head of the ruling African National Congress (ANC), garnering more than twice as many party nominations as his sole challenger, according to a tally issued Tuesday. Ramaphosa, 70, has polled 2,037 nominations from party branches against 916 for his rival Zweli Mkhize, 66, an ex-health minister who resigned from government last year amid graft allegations, the party said.

“These are the two names nominated for position of (party) president,” Kgalema Motlanthe, former president of South Africa and head of the ANC’s electoral panel, told a news conference in Johannesburg.

The ANC, the party of Nelson Mandela, spearheaded the fight against apartheid and has governed South Africa since the advent of democracy in 1994. It is due to hold a conference between December 16 and 20 to elect the party’s top leadership. Whoever wins is likely to be the head of state after the 2024 national elections, if the ANC wins that vote. Although party branches vary in size and how many delegates vote in each, the nominations can be indicative of the outcome.

Votes will be cast in person by branch representatives on the first day of the conference. Ramaphosa is seeking a second term at the helm after succeeding his

scandal-tainted former boss, ex-president Jacob Zuma, in 2018. Ramaphosa’s bid comes despite facing the risk of possible impeachment for allegedly covering up a 2020 crime. Parliament will debate on December 6 whether he should answer allegations that he concealed a multi-million dollar cash theft at his farm.

Analysts have said Ramaphosa, who is currently in the United Kingdom for the first state visit hosted by King Charles III as monarch, stands a reasonable chance of staying on as ANC leader despite the controversy.

Dipping support

“Ramaphosa is still in a very strong position to be re-elected,” said Sithembile Mbete, lecturer in political sciences lecturer at the University of Pretoria. “It seems a majority of the branches want to vote for Ramaphosa,” she said.

Pearl Mncube, an independent political analyst, said “while he (Ramaphosa) has been facing a decline in popularity over the years, his campaign has been the strongest so far”. The once revered 110-year-old ANC has seen its popularity decline, with voters for the first time turning their backs on the party during last year’s local government elections.

It won only 46 percent of the ballots cast nationally — by far its worst showing since the end of white-minority rule. Its fortunes are unlikely to swing much in the next national elections in 2024. Polls suggest that support for the ANC will dip below 50 in the next national polls, said Mbete. But the “ANC will most probably remain the biggest single party and will probably be able to form a coalition government”, she said. — AFP

Australian tells of Myanmar jail squalor, torture fear

SYDNEY: An Australian economist released after nearly two years in a Myanmar jail has told of interrogations in leg irons, squalor and the sounds of screams from tortured cellmates during his time behind bars.

Sean Turnell, who returned home to Sydney on Friday after being released as part of an amnesty of almost 6,000 prisoners, gave the first public details of his incarceration in an interview with The Australian newspaper. The former adviser to deposed Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi was detained by the military in February 2021 shortly after its forces seized control of the country. Turnell told the paper in an interview published Tuesday that he was initially kept at Yangon’s Insein prison in a six metre by 2.5 metre concrete cell in which an iron chair with leg irons had been bolted to the floor.

He then endured two months of interrogations, the paper said, sometimes being taken from his bed to be locked in the irons. Officials accused him of working for British intelligence and gun-running, and quizzed him about his work for Suu Kyi, the economist was quoted as saying. He told the paper on Monday that he had been infected with COVID-19 five times and kept in solitary confinement for months. In the early days of his confinement, Turnell said he could hear the sounds of people outside banging pots and pans at night in protest against the military coup.

“Then came the explosions and gunfire and people being tortured in rooms nearby. I thought, they’re not going to do that to me surely? Then after a while, I started thinking, maybe they will. I think they wanted me to hear it.”

‘Ate out of a bucket’

Turnell said he had expected to be treated “with kid gloves”. “They didn’t stick electrodes to me, but I was thrown into filthy cells. The food they used to deliver to me (came) in a bucket. For 650 days, I ate out of a bucket.” In the Naypyidaw detention centre, to which he was later transferred, “it wasn’t even a new bucket, they were paint buckets”, he said. “They didn’t beat me, but they did push and shove me.” In Naypyidaw, prisoners were locked away for 20 hours a day, Turnell said.

“In the monsoon, the roof would leak and we would sit there all night sometimes with water just pouring down through the roof, clutching your clothes and blanket to try to keep them dry,” he said.

Turnell said his wife, Ha Vu, an economist at Australia’s Macquarie University, helped him survive with phone chats and by regularly sending books, cookies and cake through the Australian embassy. The economist was sentenced in September to three years’ imprisonment for breaching Myanmar’s Official Secrets Act—charges he denied-before being released in last week’s amnesty along with former British ambassador Vicky Bowman and Japanese journalist Toru Kubota. — AFP



YANGON, Myanmar: Australian economic adviser Sean Turnell (L) and Australian Charge d’Affaires to Myanmar Angela Corcoran, after Turnell’s release from Insein prison in Yangon. — AFP

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 23, 2022

Business

NIC holds financial analysts conference for Q3 2022 results

KUWAIT: The National Investments Company held a financial analysts conference for its Q3 2022 results on Thursday, November 17, 2022. The conference witnessed the positive participation of Girish Nair, NIC's Chief Financial Officer, Bashar Khan, Senior Vice President of Investment Banking Sector, and Al Muthana Al Maktoum, Executive Vice President - Wealth Management Sector, who presented a brief about the company and shed light on the positive financial results achieved in Q3 2022, which reflect the company's outstanding performance and solid operational achievements that led into maintaining and strengthening its financial position, high-quality assets and its ability to achieve sustained growth. This is all due to the effective strategy and its competent, experienced team.

Financial Position

Nair presented a detailed report about the company's financial position and the outstanding performance achieved up until September 30, 2022; the company announced a net profit of KD 8.8 million (11 fils per share), and other comprehensive income of KD 5.8 million through shareholders' equity, translated into a total comprehensive income of KD 14.6 million for the third quarter, compared to KD 22.4 million generated during the same period last year (28.1 fils per share), other comprehensive income of KD 20.9 million and total overall income of KD 43.3 million.

Nair added that the return on average equity and average assets reached 4.3 percent and 3.5 percent respectively during the third quarter of 2022, while the leverage ratio was only 25.5 percent as of September 30, 2022, and the company's quick liquidity ratio was 41.2 percent. Total assets and shareholders' equity belonging to the parent company increased to KD 258.6 million and KD 195.2 million respectively in the third quarter of this year, compared to KD 278.2 million and KD 207.4 million at the end of the first nine months of 2021.

Nair indicated a decrease of KD 3.2 million in net profit through the income statement and a reduction of KD 2.5 million in other comprehensive income through shareholders' equity in the third quarter of 2022. Thus, the total complete loss reached KD 5.7 million during the same period of this year due to the performance fluctuations witnessed by the markets due to macroeconomic developments and the tightening of monetary policy measures adopted by various central banks, as the Kuwait General Index recorded a decline of 4 percent during the third quarter.

The company's total income for the third quarter of 2022 amounted to KD 17.2 million, mainly due to dividends, which amounted to KD 8.1 million, and management, brokerage, and advisory fees, which amounted to KD 8.3 million. In addition to that, the main contributor to other comprehensive income is to increase the value of investments priced at fair value through other total income, which amounted to KD 5.3 million.

Expenses and provisions amounted to KD 7.1 million in the third quarter of 2022, compared to KD 6.3 million for the same period of 2021. Administrative costs amounted to KD 7 million for the first nine months of this year compared to the same period in

- NIC achieved a net profit of KD 8.8 million, 11 fils per share
- Assets under management witnessed a 7.3 percent increase to KD 1.17 billion



Girish Nair

Bashar Khan

Al Muthana Al Maktoum

2021, reaching KD 5.4 million. This increase was mainly due to the merger of the new subsidiary and increased operations. The financing costs for the current nine months amounted to KD 0.8 million, higher than the corresponding KD 0.4 million last year. This increase was offset by decreased value losses and other provisions from KD 0.2 million in 2021 to almost zero for 2022.

Income from management, brokerage, and advisory fees grew by 41 percent to reach KD 8.3 million during the third quarter of this year, compared to KD 5.9 million for the same period of 2021. The growth was through brokerage income from one of our subsidiaries, Al-Waseet Financial Business Company, which grew by 29 percent, management fees from funds and portfolios, which grew by 10 percent, and consulting fees and other income, which grew by 482 percent.

Total assets owned by investments decreased by 7.6 percent during the first nine months of 2022, reaching KD 269 million, compared to KD 291 million as of the end of 2021, mainly due to dividends for 2021. Meanwhile, assets under management have increased by 7.3 percent to reach KD 1.17 billion as of September 30, 2022, compared to KD 1.09 billion by the end of 2021.

Notable Events

Nair added that despite market volatility, MENA's Priced Investment Sector had achieved positive returns, Mawarid has recorded 4.6 percent returns, Al Mada 3.42 percent, Al Wataniya Fund 1.94 percent, Zajil Services, and Telecommunication Fund 1.45 percent and Darij Investment Fund -0.1 percent. As for the portfolios, they achieved returns of 5-4 percent.

Market Maker service has been expanded by adding a new company, bringing the total number of companies to 10. Market Maker's transactions reached KD 9.8 million during the third quarter of this year, with the market maker's trading value representing 10 percent of clients' trading volume.

Nair said that National Investments Company continues to provide its advisory services, which included increasing the capital of the National Consumer Holding Company and Alrai Media Group during the third quarter of this year. NIC played investment advisor for the merger between Boubyan Petrochemical Company (KSCPC) and Educational Holding Group (KSCPC), as well as the investment advisor for the merger between Safat Investment Company (KSCPC) and Capcorp Investment Company (KSCC). A new IPO and listing agreement was signed, and the advisory team has completed the final stages of negotiations on the IPO and listing authorization for a Kuwait-based company, as well as a sale and acquisition authorization for the Kuwait Oil and Gas Company, in addition to the preparation of several offers across few local sectors.

The Alternative Investments Department also completed a deal with Amazon's logistics warehouse project in Germany. This real estate fund focuses on retail services assets in the United States of America. It is in the final stages of evaluating financing several other projects, namely a financial technology company based in Egypt, an Amazon logistics warehouse project in Germany, a multi-family housing project in the US, and several other financial investments, in addition to working on improving existing investments and exits.

Nair explained that the real estate investment sector continued to expand its customer base by attracting new real estate portfolios and renewing many managed real estate portfolios while achieving total occupancy rates in Al Wataniya Resort and other properties through a comprehensive marketing campaign. In addition to working on launching the electronic real estate system to raise the level of customer satisfaction, achieving an 85 percent rental collection rate, and improving occupancy rates by 89.5 percent in the third quarter of 2022 compared to 86.2 percent, this is in addition to kicking off Al Wataniya Resort's development project.

Considerate Plans

Bashar Khan, Senior Vice President of the Investment Banking Sector, said that the company's strategy focuses on four components: Building managed assets through working on critical initiatives and leading towards product development in a structured manner with a focus on venture capital and international real estate products. The second component is enabling technology and efficiencies. Therefore we continue to invest and transform our operations and evolve our digital channels, such as the online trading service 'NICTRADE,' and establish a client-focused platform.

The third component is strengthening governance; hence we continue to improve risk management to include quantitative and qualitative metrics in line with global best practices. Finally, the fourth component is leading the middle investment banking market to strengthen the company's position and continue to build its capabilities with a focus on medium-sized clients. Also, our team plays a vital role in executing pioneering projects in Kuwait and building specialized teams in Capital Markets (ECM), Debt Capital Markets (DCM), and Venture Capital (VC) to enhance the company's capabilities further.

Studies and Opportunity Acquisition

Khan referred to some studies that indicate the company's ability to identify and utilize investment opportunities in the market. In February 2019, NIC acquired a controlling stake in Boursa Kuwait, and its direct investments have amounted to 14.4 percent since the acquisition. Boursa Kuwait has also undergone an IPO and listing process, and today's market price has reached many times the cost of the purchase, achieving a total multiplier return of 11.08 times (based on market values).

Additionally, the Kuwait Foundry Company's investment study has focused on the acquisition of an asset with a discounted price and an intrinsic value much greater than the prevailing market value; the investment also provided a specific path to fair value, acquiring a 20 percent stake in January 2019, and taking measures to achieve fair value, most of the equity in the transaction was restored. The total multiplier return on a market capitalization basis was 1.27 times.

This is plus the investment in the logistics warehouse project in Italy leased to FedEx. The contract was signed for 15 years, expected to achieve an annual cash return of 8 percent and a net internal rate of return of 9 percent over 18 months. Finally, the investment in Pipe Technology, a fintech company that provides solutions to its clients with unremitting sources of income, by obtaining the necessary capital without reducing their ownership while accepting new capital entry into their companies or forcing them to get external loans.

Khan referred to the standards set by the company, which positively impacted the IPO of Ali Alghanim Sons Automotive Company, leading to positive and effective results for the company. Concluding the conference, NIC confirmed being in constant contact with its shareholders and customers, keeping them informed of all the developments through the quarterly analyst conference.



