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## Kuwait to launch visa app, smart ID

Bid to regulate workers' entry, curb forgery, fight visa trafficking

### Saudi foreign minister visits Kuwait



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah receives Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al-Saud on his arrival on Feb 4, 2023. — KUNA

KUWAIT: First Deputy Prime Minister, Interior Minister and Acting Defense Minister Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah announced Saturday the Kuwait Visa app, which will be launched soon. The Government Communication Center said Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled explained during the first meeting of the committee on demographics and labor market development that the Kuwait Visa app aims to secure and regulate the entry of workers into the country, avoid forgery and fight visa trafficking.

The app also aims to protect the society and limit the entry of those "wanted by courts or those with infectious diseases", it added. The communication center said Sheikh Talal also announced the launch of a smart employee ID by the Public Authority of Manpower, which can be accessed through the Kuwait Mobile ID app, which includes official information related to the worker.

He said the ID also includes the worker's legal status, work permit data, information on the professions authorized for the worker, the address of the company where they work, data on whether the worker is on a government contract or in the private sector, as well as a statement of the worker's status in case they are absent from work.



Sheikh Talal pointed out the smart ID aims to protect Kuwaiti families from loose laborers and their entry into the homes of families under any pretext, and so that they are not exposed to commercial fraud by those who do not work in their main profession. It can enable a Kuwaiti family to view the data of the workers used before allowing them to carry out any work inside their homes.

The meeting held on Thursday at Seif Palace resulted in a set of decisions aimed at addressing the demographics, regulating the labor market and limiting manipulation and fraud, in addition to enhancing security and safety in society. — KUNA

### News in brief

#### Qatar bans insect food

DOHA: Qatar has reaffirmed a religious ban on consuming insects in a move that comes after the European Union added new products to its list of approved foods. Insect products do not meet "the requirements of halal food technical regulations", Qatar's health ministry said in a statement. Gulf Cooperation Council regulations "and the religious opinion of the competent authorities" bans "the consumption of insects, or protein and supplements extracted from them", it added. — AFP

#### Outrage after YouTuber killed

BAGHDAD: The death of a young YouTube star at the hands of her father has sparked outrage in Iraq. Tiba Al-Ali, 22, was killed by her father on Jan 31 in the province of Diwaniya, interior ministry spokesman Saad Maan said. Police had attempted to mediate between Ali - who resided in Turkey and was visiting Iraq - and her relatives to "resolve the family dispute in a definitive manner", Maan said. He said that after the police's initial encounter with the family "we were surprised the next day... with the news of her killing at the hands of her father, as he admitted in his initial confessions". — AFP

#### Pakistan blocks Wikipedia

ISLAMABAD: Wikipedia was blocked in Pakistan on Saturday after authorities censored the website for hosting "blasphemous content". The online encyclopedia had been blocked across the country on Friday "after it failed to respond to our repeated correspondence over removal of the blasphemous content and meet the deadline", Malahat Obaid, a spokesman for the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority, told AFP on Saturday. — AFP

### Visitors flock to revived Qout Market

By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: After a break of two years due to the COVID pandemic, "Qout Market" reopened its doors to visitors to enjoy the positive and wonderful vibes. Qout Market is a concept cre-

ated by two Kuwaiti women - Nouf Hussain and Bedoor Al-Qassar - 10 years ago, which aims to support local and small businesses to promote themselves through this market, in addition to providing customers fresh products produced locally with Kuwaiti hands.

Kuwait Times on Saturday met the co-founders at the Qout Market held at Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Centre garden. The event was sponsored by major private sector companies including Zain and Gulf Bank. (See Page 2)



KUWAIT: People visit Qout Market held in the gardens of Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Centre on Feb 4, 2023. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat (See Page 2)

### Blinken scraps China trip over 'spy' balloons

WASHINGTON: A Chinese spy balloon has been spotted over Latin America, the Pentagon said Friday, a day after a similar craft was seen in US skies, prompting the scrapping of a rare trip to Beijing by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken. The Pentagon said the first balloon was now heading eastwards over the central United States, adding it was not being shot down for safety reasons.

Later Friday, Pentagon spokesman Pat Ryder said: "We are seeing reports of a balloon transiting Latin America." "We now assess it is another Chinese surveillance balloon," he added, without specifying its exact location. Moments before Blinken's decision to cancel his trip - aimed at easing tensions between the two countries - China issued a rare statement of regret over the first balloon and blamed winds for pushing what it called a civilian airship into US airspace.

But President Joe Biden's administration described it as a maneuverable "surveillance balloon". With the rival Republican Party already on the

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BILLINGS, Montana: This handout photo taken on Feb 1, 2023 and released on Feb 2 shows a suspected Chinese spy balloon in the sky over the US. — AFP

### Egyptians hope to bag bargains at book fair

CAIRO: Thousands of Egyptian bibliophiles weave through a labyrinthine display of books, reviving an annual tradition at the Arab world's largest book fair, but this year it comes at a steep cost. The 54th Cairo International Book Fair was overshadowed by a punishing economic crisis that has seen Egypt's currency, the pound, halve in value and prices skyrocket in the past year.

Organizers say the fair lured more than half a million visitors on its opening weekend alone - but with publishing houses already struggling to cover the rising cost of printing, many fear this will not translate to sales. "We expected a much smaller turnout this year than we had," said Wael Al-Mulla, one of more than 800 publishers at the fair.

Budgets are tight in Egypt, where inflation hit 21.9 percent in December, forcing many to dip into their savings to cover ever-rising daily costs. "Books are a luxury product," said Mulla, who heads the Masr El Arabia publishing house. "They'll inevitably be less of a priority when people need to budget for the basics." A steep currency devaluation has compounded

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CAIRO: In this picture taken on Jan 29, 2023, people visit the 54th Cairo International Book Fair. — AFP



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## Local



KUWAIT: Visitors interact with business owners at the 'Qout Market'. After a break of two years due to the COVID pandemic, 'Qout Market' reopened its doors to visitors. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

# 'Qout Market' reopens doors as visitors enjoy positive vibes

## Ideal opportunity for entrepreneurs and SMEs to exchange ideas

By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: After a break of two years due to the COVID pandemic, "Qout Market" reopened its doors to visitors to enjoy the positive and wonderful vibes. Qout Market is a concept created by two Kuwaiti women - Nouf Hussain and Bedoor Al-Qassar - 10 years ago, which aims to support local and small businesses to promote themselves through this market, in addition to providing customers fresh products produced locally with Kuwaiti hands.

Kuwait Times on Saturday met the co-founders at the Qout Market held at Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Centre garden. The event was sponsored by major private sector companies including Zain and Gulf Bank. The next event will be held on Feb 18. The co-founders said Qout Market started in 2013 as a small food and craft market, and over the years, the initiative grew from one location to another. This year, it is considered sort of its 10th anniversary since

launching the event.

"Due to our love of food and markets that we experience every time we travel, we decided to launch the Qout Market, especially since we don't have these types of markets in Kuwait. We have everything available in the country, starting from people who produce fresh food to wonderful local handmade crafts, beautiful locations and supportive sponsors," Hussain and Qassar said.

"At the first edition of Qout Market, we only had 10 booths, but 5,000 people attended. So we realized immediately that we will have a bigger audience in the next edition. They are only awaiting an opportunity to participate with us," they said. "Our hope is to effect change in our community by creating this platform. We want to be part of the solution instead of complaining there is nothing to do. Our main goal is to provide help to businesses and for people to have a family-friendly entertaining day. We are pleased with the supportive role private

companies are playing, while Kuwaiti local businesses and initiatives are 100 percent supportive of us too."

Masoud Salem Al-Sroor, Public Relations Officer at Zain, told Kuwait Times: "We are glad to be a part of this great initiative in order to support Kuwaiti youth and their events, which reflects Zain's image in the community as well as SMEs. Joining these events is a great opportunity to continue our mission to support them as always."

Fahad Al-Sharrah, Assistant Manager Corporate Communications at Gulf Bank, said: "We are pleased to renew our partnership with Qout Market, for it to continue to play a wonderful role in supporting the youth and local specialists in agriculture, handicrafts and the food industry within the community." He pointed out Qout Market is an ideal opportunity to bring together entrepreneurs and SMEs and allow them to exchange ideas and experiences with one another and listen to the opinions and suggestions of the general public.



Alia Al-Awadhi with her daughter.



