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Kuwait projects KD 5bn deficit

CSB: Monthly income of Kuwaiti families KD 3,995, expat families KD 940

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The finance ministry on Tuesday released the draft state budget for the 2023/2024 fiscal year, projecting a huge deficit of KD 5 billion due to a sharp drop in oil revenues and a rise in expenditures, the ministry said in a statement. The draft budget was approved by the Cabinet before resigning last week and it will become official only after its approval by the National Assembly.

Revenues in the fiscal year, which starts on April 1, were projected at KD 19.6 billion, down a massive 16.9 percent compared to this fiscal year's estimated income of KD 23.4 billion, the statement said. Oil income in the year was projected to slide a hefty 19.5 percent to KD 17.2 billion from KD 21.3 billion esti-

ated for the current fiscal year, it said.

Expenditures on the other hand were projected to soar by 11.7 percent to KD 26.3 billion from this year's estimates of KD 23.5 billion, according to the ministry. This will leave a projected deficit of KD 6.8 billion, way above the estimated deficit of just KD 124 million, according to the ministry's statistics. The main reasons for the sharp rise in the budget deficit were a major rise in wages and subsidies to the tune of over KD 3.2 billion, the ministry said.

Wages and salaries are projected at KD 14.9 billion compared to KD 13.2 billion estimated for the current year, while subsidies are projected at KD 5.9 billion from KD 4.4 billion in the current year, the ministry said. The ministry said the drop in oil income is attributed to calculating the price of oil at \$70 a barrel

in the next fiscal year from \$80 a barrel this year.

The ministry described next year's budget as "exceptional" because of extraordinary non-recurring expenditures like paying arrears of KD 1.1 billion to the ministries of electricity and water and oil. The ministry also allocated KD 481 million for government employees willing to take their annual leave in cash and close to KD 600 million for an estimated 21,000 new jobs in the government.

The ministry however referred to a positive development in the next budget, which is a 10 percent rise in non-oil revenues to KD 2.9 billion from an estimated KD 2.1 billion in the current year. The ministry said that if profits of government agencies and departments are added to the budget, the deficit will be lower at KD 5 billion. But MP Abdulwahab Al-Issa sent

a series of urgent questions to the ministers of finance and oil over the new budget. He inquired how current expenditure items of wages and subsidies jumped over KD 3 billion in one year and how the cost of oil production increased by 22 percent over the previous year. He demanded clarification for both items. He also asked if these increases are temporary or permanent.

Meanwhile, the Central Statistical Bureau said on Tuesday Kuwaiti families earn four times more than that of expat families, and they spend far more, according to the results of a field survey for 2021 spending. The survey showed that the average monthly income of Kuwaiti families is KD 3,995 compared to just KD 940 for expat families. It said Kuwaiti families spend KD 4,139 monthly, while expats spend KD 1,071. (See Page 3 for full report)

News in brief



Employees walk at Al Dhafra solar project in Abu Dhabi on Jan 31, 2023. — AFP

UAE solar plant to go online

ABU DHABI: One of the world's biggest solar plants will become fully operational this year in the oil-rich United Arab Emirates, months before it hosts UN climate talks, a partner company said Tuesday. Al Dhafra project, located in the desert some 35 km south of the capital Abu Dhabi, will provide enough electricity for 160,000 households in the country of 10 million people, said Olivier Bordes, regional director for France's EDF Renewables. The plant of giant, double-sided solar panels, which rotate to face the sun, occupies a site spanning more than 20 sq km. —AFP



This handout image from NASA shows a formation on Mars that resembles a bear. — AFP

Is there a bear on Mars?

LOS ANGELES: Yogi, Paddington and Winnie the Pooh, move over. There's a new bear in town. Or on Mars, anyway. The beaming face of a cute-looking teddy bear appears to have been carved into the surface of our nearest planetary neighbor, waiting for a passing satellite to discover it. And when the Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter passed over last month, carrying aboard the most powerful camera ever to venture into the Solar System, that's exactly what happened. — AFP

Blinken mourns 'innocent' Palestinians

RAMALLAH: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken expressed his sorrow Tuesday for "innocent" Palestinians killed in a spike of violence in the occupied West Bank, after meeting Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. Washington's top diplomat met Abbas in the West Bank city of Ramallah on the final stop on a Middle East tour aimed at curbing the bloodshed, following meetings with Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and cabinet ministers.

Both sides are reeling from a new wave of violence. A Palestinian shot dead seven people in a Zionist settlement in annexed east Jerusalem on Friday, a day after the deadliest army raid in years in the West Bank claimed 10 Palestinian lives. This month the conflict has killed 35 Palestinian adults and children, as well as the six Zionists, including a child, and one Ukrainian, killed on Friday.

Speaking in Ramallah, Blinken expressed his "sorrow for the innocent Palestinian civilians who have lost their lives in escalating violence over the last year". The year 2022 was the deadliest in the West Bank since the United Nations started tracking fatalities in the occupied territory in 2005.

Continued on Page 6



RAMALLAH: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken meets Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in the occupied West Bank on Jan 31, 2023. — AFP

Pak mosque blast toll 100; 51 die in boat capsizes

PESHAWAR: A suicide blast at a mosque inside a Pakistan police headquarters was a targeted revenge attack, a police chief said Tuesday, as rescue efforts ended with the death toll standing at 100. Between 300 and 400 policemen had gathered for afternoon prayers at the compound's mosque on Monday in the provincial capital Peshawar when an entire wall and most of the roof were blown out, showering rubble on officers.

"We are on the frontline taking action against militants and that is why

we were targeted," city police chief Muhammad Ijaz Khan told AFP. "The purpose was to demoralize us as a force." On Tuesday evening rescuers finally ended a marathon operation which saw them pry survivors and corpses out of the wreck of the mosque, rushing those who could be saved to hospitals.

The head of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province police force, Moazzam Jah Ansari, told reporters that a suicide bomber had entered the mosque as a guest, carrying 10-12 kg of "explosive material in bits and pieces". He added that a militant group that was on-and-off affiliated with the Pakistani Taliban could be behind the attack.

Authorities are investigating how a major security breach could happen in one of the most tightly

Continued on Page 6



PESHAWAR: Pakistani security officials gather to attend funeral prayers of police officers killed in a mosque blast on Jan 30, 2023. — AFP

Onion prices make Philippine staple a luxury

BONGABON, Philippines: Even before his onions are fully grown, Philippine farmer Luis Angeles races to harvest the crop and cash in on eye-watering prices for a vegetable that has become a luxury item in the country. Onion prices have soared in recent months, reaching as high as 800 pesos (nearly \$15) a kilogram in Manila supermarkets, making them more expensive than chicken or meat.

Some restaurants have stripped the staple ingredient from dishes, while

many families already grappling with the highest inflation in 14 years have stopped eating them. To meet demand and push retail prices back below 200 pesos, the government has approved the importation of 21,000 tons of onions and faces calls to crack down on traders suspected of hoarding.

But prices remain stubbornly high and onion farmers like Angeles have been harvesting earlier than usual to reap the windfall. "What is happening is historic," said Angeles, 37, as his workers pulled undersized red and white bulbs out of the soil near the northern town of Bongabon, the country's self-proclaimed "onion capital". "This is the first time that prices have reached this level." When he began harvesting last month, Angeles received as much as 250 pesos per

Continued on Page 6



MANILA: In this photo taken on Jan 19, 2023, a worker pushing a cart of onions at a market. — AFP



Local

Media, family responsible for teens committing violent crimes: Expert

Parents, society must be vigilant against principal motivators of heinous crimes

By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: Lack of communication and care from parents is one of the factors leading to violent crimes among teenagers, said Dr Huda Al-Jasser, consultant in mental health and family education. Recently, Kuwait witnessed a brutal crime by a Kuwaiti teenager, who allegedly raped and killed his family's Filipino housemaid. While the local community in Kuwait does not face such crimes frequently among teenagers, it is important to address this issue and understand the main motivators that make youth commit crimes.

Jasser pointed out that there are many reasons that could lead teenagers to commit crimes, the most important of which is the personality traits they acquire from family and friends. A teenager living in a violent environment which subjects them to witnessing physical and verbal confrontations could end up taking out their anger and frustration through violence. Teenagers might also attack others to compensate for the lack of attention they face at home.

Jasser said parents should make connecting with their children a priority to protect them from violent tendencies that could lead them to harming others. "Parents have to follow up on their teenager's lives, who their friends are and where they go, and prevent them from staying alone in their bedrooms for a long time," she said. "I don't call on parents to control their

teenagers and not give them their own space, but they have to know everything about them".

On the other hand, Jasser said consuming media content that reinforces violence plays a role as well. "If we look through social media, video games and movies, we can understand the behaviors that our teenagers are displaying. They have higher tendencies for challenging one another, which increases their stress levels," she said.

Several studies have affirmed that video games contribute significantly to criminal mindsets among teenagers, she said. "We can notice that these teenagers, who spend lots of time playing video games, are more violent and like to show off their power through words or actions, like attacking others." Jasser called for "deterrent penalties, especially for criminals who attack and boast about their physical strength". She also demanded the "adoption of severe laws that prevent the criminal from committing his crime and educate the family to raise their children according to moral behaviors."



Dr Huda Al-Jasser



KPC announces liquefied gas prices for Feb

KUWAIT: Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) announced Tuesday the new prices of liquefied petroleum gas (propane) and (butane) for the month of February. The corporation said in a statement that one metric ton of propane gas will be sold for \$790 in February and one metric ton of butane gas will be sold for \$790. Liquefied petroleum gas (propane) and (butane) are used in the petrochemical industry, in addition to other uses as fuel, cooking, heating and other uses. The prices of liquefied gas are affected by the oil prices in the global mar-

kets, as they are a major determinant of the prices of these materials, in addition to being affected by the forces of supply and demand in the market and other factors.

The price of Kuwaiti oil went down by \$1.77 to \$84.65 per barrel on Monday as opposed to \$86.42 pb last Friday, said KPC on Tuesday. The prices of the Brent crude and the West Texas Intermediate, down respectively by \$1.76 and \$1.78 to settle each at \$84.90 per barrel and \$77.90 pb.

Meanwhile, Kuwait's crude oil exports to Japan in December jumped 19.4 percent from a year earlier to 8.11 million barrels, or 262,000 barrels per day (bpd), for the first increase in four months, government data showed Tuesday. As Japan's third biggest oil provider, Kuwait supplied 8.8 percent of its total crude imports, compared with 7.4 percent in the same month of last year, the Japanese Natural Resources and Energy Agency said in a preliminary report.

For the whole of 2022, Kuwait's crude oil exports to Japan stood at 221,000 bpd, up 5.9 percent from the previous year, and took up 8.1 percent of total Japanese crude imports. Japan's overall imports of crude oil in December edged down 0.3 percent year-on-year to 2.96 million bpd, down for the second month in a row. Shipments from the Middle East accounted for 93.2 percent of the total, down 2.0 percentage points from the year before. By country, Saudi Arabia was in the top spot, although imports from the kingdom declined 5.6 percent from a year earlier to 1.21 million bpd, followed by the United Arab Emirates with 1.08 million bpd, down 1.7 percent. Qatar ranked fourth with 127,000 bpd and the US fifth with 119,000 bpd, respectively. For the full year 2022, Japan's crude oil imports rose 9.7 percent to 2.73 million bpd. Japan is the world's third biggest oil consumer after China and the US. —KUNA



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Local

Kuwait, Australia hail relations, eye more fruitful ties in the year ahead

Kuwait will seek removal of 3 Kuwaitis from UN sanctions list: Mashaan

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: The Embassy of Australia to Kuwait held a reception Monday on the occasion of Australian National Day. On the sidelines of the ceremony, Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs for Development and International Cooperation Ambassador Hamad Al-Mashaan revealed the ministry of foreign affairs will discuss in March the removal of the names of three Kuwaiti citizens from the Security Council's counter-terrorism sanctions list, following the ombudsman's interim report.

With the holy month of Ramadan approaching, Mashaan stated that the ministry is working to develop a charity tracking system, which aims to monitor the funds donated from Kuwait to people in need abroad. The system, which will be launched very soon, is a confirmation of Kuwait's commitment to verifying the sources of donations as indicated in international laws and regulations governing fund transfers.

Mashaan praised Kuwaiti-Australian relations, which began in 1974. "The bilateral relationship is fruitful and successful between the two countries. We have signed 11 agreements over the years," he said. "The value of investments amounted to more than \$16 billion in the oil and investment sectors." He added more than 500 Kuwaiti students are currently studying in Australia.



Hamad Al-Mashaan



Melissa Kelly



KUWAIT: Australian Ambassador to Kuwait Melissa Kelly with Hamad Al-Mashaan (right) cut the cake during the ceremony. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Australia is one of the sources of food security for Kuwait, said Mashaan, recalling the country's role in securing food stocks during the COVID-19 pandemic and its participation in the international coalition against ISIS. Kuwait also imports livestock from South Africa, he said, meaning there are other alternatives if needed for Australian products, which

are abundant in the market except during summertime.

Australian Ambassador to Kuwait Melissa Kelly spoke of the strong relations between the two countries and said she was looking forward to "building ties in the year ahead". The embassy celebrated the event with an "Australian bush sufra". Kelly explained that a bush is the term Australians use to refer to the coun-

try's forest landscapes. "For indigenous Australians, who have a sacred connection to traditional lands, the bush is a source of food and a place to come together and connect. When combined with the concept in Arabic of a sufra or a dining space - it's all about the coming together of Australian and Kuwaiti culture. A special place to gather friends, share food and connect," she said.

In my view

In honor of Jullebee Ranara

By Nejouad Al-Yagout



local@kuwaittimes.com

On January 22nd, the charred remains of overseas Filipino worker (OFW) Jullebee Ranara were discovered in Salmi, Kuwait. In an act of noble and supreme diplomacy, our Foreign Minister, Sheikh Salem Al-Sabah, met the Charges D'Affaires of the Philippines Embassy, Jose Cabrera, to express his heartfelt condolences for the despicable murder of Jullebee. In addition, the President of the Philippines, Ferdinand Marcos Jr, who attended the wake of Jullebee, has promised to hold a bilateral meeting with Kuwait to discuss the protection of OFWs and to see whether there are factors which can be addressed to ensure that such a heinous crime does not occur again.

Many people, local and foreign, also expressed their profound grief for the murder of Jullebee, who, it was found, was raped and burned to death by the 17-year-old Kuwaiti son of her employer. But it was the usual victim-blaming, along with a perverse denial of the racist and misogynistic undertones of the crime, which remind us that there is a lot of work to be done in Kuwait.

In order to know whether a country is considered civil, one cannot ask the citizens. It is always the minorities who can help us assess whether we are on the right track in terms of humanity and inclusivity. There have been many instances of abuse of domestic helpers and mistreatment toward foreigners and those considered "the other" for us to ignore. One would be hard-pressed to find an expatriate in Kuwait - specifically one who hails from a low-income country - who is not intimidated by us.

Instead of arrogantly arguing our case that we are welcoming or telling foreigners that if they don't like our attitude they should leave, what is required by each of us is self-reflection. We need to spend more time with people from certain nations and ask them what they would like us to do to feel more respected, more included. We can't afford to continue to become defensive when reports of human rights abuses in Kuwait are exposed, or when we top the list of worst countries for expatriates. We must assess why. Instead, we resort to pointing fingers back at those who exposed us or claiming they have an agenda and want to ruin our reputation.

How many more times do we need to be investigated for our mistreatment of others? How many more Filipinos, or those from other countries, need to seek refuge in their embassies or run away to agencies for being beaten up or deprived of food or not being paid their salaries? There is a serious problem in the service industry, a problem which gives employers a sense of entitlement to take away the phones of their domestic workers, abuse them, keep their passports away from them, and only give them one day a week off.

Domestic helpers must be treated as respected employees who deserve rest and good treatment. To even emphasize this is embarrassing. What has become of us that we need to be told how to behave toward others? Why do we infringe upon the freedom of our fellow brothers and sisters in humanity? How would we feel if we had to stay in our office buildings all day and were only granted one day in the weekend, for a few hours, to see our friends? Again, it is a tarnished mindset of arrogance - a false sense of entitlement - which we use to exert control over others we deem inferior to us. And this arrogance will be our downfall if we don't remedy it. We are not only destroying the lives of others - we are also eroding the soul of our nation.

Employers should be required to sign a contract before hiring a domestic worker to ensure they will protect their rights. That way, the law can protect those who work in our homes. The contract should include clauses which give workers rights, such as days off, the right to use and keep their phones, guarantees that they will be treated with respect and kindness, and guarantees that they will be fed and paid. Although this has been discussed, it is still not being implemented. The contract should also protect employees from physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental abuse.

Each employee should also be given a list of lawyers who are willing to work pro bono to protect them in the case of any infringement upon their rights, since the exorbitant fees of lawyers can prevent someone from seeking help. We can't just show our support in words. Action needs to be taken since, unfortunately, there is a mindset of I-am-Kuwaiti-and-this-is-my-country-not-yours. If we are not ready to transform our attitude, then we need stricter laws in place to train us to behave in a better manner. Too much time has passed, and too many crimes and abuses have been committed, for us to continue to remain silent and wait for headlines to pass.

The death of Jullebee is not just a tragedy, but a reminder of what transpires when we see others as non-entities, under our control, and not worthy of a life of dignity. May we wake up as a population and ask ourselves whether there is more we can do to ensure that future transgressions of human rights can be averted. Though the answer is yes, there is much more we can do. May we be strong enough to face our darkness and remedy it before we pollute our minds and hearts even further. We still have time to transform ourselves. All it takes is humility and honesty.

For now, let us send love to the family and friends of Jullebee, and to all those who grieve her murder. Let us reassure them that there are many of us here who stand with Jullebee. And let us reassure them that we are aware that racism and discrimination exist in our country. After all, when more of us locals are ready to dissolve self-denial and work on ourselves instead of mistreating others, we will know that Kuwait is ready for change, ready to welcome all, ready to embrace the so-called "other". The time is now, however. Only now.

News in brief

CSC begins registering KU, PAAET graduates for jobs

KUWAIT: The Civil Service Commission has opened its online registration for graduates from Kuwait University and The Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET) who wish to enroll in government institutions on Friday (February 3). According to information from the commission, the registration includes graduates from the first academic course in accordance with the rules and regulations placed by the commission. The registration and will continue until February 17.

KNPC labor syndicate elects administrative council

KUWAIT: The Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC) labor syndicate has formed its office and committees. Ahmed Al-Manea was unanimously elected as chairman of the administrative council and Jassem Al-Mutawa was elected as his deputy. New secretary general of the administrative council, Ayed Al-Fadhli said: "The syndicate has concluded its first meeting with the formation of the office's authority and its committees which have come into effect after the general assembly confirmed the membership of 11 nominees to the council during the period from January 2023 to January 2026." He announced that Sulaiman Al-Abduljaleel was elected as assistant secretary general, Mohammed Khuraibet as general cashier, Abdulaziz Al-Kanderi as head of the social and media committee. "The administrative council will seek to strengthen the relationship with the executive management of the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation headed by Sheikh Nawaf Al-Saud Al-Sabah to achieve the goals and aspirations of all KPC employees," he concluded.