KUWAIT: (From Left) Ibrahim Elbadawi, Masood Ahmed, Paulo Drummond, Karen Young and Mohamed Lahouel during the seminar. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

IMF-led seminar discusses MENA challenges

By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: The IMF-Middle East Center for Economics and Finance (CEF) in Kuwait in collaboration with the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (AFESD) organized a high-level seminar on 'Economic Challenges and Policy Choices for the MENA region' on Monday. The event was held in hybrid mode in which some participants attended in-person at the AFESD's headquarters in Kuwait while others joined virtually from other countries in the region and from the IMF headquarters in Washington, DC.

The panel discussion was chaired and moderated by Paulo Drummond, Director of the IMF-Middle East Center for Economics and Finance. He said the event was aimed at stimulating an open debate on the evolving economic challenges and policy tradeoffs faced by policymakers in Arab countries. The keynote speaker was Masood Ahmed, president of the Center for Global Development in Washington, DC. Panelists included Zeine Zeidane, Deputy Director of the IMF's Middle East and Central Asia Department, Karen Young, Senior Research Scholar at Columbia University, Mohamed Lahouel, Chief

Economist at the Department of Economic Development in Dubai, and Ibrahim Elbadawi, Managing Director of the Economic Research Forum.

In his capacity as the event moderator, Drummond emphasized the importance of thoroughly understanding the global economic context that affects Arab countries as it is quite diverse comprising resource-rich countries, middle-income and emerging markets, as well as low-income, fragile, and conflict-affected countries.

In his keynote speech, Masood Ahmed shared his views of the global economic environment, providing the context for the economic policy decisions that countries in the region will need to make, while he emphasized the need for a consensus on the gloomy global economic conditions among global institutions and economic thought leaders in the aftermath of the annual meetings of the IMF and World Bank in Washington last month.

Zeine Zeidane, gave an overview of the IMF's latest Economic Outlook for the region, as he started by explaining how the worsening global conditions have been weighing on the region's outlook amid rising

risks. He also highlighted the added fiscal and external vulnerabilities that emerging markets in the region are facing, policy priorities, and the IMF's efforts in supporting countries in the region.

According to the building on the global context provided at the seminar, Karen Young highlighted future challenges to macroeconomic stability in the region's oil-exporting countries, especially the GCC, while she emphasized new risks and opportunities to economic growth and diversification efforts in this country group, in addition to the climate policy progress in the region and the GCC.

In his remarks, Mohamed Lahouel explained how the region's middle income and emerging markets are faring amidst challenging economic context, including the issues of food and energy security and outlined the key policy priorities for these country groups. Ibrahim Elbadawi discussed the vulnerability of fragile and conflict-affected countries in the region, which have high debt ratios, collapsed economies, high food import dependency, and a legacy of subsidized commodity prices. He briefly outlined elements of a new social contract and the importance of mobilizing support for economic reforms.

Disney seeks old magic in return of Iger

PARIS: In a dramatic twist worthy of a "Star Wars" spin-off, Disney ditched CEO Bob Chapek and brought back Bob Iger, Hollywood's most respected executive, who faces a huge challenge to revive the Magic Kingdom. Iger's return comes as Disney is trying to negotiate an uncertain era, where investors have lost faith in some of the most storied names in US media as companies bleed cash in the hunt for customers to streaming platforms.

Disney's board of directors rehired Iger for a two-year contract that will add to the 15 years he ruled over the company until 2020, when he handed the reins to Chapek. But Disney's share price has slumped 40 percent this year and Chapek was unceremoniously fired after less than three years in the top job, much of it struggling to fill the big shoes left by Iger.

Iger's leadership was extraordinary even by Hollywood's standards. The 71-year-old led Disney to new frontiers when he bought the Star Wars and Marvel franchises and launched the Disney+ streaming service to rival Netflix head-on. He also bought 21 Century Fox from media baron Rupert Murdoch and held on to sports network ESPN despite calls to sell it, maintaining an empire that stretched from theme parks to local TV stations and cruise ships. The return of Iger was cheered on by Wall Street, with Disney's share price



WASHINGTON: In this file photo taken on September 25, 2019 Disney CEO Bob Iger speaks at the Atlantic Festival in Washington, DC. — AFP

surging by six percent on Monday, and analysts recommending the stock for the first time since he exited the company.

But some analysts were not so sure, warning that the world that Iger left in early 2020 — before Covid-19, before the streaming wars—had changed. "The bold move might feel like the right one, however the business is at a different phase of growth," said Paolo Pescatore, analyst at PP Foresight. "It will take time and immediate success is not guaranteed."

The core problem for Iger will be to turn a profit at Disney+ when, according to the latest figures in November, it burned through four billion dollars in just 12 months. Launched in early 2020, Disney+ streams all that the Star Wars and Marvel franchises and Disney have to offer, releasing new content at a furious rate, but that weighs heavily on finances. On the positive side, the Disney+ platform continues to gain subscribers and had 164 million customers at the end of September. But the financial hole has put pressure on Disney's other sectors: Theme parks and merchandising have succeeded for now to keep the Disney group in the green. —AFP

Business

Battling inflation 'priority' as global growth slows: OECD

Organization calls for further monetary policy tightening

PARIS: World economic growth is slowing due to decades-high inflation, the OECD said Tuesday, calling for "essential" further monetary policy tightening and "more targeted" government support. Global GDP is set to grow 3.1 percent this year—nearly half the rate for last year, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development said.

The slide is due to continue next year, with global growth falling to 2.2 percent before rebounding "to a relatively modest 2.7 percent in 2024", the Paris-based organization said. Amid the effects of Russia's war in Ukraine, "growth has lost momentum, high inflation is proving persistent, confidence has weakened, and uncertainty is high", it said in its latest forecasts.

OECD chief economist Alvaro Santos Pereira said the global economy was "reeling from the largest energy crisis since the 1970s". The energy shock has pushed inflation up "to levels not seen for many decades" and is hitting economic growth around the world, he added.

Inflation had already been on the rise before the conflict due to bottlenecks in the global supply chain after countries emerged from COVID lockdowns. But the OECD said that inflation was set to reach eight percent in the fourth quarter of this year in the Group of 20 top economies, falling to 5.5 percent in 2023 and 2024. In a positive sign, several factors driving inflation have eased in the past year.

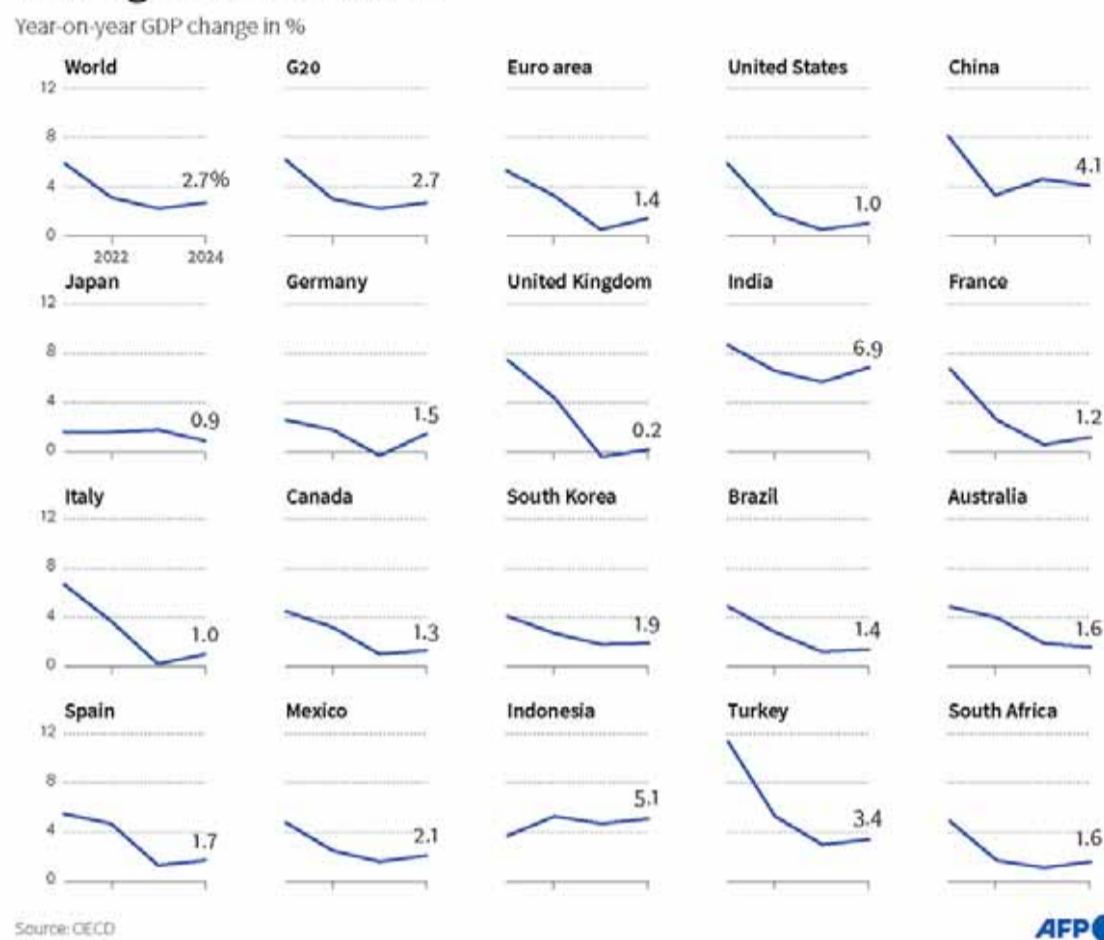
Supply chains that were disrupted during the pandemic have been restored, and maritime freight costs which had spiked have fallen back.

'Top policy priority'

"Our central scenario is not a global recession but a significant growth slowdown for the world economy in 2023, as well as still high, albeit declining, inflation in many countries," Santos Pereira said. Fighting inflation is a "top policy priority", the OECD said, as soaring prices erode people's purchasing power worldwide.

It recommended tightening monetary policy in countries where price rises remained high and targeted support for families and firms to avoid exacerbating inflationary pressures, with energy costs "likely to remain high and volatile for some time". "In these difficult and uncertain times, policy has once again a crucial role to play: further tightening of monetary policy is essential to fight inflation, and fiscal policy support should become more targeted and temporary," the

OECD growth forecasts



OECD said. The 38-member group called for an acceleration in investment in adopting and developing clean energy sources and technology to help diversify supply. Gas and oil deliveries from major producer Russia have been severely disrupted following its invasion of Ukraine. Western allies sanctioned its energy exports and Russia slashed supplies in the stand-off over the conflict.

The upheaval has sent energy costs spiraling and fuelled decades-high inflation in major economies, leading central banks to hike interest rates in a bid to tame

runaway prices. But the tighter monetary policies have stoked fears of hampered economic growth as borrowing becomes more expensive for businesses and individuals. The OECD warned that the northern hemisphere faced a "challenging" winter even though Europe has made efforts to replenish its natural gas reserves and curb demand. High gas prices or supply disruptions would bring "significantly weaker growth and higher inflation" in the world in the next two years, the OECD report said, emphasizing that securing and diversifying supplies was "imperative". — AFP



BEIJING: People walk past closed shops in Beijing's Chaoyang district due to coronavirus restrictions. — AFP

Spanish govt offers mortgage relief to struggling households

MADRID: Spain's leftist government has reached an agreement with banks on mortgage relief measures to help struggling households cope with rising interest rates on their loans. Under the agreement signed late on Monday after weeks of negotiations, more than one million households will be able to extend their loan repayments for up to seven years, the economy ministry said in a statement.

To qualify a household must earn less than €25,200 (\$25,900) per year and spend over 50 percent of their monthly income on repaying its mortgage. The measures, which are set to come into effect on January 1, also include the possibility of refinancing the mortgage at a lower interest rate during a five-year grace period. Households that earn less than €29,400 are also eligible for the extension if their mortgage burden

represents more than 30 percent of their income. In those cases households will also be eligible for a year-long freeze on loan repayments.

Economy Minister Nadia Calvino said during an interview Tuesday with Spanish public radio that she hoped "all" banks would join the agreement.

"Last night we could not have confirmation of the unanimity," she added. The agreement comes as the government and the country's banks are locked in a battle over a proposed windfall tax on lenders' net interest income and net commissions which Madrid wants to impose on 2023 and 2024 to fund measures to ease cost-of-living pressures.

A large part of households in Spain have variable-rate mortgages, whose interest rates change in accordance with the market. Inflation in the eurozone has soared to the highest levels in recent decades, leading the European Central Bank to embark on an aggressive campaign of interest rate hikes to cool the economy. Those rapid interest rate hikes have boosted borrowing costs which affects variable-rate mortgage holders. The possible impact of rising interest rates is a sensitive issue in Spain, which suffered a housing crisis when a property bubble burst in 2008, sparking tens of thousands of evictions and a financial meltdown. — AFP



MADRID: Spanish households that earn less than 29,400 euros are also eligible for the extension if their mortgage burden represents more than 30 percent of their income.