Zain's Public Relations Officer Masoud Salem Al-Sroor.



Zain's booth



Visitors arrive at Qout Market.



KIPCO's Eman Al-Awadhi with her nieces.



Co-founders of Qout Market Bedoor Al-Qassar (left) and Nouf Hussain.



Gulf Bank's Assistant Manager Corporate Communications Fahad Al-Sharrah



Children and adults alike enjoy the vibes at Qout Market.



A vendor displays wooden handcrafts.



Local

# Zain Great Idea's journey reaches 2nd destination at LEAP in Riyadh

## 10 Kuwait-based tech startups meet global innovators and investors

**KUWAIT:** Zain, Kuwait's leading digital service provider, announced ten Kuwait-based tech startups that have been selected to join its upcoming visit to the LEAP Tech Conference in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. This is the second destination of the Regional Accelerator Program (part of the 7th Zain Great Idea tech startup accelerator program), which aims to give local startups invaluable experiences at one of the world's top tech, innovation, and entrepreneurship events.

The 10 Kuwait-based startups are Octopus AI: an AI-based digital CRM platform, Baims: a digital e-learning platform, BNCHR+: a car service and roadside assistance app, Bookr: a cloud-based software and POS platform for the beauty industry, Ghahseel: an app for on-demand car wash and vehicle care services, Li3ib: a platform for booking sports venues, Looksie: an online social marketplace for everything handmade, RUBA: a one-stop shop for all educational financing needs, RZQ: a platform for on-demand deliveries, and Spedia: a digital e-learning platform.

The founders of these startups will take part in ZGI 7's second Regional Accelerator Program, which will run for four days in Riyadh during the second edition of LEAP, the global tech conference that is set to gather over 100,000 tech innovators and leading experts from around the world to discover new ideas, build new partnerships, and connect with inspiring mentors and investors to build a positive future.

Zain saw the need and ambition of Kuwait-based startups to expand into the MENA region, and it has selected this global event for its program's second destination due to the Saudi market being one of the biggest and most vital of the region's markets. Saudi Arabia also presents a unique quality, sharing close geographical proximity, culture, demographics, and target audience with Kuwait. This brings a great opportunity for ZGI participants to learn from the vast number of workshops, conferences, and shared experiences in LEAP, paving the way for them to prepare their regional expansion plans, starting with the Saudi market.

Last year, Zain held Super Saturday, an event where ZGI participants presented their startups and outlined their strategic roadmaps to the judges panel that consisted of innovation and entrepreneurship experts, representatives of venture capital firms, investors, and startup accelerators. The panel carefully evaluated all entries and selected 30 startups to take part in the Regional Accelerator Program. Ten startups joined the first destination in Dubai, and now ten more startups are set to join the second destination in Riyadh.

**The 10 startups:**

**Octopus AI**  
Octopus AI is a smart digital platform that gath-

ers customer chats from social media and WhatsApp into one place. As a leading social media CRM software, it helps brands create customers for life, and helps businesses track their customers using its AI-powered platform while offering them advanced self-service tools like bots, virtual ITRs, navigators, and so much more.

**Baims**

Baims is an online platform that offers recorded courses tailored for university students in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Jordan, and Turkey. Baims digitizes the offline tutoring experience by allowing students to learn at their own pace with video lectures, notes, live sessions, and quizzes that can be accessed on the web and a mobile app.

**BNCHR+**

BNCHR+ provides a wide range of fast and efficient car services at the customer's location. Whenever in need, customers can quickly request roadside assistance with a few clicks and track the service provider in real time.

**Bookr**

Bookr offers a full suite of cloud-based software and POS tools for appointment-based SMEs specializing in the beauty industry. The platform offers a hassle-free process to book appointments at the customer's fingertips. Bookr processes hundreds of bookings every month, with offices in Kuwait, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, and aims to expand to the rest of the MENA region.

**Ghahseel**

Ghahseel allows users to easily order on-demand car wash requests at their preferred time and location. It is the first app for car wash services in Kuwait and has expanded to Saudi Arabia to serve its wide customer base in more places. With Ghahseel, users can order a car wash, tire replacement, glass tint, and so much more at home, work or any preferred location from one of the app's certified service providers.

**Li3ib**

Li3ib is a simple way to book the sport that you want to play, whether football, padel, tennis, or biking. Discover new venues to play at or book your favorite field without the hassle of calling. Join the sports community and find out about tournaments and leagues near you that you can compete in and win.

**Looksie**

Looksie is an online social marketplace for buying and selling everything unique and handmade in the Middle East. It is a space for passionate people



who love creativity, whether buying it, selling it, or just being involved with it. Looksie empowers designers, craftsmen, and artisans with the support and tools they require to turn their hobbies into thriving businesses.

**RUBA**

Ruba is a one-stop shop for all your educational financing needs in the MENA region. The platform offers an easy installments plan for schooling fees with zero additional costs. Parents can now manage their money easily by paying their children's schooling fees monthly, and educational institutions get access to capital upfront. Ruba partners with private nurseries, K-12 schools, universities and other academic providers in the region.

**RZQ**

RZQ is a platform that connects customers with the nearest drivers on the map to help with all their needs, whether for pick-ups, deliveries, errands, or anything in between. Independent couriers bid the delivery price and the customer has the freedom to choose the most attractive offer in terms of price, distance and rating. Business owners can also create their own shops on RZQ for easier management of their deliveries.

**Spedia**

Spedia is a leading online education platform that develops cognitive skills with simple and easy-to-follow methods, targeting students from kindergarten to high schools. Spedia covers the most essential topics from the local curriculum via recorded videos, live classes, and more.

In my view

## We are all Jullebee Ranara

By Atyab Al-Shatti

Local@kuwaittimes.com

The sad murder of domestic worker Jullebee Ranara is not a surprise, in light of many physical abuse incidents that have taken place in Kuwait against domestic workers through the years. Through a system that eliminates freedom of mobility, freedom of communication, freedom of expression, ability to negotiate the work agreement, ability of an individual who is sponsored under visa 20, and the government staying away from sponsorship procedures and capacitating a citizen to sponsor domestic help, a lot have misused this law and turned it into a form of modern slavery.

The sad implications of these restrictions lead to physical, mental and sexual abuses against domestic workers. A short visit to the domestic workers' shelter will reveal the actual results of such a brutal system. If you are let in, you'll see cases of severe injuries, burns and fractures in the head of a young woman and permanent disfigurement, and bruises all over some workers' bodies.

A worker would feel lucky if she reached the shelter with only "verbal violence" from her sponsor. Some crimes of violence were organized and never proven due to a lack of evidence, and many types of mental illnesses suffered by these innocent workers. I remember witnessing a case of an Ivorian worker who was kept starving in an isolated area and wasn't given any meals unless it was in exchange for sexual favors. Anybody wants to convince me the law is well implemented?

The problem is over three main obstacles - first, the lack of law implementation mechanisms, where even when the law is set, the government cannot supervise its implementation to ensure the protection of domestic workers. For instance, can a government officer search private property to ensure that the worker is able to communicate with her family or is being treated well? Many sponsors are not aware of the existence of the domestic worker law and do not commit to the work agreement, treating the domestic worker with no integrity or human dignity.

This is where the second obstacle comes in - the culture of treating domestic workers. Many people still treat domestic workers as persons they own and can ask them to do anything, even in the middle of the night at 2 am or 3 am. They will wake the woman up, who's in need for rest after a long working day, to probably cook them some snacks and "hansa oo aish mashkhood".

Discrimination itself is sensed in many words they say. People wearing fancy clothes and brands and will appear to be very "humane" in front of me, but the minute their child speaks up, he will vomit all types of discrimination and racism learned, because kids can't hide mindsets with fancy clothes - kids just don't lie.

Thirdly, the central issue of exposing domestic helpers to such crimes is the law itself. In no developed countries will you find cleaning services provided by someone detained at your place and still call this a job. The law must be revoked and civilized regulation should replace this law.



Hamad Al-Essa Organ Transplant Center honored. —KUNA photos



## Kuwait first in Arab, 2nd in Mideast in organ donations

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait comes first in the Arab region and second in the Middle East in terms of the number of organ donors after death, compared to the population, a health official said. Kuwait

witnessed, last year, around 50 kidney transplants, sourced from 50 deceased individuals, and 49 operations, sourced from live patients, Dr Mustafa Al-Musawi, Ministry of Health Organ Provision Unit Director and Kuwait Transplant Society chief said.