MoE allows transfer between private and public schools

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Education (MoE) has issued a decision regarding an exceptional period designated for transfers of students from public schools to Arab private schools and vice versa, starting from February 5th until the end of working hours on February 16. This decision is applicable for kindergarten, primary and intermediate students enrolled in grades from the first to the ninth. "Transfer is permitted for high school students enrolled in grades ten to twelfth from Arabic private schools to general education schools only provided that the free choice subjects are matched," the education ministry announced. "The transfer of high school students enrolled in grades ten to twelfth from general education schools to private Arab schools, provided that the transfer is according to the vacancies available in the educational district," the ministry added.

Central Statistical Bureau Survey 2021

Average monthly income of Kuwaiti family is KD 3,995

KUWAIT: Acting Director-General of the Central Statistical Bureau (CSB) Moniyeh Al-Qabandi announced that the average monthly income of a Kuwaiti family in 2021, without calculating the rental value, amounted to KD 3,995 (about \$13,000) compared to KD 3,351 (about \$10,900), an increase of 2.2 percent compared to the income and expenditure survey in 2013.

Al-Qabandi said in a press statement on Tuesday on the sidelines of the conference to launch the results of the income and expenditure survey for the year 2021 that the average monthly income of a non-Kuwaiti family in 2021, excluding the rental value, amounted to KD 1,939.800 (about \$3,000), compared to KD 1,131.500 (about \$3,700), an increase of 2.3 percent compared to the income and expenditure survey in 2013.

She added that the average monthly expenditure for Kuwaiti families in 2021, without calculating the rental value, amounted to KD 3,296.600 (about \$10,800), an increase of 5.6 percent compared to the Income and Expenditure Survey in 2013, while the average monthly expenditure of Kuwaiti families with calculating the rental value is KD 4,138.800 (about \$13,500).

She explained that the average monthly expenditure of a non-Kuwaiti family in 2021, without calculating the rental value, amounted to KD 1,071.300 (about \$3,500), an increase of 4.4 percent compared to the income and expenditure survey in 2013. The average monthly expenditure of a non-Kuwaiti family, with calculating the rental value, reached KD 1,071.300 (about \$3,500). She indicated that the Central Statistical Bureau completed the Household Income and Expenditure Survey Project (2019-2021) in cooperation and partnership with the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development

and the Office of the Program.

She pointed out that the sample size was determined, which includes 4,032 families distributed over 12 months, at a rate of 336 families per month, as the percentage of Kuwaiti families reached 33.3 percent and non-Kuwaiti families reached 66.7 percent distributed in all governorates. She said it is the most important statistical project and the second largest project for any statistical body, indicating that it is one of the necessary statistical methods for drawing up the economic and social policies of the state on scientific bases, as this survey provides important data that serve the purposes of planning Economic and social development programs.

She stated that the results of the household income and expenditure survey are used as a basis for describing and analyzing a wide range of economic and social issues, the most important of which is providing a broad base of economic, social and demographic data, identifying consumer goods and services in Kuwaiti society at all levels, and identifying the relative distribution of expenditure.

Secretary General of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development Dr Khaled Mahdi said in a similar statement that this survey combines the sources of income received by each family and aspects of spending on basics, luxuries, transportation, housing, and others, indicating that the survey gives a broad breakdown of all aspects of expenditure and income. Mahdi added that the results of the survey provide a database based on an internationally and regionally approved methodology, which helps in using it in making economic policies. He explained that the results of the survey are important as they play a major role in formulating plans, programs, decisions and legislation related to the development plan of Kuwait. He indicated that the results will be published on the official website of the Central Administration for Statistics so that its data will be available to all, whether scholars, researchers or decision-makers, stressing that these results are considered one of the most important statistical projects in Kuwait. Resident Representative of the United Nations Development Program Hideko Hadzialic was also present on the occasion. —KUNA



KUWAIT: (From left to right) Moniyeh Al-Qabandi, Dr Khaled Mahdi and Hideko Hadzialic.

Kuwait drops to 77th position in corruption index: TI

KUWAIT: Transparency International has released its Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) for the year

2022 which saw Kuwait drop four positions from the 73rd to 77th globally. "Kuwait ranked seventh in the Arab world after the UAE, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Jordan and Bahrain, which is the same as its Arab ranking in the previous report." Kuwait Transparency Society announced quoting the Transparency International report.

The CPI ranks 180 countries and territories around the world by their perceived levels of public sector corruption, scoring on a scale of 0 (highly

corrupt) to 100 (very clean).

Kuwait has come last in GCC rankings as no fundamental change has occurred during the previous 10 years with the exception of 2015. Transparency International has started to release Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) in 1995. It offers annual snapshot of relative degrees of corruption. Kuwait Transparency Society, the nongovernmental organization, has revised its methodology in 2012 to allow for comparison of scores from each year.

News in brief

Rainwater drainage
contract in 2025

KUWAIT: The public works ministry is expected to sign a contract within the first quarter of 2025 for a rainwater drainage network project to be carried out in the south Abdullah Al-Mubarak area. The ministry had issued a tender for the project on June 27, 2021, with October 2021 set as the deadline for interested entities to present their offers. Many local construction companies have submitted applications, according to KUNA. The winning bidder will take over the construction, completion and maintenance of a sewage network to drain rainwater in the area. —KUNA

Al-Mojel cancels general
secretary authorizations

KUWAIT: Municipality Affairs Minister Abdulaziz Al-Mojel has cancelled a decision which delegated some of the minister's authorities to the general secretary of the municipal council. The ministerial decision removes 18 pre-designated authorizations, including: making specific hiring decisions at the general secretariat, giving employees allowances, promotions, leaves, such as study leaves and sabbatical leaves, and health exemptions. In related news, the Kuwait Municipality has announced that it will begin interviewing applicants for the "B Lawyer" position starting Wednesday, Feb 1. Applicants will be notified through a text message which includes the date and time of the interview to take place at the Legal Department building. The number of applicants who have passed the exam with 60 percent or higher has reached 453 out of 1,276, the municipality said. It has rejected all grievances related to the "impossibly" difficult questions which were submitted by those who got less than the passing grade. —KUNA

Photo of the day



KUWAIT: A bee is seen collecting nectar from a Lantana flower blooming at a green space in Kuwait. The usually dry lands of Kuwait are now covered with lush greenery and plants following heavy rainfalls in recent weeks. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Jaber Hospital performs first knee and hip replacement

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Dr Salama Ayyad, orthopedic and joint replacement consultant at Jaber Al-Ahmad Hospital, announced the success of the first double hip and knee joint replacement surgery in Kuwait. The patient is an 82-year-old man who was suffering from pain as a result of a fracture in the pelvic joint and severe osteoarthritis of the knee.

In normal circumstances, pelvic and knee joints are replaced in separate surgeries, but the patient was given the choice to combine them into one due to his condition, said Dr Ayyad. He added that an integrated medical team has performed, during the past three months, 63 pelvic and knee joint replacements. There are 20 cases on the list of surgeries at the

hospital, said Dr Ayyad, which is a significant number. The team tries to cover surgeries at all supporting hospitals, including Al-Adan Hospital and Al-Jahra Hospital.

Dr Ayyad advised patients who need a pelvic joint replacement to get the surgery done without hesitation, as it is considered the best surgical intervention worldwide and is proven by scientific research, with positive results achieved more than 99 percent of the time. He said all departments at Jaber Al-Ahmad Hospital cooperate in the interest of the patient. He added that the hospital has fully launched work in the orthopedic department since the end of the COVID-19 pandemic. The number of surgeries completed so far is still small, he said, because the team is waiting for equipment as it arrives gradually.



KUWAIT: An integrated medical team performs a pelvic and knee joint replacement surgery.



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Burgan Bank takes part in Watheefi career fair

KUWAIT: In an initiative that underscores Burgan Bank's proactive and leading role in human capital development, the Bank recently expanded its participation in Kuwait's largest career fair, Watheefi, by delivering 'The Secret to Self-Empowerment' workshop to the fair's visitors. The workshop marks an extension to Burgan's ESG strategy and its active role in the development of its community through various learning activities and events.

Led by the Bank's Human Resources Department, the workshop was delivered by Fatemah Yaqoub, Learning Manager, and Bashar Al-Qattan, Talent Empowerment Manager at Burgan Bank, who, together, led the workshop. Designed to be dynamic and engaging in its format, the workshop saw the Burgan team sharing their knowledge and experience with the aspiring professionals in attendance. Yaqoub's and Al-Qattan's workshop aimed to guide participants on how to reap the most value from their professional journeys by choosing the best suited career path for their aspirations and skills.

Commenting on the workshop, Yaqoub said: "Embodying Burgan's philosophy, Driven by You, 'The Secret to Self-Empowerment' workshop was designed and delivered with the sole purpose of empowering our community with the proper tools that any employee or job seeker needs in order to thrive in today's labor market. The ultimate aim is to achieve not only career success, but also, and most importantly, personal growth and self-actualization."

Adding to Yaqoub's comment, Al-Qattan further noted that: "At Burgan Bank, we realize that our institutional success is entwined with the develop-



Bashar Al-Qattan

Fatemah Yaqoub

ment of our community, whereby one's success leads to the other's success, forever fueling one another's growth and maturity. That's why giving back to our community is an integral part of our daily operations and overall strategy."

The workshop, which garnered more than 75 registrations, covered some of the most vital skills required for successfully choosing the best professional route, including: understanding and creating SMART goals, evaluating opportunities by running a SWOT analysis, identifying personal values, as well as different personality traits and communication styles. To ensure maximum added-value, the workshop was based on active participation from the audience through discussions and self-reflection, which culminated in an action plan that each individual can follow in pursuit of their own career success. As a leading national financial institution and an active member of the Kuwaiti society, Burgan Bank continues to innovate in its on-ground participation that aims at achieving nation-wide growth for Kuwaitis across various fields. This comes under the umbrella of the Bank's commitment to ESG practices, which call for long-term, sustainable growth that serves the environment and society, in adherence to Kuwait's governance.

Decomposing body found in Kabd desert

KUWAIT: A body of an expat was found near an electricity tower in Kabd on Tuesday morning. According to a report received by the ministry of interior's operations room, it appeared that the body, which was bloated, belonged to an expat who was probably electrocuted from wires dangling from the tower. Medical emergency team and criminal investigation officials were called by Kabd police station for investigations to identify the deceased and determine the cause of death.



KUWAIT: The body of an expat seen near an electricity pylon.



US, S Korean defense chiefs vow more drills

Thousands greet Pope in conflict-torn DR Congo



TSIRKUNY: A local resident collects shells of various types of ammunition in Tsirkuny village, Kharkiv region, on January 31, 2023, amid Russia's military invasion on Ukraine. —AFP

Biden rejects F-16s for Ukraine

France, Australia to jointly produce 155 mm shells for Kyiv's force

WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden said Monday the United States would not provide F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine, as Kyiv expands the list of weaponry it needs to be better able to drive Russian forces from occupied territories. Fighting continued at key points along the long front as Russian forces sought to expand their hold on territory in the Donetsk region of eastern Ukraine.

The Kremlin-appointed Donetsk leader, Denis Pushilin, claimed Russian forces were advancing near Vugledar, a strategically valuable town southwest of Donetsk city. "Now we can say that units have established positions in the eastern part of Vugledar, and work is also being carried out in the vicinity," Pushilin said, according to Russian news agencies.

But Kyiv rejected the claim, while conceding that the fighting there was tough. "There are constant attempts to break through our defence," Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky said late Sunday. "The enemy... maintains a high intensity of attack." Last week, Western countries including the United States and Germany approved the delivery of heavy battle tanks to Ukraine.

The move is a departure from a previous position that tanks were considered a step too far in their support for Ukraine and could risk a widening backlash from Russia. But Biden on Monday appeared to draw the line on supplying American fighter jets to Ukraine. "No," he said when asked by reporters at the White House if he was in favor of sending F-16s or others.

Brazil has 'no interest'

But European leaders said they were open to the idea, even if Ukraine has not yet formally requested advanced fighter aircraft from its allies for the war.

Analysts believe both Ukraine and Russia are gearing up for significant offensive movements in the coming months and Western aircraft could increase Kyiv's strength, with its own air force significantly depleted by 11 months of war.

French President Emmanuel Macron said Monday he would not rule out giving fighter aircraft to Ukraine but warned against the risk of escalation in the conflict. Macron had talks with Netherlands Prime Minister Mark Rutte, who has already floated the idea of sending Dutch F-16s to Ukraine.

"Nothing is excluded in principle," Macron said. Any arms delivery "must not weaken the capacity of the French armed forces," he said, adding that France would have to be confident that the weapons would not be used to strike inside Russia, which could escalate the war. "There is no taboo but it would be a big step," said Rutte.

Over in South America, President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva said Brazil "has no interest in sending ammunition to Ukraine" during a meeting with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz—the first Western leader to meet the leftist premier since he took office.

"Brazil is a country of peace... My suggestion is that we create a group of countries to sit at the table with Ukraine and Russia to try to reach peace," Lula said. He added that he had discussed this idea with Macron and would bring it up with Biden and Chinese leader Xi Jinping in future planned visits.

Lula caused a stir last year when he claimed that Russia was "as responsible as" Russian President Vladimir Putin in the conflict. Now, he said he believes Russia "made the classic mistake of invading another country's territory"—but maintained his position of non-engagement. "If one doesn't

engage, then the two (sides) won't fight," Lula said.

Artillery shells

With Ukraine's supplies of artillery munitions heavily depleted, France and Australia announced Monday a deal to jointly produce 155 mm shells for Kyiv's forces. "Several thousand 155 mm shells will be manufactured jointly," French Defense Minister Sebastien Lecornu said.

"There are some unique capabilities that exist in Australia and some synergies that can be achieved by Australia and France working together," said his Australian counterpart Richard Marles.

Meanwhile in Seoul, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg asked South Korea to "step up" military support for Ukraine, suggesting it reconsider its policy of not exporting weapons to countries in conflict.

There is an "urgent need for more ammunition", Stoltenberg said. It is "extremely important that President Putin doesn't win this war," he stressed. Tehran on Monday summoned a Ukrainian diplomat to protest at remarks made by an aide to Zelensky following unattributed weekend strikes that targeted an Iranian defense industry site in Isfahan that reportedly produced drones.

Although no link could be made between the weekend strikes and Ukraine, Mykhailo Podoliak tweeted about the "explosive night in Iran", highlighting the site's drone and missile production and oil refineries. "Ukraine did warn you," he said.

Iran has been supplying attack drones to Russia for use against Ukraine. Ukraine's charge d'affaires in Tehran was summoned to provide "an official and immediate explanation" for remarks it called "strange and biased", said Iran's foreign ministry. —AFP

Iran jails couple in viral dancing video: Activists

PARIS: An Iranian court has handed jail sentences of over 10 years each to a young couple who danced in front of one of Tehran's main landmarks, activists said on Tuesday. Astiyazh Haghghi and her fiance Amir Mohammad Ahmadi, both in their early 20s, had been arrested in early November after a video went viral of them dancing romantically in front of the capital's Azadi Tower.

Haghghi did not wear a headscarf in defiance of the Islamic republic's strict rules for women, while women are also not allowed to dance in public in Iran, let alone with a man. A revolutionary court in Tehran sentenced them each to 10 years and six months in prison, as well as bans on using the Internet and leaving Iran, the US-based Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA) said.

The couple, who already had a following in Tehran as popular Instagram bloggers, were convicted of "encouraging corruption and public prostitution" as well as "gathering with the intention of disrupting national security", it added. HRANA cited sources close to their families as saying they had been deprived of lawyers during the court proceedings, while attempts to secure their release on bail have been rejected.

The group said Haghghi is now in the notorious Qarchak prison for women outside Tehran. Activists regularly condemn conditions in the facility. Iranian authorities have clamped down severely on all forms of dissent since the death in September of Mahsa Amini, who had been arrested for allegedly violating the headscarf rules, sparked protests that have turned into a movement against the regime. —AFP

Peru Congress to resume debate on election bill

LIMA: Peru's Congress will resume debate Tuesday on a bill to bring forward elections, a move aimed at ending weeks of protests that have left dozens dead and brought parts of the country to a standstill. On Monday, lawmakers failed to reach an agreement on the bill after seven hours of discussions, and proceedings will resume at 11:00 am on Tuesday (1600 GMT), according to the legislature.

"We are sure that there will be a way out. All the democratic blocs are going to debate it taking into account the high sense of urgency," said Prime Minister Alberto Otazola on Monday. The South American country has been embroiled in a political crisis with near-daily street protests since December 7, when then-president Pedro Castillo was arrested after attempting to dissolve Congress and rule by decree.

In seven weeks of demonstrations, 48 people — including one police officer — have been killed in clashes between security forces and protesters, according to the Ombudsman's Office. The unrest is being propelled mainly by poor, rural Indigenous people from southern Peru who had identified Castillo as one of their own who would fight to end poverty, racism and inequality.

Dozens of roadblocks have been set up by protesters, causing a shortage of food and fuel in some southern areas as they demand that Castillo's replacement, President Dina Boluarte, step down. Trade unions and other bodies have called for



LIMA: Handout picture shows a session of the plenary in which Peruvian lawmakers are voting for early general elections at the Peruvian Congress in Lima. —AFP

another major demonstration against Boluarte in Lima on Tuesday.

Bringing elections forward

Last month, lawmakers moved elections due in 2026 to April 2024, but as protests showed no sign of abating, Boluarte has called to hold them this year, which Congress rejected late Friday. "Vote for Peru, for the country, by moving the elections up to 2023," the president said in an address to the nation on Sunday.

Lawmakers "have a chance to win the country's trust," she said. In last week's vote on moving elections to October, there were 65 votes against and just 45 in favor, with two abstentions. If reconvened lawmakers again refuse to advance elections, Boluarte has said she will propose a constitutional reform allowing a first voting round to be held in

October and a runoff in December.

Protesters are demanding immediate elections, the dissolution of Congress and a new constitution. In the Lima suburb of Huaycan, hundreds of people marched on Monday chanting: "No more deaths, Dina quit now." Dozens of soldiers headed to Ica, about 250 kilometers (155 miles) south of the capital, to support police in clearing roadblocks on the vital Panamericana Sur highway that connects major cities. Weeks of roadblocks have caused shortages of food, fuel and other basic supplies countrywide.

According to a survey by the Institute of Peruvian Studies, 73 percent of citizens want elections this year. Monday's congressional sitting coincided with a wake for Victor Santisteban, 55, a demonstrator who died Saturday after receiving blunt force trauma to the head, according to a medical report. —AFP

Condolences

The Management, Principals & Staff of
**United Indian School
&
Indian Public School**



Mr. Shaju Alex Joseph (45)

With grieving hearts, we remember our
Teacher and Friend who was called home
to his eternal rest on 30th January 2023.