EU rules on women board members 'break glass ceiling'

BRUSSELS: The European Union on Tuesday adopted "landmark" legislation aimed at increasing the number of women on the boards of big companies in the bloc. EU lawmakers meeting in Strasbourg signed off on the long-awaited measures after 10 years of negotiations within the bloc.

The new rules seek to have at least 40 percent of non-executive director posts or a third of all director posts on publicly listed firms filled by women by July 2026. "This is a long-awaited moment, a moment to be celebrated as a breakthrough in gender equality," the European Commission, the bloc's executive arm, said in a statement.

"We will now have an EU law to break the glass

ceiling of listed companies boards." The EU says that, on average across the 27-nation bloc, just 30 percent of board members in companies are women.

That figure varies dramatically between member states, ranging from 45 percent in France to eight percent in Cyprus. Currently, fewer than one in 10 of the largest firms in Europe have a woman as their top boss. The new regulations require EU member states to impose "effective" penalties for companies that do not reach the targets, including fines or being publicly named and shamed.

Under the rules "merit must remain the key criterion in selection procedures" and listed firms will have to provide annual updates of the gender balance on their boards. Companies with fewer than 250 employees will be exempt from the regulations. "We are finally giving women a fair chance to be in top corporate positions," said Austrian MEP Evelyn Regner, who spearheaded the push for new regulation. "We are removing one of the main hurdles for women to get the 'top jobs': informal male networks. From now on, competence will count more," she said. — AFP

News in brief

Equinor invests \$1.4bn in gas field

OSLO: Energy group Equinor and its partners will invest 14.8 billion kroner (\$1.45 billion) in a new Norwegian gas field that will supply Britain and Europe, Equinor said Tuesday. Located in the Norwegian Sea at a depth of 1,350 meters (more than 4,400 feet), the Irpa field contains an estimated 20 billion cubic meters of recoverable gas reserves, equivalent to the consumption of nearly 2.4 million British households over seven years, Equinor said in a statement. Equinor, a Norwegian company, owns 51 percent of the project, Germany's Wintershall DEA 19 percent, Norwegian public group Petoro 20 percent and Britain's Shell 10 percent. The field is expected to begin production at the end of 2026 and be in use until 2039. — AFP

LG Chem to build US cathode plant

SEOUL: South Korea's LG Chem signed an agreement with the US state of Tennessee to build a \$3.2 billion cathode materials plant for electric vehicle batteries, the company said Tuesday. The plant will be capable of producing 120,000 tons of cathodes a year by 2027, enough to power 1.2 million pure electric vehicles, LG Chem said in a statement. Covering 1.7 million square meters (420 acres), the facility will be the "largest of its kind in the United States", it added. Cathode, a key component in rechargeable batteries, is made up of nickel, lithium and other materials, and comprises around 40 percent of the cost of electric vehicle batteries. — AFP

€530m IMF loan for N Macedonia

WASHINGTON: International Monetary Fund on Monday announced it had approved a deal to give North Macedonia access to €530 million to help the country recover from the coronavirus pandemic and knock-on effects from the war in Ukraine. Under the two-year arrangement, the Washington-based global lender will immediately disburse €110 million, to be followed by multiple follow-up disbursements provided Skopje adheres to the terms of the accord, the IMF said. "North Macedonia has been hit by two consecutive global shocks. While recovering from the pandemic, the outlook deteriorated again following Russia's invasion of Ukraine and sharply rising global commodity prices," it said in a statement. — AFP

UK public finances worsen on energy support, inflation

LONDON: British state borrowing jumped last month on fallout from costly energy support and soaring inflation, official data showed Tuesday. Public sector net borrowing hit £13.5 billion (\$16 billion) in October, up from £9.2 billion a year earlier, the Office for National Statistics said in a statement.

"October's high borrowing figure largely is a consequence of the government's decision to shield households from most of the surge in energy prices," said Pantheon Macro analyst Samuel Tombs. The government of Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has maintained household energy support measures introduced by his predecessor Liz Truss to cushion a cost-of-living crisis, as prices rocketed after key producer Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Decades-high inflation, fuelled largely by sky-high energy bills, also saw interest on debt repayments balloon last month.

"It is right that the government increased borrowing to support millions of businesses and families," finance minister Jeremy Hunt said in response to the data. "But to tackle inflation and ensure the economic stability needed for long-term growth, it is vital that we put the public finances back on a more sustainable path." In a budget last week, Hunt hiked taxes and slashed spending to reverse Truss's unfunded tax cuts that had sent the pound sliding and UK borrowing costs surging.

Recession forecasts

The government also stated last week that the UK economy had fallen into a recession and would shrink 1.4 percent next year. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development was more positive, however, forecasting a contraction of 0.4 percent in 2023. That would still be more than any of the world's seven most advanced nations next year, the OECD added in global forecasts given Tuesday. The organization meanwhile took aim at the UK government's support efforts to cap energy bills, saying it would continue to push up inflation. "Better targeting of measures to cushion the impact of high energy prices would lower the budgetary cost, better preserve incentives to save energy, and reduce the pressure on demand at a time of high inflation."

The ONS added that total UK debt rose in October to almost £2.46 trillion or 97.5 percent of GDP. This was driven by the ongoing impact of emergency pandemic spending, in tandem with falling tax receipts in the faltering economy. Keir Starmer, leader of Britain's main opposition party Labour, told business leaders Tuesday that his party would "give Britain the clear economic leadership it needs" if elected in the next general election not due until 2024. "We will inherit an economy that's been damaged by the last 12 weeks and the last 12 years, and we need to fundamentally accept that," he told the annual conference of the Confederation of British Industry. — AFP

Business

Italy's draft budget centers on energy aid and growth

More than €21 billion will go towards supporting households and businesses

ROME: Italy's new far-right government unveiled its first budget on Tuesday, with most of the nearly €35 billion in spending for 2023 going on the energy crisis rather than flashy electoral promises.

More than €21 billion (\$21.5 billion) will go towards supporting households and businesses with sky-high gas and electricity bills, a major cause of the soaring inflation which risks tipping the eurozone's third largest economy into recession next year.

"There are two big priorities, growth... and social justice, meaning a particular focus on families, those on the lowest incomes and the most fragile groups," Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni told a press conference after her cabinet approved the budget in the early hours.

Meloni's far-right Brothers of Italy party swept to power in elections in September, forming a coalition government with the anti-immigration League and Silvio Berlusconi's right-wing Forza Italia. They had promised sweeping tax cuts and more funds for pensioners and for families, sparking concerns about the impact on Italy's already colossal debt.

But Meloni, whose party once called for Italy to abandon the euro single currency, has sought to present herself as a responsible leader at a time of global economic uncertainty. Notably, the coalition's flagship measure—extending a 15-percent flat tax for the self-employed—did not go as far as initially expected. "It's a prudent and responsible budget, in continuity" with the previous government under Mario Draghi, said Giuliano Noci, professor at Milan's Politecnico school of management.

League leader Matteo Salvini told a joint press conference it was a budget that was "not miraculous but that brings more money to millions of Italian homes". The plan now heads to parliament, where it can be amended. It must then be adopted by both chambers by December 31.

Pension reform

Italy's last populist government, led by the Five Star Movement and the League in 2018-19, clashed with the European Union over its failure to keep spending under control. Italy raised its 2023 public deficit forecast earlier this month to 4.5 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), above the 3.4 percent forecast in September by Draghi's government.

But the deficit is forecast to fall to 3.7 percent in 2024 and three percent in 2025, according to an economic roadmap adopted by Rome. The coalition had promised to raise the annual income ceiling for the 15-percent tax rate for the self-employed from €65,000 (\$66,700) to 100,000, but the proposed budget puts it at 85,000.

Employees will benefit from tax reductions of two percent for incomes up to €35,000 per year, as under Draghi, and three percent for those on salaries below €20,000. Companies hiring women and young people will benefit from tax exemptions, while tax amnesties, an election promise, will be offered to people owing less than €1,000 incurred before 2015.

On cash payments in shops and businesses, the government raised the ceiling from €2,000 to €5,000—despite warnings from opposition parties that the move would favor corruption. It also adjusted pension rules so people who have worked for 41 years can retire at 62 years old, a move affecting an estimated 48,000 people. The retirement age in Italy, known for its ageing population, had been set to rise from 64 to 67 in 2023. "With the global economy slowing down and interest rates rising, it is forced to remain cautious" and carry out what electoral promises it can, a bit at a time, noted Lorenzo Codogno a former chief economist at the Treasury.



ROME: Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and Italy's Economy Minister, Giancarlo Giorgetti react during a press conference on November 22, 2022 in Rome, to present the government's draft Budget for 2023. —AFP

Poverty relief measure

The new measures will be financed in part by reforming the so-called citizens' income, a poverty relief scheme introduced by the Five Star Movement. The reform shortens the time those deemed fit to work can claim the benefit and the entire system will be overhauled by 2024.

The government is also set to raise new revenues from a windfall tax on energy companies. The budget also includes the resurrection of a

long-shelved plan to construct a bridge linking Sicily to mainland Italy. Salvini said he would seek EU funds for the controversial plan for the Strait of Messina, either in launching a new tender or reopening the project ultimately shuttered in 2011.

That year, the European Commission said the project—revived and cancelled by various previous governments—was not strategic for the development of transport in the EU. —AFP

Germany plans higher borrowing in 2023 to combat energy crisis

BERLIN: Germany will have to take on more debt than expected in 2023 to combat an energy crisis that has left Europe's biggest economy facing "great economic uncertainty", Finance Minister Christian Lindner said Tuesday. The government now expects new net borrowing next year to climb to €45.6 billion (\$47 billion), more than double the €17.2 billion initially estimated.

The budget plan will be discussed in the Bundestag lower house of parliament this week and is set to be approved on Friday. "We are in a time of great economic uncertainty," Lindner told public broadcaster ARD. Industrial powerhouse Germany, which was heavily reliant on Russian gas imports before Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, has been hit hard by soaring energy prices and a cut in Russian deliveries. The government expects the German economy to tip into recession next year and shrink by 0.4 percent.

Lindner nevertheless stressed that Germany would return to the constitutionally enshrined "debt brake" in 2023, which limits annual new borrowing to 0.35 percent of gross domestic product. The government had lifted the debt brake at the start of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020 to cushion the blow from shutdowns. But reinstating the debt brake has been a priority for Lindner, a fiscal hawk from the pro-business FDP party who came into office last December.

To help steer Germany through the fallout from Russia's war without upsetting Lindner's commitment to the debt brake, the government has announced "special funds" considered separate from the regular federal budget. One of them is 100-billion-euro fund to modernize the German military, the other is a 200-billion-euro support package to help shield households and businesses from higher energy costs. Both will be financed by taking on new debt. Critics including opposition parties have decried the separate funds as a fiscal sleight of hand.

But Lindner on Tuesday defended his 2023 budget, which will total around €476 billion, as "solid" and said there "was no alternative". The government's council of economic advisors suggested earlier this month that Germany should temporarily raise taxes on higher earners to help finance the new spending. But Lindner again ruled out any tax hikes. —AFP



Jazeera Airways launches flight to Turkistan

KUWAIT: Jazeera Airways on Tuesday announced its second service to Kazakhstan, flying to the city of Turkistan in the south of the country twice weekly

Baidu revenue up 2% amid cost-cutting drive

BEIJING: Chinese internet giant Baidu reported on Tuesday third-quarter revenues of 32.5 billion yuan (\$4.6 billion), representing a year-on-year increase of 2 percent. Its earnings report showed Baidu posted a net loss of 146 million yuan for the three months through September as it reined in costs and trimmed back far deeper losses from the equivalent quarter last year.

Chinese technology majors have struggled in recent months amid an economic slowdown, COVID-19 curbs that have hammered consumer sentiment, and tighter regulatory scrutiny. Earnings reports from internet titans, including Alibaba and JD.com, have presented a mixed picture in recent weeks. "Baidu Core delivered a solid set of financial and operational results in the third quarter, despite the continued challenges posed by the COVID-19 resurgence," said CEO Robin Li.

The core business "resumed positive growth, driven by a gradual recovery of our online marketing business and the steady growth of our AI Cloud revenue", Li said, hailing "significant progress in intelligent driving". "Looking ahead, we expect our mobile ecosystem to continue generating strong cash flow and fund our investment in AI Cloud and intelligent driving, which will help ... drive long-term business growth," he said.

Beijing-based Baidu reported a third-quarter loss of 16.6 billion yuan last year, despite revenues rising 63 percent year-on-year to 31.9 billion yuan at the time.