His comments came during a Kuwait Transplant Society event held to honor these donors, and to launch a similar campaign urging further organ donations. The campaign seeks to raise the number of donors from 17,000, currently, to 30,000. Around 100 kidney transplants are

carried out annually, being the most common, said Dr Al-Musawi. However, heart transplants have just started to enter the fray as the country remains lagging in the transplantation of other organs in comparison to neighboring Gulf Arab countries. — KUNA



## Truffle harvesting season coincides with Kuwait's national celebrations

**KUWAIT:** Being leafless, flowerless, stemless or even rootless, truffle is really a treasure buried along the desert, with Kuwaiti people, especially Bedouins, adoring it in spite of its high price. The truffle harvesting season coincides with Kuwait's national celebrations, boosting the already joyous atmosphere in the Gulf country, with people enjoying efforts to find this sweet-scented fungi among rocks and fragrant wild plants.

On this occasion, Ouda Al-Bathali, a Kuwaiti researcher, speaking to KUNA, said truffle is a type of fungus formed after the fall of rains and soil irrigation. It grows in desert areas and sand environment, formed in groups ranging between 10 and 20 plants at the same place. Bearing various names, truffle looks like potato but differs in color and scent and usually grows in soft slightly saline soil, Al-Bathali said.

Elaborating, he said this fungus is closely connected with rainfalls in Al-Wasem season, which falls between December and February, associated with lightning and thunder. Lightning, which always helps increase nitrogen oxide concentration in air, comes together with downpour to create various types of fungi, including truffle, and that's why it is sometimes called "daughter of lightning". Truffle always hinges upon a host plant to live in a symbiotic manner and



Truffle is sometimes called 'daughter of lightning' since it is closely connected with lightning and thunder. — KUNA photos

emerges in areas that have never been trodden by humans, according to the Kuwaiti researcher.

Growing near tree roots, this fungus could be white, brown or black and has different sizes ranging from three to 40 centimeters per plant, weighing between 20 and 400 grams, he remarked. Truffle is deemed a rare plant that shows up independently and grown on natural rain, rather than artificial environ-



Truffle grows in desert areas and sand environment.

ments, Al-Bathali pointed out. It is rich in proteins, carbohydrates, fats and minerals that are similar to those found in the human body, including phosphorus, sodium, calcium and potassium, he added.

There are four well-known types of truffle, the most famous and most expensive of which is called "Al-Zubaidi" which has a pleasant scent and is mostly white and big and of high nutritional value. On demand for truffle in Kuwait, Khalaf Al-Enezi, a truffle



The truffle harvesting season starts in Al-Wasem.

seller, said the price of truffle at present is very high due to a shortage of Kuwaiti and even Gulf truffle.

But, he said that the harvesting season is still in the beginning so it is expected to be highly available later this month, estimating its current price at 16-20 Kuwaiti dinars. Al-Enezi said the price is forecast to dwindle away with large quantities of this delicious plant coming in from neighboring countries, mainly Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Iran. —KUNA



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## News in brief

## Arab League pushes for improved system

**CAIRO:** The Arab League has affirmed the need to improve the health system in the Arab countries by increasing spending on preventive health and anti-cancer programs. In a statement on World Cancer Day 2023, the Arab League's Assistant Secretary General D Haifa Abu Ghazaleh, stressed the need to take advantage of the member states' efforts and initiatives, as well as the civil society organizations to educate people on the dangers of cancer. Abu Ghazaleh added that the Arab League is keen to achieve health security for the Arab citizens by implementing sustainable development goals 2030. She also said that one of the goals is to provide a healthy lifestyle that everyone enjoys at any age, noting those goals aim to reduce premature deaths from non-communicable diseases by one third by 2030. Abu Ghazaleh stated that cancer is one of the main causes of death, with approximately 459,000 deaths in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, and the burden of this disease is likely to increase by 2030. World Health Organization's World Cancer Day takes place on February 4 with the slogan which reflects on the burden of infections and deaths from disease that can often be treated if it is detected early in the least developed countries.

## Kuwait oil price down \$1.26 to \$80.73 pb

**KUWAIT:** The price of Kuwaiti oil fell by \$1.26 to \$80.73 per barrel on Friday, down from \$81.99 the day earlier, said Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) Saturday. The Brent crude and West Texas Intermediate both went down by \$2.23 and \$2.49 pb respectively, settling each at \$79.94 and \$73.39 pb. — From KUNA

## Photo of the Day



**KUWAIT:** British army forces have arrived in Kuwait to participate in military exercises (Desert Warrior 7) to be carried out by Kuwaiti Ground Forces between February 5-23. The periodic joint drill serves to increase bilateral cooperation and unify military concepts and joint training, said Kuwait's Ministry of Defense in a statement on Saturday. — KUNA

# KRCS distributes clothes to 400 displaced families

**ADEN:** Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) has handed out clothes to 400 displaced families in Ma'rib governorate, central Yemen, as part of "Kuwait beside You" campaign, continuing for eighth year running. The relief effort, carried out in collaboration with Estijabah Foundation - KRCS' local partner, targets needy persons, particularly women and children, said KRCS Director-General Abdulrahman Al-Aoun.

"It aims to alleviate the suffering of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in winter," Al-Aoun, now leading a delegation from the Society on a visit to Yemen, told KUNA. He reaffirmed KRCS' commitment to continue the relief efforts with a view to improving the living conditions of Yemenis through water, healthcare, education and housing projects in collaboration with the Yemeni local authorities and partners.

Meanwhile, Chairman of Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) Hilal Al-Sayer said that the charity would keep offering humanitarian aid to disaster-affected people and the needy both at home and

abroad. Speaking to KUNA to mark the KRCS' 57th anniversary, Al-Sayer said the charity's activities are considered a landmark in humanitarian and charitable action, based on its response to humanitarian appeals as well as its fast-track field endeavors in different countries.

Since it was founded in 1966, the society has always shouldered responsibility for delivering a message of amity and peace from the State of Kuwait to all peoples who undergo excruciating circumstances through its relief programs and projects worldwide, he added.

Kuwait commits to carrying on promoting its fruitful diplomacy centered on backing global humanitarian action by carrying out its humanitarian aid and initiatives that are deemed a distin-

guished asset of Kuwait's foreign policy, thus drawing the attention of countries and organizations to its diplomatic and humanitarian role, he boasted.

Internally, the charity provides relief, educational and medical services to needy families, while, regionally and internationally, it sends relief aid to Yemen, Palestine, Comoros, Somalia, Sudan, Pakistan, Niger, Nepal, the Philippines, Senegal, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan, Al-Sayer noted. The Kuwait Red Crescent Society is one of the leading Kuwaiti beacons in the field of humanitarian work.

It plays an integral role in activities and projects both inside and outside Kuwait and is highly appreciated by a large number of international and regional organizations concerned with humanitarian work. — KUNA



**Kuwait Red Crescent Society distributes clothes to 400 displaced families in Yemen. — KUNA**



**HODEIDA:** Displaced Yemenis return to their makeshift homes with bags of food aid supplies, at a camp in the Hays district in the war-ravaged western province of Hodeida. — AFP

## NATO training courses boost experience of Kuwait missions

**ROME:** Kuwaiti Ambassador to Italy Nasser Al-Qahtani hailed the training courses provided by the NATO Defense College for Kuwaiti military and diplomatic missions, as part of the partnership between the two sides. His remarks came during his participation in the graduation ceremony for two Kuwaiti officers from the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Interior, who took part in the 141 advance training courses for high ranks on Friday.

The ceremony, held in the capital Rome, was attended by head and Dean of the faculty and ambassadors of participating countries in the courses. The participation of Kuwaitis in the NATO's training courses helps boost their experience and enhance Kuwait's cooperation with the international community's organizations, Al-Qahtani told KUNA. The ambassador congratulated Colonel



**Kuwaiti Ambassador to Italy Nasser Al-Qahtani poses for a group photo during his participation in the graduation ceremony for two Kuwaiti officers. — KUNA**

Abdulaziz Al-Osaimi and Major Ali Al-Anezi on their graduation in the highest-ranking military college of the NATO. — KUNA



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Sri Lanka weighs 'failures' on independence day

## Brazil scuttles aircraft carrier in Atlantic despite pollution concerns

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Picture released by Ukrainian Presidential Chief of Staff Andriy Yermak on February 4, 2023, shows freed Ukrainian prisoners posing following their exchange in an unknown location in Ukraine. — AFP

# Ukraine allies pledge precision weapons

## US announces a new \$2.2-billion package of arms and munitions

**KYIV:** Western allies pledged precision rockets and missile systems to Ukraine on Friday, after President Volodymyr Zelensky called for sophisticated weapons to help retain control of the embattled eastern city of Bakhmut.