International

Thousands greet Pope in conflict-torn DR Congo

Argentine pontiff on his fifth trip to Africa, will also visit conflict-hit South Sudan

KINSHASA: Massive crowds thronged for a glimpse of Pope Francis as he made his way through the streets of Kinshasa Tuesday, after arriving in DR Congo with a message of peace for a country ravaged by decades of conflict.

Waving flags and cheering, residents of Kinshasa ran after the popemobile, which wound through working-class districts towards the presidential palace, after the 86-year-old Pope Francis descended from his plane in a wheelchair. The Argentine pontiff is on his fifth trip to Africa, during which he will also visit conflict-hit South Sudan.

"We've been waiting for a year, it's a beautiful trip," the 86-year-old pope told reporters travelling aboard his plane. It is the first time since 1985 that a pope has visited the Democratic Republic of Congo, a desperately poor country of about 100 million people, 40 percent of whom are Catholic.

"I didn't want to miss the opportunity to see him face to face," Maggie Kayembe, a woman in her thirties, told AFP as she waited for the pope. "He always preaches peace wherever he goes, and peace, we really need it," she added. The six-day trip to DRC and South Sudan had been planned for July 2022, but postponed due to the pontiff's knee pain that has forced him in recent months to use a wheelchair.

He boarded the plane in Rome via an elevator. Security concerns were also said to play a role in delaying the trip, and a stop in Goma in DR Congo's east, where dozens of armed groups operate, is no longer on the itinerary.

"I would have liked to go to Goma too, but with the war, you can't go there," the pope told reporters on the plane. On Sunday, he had offered his greetings "with affection to those beloved

peoples who await me".

"These lands, situated in the centre of the great African continent, have suffered greatly from lengthy conflicts," he said after his Angelus prayer at the Vatican. He lamented "armed clashes and exploitation" in the DRC, and said South Sudan, "wracked by years of war, longs for an end to the constant violence".

Victims of violence

Despite its vast mineral wealth, some two-thirds of DRC's population live on less than \$2.15 a day, while violence plagues the eastern provinces. The Tutsi-led armed group M23, which Kinshasa alleges is backed by neighbouring Rwanda, has been conquering large swaths of territory in North Kivu province.

The region has also seen a wave of deadly attacks blamed on the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), a group the Islamic State claims as an affiliate, including a bomb blast at a Pentecostal church this month that killed 14 people. Francis will be received at the presidential palace by President Felix Tshisekedi.

The pontiff will then make his first of a dozen speeches during the trip, addressing authorities, the diplomatic corps, and representatives of civil society. "He can deliver a strong message to politicians by addressing the issue of corruption" ahead of a general election scheduled for December, said Samuel Pommeret with Catholic humanitarian group CCFD-Terre Solidaire, which operates in the area.

Tens of thousands of people are expected to attend a prayer vigil Tuesday evening at N'dolo airport ahead of a mass on Wednesday morning, which is tipped to draw more than a million faithful. During his visit to DRC, the pope will also meet victims of



KINSHASA: Pope Francis (C), seated on a wheelchair, arrives at the N'djili International Airport in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), on January 31, 2023. Pope Francis landed in the Democratic Republic of Congo, hailing his beautiful trip to Africa as he comes bearing a message of peace to the conflict-torn nation, before heading to troubled neighbour South Sudan. — AFP

violence as well as members of the clergy and charities operating in the country.

On Friday, Francis will travel to Juba, the capital of South Sudan, also one of the world's poorest countries, that has lurched from one crisis to another since gaining independence in 2011. It suffered a

brutal five-year civil war, while continued conflict between rival ethnic groups exacts a terrible toll on civilians. The pope will be joined in Juba by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, and the leader of the Church of Scotland, on what he has called "an ecumenical pilgrimage of peace". — AFP

Rights accuses Ukraine of using banned mines

PARIS: Human Rights Watch on Tuesday accused Ukraine of using banned anti-personnel landmines against invading Russian forces, saying almost 50 civilians, including five children, had been wounded. Ukraine's defence ministry insisted the army upholds its treaty obligations against mines, but it would not comment on the types of weapons used until the war ends. Distributed by rocket across a target area, the tiny PFM mines are also known as "butterfly" or "petal" mines for their distinctive shape.

"Ukrainian forces appear to have extensively scattered landmines" around the Izyum area in the northeast, HRW arms expert Steve Goose said. Russian forces held Izyum between April and early September, when Kyiv retook it in a counter-offensive. "Russian forces have repeatedly used anti-personnel mines and committed atrocities across the country, but this doesn't justify Ukrainian use of these prohibited weapons," Goose said.

Ukraine is a signatory to the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty and destroyed much of its Soviet stock by 2020.

But in 2021 -- the year before the Russian attack-Kyiv reported to the UN that over 3.3 million PFM mines contained in artillery rockets were yet to be destroyed. HRW said its researchers on the ground saw physical evidence of such rockets and traces of the mines in the Izyum area, as well as speaking to witnesses who had themselves encountered mines, knew someone who was injured, or had been warned about the weapons.

"Healthcare workers said that they treated nearly 50 civilians, including at least five children, who were apparently injured from anti-personnel mines," HRW said. "About half of the injuries involved traumatic amputations of the foot or lower leg, injuries consistent with PFM blast mines".

"Ukraine should recommit to the Mine Ban Treaty's strict prohibitions, open an investigation into the recent apparent use of PFM anti-personnel mines, hold those responsible to account, and take steps to secure and destroy its stocks of anti-personnel mines," the rights group said, also urging Russia to end their use. — AFP

Jihadists kill 28 in troubled Burkina Faso

OUAGADOUGOU: Twenty-eight people have died in new attacks by suspected jihadists in Burkina Faso, including 15 who had been abducted at the weekend, the authorities said Tuesday. Fifteen bodies bearing bullet impacts were found on Monday near Linguokoro, a village in the western province of Comoe, regional governor Colonel Jean-Charles Some said in a statement.

They were among 24 people who were aboard two minibuses travelling from Banfora that were stopped in Linguokoro by armed men on Sunday evening, he said. "The passengers, comprising eight men and 16 women, were told to get off," he said. "Eight women and one man were released and told to walk to Mangodara," 30 kilometres (18 miles) away, he said. The two minibuses were then torched and the 15 other passengers taken away. Separately, 10 police officers, two members of an auxiliary force supporting the army, and a civilian died in northern Burkina Faso from a "terrorist attack on Monday"



OUAGADOUGOU: File photo shows Burkina Faso soldiers deployed in Ouagadougou. An attack by suspected jihadists in northern Burkina Faso has killed 28 people, including 10 military police, the army said on January 31, 2023. — AFP

in the locality of Falagountou, which also goes by the spelling of Falangoutou, army headquarters said. At least five police were wounded and about 10 are missing, while the bodies of about 15 "terrorists" were found during a sweep, it said.

The attacks mark a further escalation in an insurgency that has beset Burkina, one of the world's poorest and most troubled countries, for more than seven years. Violence linked to Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State group has killed thousands of people and forced around two million more to flee

their homes.

More than a third of the country lies beyond the control of the government. Since the start of the year, at least 77 people have died, according to a toll compiled by AFP from official statements and security sources. Also in January, 62 women and four babies were abducted as they foraged for food in Arbinda, in the north of the country. They were rescued by the army several days later at a location 200 kilometres (125 miles) away, according to the state-run media. — AFP

Blinken mourns 'innocent'...

Continued from Page 1

"Palestinians and (Zionists) alike are experiencing growing insecurity, growing fear in their homes, in their communities and in their places of worship," said Blinken.

The US envoy's remarks alongside the Palestinian leader came a day after he met with Netanyahu, when he urged both sides to take "urgent steps" to calm tensions. Blinken on Monday also condemned Palestinians "who celebrate... acts of terrorism that take innocent lives," in the wake of the shooting in east Jerusalem. After meeting Palestinian residents in the West Bank, the US top diplomat said he saw a "shrinking horizon of hope" for Palestinians.

Before heading to the West Bank on Tuesday, Blinken met new Zionist Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, who took office as part of the rightwing government Netanyahu formed in December. Gallant praised Blinken for his "unwavering support" in helping safeguard the Zionist entity's military superiority in the region.

The fatal east Jerusalem shooting was preceded by the Zionist forces' deadliest operation in the West Bank in years, killing 10 people Thursday in the densely populated Jenin refugee camp. The Zi-

onist military later hit sites in the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip in response to rocket fire from the Palestinian enclave. The Islamist group said Blinken's visit "emphasizes the absolute support and partnership with the (Zionist) occupation".

Netanyahu's cabinet has moved to punish "the families of terrorists that support terrorism" with home demolitions and other measures. His government is also planning to rescind the rights to social security benefits of attackers' relatives, and steps to make it easier for Zionist citizens to obtain permits to carry firearms. Blinken had made an initial stop in Egypt, where he met President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi, commending "Egypt's important role in promoting stability in the region". The diplomats and intelligence services of Egypt - a major recipient of US military aid - are regularly called upon to intercede between Zionists and Palestinians. Blinken's visit is part of the Biden administration's efforts to engage quickly with Netanyahu, who had tense relations with the previous Democratic president Barack Obama.

Blinken reiterated US support for a Palestinian state, a prospect few expect to advance under the new Zionist government. Speaking in Ramallah, Blinken criticized Zionist moves which Washington believes create barriers to the two-state solution. He listed "settlement expansion, the legalization of (settlement) outposts, demolitions and evictions, disruptions to the historic status of the holy sites, and of course incitement and acquiescence to the violence". — AFP

bouquet. Philippine Airlines crew members on a recent flight from the Middle East were busted trying to smuggle a few bags of the pungent commodity through Manila's airport.

It is not the first time the Philippines has experienced a shortage of a basic food staple that caused prices to spike - sugar, salt and rice have all been hit in the past. Poor yields, high costs, insufficient investment in irrigation and machinery, lack of access to cold storage facilities and farm-to-market roads, and crop-destroying typhoons have long impacted the sector. Pest outbreaks as well as soaring oil and fertilizer prices since Russia invaded Ukraine last year have only added to farmers' woes.

Despite government pledges to boost domestic food production, the country relies heavily on imports to feed its growing population - but tariffs fuel inflation. President Ferdinand Marcos appointed himself agriculture secretary to overhaul the near-moribund industry, which accounts for about a

Pak mosque blast toll 100; 51 die...

Continued from Page 1

controlled areas of the city, housing intelligence and counter-terrorism bureaus, and next door to the regional secretariat. The nation is already being hobbled by a massive economic downturn and political chaos, ahead of elections due by October.

Interior minister Rana Sanaullah told Pakistan's national assembly the dead included 97 police officers and three civilians, with 27 patients still in critical condition. "I remained trapped under the rubble with a dead body over me for seven hours. I had lost all hope of survival," Wajahat Ali, a 23-year-old police constable whose feet were broken, told AFP from hospital on Tuesday. Survivor Shahid Ali said the explosion took place seconds after the imam started prayers. "I saw black smoke rising to the sky. I ran out to save my life," the 47-year-old police officer told AFP.

Dozens of slain police officers have already been buried in several mass prayer ceremonies, with coffins lined up in rows and draped in the Pakistani flag while a guard of honor was performed. "Terrorists want to create fear by targeting those who perform the duty of defending Pakistan," Prime Minister She-

hbaz Sharif said in a statement.

In a statement, the Pakistani Taliban - separate from the Afghan Taliban but with a similar ideology - denied it was responsible for the latest blast. Known as the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, it carried out a years-long wave of horrific violence after emerging in 2007 but recently has attempted to rebrand itself as a less brutal outfit, claiming not to target places of worship.

Meanwhile, 49 children died when their overloaded boat capsized in northwest Pakistan, police said Tuesday after divers spent three days dragging bodies from freezing waters. The boys aged between seven and 14 were all students of a madrassa and had been taken for a day trip to the scenic Tanda Dam lake on Sunday.

"The water of the dam was freezing due to cold weather that impeded the rescue mission. But today the divers were able to dive deep to recover the remaining bodies," said Khateer Ahmad, a senior official with Rescue 1122. The bodies of a teacher and one skipper were also pulled from the water, he added, bringing the death toll to 51.

Muhammad Umar, who sells tea at a picnic site overlooking the popular weekend tourist destination, said dozens of parents and relatives had gathered over the past few days. "Every time a body was recovered from the scene, they would jump onto the diver to see if it was their son and every time we would hear them screaming in pain and anguish," he told AFP over the phone on Tuesday. — AFP

Onion prices make Philippine...

Continued from Page 1

kilogram for his crop. By the time his onions reached Manila supermarket shelves, the price had more than doubled, exceeding the daily minimum wage. "I told my family, 'Let's just smell the onion instead of eating it,'" Candy Roasa, 56, said as she walked through a market in the capital where she has seen vendors selling bulbs the size of a small child's fist for as much as 80 pesos each.

As onion memes spread on social media, the humble vegetable has become a symbol of wealth in the poverty-afflicted country. At least one bride used pricey bulbs instead of flowers for her wedding

quarter of the country's employment but only makes up 10 percent of gross domestic product.

"Our agriculture sector is significantly challenged," said Geny Lapina, agricultural economics and management professor at the University of the Philippines. Every Filipino eats an average of 2.34 kilograms of onions per year and theoretically the country produces enough to meet the demand, official data shows. But since the tropical climate only allows one planting per year of the rain-averse crop, stocks are consumed or spoil well before the next harvest.

The recent lifting of COVID-19 restrictions, which allowed the resumption of food-focused festivals and family gatherings for Christmas, triggered soaring demand for onions. William Dar, who was agriculture secretary in former president Rodrigo Duterte's administration, said the shortage could have been avoided if the current government had allowed imports back in August. — AFP



April Lyka Nobis and Erwin Bogel Nobis pose for wedding photos while holding a bouquet of onions.

International

US, South Korean defence chiefs vow more drills to counter North

Military tensions on Korean peninsula intensified sharply in 2022

SEOUL: US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin met his counterpart in Seoul on Tuesday, pledging to beef up joint drills and security cooperation as South Korea seeks nuclear reassurances in the face of growing North Korean threats.

Seoul is eager to convince its increasingly nervous public of America's so-called extended deterrence commitments, after a year in which North Korea declared itself an "irreversible" nuclear power and conducted a banned weapons test almost every month.

Austin and South Korean Defense Minister Lee Jong-sup agreed to "expand and bolster the level and scale" of joint military exercises, in light of "continued provocations" from Pyongyang, including a recent drone incursion, they said in a statement.

Military tensions on the Korean peninsula intensified sharply in 2022 as the North conducted a record-breaking number of weapons tests, including firing its most advanced intercontinental ballistic missile.

Pyongyang sent five drones across the border on December 26, the first such incident in five years, prompting Seoul to scramble warplanes. Austin and Lee agreed to "further expand and strengthen the scale and level of combined exercises and drills this year", Lee said at a media briefing in Seoul.

This was necessary due to "changes in the security environment, including North Korea's recent attempts to upgrade its nuclear and missile programmes", he said.

The two security allies will conduct a "tabletop exer-

cise" in February to improve communication on "deterrence and response options" to Pyongyang's nuclear threats. "We will do a number of tabletop exercises to ensure that we're seeing things eye to eye," Austin said at the briefing.

Any joint US-South Korean military exercises infuriate Pyongyang, which views them as a rehearsal for an invasion and has often responded with threats and drills of its own.

Nuclear deterrent

Austin is visiting Seoul for the third time as defence secretary and met with both Lee and South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol. Yoon suggested this month his country consider acquiring its own nuclear weapons — the first time in decades a sitting South Korean president has floated the idea, reflecting growing domestic concern over the reliability of US security commitments.

But Yoon's administration has since walked back those comments, emphasising that South Korea supports global nuclear non-proliferation.

Yoon asked Austin on Tuesday for new consultations "to come up with an effective and strong extended deterrence system that can assuage the South Korean public's concerns about North Korea's growing nuclear threats", his office said in a statement.

For his part, Austin reiterated America's commitment to extended deterrence, saying US military assets, especially nuclear forces, deter attacks on allies. The com-

mitments include "the full range of US defence capabilities, including our conventional nuclear and missile defence capabilities", he said.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un recently called for an "exponential" increase in Pyongyang's nuclear arsenal, including mass producing tactical nuclear weapons and developing new missiles for nuclear counterstrikes.

Kim said his country must "overwhelmingly beef up military muscle" in 2023 in response to what Pyongyang

calls US and South Korean hostility.

Austin's visit aims "to ease growing concerns among the South Korean public and politicians over whether the United States can be trusted in its extended deterrence against North Korea's nuclear threats", Hong Min of the Korea Institute for National Unification told AFP.

"With a detailed set of US assets agreed to be deployed for joint exercises, Washington seems eager to put to rest such concerns." — AFP



SEOUL: US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin (L) and South Korea's Defence Minister Lee Jong-sup (R) speak during a joint press conference after their meeting at the Defence Ministry in Seoul on January 31, 2023. — AFP

mitments include "the full range of US defence capabilities, including our conventional nuclear and missile defence capabilities", he said.

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Pakistan's mounting security threats

ISLAMABAD: At least 95 people, mostly policemen, were killed in a suicide blast at a mosque inside a police headquarters in northwest Pakistan. The attack was a huge breach in security distinct from the increasing low-level attacks in Pakistan, tied to turmoil in neighbouring Afghanistan.

Here are the facts:

What threats does Pakistan face?

Pakistan has long struggled to govern its northwestern region neighbouring Afghanistan, where rugged terrain and a porous border offer militants safe haven. Attacks by the Pakistani Taliban — known as Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) — are on the rise, with a recent change in strategy to target security officials and avoid civilians. The regional faction of the Islamic State group — Islamic State-Khorasan — is also active there and killed 64 people in a suicide blast at a minority Shiite mosque in Peshawar last year. Further south, separatists in Balochistan have been stepping up their attacks on security forces. They are all highly factional, with commanders regularly splintering off their fighters to form smaller and more obscure groups.

"At this moment, this is irrelevant which group carried out the attack," said Imtiaz Gul, an analyst with Islamabad's Center for Research and Security Studies, referring to Monday's bombing. "They are franchises of terrorism, operating under different names with the same objective," he told AFP. "To sow fear and chaos in the country."

Why are attacks on the rise?

Over the first year of Taliban rule in Kabul, attacks spiked by 50 per cent in Pakistan, mostly along the western provinces bordering Afghanistan, according to the Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS). During the US-led intervention, America pounded mountain hideouts on both sides of the boundary with drone strikes, hindering militants' ability to organise. Islamabad has accused the Taliban in Kabul of failing to secure its borders and allowing militants inside Afghanistan to plan attacks against Pakistan.

Who are the TTP?

The TTP were founded in 2007 by Pakistani fighters in the Afghan Taliban, who splintered off to attack Islamabad as payback for supporting America's post-9/11 invasion. They carried out some of the most horrific bombings in Pakistan's history and gained global notoriety for shooting schoolgirl Malala Yousafzai. They were at the height of their power in 2014 when they raided a school for children of army personnel, killing 150, prompting a major military clearance operation that pushed them into Afghanistan.