Ramesh Kalyanaram, Executive Director - Kalyan Jewellers said, "We are delighted to introduce Es Vida to the passionate and enthusiastic football community in India and the Middle East. We believe that these all-new soccer-inspired designs will be something that the footballing community would love to wear and flaunt, as they celebrate this game season. In a brand first, we have associated with India's football icons for the Es Vida campaign, and we hope that fan's for whom football is life, will embrace Es Vida," he added.

The brand campaign for Es Vida features Indian youth icons Harmanjot Singh Khabra and Nganbam Sweety Devi, both players representing India's National Football Team. Coming together for the first time, Harmanjot Singh Khabra and Nganbam Sweety Devi speak about what football means to them. They advocate that one should #WearYourPassion - and is featured wearing the Es Vida range of gender neutral jewelry from Kalyan Jewellers.

Flight Number	Frequency	From	To	Departure (Local Time)	Arrival (Local Time)
J9 635	Monday	Kuwait (KWI)	Turkistan (HSA)	19.30	02.00 (+1day)
J9 635	Saturday	Kuwait (KWI)	Turkistan (HSA)	19.15	01.45 (+1 day)
J9 636	Tuesday	Turkistan (HSA)	Kuwait (KWI)	03.00	04.10
J9 636	Sunday	Turkistan (HSA)	Kuwait (KWI)	02.45	03.55

and connecting pilgrims and tourists for the first time with direct flights between the Middle East and the country. Flights from Kuwait depart on Mondays and Saturday, while return flights from Turkistan are in the morning of the next days. The route starts on December 3, 2022 and serves the high demand for religious and cultural tourism. Flights land at the Hazrat Sultan International Airport (HAS).

Jazeera Airways Chief Executive Officer Rohit Ramachandran said: "We are very pleased to be continuing our expansion and serving a significant demand from CIS countries for travel to the

Middle East, specifically for pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia, thanks to our frequent connecting flights to Madina, Jeddah and Taif. Turkistan also attracts religious tourism and these flights will provide customers with convenient connections through our network."

Turkistan is a city and the administrative centre of the Turkistan Region of Kazakhstan, near the Syr Darya river. The Hazrat Sultan International Airport (HSA) is a new airport that was inaugurated in 2020 with a capacity of three million passengers annually.



BEIJING: This file photo shows an employee walks past the company logo at Baidu's headquarters in Beijing. —AFP

The company, which operates China's biggest online search engine, has diversified in recent years into artificial intelligence, cloud computing and autonomous driving technologies as advertising revenue has remained sluggish.

Mixed bag

Beijing has wrought a sweeping crackdown on the tech industry since late 2020 as part of an effort to

curb monopolistic practices and promote competition between internet platforms. But the strategy of record fines, torched IPOs and probes into major firms have hit revenues and placed further strain on the ailing economy. E-commerce titan Alibaba announced last week a third-quarter loss of 20.6 billion yuan, which it partly blamed on a "decrease in market prices of our equity investments in publicly traded companies". —AFP

Kalyan Jewellers celebrates nation's passion for football

KUWAIT: Kalyan Jewellers, one of the largest and most-trusted jewelry companies, has on Tuesday announced the launch of its football-themed jewelry - Es Vida. With the ongoing football World Cup fever, the all-new limited edition jewelry designs of Es Vida pays tribute to the country's vibrant football culture.

Es Vida, is a Spanish phrase which means 'It's Life' - which is exactly what football is to its millions of supporters. This set of gender-neutral platinum and rose gold jewelry from Kalyan Jewellers provides fans with an opportunity to valiantly display their passion for the game.

Talking about this unique football memorabilia,

Football fans can now wear their passion as they cheer their favorite football teams and sporting icons - Es Vida designs are available at select showrooms across Kuwait, Qatar, UAE, Oman and India.

Listicle

Sport this stylish football-themed pendant from Kalyan Jewellers and get a chance to have a better shot at your next goal! This single-tone pendant is made of the finest quality platinum, and is an excellent way to accessorize your daily look, this soccer season.

Football for many is not just a game, it is life! Keeping this emotion at heart, Kalyan Jewellers introduces distinctive Es Vida jewelry designs, which is a perfect gifting option for your loved ones. The perfect accessory to showcase one's passion towards the sport!

This dual-tone pendant, with its stunning rose gold and platinum matte-finish gives a stylish and matchless look





In this file photo taken on April 4, 2014, Kathy Kriger (left), owner of Rick's Cafe, based on the movie "Casablanca," shows US Secretary of State John Kerry around the cafe in the Moroccan city of the same name. — AFP photos



A man walks in "Rick's Cafe", a bar which recreates that of the iconic film "Casablanca", in the Moroccan city of the same name.



In this file photo Humphrey Bogart's son Stephen Bogart and Ingrid Bergman's daughter Pia Lindstrom attend the press conference for the 60th Anniversary of "Casablanca" gala tribute screening and DVD release event at Alice Tully Hall, Lincoln Center on August 11, 2003 in New York City.

'As Time Goes By': Casablanca cafe celebrates film classic, 80 years on

Tourists are flocking to a bar in Morocco searching for the spirit of Humphrey Bogart's iconic, fictional nightclub, 80 years after the classic wartime film "Casablanca" hit the silver screen. The Moroccan port city entered the cultural imagination of the United States at a key point in World War II, thanks to the moody romance starring Ingrid Bergman as Ilsa Lund and Bogart as Rick Blaine. Just days after its initial screening on November 26, 1942,

American forces snatched Casablanca from Vichy control during Operation Torch, a string of allied landings in North Africa that helped change the course of the war.

But Morocco was still under Vichy rule when the film was made, so director Michael Curtiz shot his entire masterpiece at Warner Brothers' studios in California. Decades later, former US diplomat Kathy Kriger opened a real-life "Rick's Cafe" in Casablanca itself as a

tribute to the film.

Complete with cocktails and piano, the venue is modeled on Blaine's eponymous bar, and became an instant hit with tourists when it opened its doors in 2004. "I absolutely had to come, even though I knew that the film wasn't shot here," said Wendy, a tourist from Vancouver. "The place is a unique experience, nostalgic and romantic. You have to see it once in your life." Fellow tourist Alexandra, from Spain, said she had not seen the film but was "fascinated" by the place. "In my imagination, the city of Casablanca is linked to Rick's Cafe," she said.

'We'll always have Paris'

Stepping into the chic bar next to Casablanca's old city feels like walking back in time. Tables are laid out on two levels, amid sculpted stucco columns in a traditional Moroccan style. "It's not an exact replica of the cafe in the film," said restaurant manager and pianist Issam Chabaa. "The only thing that was perfectly reproduced in the end was its spirit." The interior is littered with reminders of the film that inspired it-wrought iron candle holders, beaded lampshades, a jazz and blues repertoire from the era and posters of the film.

Of course, the restaurant houses a piano, similar to the one on which Dooley Wilson's character Sam played "As Time Goes By"-the theme song of Rick and Ilsa's affair. "All that's missing is a roulette wheel and the smoky, dramatic atmosphere of the time," said Irish diner Tony. He and his companions said they were not cinema buffs, but could nevertheless recite lines from the film. "We'll always have Paris," quoted one,



This file photo shows posters and pictures of US legendary movie "Casablanca" at the Casablanca bar in Camaguey city, 600Km east of Cuba's capital Havana.

referring to Blaine and Lund's romance shortly before Nazi Germany invaded France in 1940.

'Anchored in legend'

Blaine recites the enduring line to Lund as he convinces her to part ways with him, sacrificing their love affair to help her husband, a Czech resistance fighter, escape the Nazis. "Casablanca" gave allied forces a propaganda boost as they gained control of North Africa, which became a springboard from which to liberate western Europe. The film's US release came in January 1943 as president Roosevelt took part in the

Casablanca Conference in preparation for that push.

Historian Meredith Hindley, author of a book on wartime Casablanca, said the film formed "part of the American war experience in a way that was never intended". "It just becomes part of the American cultural fabric," she said. The movie has remained one of Hollywood's most beloved works. American drummer Najib Salim, who has performed at Rick's Cafe for 15 years, described it as "timeless". "It will always be anchored in legend," he said. — AFP



In this file photo taken on July 12, 1999, moviegoers watch the classic film "Casablanca" on a 20-by-40-foot outdoor screen on the Washington Monument grounds in Washington DC.

'Twitter becoming taboo': Celebs look for exit strategies

It has become the common refrain of the moment on Twitter-something along the lines of: "In case this is the end, please find me at..." For some Twitter celebrities, particularly those working in politics and crypto-finance, the potential demise of the platform under Elon Musk's erratic stewardship is a serious problem. "As a back-up plan, follow me on Instagram @AOC - it's really me there," tweeted US Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez to her 13.4 million followers last week. But for many celebrities, it would not be such a great loss.



In this file photo Elon Musk, founder of SpaceX, speaks during the Satellite 2020 at the Washington Convention Center in Washington, DC. — AFP

Many have long grown wary of the hate-filled invective that swamps Twitter, with pop idols like Selena Gomez, Charlie XCX and Shawn Mendes among those already on extended hiatus. But Musk's scorched-Earth approach to management and reinstatement of Donald Trump risk making Twitter not just toxic-but also uncool.

Fashionistas like Gigi Hadid and Balenciaga, or rock star Jack White, have been among the first to shutter their accounts since the billionaire took the reins. "We really see Twitter becoming a

taboo for celebrities in the coming month or so-becoming a Truth Social-type environment where it's a controversial stance for celebrities to be on it," said Lauren Beeching, co-founder of Honest London, a PR firm that manages top-level celebrities and brands.

Beeching said her firm tested the waters with the Twitter account of an (unnamed) public figure and got immediate backlash from fans, criticizing them for still being on the platform. "Of course, they were saying this on Twitter so there is some hypocrisy." "But personally I do expect a massive walk-out. Twitter was always known as toxic but now it's controversial as well."

'Audiences can move'

Actors and models can continue to feed their fanbases on Instagram and TikTok, but Twitter currently remains the easiest way to share breaking news, making it hard to replace for political discussions and sectors such as crypto-finance, which is firmly established on the platform. That could quickly change, however. "I'm eagerly trying out Mastodon, Farcaster, Lens and others," tweeted Vitalik Buterin, co-founder of the Ethereum blockchain, to his 4.6 million followers last week, adding: "Let the best socials win!" "Audiences can move," Robin Coulet, director of French digital communication agency Conversationnel, told AFP. "When there were Facebook outages, we realized that internet users immediately went to another network."

For some niche users, however, replacing Twitter may be tricky. French train driver Wilfried Demaret, alias "BB27000", has slowly amassed some 78,000 Twitter followers with his wry tales of life among the "shadow workers", as he calls them. His writing works perfectly on Twitter, and he says he would feel uncomfortable pivoting to video on TikTok or elsewhere. One option would be to go back to an older medium. "If Twitter sinks, I'll save my stories to one day put out a book," he told AFP. "But I realize that's a huge job. When I think about copy-pasting every tweet one-by-one, I realize that I've written a lot!" — AFP

To strengthen ties, ancient Maya gifted neighbors a spider monkey

Seventeen hundred years ago, a female spider monkey was presented as a treasured gift-and later brutally sacrificed-to strengthen ties between two major powers of pre-Hispanic America, according to a new study. The paper, published Monday in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS), compared the offering by Maya elites to Teotihuacan to China's panda diplomacy that accompanied the normalization of Sino-US relations in the 1970s.

By using multiple techniques-including extraction of ancient DNA, radiocarbon dating and chemical dietary analysis-researchers were able to reconstruct the life and death of the primate, finding she was likely between five and eight years of age when buried alive. "It's such an exciting time to be doing archaeology because the methodology is finally here," lead author Nawa Sugiyama of the University of California, Riverside told AFP. The work began with Sugiyama's surprising discovery in 2018 of the animal's remains in the ruins of Teotihuacan, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in the arid Mexican Highlands.

Spider monkeys (Ateles geoffroyi) aren't native to the elevated region, leaving Sugiyama with a puzzle to solve: What was the animal doing there, who brought it, and why was it sacrificed? Vital clues came from the remains' location. Teotihuacan (pronounced tay-uh-tee-waa-kaan), which lies 30 miles (48 kilometers) northeast of Mexico City, was an important site of cultural exchange and innovation in Classic Mesoamerica. It's perhaps best known for the pyramids of the Moon, Sun and Feathered Serpent. But there is increasing interest in another monument called Plaza of the Columns, a complex where neighboring Maya maintained a pres-

ence likened to a modern day embassy.

Feasts, treasures and murals

The monkey's skeletal remains were found in the complex alongside a golden eagle-an emblem of Mexico even today-and surrounded by a collection of high-value items, including obsidian projectile points, conch shells, and precious stone artifacts. Over 14,000 ceramic shards from a grand feast were also discovered, as well as a Maya mural depicting the spider monkey. This, said Sugiyama, was further evidence of an exchange that took place at the highest levels, and preceded the Teotihuacan state's later rise and military involvement in Maya cities by the year 378 CE.