The European Union agreed to introduce price caps on Russian petroleum products to try to further limit Russian President Vladimir Putin's war chest by targeting his key exports. The announcements came shortly after Zelensky told a summit with EU leaders in Kyiv: "No one will surrender Bakhmut. We will fight as long as we can. If weapon (deliveries) are accelerated—namely long-range weapons—we will not only not withdraw from Bakhmut, we will begin to de-occupy Donbas," he said of the eastern region of Ukraine.

The United States on Friday announced a new \$2.2-billion package of arms and munitions, which the Pentagon said included a new rocket-propelled precision bomb that could nearly double Kyiv's strike range against Russian forces. The ground-launched small-diameter bombs (GLSDB), which can fly up to 150 kilometres (93 miles), could threaten key Russian supply lines, arms depots and air bases far behind the front lines.

They potentially give Kyiv's forces the ability to strike anywhere in the Russian-occupied Donbas,

Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions, as well as the northern part of occupied Crimea. However, "the delivery of the GLSDB likely won't be for several months due to contracting, production, and delivery timelines", said Pentagon spokesman Lt Col Garron Garn, declining to say how many would be delivered. France and Italy will deliver mobile surface-to-air missile systems, the French defence ministry said, in response to an urgent request from Kyiv to help protect "civilian populations and infrastructure from Russian air attacks".

The systems, called MAMBA or SAMP, are a vehicle-mounted battery of medium-range missiles designed to offer protection from airborne threats such as missiles and manned or unmanned aircraft.

Ukrainian Defence Minister Oleksiy Reznikov, who had requested the weapons, tweeted his gratitude, saying the systems would "help us save thousands of lives" from Russian attacks. Kyiv is also asking for fighter jets.

It has already secured promises from the West for deliveries of modern battle tanks and, after months of hesitation, Germany authorised the delivery of Leopard 1 tanks. In Brussels, the EU, the Group of Seven industrialised countries and Australia agreed to cap the price of Russian refined oil products to accompany an embargo on ship deliveries of the prod-

ucts that comes into force on Sunday. Already in December, the EU imposed an embargo on Russian crude oil coming into the bloc by sea and with its G7 partners-imposed a \$60-per-barrel cap on Russian crude exports to other parts of the world.

The embargo and price caps starting Sunday will target Russian refined oil products such as petrol, diesel and heating fuel arriving on ships.

The Kremlin warned that the measures would destabilise world markets. European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen estimated this week that the crude oil price cap costs Moscow around 160 million euros (\$170 million) daily.

At the Kyiv summit, the EU praised Ukraine's "considerable efforts" to start the reforms needed for joining the bloc, but urged it to go further. Corruption is a key European concern. Ukraine has widened efforts to tackle it, with raids this week on an oligarch with political connections and a former interior minister.

Zelensky, who is pressing for speedy EU accession, suggested Friday that talks could begin this year. "What exactly did we agree upon today?" Zelensky said in his regular evening address. "There is an understanding that it is possible to start negotiations on Ukraine's membership in the European Union this year."

But the path to joining the EU could take years. Von der Leyen cautioned that the process was merit-based and there could be "no rigid timelines" on either negotiations or membership.

For now, the EU says it will do more to divert Russia's frozen assets for use compensating Ukraine for damage inflicted since the invasion. Brussels also plans to roll out a new package of sanctions on the first anniversary of the invasion, February 24.

There was no let-up in fighting in Bakhmut, the front line of a prolonged battle between Ukrainian and Russian forces. Throughout Friday morning, AFP journalists heard a steady exchange of small-arms fire and the pounding of mortar shells to and from Russian positions. An American humanitarian medic was killed in the city when his evacuation vehicle was hit by a missile, according to Global Outreach Doctors, with whom he was working.

The 33-year-old victim, Pete Reed, was a former US Marine Corps rifleman who also worked as a paramedic, according to the organisation's founder, Andrew Lustig. Several others were reportedly hurt in the strike. Local man Oleksandr Tkachenko, 65, said it was "clear" the car, which was destroyed, was not a military target. Residents trying to rescue the occupants had also come under attack, he added. — AFP



JUBA: Pope Francis (3rd L) speaks to youth after a meeting with bishops, priests, deacons, consecrated persons and seminarians at the Cathedral of Saint Theres in Juba, South Sudan, on February 4, 2023. — AFP

## Pope to meet war victims on South Sudan pilgrimage

**JUBA:** Pope Francis on Saturday will meet victims of South Sudan's civil war, a day after delivering an impassioned plea for the country's leaders to recommit to peace for the sake of their long-suffering people. Francis is making the first papal visit to South Sudan since it gained independence from Sudan in 2011 and then plunged into a brutal ethnic conflict that left the young nation divided and traumatised.

Some 380,000 people died in five years of bloodshed before the civil war formally ended in 2018, with a ceasefire between warring leaders who remain in power today. But the country remains fragile and violent, and Francis, who tried to broker peace between the rival parties, is visiting South Sudan as it lurches from one crisis to the next. At his first event Saturday, the wheelchair-bound pope met South Sudan's religious leaders, who work with the poor and marginalised and are deeply respected in the devout country where 60 percent of its 12 million people are Christian.

He said they must "step into the middle of (people's) sufferings and tears," adding that the Church had a duty to be "willing to dirty its hands for people". Several thousands turned out early to wait for the 86-year-old pontiff in the courtyard of the Cathedral of Saint Theres, many waving national flags and ululating as they gave him a jubilant welcome.

"We came here to receive his blessings. This is all about peace. Pope Francis is not even walking, and he is still coming here to encourage our leaders," said John Makuei, 24. He said he arrived before dawn, so he did not miss this "historic day". "I am so so happy," said 36-year-old Adongpiny Harriet, wiping away sweat after she joined an impromptu dance outside the cathedral following the pope's blessing. "It is the first time to see papa in my country. I feel so privileged."

### 'A new start'

Later Saturday, the Argentine pontiff will address a group of South Sudanese living in a camp outside Juba who were forced to flee ethnic violence during the war. They will be brought to the capital for an audience with Francis, who has made the defence of migrants and those on the margins a pillar of his papacy.

Despite a peace deal technically ending the war, conflict still drives people from their homes, and there are some 2.2 million internally displaced people across South Sudan, according to UN data from December. On Saturday evening, Francis will hold a joint prayer with the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, who joined him in the country. On Friday, Francis delivered a pointed speech to the country's political leaders, warning they must make "a new start" toward reconciliation and end the greed and power struggles tearing the nation apart. "Future generations will either venerate your names or cancel their memory, based on what you now do," he told an audience that included President Salva Kiir and his rival and deputy Riek Machar, as well as diplomats, religious leaders and traditional kings. — AFP

## Democrats ready to battle for Biden

**PHILADELPHIA:** President Joe Biden was welcomed at a conference of his Democratic Party on Friday with chants of "four more years," as the Philadelphia crowd voiced strong support for his yet-unannounced reelection bid.

"Let me ask you a simple question: Are you with me?" the octogenarian leader asked the hotel auditorium, which responded with cheers, many attendees waving "Go Joe" placards. Gathered for two days in historic Philadelphia, members of the Democratic National Committee are working to lay the groundwork for a successful 2024 campaign, with Biden's name now widely expected to be on the ballot.

US Senator Chris Coons, a longtime ally of Biden, told AFP he expects a formal announcement "in a few months." Ahead of the president's keynote speech, the chairman of Minnesota's Democratic Party told a panel discussion to be ready to go to bat for Biden.

"All of you have to be (Biden's)... evangelist in the next two years," he said. "There has been no president that has done more in the past two years," he added, pointing to the once-in-a-generation package Biden signed into law to rebuild America's crumbling infrastructure, and his efforts to boost unionized labor. Firing up campaigners who had traveled from America's four corners, he told the audience: "We've got to get out there... sell that to the American people."

### Age-old question

It might be Republicans that have the elephant as their official symbol, but there is a giant pachyderm in the room whenever Democrats discuss Biden in 2024. The 46th president was born closer to the end of Abraham Lincoln's tenure than to the start of his own.