The UN Security Council (UNSC) said the TTP "arguably benefitted the most of all the foreign extremist groups in Afghanistan from the Taliban takeover". A

Ideology

For psychologists, climate disinformation is driven by free-market ideals that make people reject climate reforms. "The number one driver of whether people accept climate science or reject it is their personal ideology," said Stephan Lewandowsky, a psychology professor at Bristol University who researches attitudes to climate change. "People who are committed to unregulated free markets find it impossible to accept the science because the implications of the science are that we have to have regulations or a price on carbon," he told AFP.

Politics

Some of the most widely shared social media posts come from politicians—such as US ex-president Donald Trump's repeated claims on Twitter that snowfall was evidence against global warming. "People who vote conservative are more likely to be climate deniers," said John Cook, a researcher at Monash University in Melbourne and founder of the climate explainer site Skeptical Science. "Not liking the solutions to climate change, they reject that there's a problem in the first place." A November 2022 study in Nature by researchers at City, University of London revealed a rise in ideological polarisation around climate change during the COP26 climate summit in 2021, "driven by growing right-wing activity".

Psychology

A 2022 article co-authored by Lewandowsky and Matthew Hornsey of the University of Queensland pointed to other psychological aspects of climate claims, such as "motivated reasoning"—people deciding what they believe and then seeking evidence that supports their view—and "solution aversion" against reforms that imply painful sacrifice. "On top of that, people are fearful of climate change," said Lewandowsky. "Jumping into denial in the context of fear is not uncommon. The pandemic is another prime example."

Fame

Some climate contrarians have millions of followers on social media. "I think that malignant narcissism probably is a big driver of the influencers," said Cook. "These kind of mini-celebrities—what makes them popular, famous, gets followers, gets blog readers, is their denial of the science." Some prolific contrarians are former weather forecasters, such as Anthony Watts, founder of sceptic blog Watts Up With That—or scientists themselves. "I can think of individual instances of academics who had an extremely mediocre career at best and then climate change came along and they said, 'Oh, it's a hoax,' and claimed to have some expertise," said Lewandowsky. "They were flooded with media requests. These guys are motivated by attention." — AFP

Myanmar junta hints may extend state of emergency

YANGON: Myanmar's junta on Tuesday said the country had "not returned to normalcy" almost two years after its coup, casting doubt over plans for elections and ending a state of emergency. The Southeast Asian country has been in turmoil since the military toppled democracy figurehead Aung San Suu Kyi's civilian government, alleging massive fraud during elections her party won in 2020.

A junta-imposed state of emergency is due to expire at the end of January, after which the constitution states that authorities must set in motion plans to hold fresh elections. The military was widely expected to announce Wednesday that it would prepare for the polls.

But a junta-stacked National Defence and Security Council met Tuesday to discuss the state of the nation and concluded it "has not returned to normalcy yet", the military's information team said in a statement. Junta opponents, including anti-coup "People's Defence Forces" (PDF) and a shadow government dominated by lawmakers from Suu Kyi's party, had tried to seize "state power by means of unrest and violence" the statement added.

Those "who want utter devastation of the state are

continuing their activities", it said. The "necessary announcement will be released" on Wednesday, it added, without giving details. Junta chief Min Aung Hlaing has previously said elections could only be held when the country was "peaceful and stable". Under the military-authored 2008 constitution, the president in coordination with the Defence and Security Council can extend a state of emergency for six months upon a request from the head of the military.

Former civilian president and close Suu Kyi ally Win Myint has been detained since the coup and jailed on a clutch of charges by a closed junta court. Acting President U Myint Swe attended the Tuesday meeting, the military said. "We still do not know the decision of the meeting," a military source told AFP, requesting anonymity.

"We have been told to be on standby for possible attacks by PDF in coming days in the regions. We have no black-and-white instruction. "Whether the state of emergency situation is continued or not, we will be in the military barracks. We also want the situation to return to normalcy."

Last week the junta gave existing and aspiring political parties two months to re-register under a strict new electoral law, in a sign it was planning fresh polls for this year. But with armed resistance raging across swathes of the country, analysts say people in many areas will be unlikely to vote—and run the risk of reprisals if they do. A United Nations special envoy said Tuesday that elections would "fuel greater violence, prolong the conflict and make the return to democracy and stability more difficult". — AFP



MYITKYINA: File photo shows a nun pleading with police not to harm protesters in Myitkyina in Myanmar's Kachin state, amid a crackdown on demonstrations against the military coup. — AFP

Politics, cash, fame: What motivates climate change deniers

PARIS: Right-wing ideologues funded by fossil fuels, fame-seeking narcissists and doubt mongers monetising their content are pushing climate disinformation that undermines the fight against global warming, researchers say. Experts interviewed by AFP outlined six key things that motivate people to deny climate change or seek to delay action.

Oil money

Studies have documented flows of cash from the fossil fuel industry to conservative US think tanks, signalled by researchers as publishers of misleading climate claims. Greenpeace on the site ExxonSecrets.org published documents from oil giant ExxonMobil revealing donations it made in the 1990s and 2000s to three such bodies: the Heartland Institute, the Competitive Enterprise Institute and the Cato Institute. Exxon has repeatedly denied working against climate science.

An analysis of tax documents and donor records by sociologist Robert Brulle of Brown

University found that 91 climate-sceptic think tanks and lobby groups received income of \$900 million in 2003-2010, largely from conservative foundations. Since the mid-2000s, the funding has largely been channelled through philanthropic groups that conceal their donations. "Fossil fuel companies have a long history of funding climate misinformation promulgated by conservative think tanks," Brulle told AFP. "This misinformation has misled many Americans regarding the risks associated with climate change and has hindered actions to mitigate carbon emissions."

Monetising

Elsewhere there are individuals "who benefit from the outrage economy online and are exploiting the current business model of social media, which allows them to monetise climate denial and climate disinformation," said Jennie King, head of civic action at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD), a London-based digital research group. "There is a large element of grift taking place in the online space. By cultivating a brand as these contrarian, intellectual Dark Web pundits, they gain increasing prominence on social media platforms," she said. "That drives traffic to their websites and increases the likelihood of them developing brand relationships, sponsorship and paid talking appearances."

Business

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 2023

IMF lifts 2023 growth forecast with boost from China reopening

Germany, Italy seen averting recession this year: IMF

WASHINGTON: Global growth is set to be higher than expected this year, the IMF said Monday, raising its forecast on surprisingly strong consumption and investment while China's lifting of zero-Covid restrictions provides another boost.

World growth has been bogged down by fallout from Russia's invasion of Ukraine last year, economic downturns and efforts to rein in spiraling costs of living. Against this backdrop, the International Monetary Fund expects the global economy to expand 2.9 percent this year, slowing from 2022 to a rate that remains weak by historical standards.

But "adverse risks have moderated" since last October's forecast, said the IMF in the latest update to its World Economic Outlook report. "The year ahead will still be challenging... but it could well represent a turning point with growth bottoming out and inflation declining," IMF chief economist Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas told reporters.

In particular, the IMF sees Germany and Italy avoiding recessions this year, shifting from earlier predictions, as European growth proved "more resilient than expected" despite shocks from war in Ukraine. And the fund does not expect global GDP to shrink, with Gourinchas noting "we're well away from any sort of global recession marker." While the outlook has not worsened this time around, there are still challenges to overcome to reach sustainable recovery, he said.

Surprising resilience

Most advanced economies are expected to slow this year, driving the global growth decline, said the IMF. Yet, many countries have shown surprising resilience. "The forecast of low growth in 2023 reflects the rise in central bank rates to fight inflation—especially in advanced economies—as well as the war in Ukraine," the IMF said.

But although US growth is projected to fall to 1.4 percent in 2023 and euro area growth is set to slump to 0.7 percent, both figures reflect upward revisions from last October. "Economic growth proved surprisingly resilient in the third quarter of last year, with strong labor markets, robust household consumption, and also business investment," said Gourinchas.

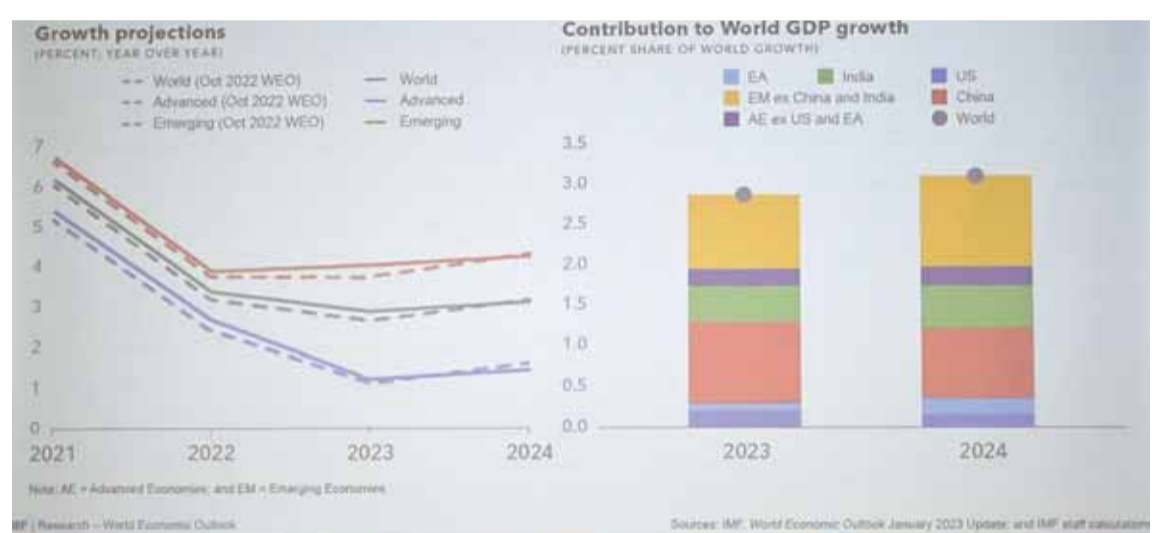
Countries adapted better than expected to the energy crisis in Europe too, he added, with the region seeing lower-than-anticipated gas prices and having enough resources to make shortages unlikely this winter.

Inflation has shown signs of decreasing globally as well, and China's reopening holds the promise of a rapid rebound in the country's economic activity, Gourinchas said. The world's second-biggest economy has in the past contributed up to 40 percent of global growth, IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva previously noted.

This year, its growth is pegged at 5.2 percent — 0.8 points more than earlier expected — "rapidly improving mobility" after it abruptly ended its zero-COVID policy in December. But the United Kingdom saw a significant downgrade to its growth forecast, and is now seen to contract 0.6 percent this year. This comes as high energy prices hurt households and businesses, while tighter monetary policy weighs on economic activity.

'Not yet won'

Despite a rosier outlook, the IMF warned of numerous risks on the horizon. An escalation of war in Ukraine could impact food and energy prices, and China's recovery might stall on a deepening real estate crisis or severe COVID outbreaks—due to low population immunity and insufficient hospital capacity.



SINGAPORE: IMF Chief Economist and Director Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas (C) and Division Chief of the Research Department Daniel Leigh (R) attend a press briefing for the World Economic Outlook update in Singapore on January 31, 2023. —AFP

Stubborn inflation could also prompt further tightening by central banks and hold back business activity as borrowing costs rise. "The fight against inflation is not yet won," Gourinchas said. Overall inflation may have peaked, but the "core" calculation which strips out the volatile food and energy components remains well above pre-pandemic levels in most economies.

Even as tighter monetary policy starts to cool demand and lower inflation, the IMF warned its "full impact is unlikely to be realized before 2024." There could be favorable surprises, such as if consumption remains solid or inflation falls without sparking a rise in unemployment. But Gourinchas cautioned it is "premature to put too much weight on that sort of benign scenario" where prices cool on their own. —AFP



PARIS: Travellers walk past information screens at Gare du Nord train station on a second day of nationwide strikes and protests against the government's pension reform plan, in Paris on January 31, 2023. —AFP

New French protests, strikes target Macron pensions plan

PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron on Tuesday faced a new wave of anger over his plan to reform pensions, with nationwide strikes and protests causing widespread disruption in transport, schools and other public services. Union-led protesters came out for mass demonstrations for the second time in less than two weeks, hoping to force Macron to drop his plan to raise the age of retirement from 62 to 64, a flagship reform of his second mandate in power.

A police source said the authorities were bracing for up to 1.2 million people to take to the streets across the country. If confirmed, the number could exceed the 1.1 million who came out on January 19 against the proposed shake-up—already the largest protests since the last major round of pension reform in 2010.

"We hope to be at least that many again," the boss of the hard-left CGT union, Philippe Martinez, told media Tuesday, adding there would be 250 protest marches. But Macron has shown no sign of stepping back, insisting on Monday that the reform is "essential" to "save our system" of pensions distribution.

Some 11,000 police were mobilised, with 4,000 deployed in Paris where several hundred extremist troublemakers were expected, according to the interior ministry. The first marches kicked off at 10:00 am (0900 GMT), with several prominent opposition politicians taking part.

'Certain to lose'

"Mr Macron is certain to lose," said Jean-Luc Melenchon, a figurehead for the far left and former presidential candidate, as he marched in the southern port city of Marseille. Millions had to find alternative means of transport Tuesday, work from home

or take time off to look after their school-age children, with workers in transport and education sectors among those staging walkouts.

"This is about more than pensions, it is about what kind of society we want," 59-year-old university professor Martine Beugnet told AFP. Paris metro and suburban rail services were severely restricted, as was intercity travel.

In the southwestern city of Bordeaux, Cheikh Sadibou Tamamate, 36, arrived at the train station in the small hours of Tuesday, hoping to catch a train to Paris after the one he was booked on around 5:00 am (0400 GMT) never left. "Unfortunately it was cancelled," he said.

Air travel appeared to be less affected, and there were only minor disruptions on international train services including the Eurostar. Around half of all nursery and primary school teachers were on strike. France's oil industry was mostly paralysed, with the CGT union at energy giant TotalEnergies reporting between 75 and 100 percent of workers on strike.

'The less they support it'

High school and university students also joined the movement, with a few dozen students at the prestigious Sciences-Po university occupying its main building overnight.

"It's important to get young people involved in the pensions debate," Jean-Baptiste Bonnet, a student there, told AFP. "Obviously this is young people's business," said Colin Champion, a student leader at the Lycee Voltaire in Paris, one of several schools blocked by pupils in the capital.

Even a prison, in the southwestern city of Nimes, was blocked by staff protesting, a union source said. Sixty-one percent of French people support the protest movement, a poll by the OpinionWay survey group showed on Monday—a rise of three percentage points from January 12.

"The more French people find out about the reform, the less they support it," said Frederic Dabi, a prominent pollster at the Ifop institute. "This is not good at all for the government," he told AFP. The most controversial part of the overhaul is hiking the minimum retirement age. —AFP

Boeing set to deliver last 747

NEW YORK: Boeing is set to officially bid farewell to the original jumbo jet, the 747, as it makes its final commercial delivery of an aircraft that democratized flying and serves US presidents. Thousands of current and former employees will converge Tuesday afternoon at Boeing's factory in Everett, Washington, in the Northwestern part of the United States for a final sendoff celebration in parallel with the delivery of a Boeing 747-8 cargo plane to Atlas Air.

The existing fleet of planes are expected to fly for decades more, but in ceasing 747 production more than 50 years after aircraft's first flight, Boeing is closing a chapter in the history of civil aviation. The plane's size, flying range and efficacy "made it possible for the middle class to travel outside Europe or the United States at an affordable price, even during the energy shocks of the 1970s," said Michel Merluzeau, director of aerospace and defense analysis at AIR consultancy.

"It opened up the world," Merluzeau said. Boeing built 1,574 747s in all. But the jet has over time been eclipsed by newer models that fly more efficiently and burn less fuel. Commercial airlines in the United States have not flown the 747 since 2017.

Biggest jet for decades

The 747's origins date to the 1960s, a period when aviation was on the upswing and airports were becoming increasingly busy. At the urging of Pan American Airways, Boeing began to plan for a jet that could carry significantly more passengers.

Engineers initially conceived of a plane with two fuselages, but dropped that idea due to concerns about evacuating passengers from a second level. Instead of making the plane taller, the 747 was made wider, Michael Lombardi, Boeing's company historian said of a jet that became the first designed with two aisles.

"This airplane will always be recognized as the queen of the sky," Lombardi said at a recent briefing



EVERETT: Handout photograph taken on December 7, 2022, shows the last Boeing 747-8 as it leaves the company's widebody factory in Everett, Washington State, in advance of its delivery to Atlas Air in early 2023. —AFP

with journalists. The 747 runs on four engines and was conceived from the start as a plane that would also carry cargo. But that imperative required other adjustments, including the need to raise the cockpit above the nose, leading to the 747's iconic "hump." The 747 remained the biggest passenger plane until the arrival in the 2000s of the Airbus 380.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the 747 was "really the industry's workhorse," with countless trips between destinations like New York, Paris and London, said Merluzeau. But the arrival of later generations of long-distance jets such as the Boeing 787 Dreamliner and the Airbus 350, which are more fuel efficient than the 747, have remade intercontinental travel, allowing for direct trips between more places and diminishing the dominance of hubs. The newer planes "have changed flying to what we want, point to point," Lombardi said. While Boeing has revamped the 747 more than once, "there are limits to what you can do compared with other options," said Merluzeau. For the last incarnation of the jet, the 747-8, which was launched in 2005, Boeing sold 48 passenger jets and 107 for cargo. —AFP

India growth to slow to 6.5% in 2022-23: Survey

NEW DELHI: Indian government on Tuesday forecast economic growth will slow down to 6.5 percent in the next financial year from the current year's projection of 7 percent growth. Indian Minister for Finance Corporate Affairs Nirmala Sitharaman tabled the Economic Survey 2022-23 in Parliament on Tuesday which projects a baseline GDP growth of 6.5 percent in real terms in the next financial year starting April 1.

A statement from the Ministry of Finance said, "The projection is broadly comparable to the estimates provided by multilateral agencies such as the World Bank, the IMF, and the ADB and by RBI,

domestically." The ministry added that GDP growth of 6.0-6.8 percent in 2023-24 will depend on the trajectory of economic and political developments globally. The forecast is based on positive indicators including rebound of private consumption, higher capital expenditure, increase in spending on restaurants, hotels, shopping malls, and cinemas as near-universal vaccination coverage has been accomplished.

It also said that in real terms, the economy is expected to grow at 7 percent for the year ending March 2023. It added that despite three shocks of COVID-19, Russian-Ukraine conflict and US dollar appreciation due to the synchronized policy rate hikes by central banks to curb inflation, agencies worldwide continue to project India as the fastest-growing major economy at 6.5-7.0 percent in the current financial year. The annual Economic Survey, which gives an overview of key economic indicators, is the basis for the country's annual budget and spending plan. —KUNA

Business

Brexit gloom prevails on UK's three-year anniversary

'Brexit is costing the UK economy 100 billion pounds a year'

LONDON: British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak defended Brexit as a "huge opportunity" on Tuesday, as the UK marked three years since leaving the EU amid economic crisis and a growing public sense of "Bregret". On January 31, 2020, the United Kingdom ended 47 years of belonging to the European Union and its predecessor, the EEC, soon after Boris Johnson won a resounding election victory for the Conservatives with his promise to "get Brexit done".