Results from chemical analysis involving two canine teeth that erupted at different points in the monkey's life indicate that prior to captivity, she lived

in a humid environment and ate plants and roots. After being captured and brought to Teotihuacan her diet was closer to that of humans, including corn and chili peppers. The spider monkey may have been "an exotic curiosity alien to the high elevations of Teotihuacan," wrote Sugiyama and colleagues, with the fact she was a fellow primate possibly adding to her charisma and appeal.

Ultimately, the animal met a grisly demise: "Hands bound behind its back and tethered feet indicate en vivo burial, common among human and animal sacrifices at Teotihuacan," the authors wrote. Though savage to modern eyes, "we need to understand and contextualize these cultural practices... and what it meant to be able to give up that which is most precious to you," said Sugiyama. — AFP



This handout image shows the complete skeletal remains of a 1,700 year old female spider monkey that was found in Teotihuacan, Mexico. — AFP

Lifestyle | Features

Spielberg to pick up lifetime honors at Berlin festival

The Berlin film festival will award Steven Spielberg a lifetime achievement prize in February and show a retrospective of the Oscar-winning director's movies, organizers said on Tuesday. The 73rd annual Berlinale, Europe's first major cinema showcase of the year, called Spielberg's more than 100 films and series "unique in the history of international cinema of the past 60 years for its immense variety".

The US director will be presented with the Honorary Golden Bear prize at a gala ceremony during the February 16-26 festival, which will also screen his new semi-autobiographical film "The Fabelmans". The 75-year-old filmmaker was already awarded Germany's Federal Order of Merit in 1998 in recognition for his Holocaust drama "Schindler's List" and his Shoah Foundation preserving the memory of survivors.



This file photo shows US director Steven Spielberg attending the 40th Anniversary Screening of "E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial" presented on the Opening Night of the 2022 TCM Classic Film Festival at the TCL Chinese Theater in Hollywood. — AFP

"With an incredible career, Steven Spielberg has not only enchanted generations of viewers all over the world, but has also given a new meaning to the cin-

ema as the factory of dreams," the Berlinale's directors Mariette Rissenbeek and Carlo Chatrian said. As the global cinema industry seeks a "new beginning" in the wake of the pandemic, "we couldn't find a better start than the one offered by Spielberg's great work," they added.

Spielberg, considered one of Hollywood's greatest living directors, has won three Academy Awards: best picture and best director for "Schindler's List," and best director again for "Saving Private Ryan." He has been nominated for 19 Oscars to date and is expected to add to that tally at next year's Academy Awards with "The Fabelmans", starring Michelle Williams and Paul Dano. The Berlinale ranks with Cannes and Venice among Europe's top three film festivals. — AFP



Cuban singer Pablo Milanes sings at a concert on March 25, 1988 in Mexico City.



In this file photo Cuban singer Pablo Milanes performs at the Ciudad Deportiva Coliseo in Havana, Cuba. — AFP photos

Cuban singer Pablo Milanes dies in Madrid at 79

Acclaimed Cuban singer, songwriter and guitarist Pablo Milanes died early Tuesday in Spain, where he had been hospitalized in recent days, his agent said. He was 79. "It is with great pain and sadness that we inform you that the maestro Pablo Milanes died this morning, November 22, in Madrid," his agency said on the singer's official Facebook page. "May he rest in the love and peace he always transcended. He will remain forever in our memory."

Cuba's Prime Minister Manuel Marrero Cruz said on Twitter that "culture in Cuba is mourning the passing" of Milanes. The writer of songs such as "Yolanda" and "Breve Espacio" had been hospitalized in Madrid, where he had lived since 2017 so that he could receive medical treatment.

On November 11, his office said he was "stable" and being treated for a series of recurrent infections that in recent months had been affecting his health. The artist rose to prominence following the Cuban revolution of 1959, and gained renown both on and off the island as he became a leader of the Nueva Trova movement alongside fellow Cuban musicians Silvio Rodriguez and Noel Nicola.

He inspired and was influenced by artists from a variety of musical genres in Latin America as well as Spain, Portugal

and Puerto Rico. Nueva Trova, born in the years following the revolution, was smiled upon by Fidel Castro's government for lyrics that gave voice to its stated political and social imperatives, including the battles against sexism, colonialism and racism.

Milanes had to cancel his final concerts planned for later this month in Spain and the Dominican Republic. He at first embraced the Cuban revolution but later distanced himself, though he never broke the bond that united him with Cubans through his music.

In June he made one last visit to Havana, after a three-year absence, where the performer known in Cuba as "Pablito" gave an emotional concert before about 10,000 fans. After nearly three years without performing in his homeland, white with gray hair and with mobility issues, Milanes had not lost the light in his myopic eyes, his affable smile and the strength of his voice.

He was born on February 24, 1943 in Bayamo in Cuba's east to soldier Angel Milanes and dressmaker Conchita Arias. Conchita moved the family to Havana so her son could attend a prestigious music school. In the 1950s, considered the golden decade of Cuban music, the boy learned piano and collaborated with other creators. He entered the Cuban music scene in the early 1960s with "Mis 22 anos", and went on to win two Latin Grammys for best singer-songwriter album (2006) and musical excellence (2015). — AFP



In this file photo American soprano Renee Lynn Fleming performs during a rehearsal for "The Hours" at the Metropolitan Opera in New York City. — AFP photos

Star soprano Renee Fleming returns to Met opera with 'The Hours'

A powerhouse trio of American song will interpret the voice of Virginia Woolf on New York's prestigious Metropolitan Opera stage, as the highly anticipated run of "The Hours" makes its world premiere Tuesday. The Pulitzer Prize-winning novel and Oscar-nominated film explores how threads of English writer Woolf's "Mrs. Dalloway" tie three women of different generations together, and its darkly moving operatic adaption offers a new vision of the drama that probes themes including mental illness and the alienation from tradition that haunts its protagonists.

The production began with a pitch from Renee Fleming, widely considered the leading American soprano of her generation, whose role as the show's Clarissa Vaughan marks her return to the Met after bidding adieu to her trademark role in Strauss' "Der Rosenkavalier" in 2017. "It was perfect for opera because of the complexity of the dealing with three periods," Fleming said of "The Hours," whose music was written by the Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Kevin Puts.

"Music gives a kind of a river, on which we can all sort of float-together or separately," Fleming said of the three-pronged production. Fleming's Vaughan—a 1990s-era New Yorker who mirrors the character

Clarissa Dalloway, and whose plotline centers on her party-planning for a friend, a renowned poet dying of AIDS—is joined onstage by the Broadway and opera star Kelli O'Hara, who performs as the depressed 1950s housewife Laura Brown.

Grammy-winning mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato plays the struggling Woolf herself. "The possibilities were so exciting," composer Puts told AFP, saying that "what you can do in music that you can't really accomplish in a film or a book is that you can begin to present the three stories... simultaneously." "The idea of introducing those stories musically and then gradually bringing them together, until maybe all three of the leading ladies would sing trios together, was a really exciting idea," Puts continued. "I loved the book so much, and I felt like I had the musical vocabulary for it."

Extraordinary women

For Fleming—who prior to collaborating with Puts on "The Hours" was putting on a song cycle by the composer, which drew from the writings of the artist Georgia O'Keefe—part of the appeal of both that project and her latest venture was to tell stories of powerful women. "Too many times in opera, historically, women have been sort of pawns," she told AFP. "They've been victims, they've been really at the center of power struggles when they have no power or no agency." "I want to tell stories now about women who are extraordinary."

Along with the force of the show's vocals, "The Hours" integrates modern dance in a way not often seen in tradition-



In this file photo American soprano Renee Lynn Fleming performs during a rehearsal for "The Hours" at the Metropolitan Opera in New York City.

al opera houses, with dozens of performers physically manifesting the characters' emotions. Choreographer Annie-B Parson—who's worked with the likes of Mikhail Baryshnikov, David Byrne and David Bowie—told AFP her process is generally "less about narrative, more about the worlds that I'm trying to create."

"We spent a lot of choreographic currency on how to animate and inhabit the actual physical set and the moving parts," she said; the Met's stage is one of the most technologically advanced in the world, allowing for complex sets including at different levels. "I liked the idea that these dancer beings would be the sinew-the interstitial, physical animation of the set," Parson said.

Fleming said productions like "The Hours" can play a vital role in freshening the opera experience and drawing in new audiences, a major goal the Met has been working towards including by staging Terence Blanchard's "Fire Shut Up In My Bones" last year. The soprano emphasized the need to continue bringing in composers of diverse backgrounds and giving women more and larger creative roles.

The Grammy-winning performer herself was the first woman in the Met's history to solo headline a season opening night gala, in 2008. "All of our art forms really need to represent our population," Fleming said. "The Hours" runs at Manhattan's Metropolitan Opera from November 22 through December 15. — AFP



Who will become history's first 'parastronaut'?

The first astronaut-or astronauts-with a physical disability could be announced as soon as Wednesday, according to the European Space Agency. People with physical disabilities have previously been excluded from one of the most exclusive and demanding jobs on Earth—and beyond—due to strict selection requirements.

Guillaume Weerts, the ESA's head of space medicine, told AFP that the agency's "parastronaut project" required "a complete change in philosophy" about the concept of medical aptitude, which originally came from the military and the selection of fighter pilots. After carrying out a feasibility study, the ESA said potential candidates could include people who have deficiencies in their lower limbs, whether from amputation or congenital defects.

Shorter people of up to 1.3 meters (4.3 feet) tall or those with different leg lengths were also eligible to apply. The educational and psychological requirements for the candidates remained the same as for any other astronaut. Applications closed in June 2021.

The ESA is expected to name between four to six new European astronauts-without disabilities—during its ministerial council in Paris on Wednesday. While Weerts said the parastronaut project runs somewhat separately, "there is a real possibility that as part of the announcement one or more people with disabilities" will also be presented.

'Disability is not a limitation'

In the extremely precise world of space travel, even small alterations can become extremely complicated—and expensive. For example, the existing systems are designed for people of a certain height, Weerts said. "What does that mean for someone who is a shorter size? How can

we make sure that person can just reach the buttons?" The ESA plans to work with those who are selected to find the best way to overcome such potential challenges.

As a member of the selection panel, Weerts could not reveal details about particular candidates. But he said "a really great group of people" had applied and worked their way through the selection process. "We have encountered absolutely marvelous individuals," he said. The process was an excellent "demonstration that disability is not a limitation", he added.

"It's really something that we all believe in," he said, adding that there was a high level of commitment to the project from ESA's partners. So when could the first astronauts with a disability blast off? "Space is a not a business for people who are in a hurry," Weerts said.

The timeline is difficult to predict because "it really depends on what we encounter", he said, adding that plenty more work would be carried out once the ESA has selected its candidates. But he did say that an astronaut with a disability could launch into space "potentially in the next 10 years".

'Incredibly exciting'

Kamran Mallick, the chief executive of the charity Disability Rights UK, said the project was "incredibly exciting". "Disabled people are excluded (from) large aspects of everything that we do in the world," he told AFP. "If we are truly to explore the universe, we have to accept that we can't just have it solely for a particular group of individuals." Mallick praised the ESA's plan to work with the astronauts to figure exactly what they need.

"I'm a wheelchair user, and it is far better that people ask me what works for me, what I would need, rather than making assumptions of what someone can or cannot do," he said. Mallick said that while watching a space shuttle launch as a teenager, he dreamt of becoming an astronaut. "Of course, I was quickly told that was not going to happen. Don't aspire to be an astronaut," he said. "I wish I'd pursued it now." — AFP



In this file photo the 342m long and almost finished cruise ship "Global Dream" is pictured in the main assembly hall of the shipbuilder "MV Werften" in Wismar. — AFP

Fairytale ending for unfinished German cruise ship

Stuck in a dockyard on Germany's Baltic coast for months, a part-completed mega-liner has been saved from the scrapheap by the American entertainment giant Disney. The ship, known up until now as the "Global Dream", was left unfinished when the Asian-owned shipyard it was being built in filed for bankruptcy at the beginning of the year. MV Werften docks and its owner, the Asian operator Genting HK, went under as

demand for cruises collapsed as a result of coronavirus pandemic restrictions. The construction of the ship would now "be completed at the former MV Werften shipyard in Wismar... under the management of Meyer Werften", which built a number of Disney's fleet of cruise ships, the group said in a statement Wednesday.

The turnaround was a "bridge to the future" for the shipyard, local IG Metall union chief Daniel Friedrich said. The union hoped the restart of works on the cruise ship would mean "as many jobs as possible" were saved in Wismar. The MV Werften docks along the Baltic coast were sold off piecemeal by administrators, with some locations being snapped up by industrial groups like ThyssenKrupp and others nationalized by the German army. The sale of the unfinished cruise liner has

dragged on with potential buyers needing to invest an estimated 600 million euros (\$622 million) to complete the project.