Already the oldest president in US history, he would be 86 when the time comes to hand over the Oval Office keys, assuming he wins reelection and stays healthy. Many of his critics think that's just too old, especially since the former senator and vice president promised in 2020 to make his presidency a "bridge" to a younger generation.

"I hear that from time to time, but I don't hear it as much as you might think," says Martin, downplaying what could be an easy talking point for Biden's Republican opponent in the race for the White House. Like Martin, many Democrats are casting aside concerns over Biden's advanced years to rally to his side ahead of what is expected to be an imminent declaration that he will vie for another four years.

Even members of the party's progressive wing, who were initially suspicious of the president's social and

climate agenda, have fallen into line. "I wouldn't discriminate against somebody because they're a certain age if they're advancing an agenda that works," Pennsylvania state representative Malcolm Kenyatta, nearly 50 years the president's junior, told AFP.

### Republican Party's 'last breaths'

In Philadelphia, the historic cradle of US democracy, opposition to Biden's putative candidacy came largely from outside the tent. In Friday's icy wind, a truck displaying a blunt but pointed slogan—"Don't run, Joe"—took laps around the convention hall.



PHILADELPHIA: US Vice President Kamala Harris gestures at the Democratic National Committee (DNC) 2023 Winter meeting in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The DNC on February 4, 2023, is expected to approve a new lineup for the party's presidential primaries. — AFP

"He's a really weak candidate going into 2024," said Sam Rosenthal, the dissident behind the stunt, whose group is not affiliated with the Democratic Party. The simmering controversy over Biden's retention of classified documents and his insufficiently progressive politics make the incumbent a "non-viable" choice for the Democratic nomination, Rosenthal told AFP.

These objections may be shared by Democrats elsewhere, but they were falling on deaf ears in the "City of Brotherly Love." Biden, who faced about 15 rivals in the party's 2020 primary, looks destined to run unopposed if he does decide to extend his tenure.

What will remain a mystery for the next year or so is the identity of his likely Republican opponent, with Donald Trump far from certain to stay the course as his party's frontrunner. "I believe that we are seeing some of the last breaths of the Republican Party," said Jaime Harrison, the Democratic Party chairman, brimming with confidence. "Take your medicine, take your vitamins and just get ready." — AFP



## International

# Brazil scuttles aircraft carrier in Atlantic despite pollution concerns

## Carrier contains tons of asbestos, toxic materials that could pollute marine food chain

**RIO DE JANEIRO:** Brazil on Friday sank a decommissioned aircraft carrier, the Navy announced, despite environmental groups claiming the formerly French ship was packed with toxic materials. The "planned and controlled sinking occurred late in the afternoon" on Friday, some 350 kilometers (220 miles) off the Brazilian coast in the Atlantic Ocean, in an area with an "approximate depth of 5,000 meters (16,000 feet)," the Navy said in a statement.

The decision to scuttle the six-decade-old Sao Paulo, announced Thursday, came after Brazilian authorities had tried in vain to find a port willing to welcome it. Though defense officials said they would sink the vessel in the "safest area," environmentalists criticized the decision, saying the aircraft carrier contains tons of asbestos, heavy metals and other toxic materials that could leach into the water and pollute the marine food chain.

The Basel Action Network had called on Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva—who took office last month vowing to reverse surging environmental destruction under far-right ex-president Jair Bolsonaro—to immediately halt the "dangerous" plan.

The group issued a joint statement with Greenpeace and Sea Shepherd on Friday, accusing Brazil of having violated "three international treaties" on the environment by sinking the ship, which the

NGOs said could cause "incalculable" damage to marine life and coastal communities.

Other "environmentally responsible measures could have been adopted, but once again, the importance of protecting the oceans, which are vital for the life of the planet, was treated with negligence," said Leandro Ramos, director of programs for Greenpeace Brazil.

Brazilian authorities said it was better to sink the ship on purpose rather than allow it to sink spontaneously on its own.

The Navy insisted it had chosen a spot for sinking that considered "the security of navigation and the environment" and "the mitigation of the impacts on public health, fishing activities and ecosystems."

A judge overruled a last-minute legal bid to stop the operation, saying in his decision that an unplanned sinking could be even worse for the environment or pose a danger to crews, the G1 news outlet reported.

He called the situation "tragic and regrettable," according to G1.

Built in the late 1950s in France, whose navy sailed it for 37 years as the Foch, the aircraft carrier earned a place in 20th-century naval history.

It took part in France's first nuclear tests in the Pacific in the 1960s, and deployments in Africa, the Middle East and the former Yugoslavia from the 1970s to 1990s. —AFP



RIO DE JANEIRO: File photo shows aircraft carrier Sao Paulo in the Atlantic Ocean, near Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. — AFP

## Bill to advance Peru elections halted in Congress committee

**LIMA:** Another bill to advance Peru's elections to this year, which President Dina Boluarte hopes will quell ongoing deadly unrest, was blocked by a congressional committee on Friday due to procedural objections. The fresh legislative setback followed the failure of two other bills over the past few days that would have advanced elections currently slated for April 2024 into 2023 — a key demand of protesters who have been in the streets since early December.

Alejandro Cavero, a right-wing member of Congress who sought to halt the bill's advancement, told reporters Friday that he raised parliamentary objections in a meeting of the Constitutional Committee, before the bill could even be debated. "The regulations of Congress clearly stipulate that a matter that has already been shelved cannot be discussed again in the committee until the next legislative session," he said.

Peru's Congress begins new sessions on July 27 of each year. "What I have responsibly done... today in the Constitutional Committee is to let this issue rest for a prudent period," Cavero, who is a member of the committee, said. The bill rejected on Thursday, in addition to moving elections up from April 2024 to 2023, included the calling of a referendum on forming a constitutional convention—another key



CUSCO: A man carrying a dog on his bicycle rack participates in a protest march against Peruvian President Dina Boluarte in Cusco, Peru. — AFP

demand of protesters.

Peru has been embroiled in a political crisis with near-daily demonstrations 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 a police officer—have been killed in clashes between security forces and protesters, according to the human rights ombudsman's office.

In December, lawmakers moved elections, originally due in 2026, up to April 2024, but as protesters dug in their heels, Boluarte, Castillo's former vice president, called for holding the vote this year instead. —AFP

## Iran slams UN nuke watchdog chief after centrifuge report

**TEHRAN:** Iran slammed UN nuclear watchdog chief Rafael Grossi after the agency raised concerns over covert changes to equipment at its Fordo uranium enrichment plant, state media said Saturday. The criticism of Grossi comes after the International Atomic Energy Agency director-general said he plans to visit Tehran in February for talks on getting it to increase cooperation over its activities, amid stalled negotiations to revive a landmark deal over Iran's nuclear programme.

The IAEA said in a confidential report seen by AFP on Wednesday that Iran had substantially modified an interconnection between two centrifuge clusters enriching uranium to up to 60 percent at Fordo Fuel Enrichment Plant (FFEP), without giving prior notice. Iran said later an inspector had "inadvertently" reported the changes, and that Grossi had issued the report despite the matter being resolved—a response that the United States and its allies criticised as "inadequate".

"We gave a letter to the agency that an inspector... made a mistake and gave an incorrect report," Mohamad Eslami, the head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, was quoted as saying by state news agency IRNA.

"But yet again the director-general of the agency

released this issue to the media," he said, labelling it "unprofessional and unacceptable" behaviour. "We hope that this practice will not be continued... because this is not acceptable for his reputation and the agency."

The IAEA had said that during an unannounced Fordo inspection on January 21 it found "two IR-6 centrifuge cascades... were interconnected in a way that was substantially different from the mode of operation declared by Iran to the agency". Since late last year, the two cascades had been used to produce uranium enriched to up to 60 percent, the report to member states added.

In the report, Grossi expressed concern that Iran had "implemented a substantial change in the design information of FFEP in relation to the production of high enriched uranium without informing the agency in advance". In a statement on Friday, the United States, Britain, France and Germany said Iran's response to the report was "inadequate".

"Iranian claims that this action was carried out in error are inadequate," they said. "We judge Iran's actions based on the impartial and objective reports of the IAEA, not Iran's purported intent." Grossi told the European Parliament on January 24 that he plans to visit Tehran this month "for a much-needed political dialogue, or reestablishment thereof, with Iran".