An Ipsos poll last week found 45 percent of people in Britain think Brexit is going worse than they expected. "In the three years since leaving the EU, we've made huge strides in harnessing the freedoms unlocked by Brexit to tackle generational challenges," Sunak said in a statement released for the anniversary.

"I'm determined to ensure the benefits of Brexit continue to empower communities and businesses right across the country," the prime minister said. Sunak called Brexit a "huge opportunity to deliver" on his priorities of growth, employment and social mobility. The prime minister—who will also mark 100 days in office this week—said the UK had "forged a path as an independent nation with confidence" and "that momentum hasn't slowed".

He said this included Europe's fastest vaccine roll-out, trade deals with 70 countries and "taking back control of our borders". The statement came as Sunak faces numerous challenges, with thousands of UK workers taking strike action over pay that has been outpaced by soaring inflation.

'Growing Bregret'

The cost-of-living crisis has hit millions and inflation has soared above 10 percent. While saving the over-stretched state-funded health service (NHS) was a keystone of the Brexit campaign, NHS workers including nurses and ambulance staff are now striking over pay and working conditions.

Brexit, which was in part a backlash against the free movement of people and goods across the EU, has led to restrictions that have hit food supplies to the UK and made it harder to hire foreign workers. Yet the numbers of migrants making the dangerous Channel crossing to claim asylum in the UK reached a record level of 45,000 last year. The UK has also seen a period of political instability, with three prime ministers last year. Sunak did not mention the problems in



STOCKTON-ON-TEES: Britain's Prime Minister Rishi Sunak (R) speaks to staff during a visit to the University Hospital of North Tees in Stockton-on-Tees. — AFP

Northern Ireland surrounding post-Brexit trading agreements that have led to months of negotiations between London and Brussels and paralysed self-government in Belfast.

There are no celebrations planned to mark the anniversary and in Scotland, where most voted to stay in the EU, opponents planned a torchlit procession through Edinburgh. "Today's Brexit anniversary marks three years of political mayhem and economic calamity," a columnist wrote in left-wing broadsheet The Guardian. Even right-wing broadsheet The Sunday Telegraph wrote there was "a growing sense of 'Bregret' taking hold in Britain", questioning: "Is there really much cause for celebration?"

Economic woes

A study by Bloomberg Economics published on Tuesday said: "Brexit is costing the UK economy 100 billion pounds a year (\$124 billion), with the effects spanning everything from business investment to the ability of companies to hire workers."

The Office of Budget Responsibility predicts that the new trading relationship between the EU and UK

will reduce long-term productivity by four percent, as compared to staying in the EU. Nevertheless, even the opposition in parliament is not calling for Brexit to be reversed.

Keir Starmer, the leader of the main opposition Labour Party, which is riding high in the polls, has vowed to reconnect with Europe but ruled out taking the UK back into the European Union or its single market. The IMF significantly downgraded its UK growth forecast on Monday, predicting its economy would contract by 0.6 percent this year. Britain looks set to suffer more than most from soaring inflation and higher interest rates. In a jargon-heavy statement, Sunak said progress had been made in "a range of key growth areas". He cited economic reforms including the opening of free ports that exist outside normal tax and customs territory, as well as regulatory reforms to the financial sector. Sunak also included a bill going through parliament to scrap all the EU laws automatically retained post-Brexit. The bill has provoked a backlash in Britain, with many public and private interest groups and organisations accusing the government of moving too far, too fast. — AFP

Norway's wealth fund posts record loss of \$164bn

OSLO: Norway's sovereign wealth fund, the world's largest, said Tuesday it recorded a loss of 1.637 trillion Norwegian kroner (\$164 billion) in 2022, the largest since its creation, citing volatile markets. "2022 was a truly dramatic year in the world. It affected financial markets and hence it also affects our global fund," deputy chief executive Trond Grande of Norges Bank Investment Management which manages the fund told a press conference.

"We had multiple different emergencies and crises at the same time. War in Europe, broader geopolitical tensions, rising inflation, rising interest rates, high energy prices and increased economic uncertainty," Grande added. The return on investment was -14.1 percent. Set up in the late 1990s, the Norwegian Government Pension Fund, known as the oil fund, is one of the world's largest investors with shares in more than 9,000 companies in nearly 70 countries, including Apple, Microsoft and Alphabet, the parent company of Google.



OSLO: Norway's Government Pension Fund Global CEO Nicolai Tangen arrives to present the results for the fund in 2022, at a press conference in Oslo, Norway, on January 31, 2023. — AFP

Norges Bank Investment Management CEO Nicolai Tangen said that "2022, for sure, was a year for the history books," noting that equities in all sectors were down, except for energy. The 1.637 trillion kroner loss was "the biggest drop we've had in monetary terms since the inception of the fund." Tangen told a press conference, noting that losses in terms of percentages had been worse, but the fund's total value had increased significantly since then thanks to inflows.

In 2008, in the wake of the financial crisis, the return was -23.3 percent. At the end of 2022, the value of the fund, which is financed by taxes paid by the nation's oil and gas industry, still amounted to a whopping 12.43 trillion kroner.

That is higher than the 12.34 trillion kroner the fund held at the end of 2021, thanks to 1.09 trillion kroner in new tax inflows. Currency fluctuations also boosted the fund's value by 642 billion kroner. The losses recorded in 2022 marked a trend reversal: in 2021, the fund earned 1.580 trillion kroner and in 2020 it saw a return of 1.070 trillion. At the end of 2022, 69.8 percent of the fund's assets were in equities, 27.5 percent in fixed income, 2.7 percent in unlisted real estate, and 0.1 percent in renewable energy infrastructure, according to the fund. — AFP

ExxonMobil reports record profits of \$55.7bn in 2022

NEW YORK: ExxonMobil reported record annual profits of \$55.7 billion in 2022 on Tuesday, reflecting higher commodity prices amid recovering demand and the impacts of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. In the fourth quarter, profits rose 43.7 percent to \$12.8 billion, thanks to higher oil and natural gas prices and better refining margins compared with the year-ago period. Revenues from October through December rose 12.3 percent to \$95.4 billion. The results reflect slightly higher production of oil and natural gas in 2022 that Chief Executive Darren Woods said reflected ExxonMobil's investments prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"While our results clearly benefited from a favorable market, the counter-cyclical investments we made before and during the pandemic provided the energy and products people needed as economies began recovering and supplies became tight," Woods said.

"We leaned in when others leaned out." In 2020, ExxonMobil was kicked out of the Dow index while its stock languished during the coronavirus crisis, which dented petroleum demand. At the time, the company was criticized for taking on more debt than rivals.

The huge profits by oil companies have sparked pushback from governments. In December, ExxonMobil sued to challenge a new windfall tax policy in Europe. ExxonMobil, along with rival Chevron, has also sparred with US President Joe Biden, who has bashed the energy giants for buying back shares instead of putting extra funds into new oil and gas investments. In 2022, ExxonMobil put \$29.8 billion into shareholder distributions, evenly split between dividends and share repurchases. Shares fell 1.5 percent to \$111.90 in pre-market trading. — AFP

After turbulent year, UBS upbeat with eye on Asia

ZURICH: Swiss banking giant UBS voiced optimism for 2023 on Tuesday, hoping that higher interest rates and a swelling business in Asia would boost its results following a turbulent 2022. "We are starting 2023 from a position of strength," group chief executive Ralph Hamers said in an earnings statement.

Switzerland's largest bank posted better-than-expected fourth-quarter earnings, as its net profit soared 23 percent year-on-year to \$1.65 billion. And while its revenue for the three-month period shrank by eight percent to just above \$8 billion, that too was above market expectations. Analysts polled by the AWP financial news agency had expected to see UBS rake in \$1.28 billion in net profit on revenues of \$7.92 billion. For all of 2022, UBS posted a net profit of \$7.6 billion, up two percent from 2021.

"We delivered good full-year and solid fourth-quarter results in a difficult macroeconomic and geopolitical environment," Hamers said. Analysts deemed the bank's performance as mixed, however, while its share price tumbled more than two percent in mid-afternoon trading to 19.44 Swiss francs.

Investor sentiment hit

The bank said the combined impact in 2022 of "persistent inflation, rapid central bank tightening, the Russia-Ukraine war, and other geopolitical tensions affected asset pricing levels and investor sentiment." As with several large US investment banks posting results this month, the challenging climate and declining appetite for mergers and acquisitions took its toll on that part of UBS's business.

UBS said its investment bank's revenues shrank 24 percent in the fourth quarter as global advisory and market activities dwindled. Its asset management revenues dropped by 31 percent due to decreasing net management fees, amid negative market performance and foreign currency effects, it said.

And its global wealth management division—the historic heart of its business—also saw revenues slip, although only by five percent in the final quarter of the year. The losses there were offset by net interest income that soared 35 percent, mainly thanks to "an increase in deposit revenues, as rising interest rates led to higher deposit margins", UBS said. Central banks have raised rates worldwide in efforts to tame runaway inflation.

Credit Suisse effect?

While the tricky macroeconomic and geopolitical conditions were expected to continue, UBS said it expected its first quarter of 2023 to be "positively influenced by seasonal factors, such as higher client activity levels compared with the fourth quarter of 2022."

It said it expected "higher interest rates to positively affect our net interest income, especially for the Swiss franc and the euro." At the same time, the bank said "the easing of COVID-19-related restrictions in Asia Pacific is expected to contribute to generally more positive sentiment in that region, which we expect to translate into higher client activity levels over time." Already last year, UBS pulled in \$60 billion of new fee-generating assets in 2022, including \$23 billion in the fourth quarter alone. That stood in stark contrast to expectations for UBS's main Swiss rival Credit Suisse as it prepares to report results next week.—AFP



KARACHI: Picture shows residents buying groceries at a market in Pakistan's port city of Karachi. Pakistan's economy is teetering on the edge, with the government dependent on a lifeline cash injection from an emergency IMF visit this week. — AFP

Pakistan economy in 'collapse' as IMF team visits

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan is gripped by a major economic crisis, with the rupee plummeting, inflation soaring and energy in short supply as International Monetary Fund officials visit to discuss a vital cash injection. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif for months held out against the tax rises and subsidy slashing demanded by the IMF, fearful of backlash ahead of elections due in October. But in recent days, with the prospect of national bankruptcy looming and no friendly countries willing to offer less painful bailouts, Islamabad has started to bow to pressure.

The government loosened controls on the rupee to rein in a rampant black market in US dollars, a step that caused the currency to plunge to a record low. Artificially cheap petrol prices have also been hiked. "We're at the end of the road. The government has to make the political case to the public for meeting these (IMF) demands," former World Bank economist Abid Hasan told AFP. Time is of the essence, with Nasir Iqbal from the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics warning the economy had already "virtually collapsed" due to mismanagement and political turmoil.

Cost-of-living crisis

The IMF delegation arrived on Tuesday to a nation in panic. The world's fifth-biggest population has less than \$3.7 billion in the state bank-enough to cover just three weeks of imports. It is no longer issuing letters of credit, except for essential food and medicines, causing a backlog of thousands of shipping containers at Karachi port stuffed with stock the country can no longer afford. Industry has been hammered by the imports block and massive rupee devaluation. Public construction projects have halted, textiles factories have partially shut down and domestic investment has slowed. In downtown Karachi, dozens of day labourers including carpenters and painters wait with their tools on display for work that never comes.

"The number of beggars has increased and the number of labourers has decreased," said 55-year-old mason Zafar Iqbal, who was eating biryani from a plastic bag donated by a passerby. "Inflation is so high that

one cannot earn enough." At the petrol pump, a widow with her son said every few hundred rupees (75 cents) of fuel for their motorcycle was precious, with the pair only eating two meals a day.

"The cost is so high that we eat our breakfast late and the second meal at around seven, with nothing in between," said Ulfat, who declined to give her second name. Pakistan is struggling on many fronts, with the country reeling from unprecedented floods that submerged a third of its territory last summer and a deteriorating security situation near the Afghanistan border.

Political mayhem

Pakistan is locked in an endless cycle of servicing external debt. State Bank governor Jamil Ahmed last month said the country owed \$33 billion in loans and other foreign payments before the end of the fiscal year in June. A diplomatic offensive has seen \$4 billion rolled over by lending nations, with \$8.3 billion still on the negotiating table.

Meanwhile, Pakistan is battling severe energy shortages—with capacity drained by poor infrastructure and mismanagement—compounding the misery of businesses and citizens. Last week the whole country was plunged into a day-long blackout because of a fault in the national grid that followed a cost-cutting measure. State petroleum minister Musadik Malik told reporters in Islamabad that imports of Russian oil would start in April, paid for in currencies of "friendly countries" in a mutually beneficial deal.

The tumbling economy mirrors the country's political chaos, with former prime minister Imran Khan heaping pressure on the ruling coalition in his bid for early elections while his popularity remains high. Khan, who was ousted last year in a no-confidence motion, negotiated a multi-billion-dollar loan package from the IMF in 2019. But he reneged on promises to cut subsidies and market interventions that had cushioned the cost-of-living crisis, causing the programme to stall.

It is a common pattern in Pakistan, where most people live in rural poverty, with more than two dozen IMF deals brokered and then broken over the decades. "Even if Pakistan avoids default, the underlying structural factors that triggered the current crisis—one exacerbated by poor leadership and external global shocks—will still be in place," tweeted political analyst Michael Kugelmann, the director of the South Asia Institute at the Wilson Center in Washington. "Barring difficult, large-scale reforms, the next crisis could be just around the corner." — AFP

Business

Large investors pull Adani's \$2.5bn share sale through after stock rout

Still Asia's richest man despite a bruising \$36bn hit to his personal fortune

MUMBAI: Adani Group's ambitious share sale exceeded its subscription targets Tuesday in a relief for the Indian conglomerate, which is reeling from allegations of "brazen" corporate fraud that wiped more than \$65 billion off its value.

The success of India's biggest follow-on public offer (FPO) is the first reprieve in a horror week for the sprawling business empire of Gautam Adani — still Asia's richest man despite a bruising \$36 billion hit to his personal fortune.

Large institutional investors swooped in on the offer's final day, even as some of the firm's listed companies were hammered in trade and smaller retail investors steered clear. "Thank you for the support provided in making the Adani FPO a success during the most unprecedented and challenging times," a public relations representative for the conglomerate said in a statement.

The \$2.5 billion share offer was 112 percent subscribed by Tuesday afternoon, driven by corporate institutions, foreign funds and other large investors. But retail investors bid for only 12 percent of their category, despite additional discounts, impeding Adani's plans to expand his shareholder base and invite "the average, normal Indian mom and dad as shareholders".

Shares in flagship Adani Enterprises closed 3.35 percent higher on Tuesday but remained well below the 3,112-3,276 rupees price range set for the FPO, making them cheaper to buy on the open market. Adani Transmission, Adani Green Energy and Adani Ports closed 3.73, 3.06 and 2.67 percent higher respectively.

But Adani Total Gas saw another day of dramatic

falls with trading halted for another session after diving 10 percent in the morning. The natural gas distribution company — of which France's TotalEnergies owns 37.4 percent — has lost 45 percent in market value over the past week. Adani Power and Adani Wilmar also hit their circuit breakers after falling five percent each.

Founder Adani, 60, was the world's third-richest person last week but has now slipped to eighth place on Forbes' real-time global rich list.

'Brazen manipulation'

The slump in Adani stocks began after US investment group Hindenburg Research last week alleged a "brazen stock manipulation and accounting fraud scheme over the course of decades". Adani said it was the victim of a "maliciously mischievous" reputational attack and on Sunday issued a 413-page statement that it said rebutted Hindenburg's claims.

Dubbing Hindenburg the "Madoffs of Manhattan" — a reference to crooked financier Bernie Madoff — the statement said the researchers' allegations were "nothing but a lie". "This is not merely an unwarranted attack on any specific company but a calculated attack on India, the independence, integrity and quality of Indian institutions, and the growth story and ambition of India," Adani said.

Hindenburg said in response that "India's future is being held back by the Adani Group, which has draped itself in the Indian flag while systematically looting the nation". It added that Adani's response only included about 30 pages focused on issues related to its report. —AFP



MUMBAI: File photo taken on November 19, 2022, Chairperson of Indian conglomerate Adani Group, Gautam Adani, speaks at the World Congress of Accountants in Mumbai. Indian industrialist Gautam Adani is Asia's richest man, with a business empire spanning coal, airports, cement and media now rocked by corporate fraud allegations. —AFP

Eurozone dodges recession, gloomy outlook persists

BRUSSELS: The eurozone economy showed greater resilience than expected after avoiding a recession in the fourth quarter of 2022, official data showed Tuesday, but the outlook remained gloomy as soaring prices dampen growth.

The single currency area's economy recorded weak-but-positive growth of 0.1 percent in the final three months of 2022, the EU's statistics agency, Eurostat, said. The figure is lower than the 0.3 percent growth recorded in the third quarter of 2022, but better than forecasts of a contraction by economists.

"Good news: the euro area avoided a contraction in the last quarter of 2022," the EU's economy commissioner Paolo Gentiloni said on Twitter. "We continue to face multiple challenges but the outlook for this year looks a little brighter today than in the autumn," he added.

The data will be welcome after fears of a deep recession following Russia's war in Ukraine, which unleashed sky-high energy prices and stoked inflation to record levels. But people's purchasing power remains lower than before the war as fuel bills eat into household spending and push European businesses to the brink.

The economy has been helped by a mild winter, reducing the use of gas and electricity, while China's recent reopening and improved supply chains also provided support.

'Incredible resilience'

Economists acknowledged the worst was avoided but warned against celebrating too early. "The worst scenarios for this winter have been avoided, but the economy remains sluggish" even if it did show "incredible resilience", according to ING's senior eurozone economist, Bert Colijn.

Andrew Kenningham, chief Europe economist at Capital Economics, was more pessimistic, predicting a recession in the first half of the year. He pointed to the intensifying effects of the European Central Bank's monetary policy tightening as well as households struggling with the cost of living crisis and "sluggish" external demand.

The ECB is set to continue raising interest rates with a fresh hike on Thursday. Eurostat also said the single currency area's economy grew by 3.5 percent in 2022 — higher than China's at 3.0 percent and the United States at 2.1 percent.

The figure for the eurozone is better than the European Commission's forecast in November of 3.2 percent. The economy of the 27-nation EU as a whole, including the countries using the euro, grew by 3.6 percent in 2022. —AFP

Reliable European demand fuels US natural gas boom

NEW YORK: Rising demand from Europe has added to a US natural gas investment boom even as the industry struggles to overcome opposition to pipeline construction. Production of the fuel reached 3.1 trillion cubic feet for the month of October, according to the most recently available US data, an all-time high and up almost 50



KCCI welcomes Italian economic delegation

KCCI receives Italian panel

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) has received an Italian trading commercial panel, SACE, and a number of companies specialized in energy and oil headed by Italian ambassador to Kuwait Carlo Baldocchi. The Kuwaiti panel was represented by administrative council at the chambers, Omran Hayat and a number of representatives from the Investment Encouragement Authority, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Commerce and Industry Ministry, and a number of Kuwaiti companies.