The purchase by Disney meant the works in Wismar and local employees had new "prospects", said Rheinland Meyer, the economy minister for the local region of Mecklenburg-West Pomerania. The cruise ship, which will be renamed, would be finished with "know how from north Germany", Meyer said. Some features of the 342-metre-long cruise ship, set to become one of the world's largest pleasure liners, will also be "reimagined", including a "Mickey Mouse-inspired" paint job, the group said. Disney expects "passenger capacity to be approximately 6,000" for the finished ship with a further 2,300 crew. — AFP

Sports

Bulls overpower Boston Celtics as Warriors crash

Antetokounmpo lifts Bucks to a 119-111 victory

LOS ANGELES: The Chicago Bulls, led by 28 points from DeMar DeRozan, ended the Boston Celtics' nine-game NBA winning streak with a 121-107 victory on Monday. Zach LaVine, who was frustrated to be pulled from the waning minutes of the Bulls' loss to Orlando on Friday, scored 22 points. Nikola Vucevic added 12 points and 13 rebounds for Chicago—who had also beaten the Celtics at home in October but fell to them in Boston on November 4 in the game that launched the Celtics' streak.

At 13-4, the Celtics still own the best record in the NBA. Down by as many as 21 in the third quarter, Boston twice pulled within eight in the fourth quarter. They were down by 10 with 4:49 to play, but LaVine drained a three-pointer and DeRozan passed to Alex Caruso for a reverse layup that pushed the Bulls' lead to 116-101 with less than three minutes to go and Chicago ended a four-game skid.

"There's a sense of urgency when you lose a game," LaVine said. "We all have that sense of urgency, individually and collectively as a team. You need to have that. You need to be a desperate team when you go out and play and get those wins." Jayson Tatum, scored 28 points, pulled down 11 rebounds and handed out seven assists in the defeat. Jaylen Brown added 25 points and seven rebounds for Boston.

While the Celtics found numerous ways to win during their streak, even when short-handed due to injuries, they couldn't overcome a poor night from three-point range—or Al Horford's dismal 0-for-9 shooting night. "It's tough to beat a team on their home court when they're hitting shots and you're missing shots that you normally make," said Marcus Smart, who was back in Boston's lineup after missing two games with a bone bruise. It was a humbling night in New Orleans for the reigning

NBA champion Golden State Warriors.

One day after grabbing their first road win of the season at Houston, the Warriors—with their top stars sitting out—crashed to a 128-83 defeat. Stephen Curry, Draymond Green, Klay Thompson and Andrew Wiggins all sat out. Thompson was coming off a 41-point performance in Houston and was expected to miss the second night of the back-to-back. He hasn't played both games in a back-to-back since returning in January from Achilles and knee ligament surgeries.

Curry, who had 33 points in Houston, was listed as out with right elbow soreness and Green for lower back injury management. Kevon Looney was the only regular starter in the Warriors lineup and the Pelicans, led by 35 points from Brandon Ingram, took full advantage of 27 Golden State turnovers. CJ McCollum added 15 points and Jonas Valanciunas added 10 for the Pelicans, who welcomed star forward Zion Williamson back after a three-game absence with a foot contusion.

Clippers silence Jazz

Ingram said the Pelicans tried not to let the late announcement that they wouldn't face the Warriors' top players unsettle them. "That's one of those messages where we say worry about ourselves," he said. "Having Zion back in the lineup, we haven't had much minutes with the starting group so it was important for us to try to get back and try to get our institution together for later games." The Los Angeles Clippers, fueled by 30 points from reserve forward Norman Powell, held off the Western Conference leading Utah Jazz down the stretch for a 121-114 victory.

In Milwaukee, Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 37 points to lead the Bucks to a 119-111 victory over the



CHICAGO: Malcolm Brogdon #13 of the Boston Celtics passes the ball around Nikola Vucevic #9 and Ayo Dosunmu #12 of the Chicago Bulls during the second half at United Center on November 21, 2022. —AFP

Portland Trail Blazers, who were without star Damian Lillard because of a calf strain. In Cleveland, Donovan Mitchell scored 29 points and Darius Garland added 26 as the Cavaliers beat the Atlanta Hawks 114-102. Cedi

Osman added 24 points off the bench and the Cavs drained 10 three-pointers as they gained a little payback for their loss to the Hawks in last season's play-in tournament. —AFP

49ers stun Cardinals in NFL Mexico clash

MEXICO CITY: Jimmy Garoppolo threw for four touchdowns without an interception on Monday to lead the San Francisco 49ers to a 38-10 NFL victory over the Arizona Cardinals at Mexico's iconic Estadio Azteca. Garoppolo said the 49ers fed off the energy of the crowd in the last of the league's five international games this season. A rainy night in Mexico City didn't dampen the enthusiasm of 78,427 fans, the overwhelming majority of whom were pro-San Francisco. "It was electric," Garoppolo said. "We were feeding off that."

The Niners out-scored the Cardinals 21-0 in the second half—the third straight game that San Francisco's defense held their opponent scoreless in the second half. Garoppolo completed 20 of 29 passes for 228 yards and four touchdowns without an interception as the 49ers improved to 6-4. They top the NFC West and are 4-0 against division rivals. Garoppolo connected with George Kittle and Brandon Aiyuk for two touchdowns and Deebo Samuel rushed for another. "All the receivers stepped up, the O-line played great," Garoppolo said of the dominant offensive performance. "It was a clean pocket all night, and when it's like that it makes for a fun night." Arizona quarterback Colt McCoy, playing in place of injured starter Kyle Murray, was sacked to end the first half and roughed up in the second. San Francisco defender Nick Bosa accidentally stepped on his hand and after a late hit was penalized for roughing the passer.

McCoy connected on 24 of 34 passes for 218 yards and an interception. The Cardinals' lone touchdown was James Conner's two-yard run in the second quar-



MEXICO CITY: Elijah Mitchell #25 of the San Francisco 49ers carries the ball against the Arizona Cardinals during the fourth quarter at Estadio Azteca on November 21, 2022. —AFP

ter that pulled Arizona within 14-10. The game was the fifth NFL contest at Azteca, which has played host to two World Cup finals. The first was the first international regular-season game in league history in 2005, when the Cardinals beat the 49ers 31-14 in front of 103,467 fans.

The venue's seating capacity for NFL games has since been reduced, but the festive atmosphere sur-

rounding the import from the north remained undiminished. Injured Cardinals guard Will Hernandez, whose parents were both born in Mexico, made the trip even though he couldn't play and led his team onto the field before the game waving a huge Mexican flag. The US national anthem was sung by La Marisoul before Mexican singer-songwriter Sofia Reyes performed the Mexican national anthem. —AFP

Boxing champion Cruz training for debut

HAVANA: Olympic and triple world amateur boxing champion Andy Cruz - who was expelled from Cuba's official federation in July - is planning to turn pro and says he left his home country "legally," after speculation he had defected. In an interview with ESPN given in Spanish, the 27-year-old Cruz did not reveal his current location, though specialized blogs said he had gone to the Dominican Republic about two weeks ago.

"Thank God, I am already taking this great

step that many expected. I am here ready to face this great challenge that lies ahead of me and I plan to do great things in professional boxing," Cruz said Sunday on the network's Knockout show. Cruz was expelled from competing for Cuba in July after what the country's boxing federation said was an attempt to "illegally leave the country" the month before.

In May, he was pulled from making his professional debut with other Cuban fighters in Mexico - the squad's first pro fight in 60 years. The federation accused him of neglecting his training at the time. Cruz - the Olympic lightweight champion at the Tokyo Summer Games held a year late in 2021 - explained to ESPN that his relationship with Cuba was "good" because he got an "out from the national team" and left the country "legally."

The boxer, considered the most technically sound Cuban fighter, stressed that he is "preparing very well" for his professional debut, noting: "I'm starting to take my first steps, I'm already in action, I'm already training." "I am going to forge a new stage in my career now, in professional boxing," Cruz said.

Cuban officials told AFP that the island's sports authorities could not comment on the boxer's activities because he was no longer a "member of Cuban sports." Known in Cuba as the "dancer of the ring," Cruz has become the most high-profile loss to the country's squad - which has racked up 80 world titles and 41 Olympic titles - since double Olympic champion Robeisy Ramirez defected in Mexico in 2018. Ramirez is currently shining on the US boxing scene. —AFP

Erasmus making Springboks 'so easy to dislike'

LONDON: Rassie Erasmus's conduct has made South Africa "so easy to dislike", according to Springboks great John Smit. Erasmus, South Africa's director of rugby, has been given a two-game matchday ban by World Rugby following his criticism of refereeing decisions during the ongoing Autumn Nations Series on social media. As a result, Erasmus missed the Springboks' 63-21 win over Italy in Genoa last weekend and the 50-year-old, who guided South Africa to 2019 World Cup glory, won't be at Twickenham for Saturday's match against England.

"It's hard to defend him," Smit told the BBC's Rugby Union Daily Podcast. The 2007 World Cup-winning captain added: "The way he has approached this is not right. Are you telling me Rassie is the only coach frustrated by a call that has gone the wrong way? "Something has to be done. There has to be a line that has to be drawn, and he is making it difficult for his team. It's made us, as a rugby team, so easy to dislike."

Former Springbok flanker Erasmus has only recently completed a stadium ban following a World Rugby suspension for his infamous hour-long video criticizing referee Nic Berry's performance in the first Test between South Africa and the British and Irish Lions last year. That did not stop Erasmus from publishing several videos on social media that appeared to question decisions made by referee Wayne Barnes during the Springboks' recent 30-26 loss to France on November 12.

He had made similar comments on social media following South Africa's defeat by Ireland a week earlier. Erasmus said accusations that his videos had led to threats against experienced English referee Barnes were "completely unfounded". But there is a growing belief among officials that Erasmus's comments have encouraged angry supporters to make vitriolic posts of their own towards referees and their families.

World Rugby chief executive Alan Gilpin said the global governing body had to act against Erasmus for the safety of referees at all levels. "This is about every referee who is, on a Sunday morning, refereeing kids' rugby anywhere in the world, having permission to do the job properly, and not having every parent on the touchline posting videos on social media," Gilpin said. "That's the really important thing in terms of the integrity of the game." —AFP

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Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700	Khaldiya	24848075
Chest Hospital	24849400	Kaifan	24849807
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010	Shamiya	24848913
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Sports

Rain-hit draw hands India T20 series win in N Zealand

India seal Twenty-20 series victory

NAPIER: India sealed a Twenty-20 series win over hosts New Zealand after Tuesday's rain-hit third match finished in a draw in Napier. The Black Caps were bowled out for 160 in their innings. India then labored to 75 for four wickets in their nine overs before the rain started. Under the Duckworth-Lewis-Stern method, the match was a rare draw in Twenty-20 cricket. India took the series having won the second tie on Sunday at Mount Maunganui, where morning rain threatened to delay the start before Suryakumar Yadav smashed 111 off 51 balls in a 65-run win.

The first tie was washed out by heavy rain in Wellington on Friday. "We would have liked to have won by playing the full overs, but it's how it is. We don't mind getting the trophy and the win," said India captain Harkish Pandya. Fast-bowler Mohammed Siraj was the man-of-the-match after restricting New Zealand to just 17 runs for four wickets, supported by Arshdeep Singh's 4-37. "All three matches were affected by the weather, but we are happy to have won the series," said Siraj.

After setting India 161 to win, the Black Caps' bowlers struck early with India's openers Ishan Kishan and Rishabh Pant dismissed to leave the visitors on 21-2. With Kane Williamson sitting out due to a medical appointment, New Zealand's stand-in skipper Tim Southee took the wickets of Pant and then Shreyas Iyer in successive balls. India were in trouble at 23 for three before Suryakumar Yadav went for just 13.

Pandya steadied the ship with a solid 30 off 18 balls to steer his side to 75 for four from nine overs when rain stopped play. Having won the toss and elected to bat, New Zealand made a strong start with Glenn Phillips smashing 54 off 33 balls. Devon Conway hit 59, including five fours and two towering sixes. The Black Caps were cruising at 146 for three when Conway was caught by Kishan in the deep before New Zealand collapsed to lose their last seven wickets for just 14 runs. The teams meet again in Auckland on Friday, when Eden Park hosts the first of three one-day internationals. —AFP



NAPIER: India's Yuzvendra Chahal (left) bowls to New Zealand's Glenn Phillips (right) during the third Twenty20 cricket match between New Zealand and India at McLean Park in Napier on November 22, 2022. —AFP



MELBOURNE: England's James Vince (rear) watches Australia's Sean Abbott (left) dive to stop the ball during the third one-day international (ODI) cricket match between Australia and England on November 22, 2022. —AFP

Australia thrash England in final ODI

MELBOURNE: Dominant centuries from Travis Head and David Warner helped Australia thrash a tired England by 221 runs Tuesday in the third and final one-day international at the Melbourne Cricket Ground to sweep the series 3-0. After a six-wicket loss in Adelaide and a 72-run defeat in Sydney, England's long tour ended with a crushing defeat at the same venue where they won the Twenty20 World Cup this month.