The IAEA chief noted the "big, big impasse" on the Iran nuclear deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. The deal with world powers collapsed after the United States withdrew from it in 2018 under former president Donald Trump. Negotiations that started in April 2021 to revive the agreement have since stalled. — AFP

## Blinken scraps China trip over...

Continued from Page 1

offensive, Blinken postponed a two-day visit that was to have started Sunday. In a telephone call with senior Chinese official Wang Yi, Blinken said he "made clear that the presence of this surveillance balloon in US airspace is a clear violation of US sovereignty and international law, that it's an irresponsible act".

Blinken said, however, that he told Wang that "the United States is committed to diplomatic engagement with China and that I plan to visit Beijing when conditions allow". "The first step is getting the surveillance asset out of our airspace. That's what we're focused on," Blinken told reporters. According to Chinese state news agency Xinhua, Wang said the two discussed the incident "in a calm and professional manner."

"China is a responsible country and has always strictly abided by international law," Xinhua quoted Wang as telling Blinken. "We do not accept any

groundless speculation and hype," he said, calling both sides to "avoid misjudgments and manage divergence." Blinken would have been the first top US diplomat to visit China since Oct 2018, signaling a thaw following intense friction under former president Donald Trump.

Last month, Blinken said he would use the trip to help establish "guardrails" to prevent the relationship from escalating into all-out conflict. Republican lawmakers quickly pounced on the balloon incident, casting Biden — who has largely preserved, and at times expanded, Trump's hawkish policies on China — as weak.

"President Biden should stop coddling and appeasing the Chinese communists. Bring the balloon down now and exploit its tech package, which could be an intelligence bonanza," tweeted Senator Tom Cotton, a prominent hardliner who had urged Blinken to call off his trip. "Shoot down the balloon!" added Donald Trump on his Truth Social media platform.

After initial hesitation, Beijing admitted ownership of the "airship" and said it veered off course due to wind. "The airship is from China. It is a civilian airship used for research, mainly meteorological, purposes," said the statement attributed to a foreign ministry spokesperson. — AFP

more selective. As the pound plummeted, the price of basic paper stock — all imported — quadrupled, forcing publishers to "decrease commissions and print fewer books per edition", Mulla said. "I have to be very careful with my choice of books, only picking the titles I'm really sure will be popular."

Egypt's robust publishing industry — historically a key exporter of Arabic literature, to which readers would flock for the region's cheapest volumes — has already shown signs of trouble. "Some publishing houses have had to downsize to the bare minimum, or halt activities until the economic landscape is a little clearer," Mulla said, noting some had already had to shut down their presses permanently.

In a corner of the fair, vendors from the city's well-known Azbakeya second-hand book market appeared unfazed by the economic downturn. Nestled against the walls of the historic Azbakeya Garden, the stalls have for over a century sold used books, as well as pirated prints, for a fraction of the prices elsewhere. As in past years, the booksellers have carted their innumerable volumes from the bustling market in central Cairo to the polished new exhibition center on the city's outskirts.

Like hundreds of thousands of loyal readers, 39-year-old Mohamed Shahin "made a beeline" for the Azbakeya booksellers with his family in tow, he told AFP. "This is the most popular place at the fair, even though the good books sell out quick because there aren't a lot of copies," 18-year-old engineering student and volunteer Malak Farid said. — AFP

## Bird flu detected in mammals but risk to humans low

**PARIS:** Experts have warned that the recent detection of bird flu in mammals including foxes, otters, minks, seals and even grizzly bears is concerning but emphasized that the virus would have to significantly mutate to spread between humans. Since late 2021, Europe has been gripped by its worst-ever outbreak of bird flu, with North and South America also experiencing severe outbreaks.

This has led to the culling of tens of millions of domestic poultry worldwide, many with the H5N1 strain. The global outbreak is also responsible for the deaths of tens of thousands of wild birds, Tom Peacock, a virologist at the Imperial College London, told AFP that it constitutes a "pandemic" — a pandemic among animals, in this case birds.

"We are not fully sure why it's happening now but we think this might be driven by a slightly different strain of H5N1 which is spreading very effectively in wild, migratory birds," Peacock said. It is rare that bird flu jumps over into mammals — and rarer still that humans catch the potentially deadly virus. On Thursday, the UK Health Security Agency said that a fox had recently tested positive for H5N1.

It joins eight foxes and otters which tested positive in the UK last year, all of which had a PB2 mutation. Peacock said that this mutation "allows the virus to replicate better in mammalian cells". But further mutations would be "required for the virus to cause a flu pandemic" in humans, he added. France announced last week that a cat had been put down after testing positive for H5N1.

And last month, the US state of Montana's parks service said three grizzly bears with bird flu had been euthanized. All of these mammals were suspected to have eaten infected birds. Paul Wigley, a professor of animal microbial ecosystems at the UK's Bristol University, said that while "there is no transmission within mammalian populations, the risk to humans remains low".

### 'Potential to cause pandemic'?

However two recent larger scale infections have raised concerns that bird flu has the potential to spread between mammals. One was an outbreak of H5N1 with the PB2 mutation at a Spanish farm in October that led to the culling of more than 50,000 minks. Research published in the journal

Eurosurveillance last month said its findings "indicate that an onward transmission of the virus to other minks may have taken place in the affected farm".

Transmission between the minks has not been confirmed, with further research ongoing. The mass death of some 2,500 endangered seals found along Russia's Caspian Sea coast last month has also raised concern. A researcher at Russia's Dagestan State University, Alimurad Gadzhiev, said last week that early samples from the seals "tested positive for bird flu", adding that they were still studying whether the virus caused the die-off.

Peacock warned there have been mixed reports from Russia about the seals, which could have contracted the virus by eating infected seabirds. But if the seals did give bird flu to each other it "would be yet another very concerning development", he added. "The mink outbreaks, the increased number of infections of scavenger mammals and the potential seal outbreak would all point to this virus having the potential to cause a pandemic" in humans, he said.

### 'Mixing point'

David Heymann, an infectious disease specialist at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, urged caution. More bird flu cases could be being detected in mammals because countries have ramped up testing, he said. "This may have been going on for years and nothing has really occurred," he told AFP. But it was always concerning when a flu virus enters mammals "because they're often the mixing point of influenza viruses, or they create an environment where mutations can occur and then can become adapted in humans", he added.

Even if that did occur, he said there were excellent surveillance systems in Europe and North America, and that H5N1 has been heavily researched since it first emerged in China and Hong Kong in 1996. If H5N1 did mutate into a strain that could circulate among humans, the current seasonal flu vaccine could be fairly easily updated to include it, he said.

The UK Health Security Agency said "there is no evidence of sustained human to human transmission" of bird flu. Over the last two decades, there have been 868 confirmed H5N1 cases in humans with 457 deaths, according to the World Health Organization. There were four confirmed cases and one death last year. Last month, Ecuador reported South America's first case of the A(H5) bird flu virus in a human — a nine-year-old girl who was in contact with backyard poultry. The experts called for continued surveillance of avian influenza in wild birds, poultry and mammals, in order for humans to limit their exposure. —AFP

## Egyptians hope to bag bargains...

Continued from Page 1

costs for import-dependent publishers, leading many to hike the price of books by up to double.

"You could once come with 2,000 pounds (now \$66) and fill a suitcase with books," Mohamed El-Masry, chief executive of El Rasm Bel Kalamat Publishing, told AFP. "You can't do that anymore," the 38-year-old lamented. To incentivize readers, Egypt's publishers' association has encouraged sellers to give the option of buying books in instalments through popular buy-now-pay-later services. State-owned publishers have also offered heavily discounted Arabic classics for under 30 pounds, or \$1.

According to sellers, readers — eager for their annual haul despite the crisis — are deploying new methods to lessen the burden. "We see most people coming with their friends as a group. They'll decide what they want, divide the books among themselves and then pass them around," said Abdallah Sakr, 33, a publishing manager at El Mahrousa. "Everyone's surprised when they see the prices, but there's still a desire to read. So instead of buying five books they'll get two, or one instead of two," he added.

To survive the crisis, publishing houses have grown



## International

## Sri Lanka weighs 'failures' on independence milestone

Its 22 million people still reeling from hardships triggered by an economic collapse

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka marked 75 years since independence with a sombre military parade on Saturday, as its president urged reflection on past "errors and failures" at a time of national crisis. Since the 1948 end of British rule, the island nation has spent much of its history at war with itself, including a decades-long Tamil separatist rebellion that claimed up to 100,000 lives and two deadly communist insurgencies.