At the beginning of the meeting, Omran Hayat welcomed the Italian economic delegation, stressing the strength of relations between the two friendly countries, pointing out that Italy was a

Spotify passes 200m paying users, posts 2022 loss

STOCKHOLM: Music streaming giant Spotify on Tuesday reported a total of 205 million paying subscribers at the end of 2022, beating expectations, but its losses deepened. The Swedish company, which last week announced it was cutting almost six percent of its workforce to reduce costs, posted a net loss of 430 million euros (\$465 million) for the year compared to a loss of 34 million euros in 2021.

Analysts had forecast a loss of 441 million euros, according to Factset. Around 1230 GMT, shares in Spotify, which is based in Stockholm but listed in New York, were up five percent in pre-market trading. Revenue for the full year also slightly beat forecasts, coming in at 11.7 billion euros or a rise of 21 percent from a year earlier.

The number of paying subscribers climbed by

percent from the level a decade ago.

The industry has been in growth mode since the summer of 2021 when Russia began trimming shipments to Europe, according to Steven Miles, a fellow at Rice University's Banker Institute in Houston. That comes on the heels of the US shale revolution in the first decade of the 21st century that ultimately led to the United States becoming a net exporter of the fuel in 2017.

The progression has not been continuous, with plummeting natural gas prices crimping investment and leading to the bankruptcy of one of industry's biggest players, Chesapeake Energy, in June 2020. But energy companies have become more confident in the long-term demand



major destination for Kuwaiti public and private investments as the Kuwaiti investment experience in Italy dates back to several decades ago.

"For three decades or more, Italy has been among the top ten trading partners of Kuwait, as the latest trade statistics for the year 2021 showed that Italy ranked eighth as the best exporter to Kuwait, as the volume of trade exchange between the two countries amounted to \$1.250 billion," Hayat said.

"The Chamber has devoted all efforts to strengthening bilateral trade relations between the two friendly countries, which provides great opportunities to learn more about the business and investment environment in the oil and gas sector in Italy," he added.

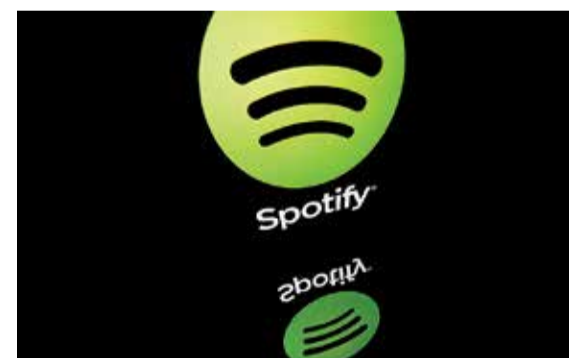
"There is room to expand bilateral economic relations by taking advantage of all the elements available in both countries as Italy is distinguished by several industrial sectors, such as the automobile

industry, heavy machinery, engineering industries, clothing and fashion, food and tourism industries, as well as the oil and gas sector," he said expressing his hope that these meetings will contribute in establishing further strategic partnerships.

In turn, the Italian Ambassador to Kuwait Carlo Baldocchi affirmed the strength of trade relations between the two countries, considering that Kuwait is one of Italy's most important trade partners.

"The value of Italian exports to Kuwait in the first ten months of 2022 amounted to about 1.86 billion euros, a growth of 110 percent compared to the corresponding period of 2021, while the value of Kuwaiti exports to Italy during the same period amounted to about 350 million euros, a growth of 1000 percent, compared to the corresponding period of 2021," Baldocchi clarified.

He pointed out that there are many Italian companies in Kuwait operating in various sectors such as oil and gas, food, health and others.



PARIS: File photo illustration shows the logo of on-line streaming music service Spotify displayed on a tablet screen. —AFP

Spotify has also invested more than one billion euros into podcasting in recent years, but analysts say the company has yet to prove the investment is bearing fruit. Its venture into podcasts has also been a source of controversy, with US star Joe Rogan accused of spreading misinformation in his shows. —AFP

outlook for the fuel in light of shifting geopolitical dynamics.

Five years ago, the long-term demand "was not nearly as clear as it is today," said Eli Rubin of EBW Analytics Group, a consultancy. "Especially after Russia invaded Ukraine, we have a healthy new respect for natural gas' role in providing energy security, for its role in helping to tame consumer pricing."

Even before the invasion, there was heavy investment in facilities to transform gas into liquefied natural gas (LNG). In recent years, some 14 new liquefaction terminals have been approved, with the first set to begin operating in 2024.

"Over the next five years, we could potentially double US LNG exports," Rubin said. The push comes as big energy companies enjoy rich cash-

flow courtesy of lofty commodity prices that have enabled the industry to invest aggressively even as they boost share buybacks and dividends.

While the growth of LNG has globalized the natural gas market to a limited extent, the dynamics remain heavily localized. Prices on the benchmark European TTF contract are currently more than six times the level of comparable Henry Hub contract in the United States.

That gap means that LNG exports are priced more closely to the US level, setting the stage for "middlemen" who can move the cargoes to Europe and "sell them at European prices," said Miles. Much higher exports of US natural gas could lead to more price consistency across regions—but probably not for many years. —AFP

Famous rabbit people

Year of the Rabbit
The lunar calendar
Lunar New Year 2023
Sunday, January 22

Rooster 2017
Dog 2018
Pig 2019
Rat 2020
Ox 2021
Tiger 2022
Snake 2024
Dragon 2024
Snake 2025
Horse 2026
Goat 2027
Monkey 2028

Jet Lee (1963)
Maria Ressa (1963)
Angelina Jolie (1975)
Novak Djokovic (1987)
Tiger Woods (1975)
Elliot Page (1987)
Marion Cotillard (1975)
Evonne Goolagong Cawley (1951)
Harry Belafonte (1927)
Lil Nas X (1999)

Events of rabbit years

- 1951**
UN forces recapture Seoul, the final time the city changes hands in the **Korean War**
- Libya gains independence** from Italy
- PGA approves participation of **black golfers** (Jan 1952)
- 1963**
Soviet cosmonaut **Valentina Tereshkova** becomes the **first woman to fly to space**
- US President John F. Kennedy assassinated** in Dallas, Texas
- The Beatles** release their first album, "Please Please Me"
- 1975**
Ethiopia abolishes monarchy after 3,000 years
- Bill Gates and Paul Allen found **Microsoft**
- The end of Vietnam war**
- 1987**
Construction begins on the **Channel Tunnel**
- World stock market crash on Oct 19, remembered as **Black Monday**
- Ferry "**Herald of Free Enterprise**" capsizes soon after departing Belgian port Zeebrugge, leaving 193 dead
- 1999**
Eleven countries begin to use the **Euro** as their currency
- NATO commences **Yugoslavia air bombardment**
- A 7.4-magnitude **earthquake** strikes Izmit, Turkey, **killing more than 17,000**
- 2011**
Arab Spring protests topple Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak
- FBI's most wanted man **Osama bin Laden** killed by US special forces in Abbottabad, Pakistan
- A 9.0-magnitude **earthquake and tsunami** trigger **Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant disaster**

The legend of the Year of the Rabbit

The Rabbit is the fourth of all zodiac animals. Legend has it the Rabbit was proud-arrogant even-of its speed. He was neighbors with Ox and always made fun of how slow Ox was. One day, the Jade Emperor said the zodiac order would be decided by the order in which the animals arrived at his party. Rabbit set off at day-break. But when he got there, no other animals were in sight. Thinking that he would obviously be first, he went off to the side and napped. However, when he woke up, three other animals had already arrived. One of them was the Ox he had always looked down upon. The Rabbit is also associated with the Earthly Branch mao and the hours 5-7 in the morning. In the terms of yin and yang, the Rabbit is yin. In Chinese culture, rabbits represent the moon. Some say it is because the shadows of the moon resemble a rabbit. Others say it is because of the rabbit's pure characteristics. Paired with the Celestial Stems, there is a 60-year calendrical cycle. Although mao is associated with metal, the years also cycle through the five elements of nature.

Year of the Rabbit
The lunar calendar 2023
1951, 1963, 1975, 1987, 1999, 2011

Snake 2025
Horse 2026
Goat 2027
Monkey 2016
Rooster 2017
Dog 2018
Pig 2019
Rat 2020
Ox 2021
Tiger 2022
Rabbit Lunar New Year Sunday, January 22

What are the worst habits for belly fat?



Eating while distracted

Instead of scrolling through your smartphone while you snack, pay attention to your meals and savor the flavors. The more mindful you can be while eating, the less likely you are to overeat. Notice your food, chew with care, and be present in your body as you nosh. Your waist will thank you.

Eating late

Give your digestive system time to do the work of burning off your meal by eating on the earlier side of the evening. The later you take in calories, the fewer hours your body has to use them up.



Eating white bread

The refined grains in white bread and other processed foods are stripped of slow-digesting fiber, so your body digests it faster, raising your blood sugar. Over time, this can lead to weight gain. Choose whole-grain carbs instead.



Drinking diet soda

You may think swapping full-sugar soda for the diet version would keep your calorie count low and therefore curb weight gain. But scientists say that's not true at all: Aspartame, the artificial sweetener in many diet sodas, actually increases belly fat. Skip soda altogether and quench your thirst with water.



Eating too fast

It takes about 20 minutes for your brain to get the message from your stomach that it's full. If you're cramming food in too quickly, you'll keep eating past the point your body needs. Slow eaters take in fewer calories and prevent extra pounds.



Getting poor sleep

In one study, adults under 40 who slept less than 5 hours a night gained more belly fat than those who got more ZZZs. But if you're sleep-deprived, don't go overboard to correct it—sleeping more than 8 hours a night can have the same gut-expanding effect.



Skipping meals

Did you know opting out of breakfast makes you 40% more likely to be obese? Going without a meal slows down your metabolism, which makes it more probable you'll overeat later on when you're hungry.



Eating 'Low-fat' or 'Fat-Free' food

It's good to watch your fat intake, but foods that take out fat and sugar can often be higher in carbs. High-carb foods can raise your triglycerides, increase your insulin sensitivity, and increase fat in your midsection.



Smoking

You already know smoking is terrible for health, but one of the many bad effects of smoking centers on your belly. The more you light up, the more fat you store in your stomach, as opposed to your hips and thighs.

Eating on a big plate

Yep, it's that simple: Put your food on a smaller plate (and use smaller utensils!) and trick your brain into thinking you're eating more than you are. If you go for the huge platter, you're more likely to finish it all and eat more than you need.



Not moving enough

The science is certain: Physical activity is the key to health. Aim for 30 minutes of moderate-intensity movement every day, and your waistline will shrink (and your muscles will grow), even if your weight stays the same.



Being stressed often

Stress releases a hormone called cortisol into your body. Higher cortisol levels can lead to weight gain, especially the visceral weight you hold in your belly. Practice regular relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing and meditation, to help keep calm and curb stress levels. — www.webmd.com





Young bass players with the New York Youth Symphony perform during a rehearsal in New York City.



When the New York Youth Symphony recorded its debut album during the pandemic's dark early days, violinist Jessica Jeon was just 12 years old. Now she and her fellow musicians are competing against some of the world's elite orchestras, including the famed Los Angeles and Berlin Philharmonics, to take home the Grammy award for best orchestral performance—the first time a youth orchestra has ever made it into the category.

"What a cool experience to have—this is my first time ever, like, recording in a studio," Jeon, now 14, told AFP after a rehearsal. Confronted with the pandemic-forced cancellations of the symphony's customary performances at Carnegie Hall, music director Michael Repper decided to organize a recording experience for his students instead—something to mark their accomplishments despite the halt in live performance.

It was no easy feat: pandemic restrictions meant recording could only happen in smaller groups, meaning the young artists had to wear headphones and use a click track for cues, and the different parts were later synchronized. "It was a funny story to tell my teachers, why I had to miss school a couple of days to record," said 17-year-old bassist Gregory Galand.

Recording in small groups is atypical for orchestras, but the health crisis demanded creativity while ensuring that no one contracted Covid-19 (no one did, Repper said). "I'm very proud that we were able to engineer a way of making it happen despite the pandemic. It was a fantastic experience," the 32-year-old conductor said. And the Grammy nomination? A cherry on top. Noelia Carrasco, a 19-year-old cellist, is now studying music at New York University. She called finding out that she was a Grammy nominee "so surreal." "I had to re-read that, like twice, because I didn't really process it the first time," she said. "It's just amazing."

'A big honor'

The untitled album was produced by Grammy winner Judith Sherman, who this year is nominated as well, as classical producer of the year. In the wake of the 2020 police murder of George Floyd and the mass uprising that followed, the symphony decided the album would include pieces by Black composers—it features Florence Price,

Valerie Coleman and Jessie Montgomery.

"I thought that it would be really important to highlight works by Black composers and works that address

only listening to Mozart, Bach, Beethoven... all white men," she said. "And I think that I never really grew up knowing a composer of color."

Phoebe Ro, a 19-year-old viola

was a really big honor to perform that," said Ro.

Unfortunately the youth orchestra members won't be able to attend Sunday's ceremony in Los Angeles—tickets

I mean come on!" he said. "I'm beyond honored to even just be on the same list with them, and to be with the New York Youth Symphony that's been a really special part of my life for the last six

Youth symphony vies for a Grammy with debut album



Music director Michael Repper conducts the New York Youth Symphony during a rehearsal in New York City. — AFP photos

systemic racism from the perspective particularly of Black women," Repper said. Violinist Jeon said that as a person of color herself, playing music by historically underrepresented composers "really strengthened my connection to the repertoire." "I always grew up

player, called it "a big honor" to learn the pieces and record them. She said Coleman's "Umoja: Anthem of Unity" was particularly meaningful. "To be able to come back together, especially during the time of isolation, and to play and reflect the message... of unity-it

are reserved for conductors—but they are planning a watch party to bask in their moment together. Repper, who will be there, noted it's his first Grammy nomination as a conductor.

"Many of my idols are on this list: Gustavo Dudamel and John Williams,

years, it's wonderful." "I'm really proud of the young musicians for taking it and running with it." — AFP

Bond actress Eva Green blames 'Frenchness' for insulting director

James Bond actress Eva Green on Monday told a UK court her "Frenchness" led her to call a film director "weak and stupid" and accuse him of making a cheap "B shitty movie". The High Court battle revolves around never-made sci-fi film "A Patriot", in which the French "Casino Royale" actress was due to play a soldier. Green is seeking payment of her \$1 million (£810,000) acting fee for the aborted project from UK-based production company White Lantern Film. The production company is counter-



French actress Eva Green arrives at the Rolls Building, High Court, as she is due to give evidence in a battle with a production company, in central London. — AFP

suing, alleging that she derailed the £4 million project by making "unreasonable demands". White Lantern lawyer Max Mallin read out messages sent by Green in which she disparaged the film's producers and director. Mallin read out an

email she sent to her agent Charles Collier in which she said "I am very worried, they are super weak and stupid", referring to director Dan Pringle and business partner Adam Merrifield.

Green responded in court that the messages were "my Frenchness coming out". "Sometimes I say emotional things I don't really mean. Of course they are not weak and stupid," the actress, wearing jeans, a black jumper and a dark green jacket, added. The 42-year-old actress signed up to the project in 2018, but became increasingly uneasy as funding issues meant that UK producer Jake Seal began to assume more control.

She said in another message that she was worried his influence would turn the project into a "B shitty movie", telling court that being involved with it could destroy her career. "I don't care about the money. I live to make good films. It's my religion," she told court.

Green was also angry that production of the film was shifting from Ireland to Black Hangar studios in southern England. "I need my team around me so that I can handle anything evil Jake (Seal) throws at me", she messaged her agent. "My team will have to pull out and I will be obliged to take his shitty peasant crew members" from nearby Hampshire, she added.

Green claims that she was not given enough training for the role and accused the producers of "cutting corners". "Look at what happened with Alec Baldwin on the movie 'Rust'," she told the court. "Producers cutting corners, no safety measures in place, and a young woman got killed." The trial, which began on Thursday, is due to last nine days. — AFP

Actress Lisa Loring, first Wednesday Addams, dies at 64

American actress Lisa Loring, who played the child character Wednesday Addams in the original "The Addams Family" television series in the 1960s, has died. She was 64. Her death from a stroke, reported by US media, comes a couple of months after the release on Netflix of spinoff show "Wednesday," starring Jenna Ortega. Loring "passed away on Saturday surrounded by her family," longtime agent Chris Carbaugh told CNN in a statement

on Monday.

"She brought to life one of the most iconic characters in Hollywood history that is still celebrated today," Carbaugh added. Laurie Jacobson, a producer and close friend of Loring wrote in a Facebook post that the actress had "suffered a massive stroke brought on by smoking and high blood pressure."

Loring had been on life support for three days before her family "made the difficult decision to remove it," she wrote.



"She is embedded in the tapestry that is pop culture and in our hearts always as Wednesday Addams," Jacobson added. Loring, born Lisa Ann DeCinces in the Marshall Islands, was cast aged six as the pigtail-wearing Wednesday in the sitcom in 1964.

It would be her most famous role and set the standard for subsequent portrayals of Wednesday. Actress Christina Ricci took up the mantle in the 1991 film "The Addams Family" before Ortega followed up as the title character in Netflix's Tim Burton-directed "Wednesday." — AFP



Iraqi farmers ride a boat on the waters of the southern Chibayish marshes in Dhi Qar province.



An aerial picture shows Iraqi farmers tending their herd of buffaloes on the banks of the southern Chibayish marshes in Dhi Qar province.

Black buffaloes wade through the waters of Iraq's Mesopotamian marshes, leisurely chewing on reeds. After years of drought, winter rains have brought some respite to herders and livestock in the famous wetlands. Listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the marshes were parched and dusty last summer by drought in the climate-stressed country and by reduced flow from the Tigris and Euphrates rivers due to dams built upstream in Turkey and Iran.



An Iraqi farmer tends to one of his buffaloes on the banks of the southern Chibayish marshes in Dhi Qar province.



An egret wades in the waters of Iraq's southern Chibayish marshes in Dhi Qar province.

Winter brings seasonal rains, offering relief in marshes like those of Huwaizah which straddles the border with Iran and Chibayish, located in nearby Dhi Qar province. Among the reeds of Chibayish, buffalo farmer Rahim Daoud now uses a stick to punt his boat across an expanse of water. "This summer, it was dirt here;



After drought, winter rains revive Iraq's famed marshlands

there was no water," said the 58-year-old. "With the rain that has fallen, the water level has risen."

Last summer, AFP photographers travelled to the Huwaizah and Chibayish marshes to document the disappearance of large portions of the wetlands, observing vast expanses of dry and cracked soil dotted with yellowed shrubs.

In October, an official in the impoverished rural province of Dhi Qar told AFP that in the previous six months, 1,200 families had left the marshes and other agricultural areas of southern Iraq and more than 2,000 buffaloes had died.