Australia made a formidable 355-5 on the back of Head's 152 and Warner's 106 in a rain-hit game reduced to 48 overs, with the pair's 269-run stand the ninth-highest opening partnership in 50-over cricket and the biggest at the MCG. It left England needing 364 to win under a DLS-adjusted target, an ominous score they never looked like getting against a disciplined attack led by pacemen Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood and Adam Zampa's spin.

"It's been fantastic, all three games," said Australian skipper Cummins. "Everything has really clicked. Good to finish it off here, that's just about the best ODI I've been a part of. Everything was perfect." With Phil Salt sidelined for a concussion check after hitting his head while fielding, Dawid Malan was elevated to open for England with Jason Roy but he fell for two to Hazlewood. It didn't get any easier for the batsmen, who were restricted to just 49-1 off the opening 10 overs, already well behind the required run rate.

Cummins accounted for Roy (33) and Sam Billings (7) in quick succession, while James Vince ground out 22 off 45 balls before Sean Abbott broke his resistance. When Zampa removed skipper Jos Buttler (4) and Chris Woakes in successive balls, then Moeen Ali (18) in his next over, England were 95-7 and their hopes over. Zampa ended with 4-31. "We tried our best, fell a long way short. Australia outplayed us in every department," said Buttler. "But lots to be proud of. You don't need long memories to remember the scenes here last week," he said of the World Cup victory.

Buttler, back after missing the Sydney game, won the toss and asked Australia to bat, only to watch an exhibition from Head and Warner. Head made his third one-day century and highest score, off 130 balls with 16 fours and four sixes, as he solidified his place at the top of the order after the retirement of Aaron Finch. With conditions overcast and cool, the England bowlers extracted early swing and Head survived a missed catch on four and being given out lbw on nine, which he successfully challenged.

But he settled as he and Warner assumed full control, bringing up their second 100-run partnership in three matches. Rain interrupted play for 30 minutes but the pair resumed where they left off with Head racing to his century, bringing up the milestone with a four from Chris Woakes. Warner soon followed, crunching Ollie Stone to the ropes for his 19th ODI ton. The partnership was finally broken by the persistent Stone, who bagged both Warner and Head in the same over and finished with 4-85 after removing Mitchell Marsh for 30 and Steve Smith for 21. —AFP

Saudi football academies eye WCup boost

RIYADH: As the World Cup brings some of the best-known names in sports to Qatar, youth football academies in neighboring Saudi Arabia expect a spike in registrations but urge more investment. The Gulf kingdom has long been obsessed with football, but interest in playing - not just watching - has surged in recent years amid a government push to promote physical activity under Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's Vision 2030 reform agenda.

Among the wannabe Messis and Neymars is 11-year-old Abdulrahman Al-Ghamdi, who first put on cleats two years ago, encouraged by an uncle who once played for the prestigious local club Al Nassr. "One day I stepped on the pitch and I started loving it," Ghamdi told AFP during a recent practice. But Ghamdi fears he has already fallen behind peers in other countries with more advanced training pipelines.

"I don't really think I'm going to be a high-level football player because in England they have better advantages... and professional people" as coaches, he said. "There are young kids that are way better than me." Even before World Cup fever descended on the region with its first edition in the Arab world, local academies were struggling to accommodate the needs of youngsters taking to the pitch.

Leveling the playing field should be a top priority as Saudi Arabia develops its youth teams and potentially vies for World Cup hosting rights in 2030, said Karim Ziane, general manager of the kingdom's French Football Federation Academy. Saudi Arabia is "definitely" a country of football, he told AFP. "They love to play, they love to watch, they love to cheer and support. This passion is no different than any other place," Ziane said. "The only difference is whether they have access to it or not."

Room to improve

The French academy opened its first facility in the capital Riyadh in January and has since added five more including in Jeddah and Dammam, training 500 young players in total. During a recent evening training session in Riyadh, more than 20 teenagers ran passing drills and took shots on mini-goals before a short scrimmage, their parents cheering them on from the sidelines.

The field, on a residential compound, is something of a rarity in the Saudi capital: made of natural grass and large enough for an 11-a-side match, as opposed to smaller fields of artificial turf. "You have to take into consideration that it's definitely not going to be the same as in Europe or in France, for example, so you have to forget about what you know and adapt to what's in front of you," Ziane said. Wilfried Louisy-Daniel, a former professional player in France now coaching in Saudi Arabia, said he has been impressed by the level of enthusiasm for the sport but that "some things need to be developed."

Specifically, more youth teams are required so players can compete closer to home instead of having to travel hundreds of kilometers for a game, he said. Demand is only going to increase during and after the World Cup, he assessed, especially if the Saudi team makes a deep run. The Green Falcons have qualified for six World Cups but advanced to the knockout stage just once, during their 1994 debut. "If we have a good campaign, on top of the fact that it's the first World Cup in the Middle East, surely that will bring a lot of fervor," Louisy-Daniel said.

Challenges aside, several Saudi players told AFP they were determined to attain football stardom, recognizing that other players have come from much poorer backgrounds to reach the elite stages. "Most of the football players in the World Cup, they had to train like me, and they had to train really hard, and some people had it a little more harder," said 11-year-old Nawaf Al-Jaser. "I really want to train more so I can be like them."

If all goes well, Jaser could one day



RIYADH: Karim Ziane (left), general manager of Saudi Arabia's French Football Federation Academy, gives instructions to young players, in the capital Riyadh's Ishbilila compound. —AFP photos



RIYADH: Young football players train at the Ishbilila compound, one of the locations of the French Football Federation Academy, in the Saudi capital Riyadh.

get the chance to play in a World Cup match before a home crowd. An Egyptian official said in September that Egypt, Greece and Saudi Arabia were in talks on a joint proposal to host the tournament in 2030. But even if that

doesn't happen, Jaser is eager to put Saudi football on the map. "In most of the really good teams in Europe, there's not many Saudi players, and I hope I can change that" and "change the football world", he said. —AFP



KUWAIT: Kuwait Cricket Club and Friendi mobile officials pose for a group photo.

Kuwait Cricket Club, Friendi mobile seal partnership deal

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait Cricket Club and Friendi mobile officially launched their partnership at an event held at the Olympic Council of Asia in the presence of senior officials from both sides. "It is a great day for us as we are starting our future events for the coming season with a new partner Friendi, which will join us all the way for the next season. We will experience each other and will know exactly where we stand, as we both work for the interest of cricket," Chairman of KCC Haidar Farman said.

Farman announced there will be a meeting for building a new venue and new grounds for Kuwait cricket. "With Friendi being with us, I do not think Kuwait cricket will be the same from today onwards. All what we are doing is in

the interest of our players, not only for the national team, but for the 140 teams who are members of KCC," he said.

Friendi CEO Benoit Janin congratulated the Kuwait national cricket team on their win over UAE. "We are here to celebrate to launch the partnership between Friendi and KCC. Friendi is a brand already in the region, in Oman and Saudi Arabia, and have over 2 million customers. We are all excited about this partnership and hope to go further on new levels," he said. KCC Director General Shahid Ashraf said Kuwait Cricket Club is the sole official governing body for the game of cricket in Kuwait, affiliated with the Public Authority for Sport, Kuwait Olympic Committee, International Cricket Council and Asian Cricket Council.

He said Kuwait men's team is currently ranked 25th in the ICC T20 out of 104 countries, adding that ICC will have 20 teams participating in the world cup that will take place in the West Indies and US. Shahid Ashraf said Kuwait men's team for the first time beat UAE, which is ranked 12th in the ICC T20 rankings, in the final leg of Asia qualifiers recently, and this will help improve their ranking. "With this partnership, all events will be named after Friendi mobile. The entire international calendar year all events will be branded as Friendi," Ashraf said.

Speaking exclusively to Kuwait Times, Farman said a

Kuwaiti team played in two Asian Games in Guangzhou 2010 and Incheon 2014, but in 2018 the game was not included. In 2022, Kuwait Olympic Committee did not think that there is the possibility of positive participation in the games. "We think otherwise. This hurt the Kuwait team spirit that longed for participating in the Asian Games," he said.

Farman said this took place while the game is developing and reached an advanced stage. "We suddenly received an unfavorable answer from Kuwait Olympic Committee for not participating, and this is not in the interest of the game. We hope KOC reconsiders future participations, because it is a game that has proved itself," he said.

Farman said cricket began in Kuwait with a committee at KOC in 1998, then in 2009 the KCC was approved by the Public Authority for Sport as a specialized club. "This recognition gave us a strong push to take our role to new levels as far as work and development are concerned, and we are looking to establish an academy to care of young players. We are in the development stage, as Kuwait can reach at highly advanced levels, but the game requires much investment and work with a team spirit to fulfill the plan," he added.

Tunisia, Denmark draw 0-0 in their World Cup opener

Group D: Tunisia frustrate Eriksen's Denmark

DOHA: Tunisia held Denmark to a goalless draw in their World Cup opener on Tuesday, kicking off their Group D campaign with a strong performance against one of the pre-tournament dark horses. Tunisia have never reached the World Cup knockouts in five previous attempts but Jalel Kadri's side will be encouraged both with a point at Education City Stadium and with how they performed against the fancied Danes.

Since Kadri took charge of the team in January Tunisia have only lost to Brazil and they frustrated Denmark in front of thousands of noisy North Africans. Christian Eriksen was largely anonymous on his return to major tournament football after nearly dying on the pitch at the European Championship last year, wilting in the face of ferocious defending. Denmark had come into the match as favorites but Tunisia tore into their more illustrious opponents from kick-off, flying into tackles.

The massed ranks of Tunisians in the stands created a crackling atmosphere and they cheered every tackle and clearance. The African side nearly took the lead in the 11th minute, with Mohamed Drager's long-range effort clipping off Andreas Christensen and drifting just wide. The Danes began to get a foothold in the

game but talisman Eriksen struggled to shake off the attentions of Tunisia's well-organized backline, and although they got into dangerous positions any attacks were comfortably snuffed out.

The Tunisians came closest to taking the lead in the opening period, Copenhagen-born Anis Ben Slimane straying offside before slotting past Kasper Schmeichel, who then made sure the scores were level at the break with a wonderful stop. Issam Jebali managed to break through onto Youssef Msakni's smart pass but his dinked finish was brilliantly tipped away by the onrushing Schmeichel. Tunisia kept up the intensity but it was Denmark who had the two best chances of a tight second half.

Eriksen was denied what would have been a fine goal by Aymen Dahmen's fingertip save in the 69th minute and from the subsequent corner substitute Andreas Cornelius somehow headed onto the post from close range. That would have probably won the match for Denmark as Tunisia failed to match their physical efforts with much real creativity. After surviving a late penalty scare they celebrated a precious and unexpected point with their passionate supporters. — AFP



AL-RAYYAN: Tunisia's defender #03 Montassar Talbi (center) and Tunisia's midfielder #14 Aissa Laidouni both jump to head the ball next to Denmark's defender #04 Simon Kjær during the Qatar 2022 World Cup Group D football match between Denmark and Tunisia on November 22, 2022. — AFP

Bale shines as Wales, US draw

AL-RAYYAN: Gareth Bale scored a late penalty to snatch a 1-1 draw with the United States in Wales' first World Cup game in 64 years on Monday. Welsh skipper Bale lashed home an 82nd-minute spot kick to break American hearts moments after earning the penalty when defender Walker Zimmerman crashed into the former Real Madrid star.

The penalty drama cancelled out Tim Weah's superb first-half goal for the Americans which had threatened to ruin the celebratory mood surrounding Wales' long-awaited first World Cup appearance since the 1958 finals in Sweden. Bale's equalizer triggered roars from a large and raucous contingent of Wales fans in a crowd of 43,418 fans at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium on the outskirts of Doha.

Bale said afterwards a rousing half-time team talk by manager Rob Page had helped inspire Wales after a lacklustre first-half performance. "Obviously a difficult game. First half was not how we wanted to play," said Bale. "The US played well and we played poorly. We played really well in the second half. "Good point, but we would have loved to have had three." Page paid tribute to the 33-year-old Bale's nous in winning the penalty. "He's very good at finding those spaces," Page said. "He's intelligent, he's got a wise head to get in those positions and he used all his wisdom there."

Until the late penalty it looked as if Wales were heading for a defeat, struggling to break down a skillful and ener-

getic US squad that is the second youngest at the tournament. Coach Gregg Berhalter admitted his team had been left dejected by failure to hang on for victory as they now contemplate a daunting Group B game with England on Friday. "Taking a point in the first game is not the end of the world," Berhalter said. "Walking into the locker room after the game you could see the disappointment in the group. The guys worked hard. "In the end we fell a little bit short of the victory."