Its 22 million people are also still reeling from the hardships triggered by an unprecedented economic collapse last year that brought months of food and fuel shortages. President Ranil Wickremesinghe, who took office last July at the peak of the resulting political unrest, said Saturday's anniversary came at "an extremely critical and challenging time".

"It presents an opportunity for us not only to review our strengths and gains as a nation but also to rectify our errors and failures," he said in a statement. Wickremesinghe, flanked by top military brass, watched the hour-long procession of soldiers and army vehicles along a seafront promenade in the capital Colombo, inaugurated by ceremonial artillery fire but boycotted by opposition parties.

For several months last year the boulevard was the site of a protest encampment erected by Sri Lankans outraged over the island's economic calamity and mismanagement by its leaders. The protest movement peaked in July when a huge crowd stormed the home of Wickremesinghe's predecessor and chased him into temporary exile,

from where he issued his resignation.

Wickremesinghe ordered security forces to dismantle the camp hours after he was sworn into office and has since set about repairing Sri Lanka's ruined finances. His government has hiked taxes and is negotiating with international creditors including India and China to clear the way for an urgently needed International Monetary Fund bailout. "I am confident that even at this juncture we will pool our energies... to rise up from the current economic abyss and build back stronger," Wickremesinghe's statement said.

## Troubled history

But the impact of the crisis is still being acutely felt, with Wickremesinghe saying last week that the economy had contracted by up to 11 percent in 2022. On Friday the UN children's agency reported that nearly one in three Sri Lankans were in need of humanitarian assistance as a result of the downturn.

"Sri Lanka is a bankrupt nation, so we have to start from zero now," political analyst Ranga Kalansooriya told AFP ahead of the independence anniversary. The economic collapse is the latest of several calamities that have pockmarked Sri Lanka's history since independence. Nearly 31,000 people were killed when the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami struck the tropical nation's coastline. A series of coordinated Islamist attacks on hotels and churches during Easter Sunday services in 2019 killed 279 people.

Rights groups say that up to 40,000 civilians

informed the police. The cops broke open the door and found her dead in the apartment. Vani Jairam's husband died a few years ago and she used to live alone in her apartment in Chennai.

Reports from people close to her suggest she might have slipped and suffered a fall. She was a part of the film industry for five decades, and received the India's best playback singer award thrice, besides state awards in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Odisha.

Vani Jairam collaborated with some of the biggest composers across various industries and delivered evergreen chartbusters. The talented singer has a number of songs in Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Hindi, Urdu, Marathi, Bengali, Bhojpuri, Tulu and Oriya to her credit. She has performed extensively in the country and across the world.

Vani Jairam recently completed 50 years as a



COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's President Ranil Wickremesinghe (C) salutes during Sri Lanka's 75th Independence Day celebrations in Colombo on February 4, 2023. —AFP

were killed in the final weeks of the decades-long civil war during an army assault that crushed the remnants of the Tamil Tigers leadership. Sri Lanka has resisted international calls for a probe into war crimes allegations and later governments have been accused of abetting continued discrimination

against the island's Tamil minority.

Kalansooriya said Sri Lanka had yet to heal the wounds from the long conflict and its political leaders had failed to bring reconciliation. "We needed a Mandela in Sri Lanka," he said, "but what happened in the aftermath was entirely different." — AFP

## Veteran Indian singer Vani Jairam dies

CHENNAI: Veteran Indian playback singer Vani Jairam who sang over 10,000 songs in several languages including Tamil, Telugu, Hindi, Bhojpuri, and Marathi, died on Saturday at her apartment in Chennai. The 78-year-old veteran singer was found dead at her Haddows Road apartment in Chennai. She was recently awarded the Padma Bhushan, India's third-highest civilian award.

The singer's maid turned up for work Saturday, however, she did not get any response despite repeated calls. She alerted her relatives who then



professional singer. She has worked with legendary composers including MS Viswanathan, Ilaiyaraaja, RD Burman, KV Mahadevan, OP Nayyar and Madan Mohan, among others. — Agencies

## China's mega-rich move their wealth to Singapore

SINGAPORE: Singapore is seeing an influx of ultra-wealthy families from China looking to protect their wealth from a Communist Party that increasingly views them with suspicion.

Beijing's recent crackdowns on tech billionaires and tax-shy celebrities, as well as three years of zero-Covid, have led many rich Chinese to look for a safe haven.

Nervous over the fate of their fortunes, some of the country's mega-rich have since booked tickets to Singapore, insiders told AFP. The key Asian financial hub ticks all the boxes for relocating tycoons.

Singapore has been ruled by one party for the past six decades, and labour strikes and street protests are banned. Taxes are comparatively low and the population is predominantly ethnic Chinese.

The presence of recent Chinese arrivals is keenly felt in Singapore, with some relocating to luxury homes with waterfront views on Sentosa Island, which also houses a theme park, a casino and a prestigious golf club.

"You cannot imagine the way they spend money. It's crazy," said Pearce Cheng, CEO of AIMS, a firm providing immigration and relocation services.

He recalled attending a client's party where a rare Japanese "Yamazaki 55" whisky, worth around \$800,000 a bottle, was served.

Cheng's firm also helps find luxury condos, hire chauffeurs and enrol kids in private schools. It once even bought \$61,000 worth of cigars.

The new arrivals drive Rolls Royces and Bentleys, and are often spotted at top-tier golf clubs such as the exclusive Sentosa Golf Club, where foreign members pay \$670,000 a year.



SINGAPORE: Photo shows Sentosa Cove private residential housing next to yachts docked at One 15 Marina Sentosa Cove in Singapore. Singapore is seeing an influx of ultra-wealthy families from China looking to protect their wealth from a Communist Party that increasingly views them with suspicion. — AFP

"Many of them are younger Chinese, in fashionable designer clothes, and they usually keep to themselves and dine amongst themselves, which is not surprising," said Benny Teo, managing director of Blazon, a consultancy specialising in golf.

## 'My money is mine'

Relocating to Singapore puts the wealth of China's richest beyond the reach of Beijing, whose recent high-profile crackdowns have rattled billionaires. Jack Ma, one of the most recognisable faces in Asian business, lost an estimated \$25 billion when Chinese regulators pulled the plug on a blockbuster IPO in 2020. Other Chinese tycoons fear the Communist Party could apply similar pressure or even take over their businesses at low prices, an accountant familiar with the situation told AFP.

"Moving to Singapore is about making sure the family wealth is kept safe and can last for several

generations," the accountant said.

Singapore is increasingly viewed as a home rather than just a backup plan, another source in the industry said, adding that clients had told him: "At least when I'm here, I know my money is mine."

One of the founders of China's largest hotpot chain, Haidilao, recently set up a so-called family office in Singapore.

The Monetary Authority of Singapore estimates that the number of family offices — wealth management companies dedicated to individual and group assets — rose from 400 in 2020 to 700 in 2021.

Loh Kia Meng, co-head of private wealth and family office practices at law firm Dentons Rodyk, estimated that 1,500 family offices would have been set up by the end of last year.

"I won't be surprised if the total figure by the end of 2022 shows that one out of two new family offices originates from China," Loh said. — AFP

with the Afghan Taliban, led by Hibatullah Akhundzada who issues edicts from his hideaway in the southern city of Kandahar.

Special assistant to Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Faisal Karim Kundi, said delegations would be sent to Tehran and Kabul to "ask them to ensure that their soil is not used by terrorists against Pakistan".

A senior Pakistani police official in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province where Monday's blast took place told AFP the Kabul delegation would hold "talks with the top brass". "When we say top brass, it means... Afghan Taliban chief Hibatullah Akhundzada," he said on condition of anonymity. Afghan officials did not immediately respond to AFP's request for comment.

But on Wednesday Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi warned Pakistan should "not pass the blame to others". "They should see the problems in their own house," he said. "Afghanistan should not be blamed."

During the 20-year US-led intervention in

Afghanistan, Islamabad was accused of giving covert support to the Afghan Taliban even as the country proclaimed a military alliance with the United States. But since the ultra-conservatives seized Kabul in 2021, relations with Pakistan have soured, in part over the resurgence of the Pakistani Taliban, also known as Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

The TTP-formed in 2007 by Pakistani militants who splintered off from the Afghan Taliban-once held sway over swathes of northwest Pakistan but were routed by an army offensive after 2014. But over the first year of Taliban rule, Pakistan witnessed a 50 percent uptick in militant attacks, concentrated in the border regions with Afghanistan and Iran, according to the Pak Institute for Peace Studies.