Scorching summers

Iraq has faced three consecutive years of severe drought and scorching heat, with temperatures regularly exceeding 50 degrees Celsius (122 Fahrenheit) during the summer of 2022. "There is a gradual improvement," Hussein al-Kenani said after the recent rains.

Kenani, who heads the governmental centre in charge of protecting the wetlands, said rainwater collected in canals and rivers has been redirected to the marshes.

"The water level in Chibayish's swamps has increased by more than 50 centimeters (20 inches) compared with

December and by more than 30 centimeters for the Huwaizah swamps," Kenani said. In July, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization deplored the "unprecedented low water levels" in the marshes, highlighting "the disastrous impact" for more than 6,000 families, whose buffaloes and livelihoods were being lost.

The relief of rainfall early this month was welcomed by the UN agency, which noted in a statement that in the Chibayish region "salinity levels decreased" to the point where people and animals could again drink the water. "This has had a great positive impact, especially on buffalo herders," it said.

While the crisis has been relieved for now, there are fears about the longer-term fate of the threatened wetland habitat. "There is not enough water coming from the Turkish side," said Jassim Al-Assadi, head of environmental group Nature Iraq, who added that Iraq's dams upstream from the marshes "do not have an adequate and sufficient reservoir for the rest of the year." "The rains alone are not enough," he said, voicing fears about another looming "problem next summer." —AFP

High energy bills deal heavy blow to Belgian glassware business

When energy prices blew up last year in the wake of Russia's war in Ukraine, Belgian glassblower Christophe Genard had no other option but to close for three months. The 45-year-old's gas bill had hit a whopping 6,000 euros (\$6,500) a month. Faced with the prospect of giving up his beloved 20-year career as a glassblower, he was forced to adapt to survive by using a smaller oven to produce his glassware. "While I was closed, between July and September 2022, I thought about how I could keep earning a living, so I merely changed what tool I used," Genard said at his studio in Liege, where he also hosts classes.

Genard told AFP that he now uses propane gas cylinders to fire up his smaller oven for a couple of days a week. "That comes to around 3,000 euros a month, half the cost, but I no longer work every day," Genard said, adding that he produces half of what he used to. Late



This photograph shows Belgian glassblower Christophe Genard forming glass at his workshop in Seraing.

last year, the Walloon regional government announced measures worth around 175 million euros to support businesses with rising energy costs, but some worry it might not be enough.

"We'll see if it will be sufficient in terms of amount," Walloon Union of Companies chief Olivier de Wasseige said in an LN24 channel interview on January 22. He called on Belgium's federal government to have a "structural energy policy" that matches neighboring countries and take serious measures including a transition to renewable energy.

Belgium has allocated just 4.3 billion euros to help households and businesses

with the energy crisis-equivalent to 0.8 percent of its gross domestic product, according to a study published by the Bruegel think tank in November. It was the fourth lowest level within the 27-nation EU, well behind other nations such as the neighbouring Netherlands, which spent 43.9 billion euros, or more than five percent of GDP on such aid. Even smaller economies have spent bigger shares of their GDP on such assistance, with Romania earmarking 8.5 billion euros (3.5 percent).

Businesses feel the heat

Genard is one of many independent business owners in Belgium forced to change how they work to meet soaring energy costs, even if it means producing less. The Federation of Belgian Enterprises (FEB) warned this month of spiraling costs for businesses because of higher energy prices and inflation-related wage hikes.

The first half of 2023 will be "extremely difficult" for Belgian companies, the FEB said, as fixed contracts for gas and electricity prices end during this period. "They will face energy costs three to seven times higher than usual," the federation warned, adding that it would cost businesses an additional 10 to 25 billion euros.

Another survey published last month showed that over 76 percent of Belgian retailers fear they will go bankrupt, citing several threats including higher energy



This photograph shows artisanal glass made by Belgian glassblower Christophe Genard in Seraing. — AFP photos

bills. Three-quarters of the retailers surveyed said they had reduced heating in their shops while 66 percent said they turned off neon signs outside opening hours.

No more pressure

Genard said he wanted to keep his prices unchanged "because already most people's purchasing power is falling", he said, surrounded by gold-speckled glass apples and vibrant glass hens. One decorative glass apple costs 60 euros, the same price as in 2022. "I want to keep producing pieces and welcoming every-

one to my workshop," Genard said. He added he tried not to think about what may happen in the future.

"I find it difficult to look too far ahead. When we think too much about the future, it puts us in uncomfortable situations, feeling fear and anxiety," he said. But the changes are not all bad for the glassblower. "I no longer feel constant pressure to be profitable. I have more time to design, to create, to think of ways to develop partnerships." — AFP



This photograph shows Belgian glassblower Christophe Genard heating glass in an oven at his workshop in Seraing.



This photograph shows glassblowing tools in Belgian glassblower Christophe Genard's workshop in Seraing.



These photographs show Belgian glassblower Christophe Genard forming glass at his workshop in Seraing.



Sports

Zain kicks off Kuwait's first local fantasy football game

Valuable cash prizes of KD 10,000 to winners of Dawri Zain Fantasy League

KUWAIT: Zain, Kuwait's leading digital service provider, kicked-off its latest surprise for Kuwaiti football fans, the Dawri Zain Fantasy League; the first-ever local fantasy football game for the Kuwaiti Premier League - available now on dawrizain.com, the App Store, and Google Play store. With this launch, Zain takes the thrills of Kuwaiti football into the digital space.

The announcement comes under the umbrella of Zain's strategic partnership with the Kuwait Football Association, where the company becomes the Official Sponsor of the KFA's competitions for the 2022-2026 seasons, including the Kuwait Premier League (renamed Dawri Zain) and First Division League. Zain also extends its support to HH the Amir's Cup, HH the Crown Prince's Cup, and the KFA Cup (Zain Cup).

To encourage fans to play, compete, and passionately follow their teams, Zain offers cash prizes of KD 10,000 to the winners of the Dawri Zain Fantasy Football League. The prizes will be given to the

winners of the first three places at the end of the season as follows: KD 5,000 for the first-place winner, KD 3,500 for the second-place winner, and KD 1,500 for the third-place winner. The game officially kicks-off with the 12th round of the current season of Dawri Zain.

Fantasy Football is one of the most popular games in European and international leagues, and Zain sought to offer Kuwaiti fans the same experience in a 100 percent local flavor. The game offers users a thrilling experience to pick their own team and compete with other players to achieve fantasy league titles.

Players select 15 players to form their team from the available KD 100m budget, and player prices will depend on their actual performance in the Kuwaiti Premier League. Each user score points depending on their team's actual results from real matches. Users can play on dawrizain.com or download the app on their smartphones via the App Store and Google Play store.



Gatland recalls Halfpenny for Wales opener

CARDIFF: Warren Gatland marked the first team selection of his second spell as Wales coach by recalling Leigh Halfpenny to face Ireland in a Six Nations opener in Cardiff on Saturday for the full-back's first Test start in 19 months. Halfpenny, who has won 97 caps for his country, last featured in the starting line-up when Wales beat Canada in 2021.

The Scarlets star, back from a serious knee injury, has been selected after Liam Williams was ruled out. Halfpenny is joined in the back-three by Josh Adams and Rio Dyer, with 20-year-old center Joe Hawkins set for a Six Nations debut alongside Ospreys team-mate George North after being preferred to Saracens' Nick Tompkins. "We've picked Joe at 12," said Gatland, who has only had a couple of weeks with the current squad, after announcing his team on Tuesday. "He is a lovely footballer with some great skills."

Gatland selected a back-row of Jac Morgan - who has scored four tries in his last two Tests - Justin Tipuric and Taulupe Faletau. Veteran former skipper Alun Wyn Jones partners Adam Beard at lock, with Wales now led by Scarlets hooker Ken Owens. Gatland's previous reign as Wales boss, from 2007 to 2019, yielded four Six Nations titles, three Grand Slams and two World Cup semi-finals.

But Wales are now at a low ebb after fellow New Zealander Wayne Pivac, his successor, guided the national side to just three wins in a 2022 that also included shock home defeats by Italy and Georgia. Meanwhile, the Welsh Rugby Union has also been beset by allegations of misogyny, sexism, racism and homophobia within the governing body.

Claims of a "toxic culture" at the WRU were aired in a television documentary last week, resulting in the resignation of chief executive Steve Phillips on Sunday. Ireland have had no such off-field drama and will arrive at the Principality Stadium as the world's number-one ranked side after a superb 2022 that included a series win in New Zealand.

Head coach Andy Farrell, who is due to announce his team on Thursday, will be aware, however, that Ireland have lost their last four Six Nations games in Cardiff. Gatland, who coached Ireland from 1998-2001, added: "We know how good they are and we are expecting a really tough contest. It's important for us that we start well, but we need to be in the game at the last 20 minutes. "We've only had a couple of weeks together, but I am confident the guys will go out and give a good account of themselves." — AFP

Russia says athletes must compete without restrictions

MOSCOW: The head of Russia's Olympic Committee said Tuesday that athletes representing Russia must not be subjected to different conditions from those of other countries, amid a growing row over their participation in the 2024 Paris Games. "Russians must participate exactly on the same conditions as all other athletes. Any additional conditions or criteria are unwelcome, especially any that have political overtones, which are completely unacceptable for the Olympic movement," Stanislaw Pozdnyakov said, according to Russian news agencies.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) said last week it was examining a "pathway" for Russians to take part in the summer Games next year, probably as neutral athletes rather than under their national flag. Russia and its ally Belarus, which allowed its territory to be a stage ground for the offensive, have been sidelined from most Olympic sports since Russian forces invaded Ukraine last February. That announcement sparked an immediate backlash from Kyiv, with a Ukrainian presidential aide accusing the IOC of being a "promoter of war".

Ukraine has threatened to boycott the Paris Games if Russians are allowed to take part. Pozdnyakov said his organization welcomed efforts by

150 karatekas to participate in Kuwait event

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The draw for the 5th Arab Clubs Karate Championship for men and women will be held on Wednesday. The event is organized by Yarmouk Club over Thursday and Friday with 150 players representing 17 clubs from 8 countries. The clubs are Yarmouk, Kuwait, Shabab, Burgan and Fatat from Kuwait, Sharjah, Sharjah Women, Shabab Al-Ahli and Ittihad Kalba from UAE, Nasr (Saudi Arabia),



NHL legend Bobby Hull dies at 84

MONTREAL: Canadian ice hockey legend Bobby Hull, regarded as one of the greatest players in the history of the sport, died Monday aged 84, his former NHL club the Chicago Blackhawks announced. The blonde-haired Hull, who forged a reputation as one of the most feared goalscorers in ice hockey during his 23-year career, was known popularly as the "Golden Jet".

"The Chicago Blackhawks are saddened by the passing of Blackhawks legend Bobby Hull, a superstar for our franchise between 1957 and 1972," the Blackhawks said in a statement. "Hull is part of an elite group of players who made a historic impact on our hockey club." Hull helped the Blackhawks win the 1961 Stanley Cup during a career that included a franchise record 604 goals.

the IOC to allow Russian athletes to compete. "But as for additional conditions, we strongly disagree. The Olympic Charter states that all athletes must participate on an equal footing," he added.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Russia's participation in the Paris Olympics would amount to showing that "terror can allegedly be something acceptable". Zelensky also last week said he had invited IOC president Thomas Bach to visit the frontline Ukrainian city of Bachmut, "so that he can see for himself that neutrality does not exist".

Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said on Monday that of the 71 medals that Russian competitors won at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, 45 were won by athletes who were members of the Central Sports Club of the Russian Army, or CSKA. "The army that commits atrocities, kills, rapes, and loots," Kuleba said. "This is whom the ignorant IOC wants to put under (the) white flag allowing (them) to compete."

The Olympic Council of Asia, however, last week offered Russian and Belarusian athletes the chance to compete in this year's Asian Games, arguing that "all athletes, regardless of their nationality or the passport they hold, should be able to compete in sports competitions". That was a significant move because it would allow athletes from those two countries to achieve qualifying standards they would need to compete in the Paris Olympics. The IOC reiterated last week that the international federations for each Olympic sport were "the sole authority for its international competitions". — AFP

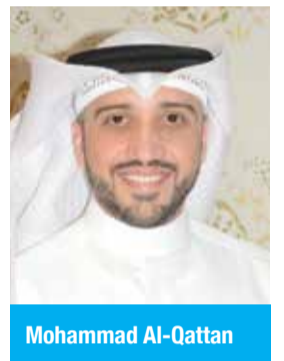
Alwehda (Yemen), Um Qasr, Baladiya and Ittihad Al-basra (Iraq), Shurta (Syria), Shabab Al-Buraiki (Algeria) and Beit Lahya (Palestine).

The tournament includes kata singles competitions for men and women and groups on Thursday, while on Friday will see the group combat competition for men and women, followed by the closing ceremony. The general coordinator of the tournament Mohammad Al-Qattan welcomed guests in Kuwait and wished them a pleasant stay. He said Yarmouk Club is hosting the event as karate has developed very well at the club, besides the great facilities the club has to host such an event.

He said the higher organizing committee headed by club President Ahmad Al-Jarki as well as all sub-committees were keen to prepare well for this Arab tournament by removing all obstacles to ensure a brotherly sports atmosphere. "We are pleased with

the organization and I expect the tournament will see an advanced technical level as clubs are participating with international professional players," Qattan added.

About the tournament's guests, he said there will be a distinguished presence of game officials in the Arab world including the President of the Arab Karate Federation Ibrahim Al-Qannas from Saudi Arabia, along with federation members, Kuwait Karate Federation President Mohammad Al-Jassem and ambassadors of participating Arab countries.



Mohammad Al-Qattan

National Hockey League commissioner Gary Bettman said during his 1960s heyday, "there was no more prolific goal-scorer in ice hockey". "When Bobby Hull wound up to take a slapshot, fans throughout the NHL rose to their feet in anticipation and opposing goaltenders braced themselves," Bettman said, describing Hull as a "true superstar".

Hull led the NHL goal-scoring charts on seven occasions and was twice named as winner of the Hart Trophy for Most Valuable Player. He was a first-team All-Star on 10 occasions. "The National Hockey League mourns the passing of one of its most iconic and distinctive players," Bettman added. As well as his speed and eye for goal, Hull was also renowned for possessing one of the hardest slap shots the sport has ever seen, routinely clocking shots measured at more than 100mph.

Former Blackhawks goalie Glenn Hall once joked in 1965 that it was safer to simply let Hull score than attempt to save. "There are days when you just step aside and leave the door wide open," Hall said. "It is a simple matter of self-preservation." Away from ice hockey, Hull was mired in several controversies. Two of his wives accused him of multiple incidents of do-



Bobby Hull

mestic violence.

In 1998 meanwhile he caused controversy after an interview with the English-language Moscow Times in which he said the African-American population in the United States was growing too rapidly. In the same interview, Hull said Adolf Hitler "had some good ideas. He just went a little bit too far." —AFP

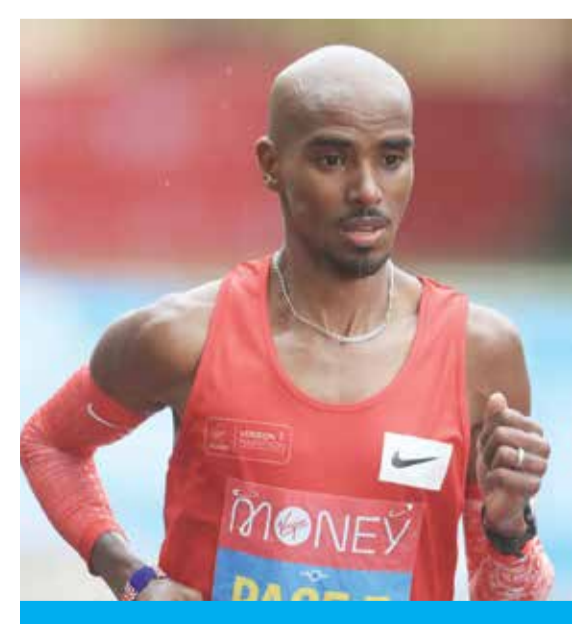
Farah says 2023 London Marathon will be his last

LONDON: British athletics great Mo Farah has said this year's London Marathon will likely be his last as he contemplates the end of a brilliant career. The 40-year-old is best known for his success on the track winning gold in the 5,000 and 10,000 meters at both the London 2012 and Rio 2016 Olympic Games, as well as several world titles across both distances.

And while his marathon career has reached nothing like the same heights, Farah is keen to run in London again after missing last year's edition even though he will be 40 by the time of the April 23 race. "It's been an amazing career and taking part in the London Marathon is a very big deal," he said in a statement issued by event organizers.

"I was gutted not to race last year and I just want to give it one more shot. It depends on my body. I just want to get to the start line and see what I can manage. I'm just taking one race at a time." He added: "I'm not a spring chicken any more. You can't keep coming back in the right shape and, for me, I'd love to be able to finish it at home."

Farah has ruled out competing at the 2024 Olympics in Paris, but may yet try to finish his time as a British international at this year's World Championships in Budapest. "I'm not going to go to the Olym-



Mo Farah

pics and I think 2023 will be my last year," he added. "But if it came down to it towards the end of the year and you did get picked for your country, I'd never turn that down."

Farah last ran in London in 2019, coming fifth, having finished third the year before. "So it's been a little while," he said. "But I'll be preparing well, I'll head out to Ethiopia and put in a lot of solid training and see what I can do when it comes to April." —AFP

Sports

Real expected to continue Europe dominance of Club World Cup

RABAT: One of the last Club World Cups in its current format begins on Wednesday in Morocco, where Real Madrid will be favorites to continue Europe's dominance of the much-maligned FIFA competition. FIFA president Gianni Infantino announced on the sidelines of the World Cup in Qatar in December that an expanded Club World Cup is planned from 2025.

The bigger competition, which would feature 32 teams, has been a controversial pet project of Infantino's for some time. A 24-team Club World Cup, involving eight European sides, had been due to take place in China in 2021 only to be put on hold due to the coronavirus pandemic. World football's governing body is yet to reveal any further details of the plans, but global players' union FIFPro has already complained of Infantino making the announcement "unilaterally without seriously consulting...with the players".

For now, the Club World Cup limps on with just seven teams, including the six continental champions. After five consecutive editions in the Middle East it returns to Morocco, which hosted the tournament in 2013 and 2014, and Real will be expected to become the 10th consecutive European winners. Real, the reigning European champions, have claimed the title four times, including in Morocco in 2014.

Real will enter in the semi-finals on February 8 and will play in Rabat against either CONCACAF

champions Seattle Sounders, Egyptian giants Al Ahly or New Zealand's Auckland City, the champions of Oceania. If they win, Carlo Ancelotti's side will advance to the final on February 11.