Menace

Wales were outplayed for long periods of the first half, with manager Page's decision not to start towering centre-forward Kieffer Moore depriving them of a crucial attacking outlet. Instead it was the US who made all the early running, with Chelsea's Christian Pulisic a constant darting menace. The positive early play almost resulted in a goal when Weah's whipped-in cross almost forced Joe Rodon to head into his own net. The US exuberance led to a flurry of cards for the Americans early on, with Sergino Dest and Weston McKennie both booked for wild tackles on Neco Williams.

The relentless US pressing game meant Wales were unable to construct anything in midfield, where Aaron Ramsey and Ethan Ampadu were rarely afforded time or space. The breakthrough came on 36 minutes. Good hold-up play by Josh Sargent near halfway sent Pulisic accelerating towards goal before picking out



AL-RAYYAN: USA's goalkeeper #01 Matt Turner (2nd right) punches the ball ahead of Wales' defender #05 Chris Mepham (left) during the Qatar 2022 World Cup Group B football match between USA and Wales on November 21, 2022. — AFP

Weah, who had darted in behind goal. The son of African football icon George Weah showed terrific composure, dinking a cool finish with the outside of his right foot over Wayne Hennessey for a goal that was no less than the US deserved.

Wales were in disciplinary soon afterwards, Bale earning a yellow card for clattering into Yunus Musah at 40 minutes. Chris Mepham joined the Welsh captain in the book after hauling Pulisic down near half-time. Page brought on Moore at half-time for Daniel James and the substitution immediately started to have an effect. Tottenham's Ben Davies almost headed

Wales level on 64 minutes but was denied by goalkeeper Matt Turner with an acrobatic parry over the bar.

Moore powered a header just over from the ensuing corner. The US dropped deeper and Wales pressed more aggressively as they chased an equalizer. On 80 minutes Ramsey surged down the right and cut back for Bale, who shielded the ball and tempted Zimmerman into a wild lunge. Qatari referee Abdulrahman Al-Jassim pointed to the spot and Bale stepped up to save Wales. Wales face Iran on Friday in their second Group B game. England were 6-2 winners over the Iranians earlier on Monday. — AFP

Today's matches

FIFA World Cup 2022	
Morocco v Croatia	13:00
beIN Sports HD 2 Max	
beIN Sports HD 1 Max	
Germany v Japan	16:00
beIN Sports HD 1 Max	
Spain v Costa Rica	19:00
beIN Sports HD 1 Max	
Belgium v Canada	22:00
beIN Sports HD 2 Max	
beIN Sports HD 1 Max	

Germany's Musiala armed with skills

AL SHAMAL: When Mario Goetze scored in extra time against Argentina to win the 2014 World Cup for Germany, an 11-year-old Jamal Musiala watched from his couch alongside his parents in London. Eight years later and still three months shy of his 20th birthday, the former Chelsea youth star has established himself as an essential part of Hansi Flick's XI in Qatar.

The Bayern Munich forward, nicknamed "Bambi" for his youthful appearance, opened Monday's Germany press conference by reiterating the need to keep his cool. Germany begin their latest World Cup title charge on Wednesday against Japan in the Doha heat. "I feel it's important to bring a bit of looseness, not to put too much pressure on yourself and to have a bit of fun, and then it'll go well," said Musiala, whose calm on the ball is crucial in Germany's high-octane attack.

"Jamal is a laid-back guy," teammate Niklas Sule, 27, said while sitting alongside the teenager, who has been showered with praise after a stunning domestic season in which he has scored nine goals and had six assists in 15 league games with Bayern. German legend Lothar Matthäus says that Musiala is so good that he compares him with Lionel Messi.

"Being compared to Messi, it's a little difficult," Musiala said on Monday at Germany's isolated training camp in Al-Shamal, northern Qatar. "I am focused on myself and what I can do better as Jamal." Musiala's form has been so strong that Bayern have hardly noticed the absence of talisman Thomas Müller, who has missed much of the season so far with injury.

'Play with freedom'

Born in Stuttgart, Musiala moved to England at the age of seven. He returned to Germany in 2019 after spending eight years in the Chelsea youth set-up. Musiala represented England throughout his teenage years but in February 2021 opted to swap allegiance to Germany, despite Gareth Southgate's attempts to keep him.

Former Bayern and England midfielder Owen Hargreaves has called Musiala "one of a kind" and says he "had something that England doesn't have". Musiala remains good friends with several current English stars, including 19-year-old Borussia Dortmund midfielder Jude Bellingham. Musiala said his decade in England armed him with skills that he may not have picked up in Germany.

"In the England youth set-up you learn different things than you do in Germany. I have taken a real lot from (that time), like quality playing as an individual and in one-on-one situations," he said. "A saying they often repeated was 'play with freedom', which I have tried to implement throughout my career (and which) will always be a part of me." Formerly Musiala's teammate at Bayern before an off-season move to Dortmund, Sule recalled the moment he recognized the teenager's "incredible" talent.

"We played against the under-19s and you could see what incredible skills and abilities he had," said Sule, adding that "after this game, he was moved to the professional side". While admitting that as a teenager he "supported England" and was still "happy when they win games", Musiala believes Germany can turn it on when it matters. "We came into the tournament with the mindset that we can win," he said. "We are well prepared and pumped up to know that the tournament is starting." — AFP

Ronaldo to leave Man United with 'immediate effect'

LONDON: Cristiano Ronaldo's controversial second spell at Manchester United is to end with "immediate effect", the Premier League giants announced Tuesday. The Portugal forward

appeared to be on his way out of Old Trafford following a recent television interview in which he said he felt "betrayed" by the club and had no respect for new manager Erik ten Hag.

"Cristiano Ronaldo is to leave Manchester United by mutual agreement, with immediate effect," said a United statement. "The club thanks him for his immense contribution across two spells at Old Trafford, scoring 145 goals in 346 appearances, and wishes him and his family well for the future. "Everyone at Manchester United remains focused on continuing the team's

progress under Erik ten Hag and working together to deliver success on the pitch."

As well as criticizing the Old Trafford hierarchy and ten Hag, the 37-year-old Ronaldo, currently with the Portugal squad at the World Cup, was scathing about the club's US owners. Ronaldo said the Glazer family cared far more about the money-making potential of United than results on the pitch. He even turned on former team-mates Gary Neville and Wayne Rooney, saying "they are not my friends" after recent criticism from the pair. — AFP

Japan seeking to upstage Germany

DOHA: Japan manager Hajime Moriyasu is hoping the apprentices can upset the masters when they take on "role models" Germany in their World Cup opener on Wednesday. Germany has become a popular destination for Japanese players in recent years, with eight of the current squad playing in the Bundesliga.

Moriyasu paid tribute to the contribution German football has made to his players' development but urged them to show their own qualities when the teams meet in Doha. "Germany have won the World Cup and that is our aim too—they are role models for us," the manager said on Tuesday.

"We are learning from Germany but we also want to compete on the world stage with the qualities that Japan has. "We have a lot of feelings towards Germany but we have to treat tomorrow's game as if we are playing any other team and just do our best." Japan have been handed a tough group, with Costa Rica and Spain also lying in wait in Group E. The Blue Samurai have never gone

beyond the last 16 at a World Cup but Moriyasu said they were hoping to "change history" by reaching at least the quarter-finals.

Captain Maya Yoshida acknowledged that their chances of progress could hinge on the result of their opening game. The centre-back has witnessed Germany's players at close quarters since joining Schalke in July, and is impressed by what he has seen. "We understand that they have good qualities—speed, pace and physical ability as well," said the former Southampton player, who is appearing at his third World Cup.

"The key is we have to defend well. Probably less opportunity to attack, but we need to make counter-attacks." Japan have had several injury scares in the build-up to the tournament, with doubts over the fitness of influential midfielder Hidemasa Morita. Moriyasu said his entire squad was available for selection and wants his team to play "with no regrets". "We have players in the Bundesliga, playing with or against the best players in the world, and I want them to be confident when they play in tomorrow's game," he said.

Asian teams have suffered a torrid time at the tournament so far, with host nation Qatar losing 2-0 to Ecuador in the opening game and Iran hammered 6-2 by England. Yoshida urged fans from across Asia



DOHA: Japan's head coach Hajime Moriyasu signs an autograph on a jersey for schoolchildren during a training session in Al Sadd SC in Doha. — AFP

to cheer on Japan. "Germany is so strong so we need some support," he said. "We are representing Japan of course, but at the same time representing Asia. "So hopefully many fans come to the stadium, not only Japanese but also the many Asian fans." — AFP

Saudi Arabia pull off one of the greatest upsets in WCup history

Saudi shock Messi's Argentina 2-1 at World Cup



LUSAIL: Saudi Arabia's midfielder #10 Salem Al-Dawsari celebrates after scoring his team's second goal during the Qatar 2022 World Cup Group C football match between Argentina and Saudi Arabia. — AFP

DOHA: Saudi Arabia pulled off one of the greatest upsets in World Cup history on Tuesday, roaring back to beat Lionel Messi's Argentina 2-1 and set the tournament in Qatar alight. Copa America champions Argentina came into the match on a 36-match unbeaten streak and appeared to be on their way to a straightforward victory after Messi stroked home an early penalty. Lionel Scaloni's team could have put the game beyond Saudi Arabia's reach in the first half but had three goals chalked off for offside.

Saudi Arabia, ranked a lowly 51st in the world, equalized early in the second half through Saleh Al-Shehri, silencing the hordes of Argentina fans. But just minutes later the Green Falcons were in front when Salem Al-Dawsari rifled an unstoppable shot into the top corner after a delightful piece of trickery. Argentina laid siege to the Saudi goal as the minutes ticked away but Saudi goalkeeper Mohammed Al-Owais proved unbeatable and the final whistle sparked scenes of jubilation.

"Sometimes all the stars are aligned," said Saudi's French coach Herve Renard. "Today all the stars were aligned for us." "We made history for football," he added. "It will stay forever, this is most important. But we also have to think about looking forward. We still have two difficult games before us." Defeat is a bitter

blow for Argentina, who were one game away from equalling Italy's all-time record of 37 matches unbeaten.

Forward Lautaro Martinez said the loss-in what is likely to be the final World Cup of Messi's glittering career-hurt badly. "It's clear we lost the game because of our own mistakes, above all in the second half," he said. "In the first half, we should have scored more than a goal. But that's the World Cup. Now we have to rest and think about what's ahead. Those are two finals now." The other match in Group C pits Robert Lewandowski's Poland against Mexico, with the Barcelona forward still seeking his first World Cup goal.

The prolific Lewandowski is yet to open his account at the finals after failing to score on his one previous appearance, in 2018. Goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny believes his teammate will break his duck in Qatar as Poland aim to reach the knockout phase for the first time since 1986. "I think it's definitely important for him (to score)," Szczesny said. "He's very motivated before the World Cup. No one doubts that Robert is one of the best players in the world right now."

Mbappe the difference

Messi's PSG teammate, Kylian Mbappe, is already a world champion at the age of 23. The forward will be

licking his lips ahead of France's Group D match against an Australia side desperately lacking star power. France coach Didier Deschamps is without first-choice midfielders Paul Pogba and N'Golo Kante for the whole tournament while Ballon d'Or winner Karim Benzema has also been ruled out.

Deschamps said Benzema's absence would put Mbappe under even more pressure to deliver. "He has always had the ability to make the difference and we will need that," said Deschamps, who led the team to glory in 2018 in Russia. "He has the ability to be decisive at any moment, unlike many other players." Mbappe will lead a French attack in which veteran Olivier Giroud is expected to feature.

Denmark take on Tunisia in the other match in the group, with talisman Christian Eriksen set to complete a remarkable comeback after suffering a cardiac arrest during the European Championship last year. World Cup organizers were facing growing questions about whether rainbow-themed hats and t-shirts can be worn in Qatar, where homosexuality is illegal. The issue arose on Monday when former Wales captain Laura McAllister was confronted by security at her country's match against the USA and ordered to remove a rainbow-colored bucket hat. — AFP



Argentina's forward #10 Lionel Messi reacts after a challenge during the Qatar 2022 World Cup Group C football match between Argentina and Saudi Arabia. — AFP photos



Supporters of Saudi Arabia celebrate their team's victory during the Qatar 2022 World Cup Group C football match between Argentina and Saudi Arabia.



Saudi Arabia's defender #13 Yasser Al-Shahrani collides with Saudi Arabia's goalkeeper #21 Mohammed Al-Owais during the Qatar 2022 World Cup Group C football match between Argentina and Saudi Arabia.



Argentina's supporters react at the end of the Qatar 2022 World Cup Group C football match between Argentina and Saudi Arabia at the Lusail Stadium.



Fans attend the Qatar 2022 World Cup Group D football match between Denmark and Tunisia at the Education City Stadium in Al-Rayyan.



Fireworks are set off prior to the Qatar 2022 World Cup Group D football match between Denmark and Tunisia at the Education City Stadium in Al-Rayyan.