Moroccan hopes

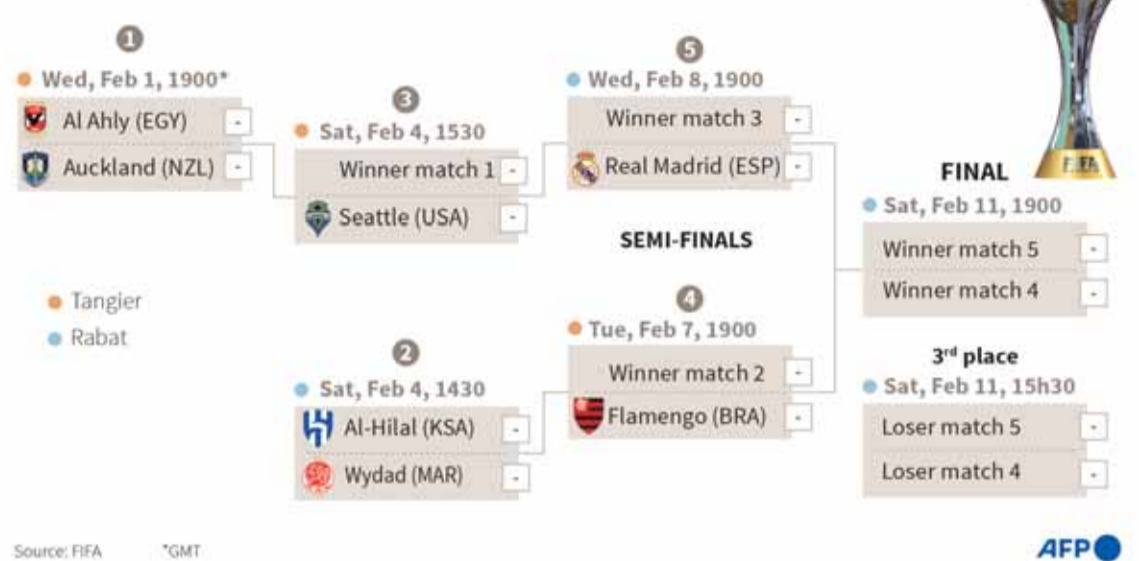
The other semifinal will see last year's Copa Libertadores winners Flamengo take on either Al Hilal of Saudi Arabia or home hopes Wydad Casablanca. Widely dismissed as an irrelevance in Europe, the competition is considered far more prestigious in the rest of the world, a chance for their best sides to pit themselves against giants like Real. Brazilian clubs have won the Club World Cup four times, most recently through Corinthians in 2012. Wydad will be hoping to become the first African club to triumph.

The host nation is always represented, but Wydad also won last year's CAF Champions League, and so Al Ahly - the team they beat in the final - have been invited to take part as well. Walid Regragui led Wydad to that continental title before taking Morocco on a historic run to the World Cup semifinals in Qatar. "It's nice for Morocco - particularly after the World Cup we had - for people to see that there's football here, there are fans, and there are beautiful stadiums. It's going to be fantastic for our country," Regragui told FIFA.com

The competition kicks off on Wednesday when

FIFA Club World Cup

From February 1 to 11, 2023 in Morocco



Al Ahly - the record 10-time African champions who have finished third at the last two Club World Cups - play Auckland City in Tangier. The tournament will see a refereeing first after the

International Football Association Board, the sport's lawmakers, approved a trial that will allow fans in the stadium to hear officials explain decisions taken after VAR reviews. —AFP



DERBY: West Ham United's French goalkeeper Alphonse Areola jumps to make a save during the English FA Cup fourth round football match between Derby County and West Ham United at Pride Park on Jan 30, 2023. —AFP

West Ham ease past Derby to earn Man Utd clash

LONDON: David Moyes cannot wait to take on his former club Manchester United in the FA Cup fifth round after goals from Jarrod Bowen and Michail Antonio sealed West Ham's 2-0 victory at third tier Derby on Monday. Bowen put West Ham ahead early in the first half and Antonio doubled the lead soon after the interval in the fourth-round tie.

Moyes' side will head to Old Trafford in late February as they continue their bid to reach the FA Cup final for the first time since 2006. It will be Moyes' latest return to United, who sacked the Scot in 2014 only 10 months after he succeeded Alex Ferguson. "I'm really looking forward to the game. It's a really good game for us," Moyes said. "Maybe at the moment that's the game we need because we've got players who want to play on the big stage. There's nothing bigger than Old Trafford, so I'm saying to the players, 'Come on, let's go and take it on and challenge them'."

Avoiding an embarrassing defeat against Derby was essential for the under-fire Moyes, but it is Premier League survival that remains his top priority. The Hammers are languishing in 16th place in the Premier League, just one point above the relegation zone. "This was a difficult game because Derby had gone 16 unbeaten. In the end, we did a pretty professional job on them," Moyes said.

Moyes made six changes following West Ham's vital 2-0 victory over Premier League relegation

rivals Everton in their most recent match nine days ago. Despite the selection gamble, West Ham proved too strong for a Derby side on the up after a turbulent period. Just 12 months ago, Derby were in turmoil, with the club close to going out of business after they plunged into administration and suffered relegation to the third tier for the first time since 1986.

Finally rescued in July 2022 when lifelong Derby fan David Clowes bought the club from Mel Morris, the Rams have been revitalized this term. Paul Warne's side sit fourth in League One and the FA Cup exit shouldn't detract from their promotion challenge.

Antonio shines

Bowen was one of West Ham's established stars to feature despite a difficult season that Moyes admits has been caused by the winger's frustration at failing to make England's World Cup squad. The 26-year-old is finally showing signs of getting back to his best after netting against Everton and he was on the scoresheet again in the 10th minute.

Antonio's long pass caught out the Derby defense and Tomas Soucek headed the ball towards Bowen, who coolly slotted home from close-range. Moyes has insisted Antonio will not be sold before Tuesday's transfer deadline after he hinted he might be ready to quit the London Stadium amid reports of interest from Everton. With Gianluca Scamacca and new signing Danny Ings injured, Antonio is West Ham's only fit senior striker.

And it Antonio who killed off Derby in the 50th minute with a close-range header after Bowen's cross deflected into his path off Derby's Craig Forsyth. West Ham's victory came just hours after the last 16 draw was made. Wrexham will host Tottenham if the non-league side can beat Sheffield United in a fourth round replay. — AFP



Joao Cancelo

Salihamidzic said the club "had been thinking about (Cancelo) for a while" before making its move. "He's the optimal fit in our system with his attacking style of play and dynamism, and his mentality and experience fit very well in our team. "I'm convinced Joao will help us in the coming weeks and months where we want to win titles."

Bayern secured the deadline-day signing after Cancelo, who has been named in the Premier League Team of the Year for the past two seasons, has fallen out of the Man City first team in recent weeks. Manager Pep Guardiola has left Cancelo out of the starting line-up in each of the team's last three games, with academy graduate Rico Lewis, alongside Nathan Ake, Kyle Walker and John Stones all preferred to Cancelo. Cancelo could make his Bayern debut in the club's German Cup match away against Mainz on Wednesday, or in their away Bundesliga clash with Wolfsburg on Sunday. — AFP

Le Graet 'no longer has legitimacy' to stay in post: Report

PARIS: Noel Le Graet, the scandal-hit president of the French Football Federation under investigation for sexual harassment, "no longer has the necessary legitimacy to run and represent French football", according to a report into governance failings at the body seen by AFP on Monday. The report follows an audit of the FFF ordered by France's Sports Ministry after allegations made against the 81-year-old Le Graet, who was forced to step down earlier this month pending its outcome.

"Considering his conduct towards women, his public comments and the governance failings of the FFF, Mr Le Graet no longer has the necessary legitimacy to run and represent French football," the report said, adding that the body's handling of cases of sexist and sexual violence was "neither effective nor efficient".

Le Graet is currently under investigation by Paris prosecutors for sexual and psychological harassment following accusations against him made by football agent Sonia Souid. The report stated that his attitude towards women "can be described at the very least as sexist", and said that there was evidence his behavior was "likely to be considered as criminal". He denies any wrongdoing.

Despite already stepping down and being replaced on an interim basis by vice-president

Philippe Diallo, Le Graet is still officially recognized as president by world governing body FIFA. The report also targeted the "brutal" management practices of the body's director general Florence Hardouin, who has also been suspended from her role. The FFF's directors have been given until Feb 13 to respond to the conclusions of the report. — AFP



Noel Le Graet

Today's matches on TV

ENGLISH LEAGUE CUP

Manchester United v Nottingham Forest FC	23:00
beIN Sports 2 HD Premium beIN Sports HD 1 English beIN Sports Connect	

SPANISH LEAGUE

Real Betis v FC Barcelona	23:00
beIN Sports HD 1 beIN Sports 1 HD Premium	

Classifieds

Change of Name

I, GURBAX RAM S/o SURJAN DASS R/o Talwandi Goni, Hoshiarpur, Punjab, India, have changed my name GURBAX RAM to GURBAKHASH SINGH, Passport No. J3507741. (C#2844) - 31-01-2023

I, Hojafa, holder of passport no P6320762 do hereby change my name to Huzaifa (as given name) Bohra (as surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name Huzaifa Bohra and also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. (C #2843) 30-1-23

Automated enquiry about the CivIID card is 1889988

For labor-related inquiries and complaints: Call MSAL HOTLINE 128

NOTICE
January 18, 2023

Mr. Pranav Mohit Mirchandani, Indian national, son of Mr. Mohit Govind Mirchandani, resident of B 603, Heritage Building, Lokhandwala Complex, Andheri, Mumbai - 58 and Ms. Chitra Hareesh Jetwani, daughter of Mr. Jetwani Hareesh Kumar Devidas, resident of 501 Sopan Bldg, Ambalal Road, Opp PNB Navrangpura, Ahmedabad, Gujarat both Indian nationals presently residing in Kuwait, have given notice of intended marriage between them under the Foreign Marriage Act, 1969. If anyone has any objection to the proposed marriage, he/she may file the same with the undersigned according to the procedure laid down under the Act/Rule within thirty days from the date of publication of this notice. Communications in this regard can be made by Email (cw2.kuwait@mea.gov.in) / letters / telephonic calls (00965 - 22550171, 00965 - 22533125).

K. Senthil Kumar
(Kamal Singh Ruffore)
First Secretary (Community Affairs) and Marriage Officer,
Embassy of India, Kuwait.
Email: cw2.kuwait@mea.gov.in

Hospitals & Clinics

Sabah Hospital	24812000	Kaifan	24849807
Amiri Hospital	22450005	Shamiya	24848913
Maternity Hospital	24843100	Shuwaikh	24814507
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700	Abdullah Salem	22549134
Chest Hospital	24849400	Nuzha	22526804
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010	Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Adan Hospital	23940620	Qadsiya	22515088
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300	Dasmah	22532265
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000	Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9	Shaab	22518752
Clinics			
Kaizen center	25716707	Qibla	22459381
Rawda	22517733	Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Adaliya	22517144	Mirqab	22456536
Khaldiya	24848075	Sharq	22465401
		Salmiya	25746401

Banchero sparks Magic over Sixers



PHILADELPHIA: Paolo Banchero of the Orlando Magic dunks during the fourth quarter against the Philadelphia 76ers at Wells Fargo Center on Jan 30, 2023. — AFP

LOS ANGELES: Paolo Banchero led a second-half fightback as the Orlando Magic overturned a 21-point deficit to upset the Philadelphia 76ers 119-109 on Monday. Banchero, the number one pick in last year's draft, scored 29 points from 11-of-22 shooting, with nine rebounds and three assists to give Orlando another notable win after last week's defeat of league-leading Boston.

In other games across the NBA on Monday, Luka Doncic returned from injury with a 53-point bang as the Dallas Mavericks routed the Detroit Pistons 111-105, while Stephen Curry dropped 38 points for Golden State as the Warriors downed the Oklahoma City Thunder 128-120. In Portland, Damian Lillard's 42 points led the Trail Blazers to a 129-125 win over the Atlanta Hawks. Dejounte Murray finished with 40 points for Atlanta. In Philadelphia, Magic rookie Banchero was backed with scoring support from German brothers Franz Wagner and Moritz Wagner, who combined for 41 points as Orlando silenced the home crowd with a second-half scoring blitz. Philadelphia, who dropped to third in the Eastern Conference standings after the loss, led by 21 points midway through the second quarter and appeared poised for a comfortable victory. But Orlando erupted after the break with a 42-point third quarter to edge into the lead and then closed with a 19-8 run in the fourth to seal the victory. Moritz Wagner finished with 22 points off the bench while younger brother Franz added 19. Markelle Fultz had a double-double with 12 points and 10 assists while Wendell Carter Jr also cracked double-figures with 12 points.

Joel Embiid led the Sixers scoring with 30 points while James Harden and Tobias Harris had 17 points apiece. "I'm so proud of these young men," Orlando coach Jamahl Mosley said of his team afterwards. "The way that first half started - we were hanging our heads a little bit. But we pulled ourselves together at half-time and talked about our belief system and what we're capable of doing, and we showed up. "It shows growth and that they're learning from their experiences-they find a way to bounce back, find a way

to believe in each other."

'He fired us up'

Banchero said Mosley had rallied the locker room at half-time. "He fired us up," Banchero said. "Just told us we need to play better, play harder, that we're a very good team we need to act like it." Sixers coach Doc Rivers had few complaints after his side's defeat, describing Orlando as worthy winners. "I thought from near the end of the first quarter, they played harder, faster, tougher, more physical," Rivers said. "I think they deserved to win."

Orlando continue to languish near the bottom of the Eastern Conference, with 20 wins against 31 defeats. In Dallas, Doncic bagged the fifth 50-point game of his career with another virtuoso performance to lead the Mavericks to victory over Detroit. Doncic's tally included 18 points in the fourth quarter as the Mavericks rallied to victory after trailing by 11 points in the third quarter.

In Oklahoma City, Golden State held off a furious

late rally from the Thunder to close out a wire-to-wire win. Curry's 38-point performance included eight-of-14 from beyond the arc, while Klay Thompson drained six three-pointers in his 28-point performance. Shai Gilgeous-Alexander led the Thunder scoring with 31 points. "I was really happy with the way the guys responded down the stretch," Warriors coach Steve Kerr said. "We closed the game really well. It was a good night overall."

The Warriors had led by 18 points after the first quarter, a lead which proved insurmountable for Oklahoma City. "That first quarter set the tone for the game," Kerr said. "They were swimming upstream for the remaining three quarters." Elsewhere on Monday, a depleted Los Angeles Lakers slid to defeat on the road against the Brooklyn Nets. The Lakers, missing LeBron James and Anthony Davis from their lineup, fell 121-104. Kyrie Irving led Brooklyn's scoring with 26 points as the Nets recovered after falling behind in the third quarter to outscore Los Angeles 36-22 in the fourth quarter. — AFP

Struggling Everton appoint Dyche as new manager



Sean Dyche

LONDON: Sean Dyche vowed on Monday to "re-model" Everton after the Premier League strugglers hired the former Burnley boss to save them from relegation. Dyche agreed a two-and-a-half-year contract and will face Premier League leaders Arsenal at Goodison Park in his first match in charge on Saturday.

The 51-year-old said it was an "honor" to take over the Merseyside club, who have not won any silverware since 1995 and sacked Dyche's predecessor Frank Lampard after just less than a year in charge. Dyche arrives at Goodison well aware that Everton's morale is at rock bottom in the midst of their struggle to avoid playing outside the top-flight for the first time since 1954.

"There's a big challenge ahead but one I'm ready for and want to take on. I'm looking forward to hopefully playing my part and realigning things," Dyche told Everton's website. "We want to change the shape of this club going forwards, remodel it in our style, but remodel it in a way we can win."

Hinting that Everton have lacked fight this season, Dyche said: "We want to put out a team that works, that can fight and wear the badge with pride, beyond the tactical and technical. "I'm not questioning any manager who has been here before, I've got to imprint my feeling and my style on it and that's part of what I do. "But it starts with hard graft, literally the hard yards. We have to fast-track it. We want truth and honesty and they will certainly get that from me."

Everton chairman Bill Kenwright added: "He quickly convinced me that he has exactly the right attributes to make himself a great Everton manager - and a man who could inspire our fanbase". Lampard was dismissed last week after a run of nine defeats in 12 Premier League matches, with a dismal loss at relegation rivals West Ham proving the final straw in his troubled reign.

Languishing second from bottom of the Premier

League, Everton had set their sights on former Leeds manager Marcelo Bielsa before eventually appointing Dyche. Everton's eighth permanent manager since Farhad Moshiri took ownership of the club in 2016 is aware that some fans have already criticized his appointment.

'Under no illusions'

Dyche's Burnley teams were known for hard work rather than the quality of their often-rudimentary attacking play, but the new Everton boss defended his philosophy. "I've seen all the white noise at what's going on but - at the end of the day - just give us a start and we will pay you back. That's all I can ask for," Dyche said. "I am under no illusions I have to earn my right as manager here. I don't expect a free ride from fans. Even with the players, I have to earn that. I don't expect them to just do what we ask."

Dyche, who also previously managed Watford, was sacked by Burnley last April before the club's relegation from the Premier League. He over-achieved on a tight budget during his 10-year Burnley reign, winning promotion from the Championship twice and keeping them in the Premier League for several years. The pressure will be far higher at Everton, who only narrowly avoided relegation under Lampard last season. In a sign of the turmoil enveloping Everton, club directors were earlier this month ordered to stay away from Goodison Park due to perceived security risks. — AFP

Messi says World Cup trophy 'called out' to him

BUENOS AIRES: Lionel Messi won the World Cup because the sparkling solid gold trophy picked him to lift it, the Argentine star said in a radio interview aired on Monday. The 35-year-old inspired his country to World Cup glory last month by scoring two goals and a penalty in the South Americans' shoot-out triumph over previous holders France following a thrilling 3-3 draw in Qatar.

"The cup called out to me, it told me: come and grab me, now you can touch me," Messi told the Argentine Urbana Play radio station. "I saw it sparkling in that beautiful stadium and I didn't hesitate" to kiss it, he added, referring to the stunning Lusail Stadium in Doha, where the final was played. Messi finally lifted the trophy in his fifth and final World Cup tournament, having lost in the 2014 final to Germany.

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He also played in three losing Copa America finals before finally clinching that trophy in 2021. "After so much suffering and lost finals, God kept it for me," said Messi of the World Cup. He thus became the first Argentina captain since Diego Maradona in 1986 to lift the World Cup. "I would have liked Maradona to hand me the cup, so he could at least see Argentina champions."

Maradona died of a heart attack two years ago. "From up above he gave me strength, as did so many people who love me." Many people expected Messi to retire, at least from international duty, after the Qatar triumph but he decided to continue so he could take to the field with his teammates as world champions. However, he admitted that the end was close after a glory-laden career that saw him also win four Champions League titles and 10 La Liga crowns with Barcelona, and a Ligue 1 trophy with Paris Saint-Germain, as well as the Ballon d'Or a record seven times. "That's it, there's nothing left. I've achieved everything with the national team, with Barcelona, individually," he said. — AFP



DOHA: Argentina's forward Lionel Messi kisses the World Cup trophy after receiving the Golden Ball award during the Qatar 2022 World Cup trophy ceremony at Lusail Stadium in this Dec 18, 2022 file photo. — AFP