The TTP, notorious for shooting schoolgirl Malala Yousafzai, has "arguably benefitted the most of all the foreign extremist groups in Afghanistan from the Taliban takeover", a UN Security Council report said in May 2022. Last year Kabul brokered peace talks between Islamabad and the TTP but the shaky truce collapsed. — AFP

## News in brief

## Shark kills teenage girl

SYDNEY: A 16-year-old girl died Saturday after being mauled by a shark as she swam in a river in Western Australia, officials said. The girl was bitten by an unknown species of shark in the Swan River in the Perth suburb of North Fremantle, a state government statement said. She was pulled from the water but pronounced dead at the scene after efforts to revive her failed, said Paul Robinson, police acting inspector for the Fremantle district. "It's very early on, what we're being advised is that she was with friends on the river," he told a news conference. "They were on jet skis. Possible a pod of dolphins were being seen nearby and the young female jumped in to swim nearby the dolphins." Describing it as a "very, very traumatic incident," Robinson said the family of the girl, who was from Perth, were "absolutely devastated by the news".

## Sixth police officer fired

WASHINGTON: The Memphis Police Department on Friday said it had fired a sixth officer involved in the arrest of Tyre Nichols, the 29-year-old African American whose fatal beating shocked the nation. Preston Hemphill, who had been in the southern US city's police force since 2018, "violated multiple departmental policies," including on "personal conduct," "truthfulness" and regulations on Taser gun use, the department said in a statement. Five other officers had already been fired and charged with murder over Nichols's death. Hemphill, a white man, had been suspended since the beginning of the department's investigation, but that was not made public until Monday. Nichols was arrested by members of a special police unit called Scorpion on January 7 for what police said was a traffic violation.

## Japan PM aide dismissed

TOKYO: Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida dismissed one of his secretaries on Saturday over homophobic comments that the premier called "outrageous". Kishida said the remarks by Masayoshi Arai-in which he said he "doesn't even want to look at" married same-sex couples-were "outrageous" and "incompatible" with an inclusive society the government is aiming for. "I made the decision to relieve him of his position as secretary," Kishida told reporters. On Friday, Arai said he "wouldn't like it if they lived next door" and that people would "abandon the country if we allow same-sex marriage", according to public broadcaster NHK. The 55-year-old apologised later, saying his remarks were not appropriate, even if they were his personal opinion. — AFP

## Cattle thieves kill 41

KANO: A gang of cattle thieves has killed 41 vigilantes in Nigeria's troubled north in a forest ambush, police said. The incident happened on Thursday in Katsina state when scores of vigilantes from several villages in the Bakori district mobilised to track down the gang, which had stolen cattle from a local the previous day. Katsina state police spokesman Gambo Isah said late Friday the vigilantes were ambushed by the thieves, who killed 41 and injured two others. He said the vigilantes were armed with Kalashnikov rifles. "The hoodlums shot and killed 41 Yansakai (vigilantes) and wounded two," he said, adding that their bodies had been recovered. "A joint security operation is currently ongoing with a view to bringing the perpetrators to book," he added. — AFP

## Pakistan to appeal over police mosque bombing

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad will ask the secretive supreme leader of Afghanistan's Taliban to rein in militants in Pakistan after a suicide bombing killed scores of police in a mosque, officials said Saturday. Since the Taliban returned to power in Kabul, Pakistan has witnessed a dramatic uptick in attacks in regions bordering Afghanistan, where militants use rugged terrain to stage assaults and escape detection.

Detectives have blamed an affiliate of the Pakistani Taliban—the most notorious militant outfit in the area—for the Monday blast in Peshawar which killed 84 people inside a fortified police headquarters. The Pakistani Taliban share common lineage and ideals



## Business

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2023

## Adani market turmoil a key test for Modi's India Inc

## List of corrupt Indian moguls is long, from Nirav Modi to Vijay Mallya

**NEW DELHI:** The market rout suffered by Indian tycoon Gautam Adani is the latest corporate scandal to plague one of the world's largest economies despite Prime Minister Narendra Modi's efforts to root out corruption. Properly investigating the claims of fraud that triggered the sell-off in Adani's companies will be a key test for "India Inc" as the country seeks to attract foreign investment and rival China economically in the 21st century, analysts say.

In its breakneck expansion Adani's vast business empire conducted "brazen stock manipulation and accounting fraud" that amounted to "the largest con in corporate history", according to US short-seller group Hindenburg Research. Adani has denied the explosive claims, which accuse the companies of inflating stock prices using offshore tax havens. But an avalanche of selling by spooked investors has wiped more than \$100 billion from the group's market value since last week.

Most damning for Modi's government is Hindenburg's assertion that Adani's dodgy activities "seem to be enabled by virtually non-existent financial control". Adani has used his "immense power to pressure the government and regulators to pursue those who question him", the group said, with investors, journalists, citizens and even politicians "afraid to speak out for fear of reprisal".

## Good times king

The list of corrupt past Indian moguls is long, from fugitive jeweler-to-the-stars Nirav Modi to Vijay Mallya, the "king of good times" behind Kingfisher beer. Modi-no relation to the prime minister-fled India in 2018 after being accused of defrauding one of India's largest state-backed lenders out of \$1.8 billion.

Mallya left the country in 2016 owing more than \$1 billion after allegedly defaulting on loan payments to a state-owned bank and misusing the funds. Both saw their empires collapse under Modi, which helped raise hopes that along with giving regulators more powers he was serious about tackling wrongdoing. Modi's demonetization drive in 2016 — withdrawing almost 86 percent of banknotes-was catastrophically handled but the stated aim was to root out corruption and bring all transactions out of the shadows. "I would actually really compliment Prime Minister Modi," Tim Buckley, an Australian energy analyst who monitors India, told AFP. "Seven years ago, crony capitalism was endemic in India."

## Gujarat connection

But Adani's rise could be seen as telling another story, with the mogul's ascent mirroring the meteoric political career of Modi, a fellow native of Gujarat. Having linked hands while Modi ran the state, when he became prime minister their close cooperation went national, enabling Adani to expand into virtually every area of the economy.

That includes ports, coal and solar power, with critics saying Adani was able to out-compete rivals to win more and more business-with insufficient oversight-and take on ever more debt. But independent market analyst Ambareesh Baliga said that he believes Adani is an isolated case, pointing to India's strong economic growth under Modi. "As of now, I wouldn't paint India Inc with the same brush, because the report was basically on the Adani Group," Baliga told AFP.

"In India, corporate governance has improved a lot over the last decade or more. It's not the same as



**MUMBAI:** Art school teacher Sagar Kambli gives final touches to a painting of Indian businessman Gautam Adani (left) highlighting the ongoing crisis of the Adani group in Mumbai on February 3, 2023. — AFP

what it was two or three decades back." Nonetheless other specialists said authorities must still be seen to investigate Hindenburg's claims properly.

Capital markets regulator the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) did not respond to AFP's request for confirmation Friday on whether it was probing Hindenburg's allegations. Hindenburg's report said that SEBI had been investigating suspi-

cious Adani stakeholders based in Mauritius back in 2021 but had not taken any action more than a year later. "Are they asking questions, demanding disclosures? All that is extremely critical," said independent analyst Srinath Sridharan.

"This also will set the tongues wagging about the true independence of the regulator. Are they really independent? And do they have a mind of their own asking questions?" — AFP

## US jobs surge, tech concerns whiplash stocks

**WASHINGTON:** A surge in hiring in the United States renewed worries about aggressive interest rate hikes on Friday, bolstering the dollar and whiplashing Wall Street stocks. Meanwhile, disappointing earnings reports from Apple, Amazon, and Google owner Alphabet added to unease about the outlook for the crucial tech sector after torrid growth early in the pandemic.

The tech-heavy Nasdaq, which piled on more than three percent Thursday thanks to forecast-beating results from Facebook parent Meta, led major US indices lower, falling 1.6 percent. Shares of Amazon and Google parent Alphabet both tumbled Friday, while Apple shook off early weakness and finished higher. Data showing that after a five-month slowdown in hiring, the world's biggest economy added 517,000 jobs in January, may have dented hopes that the US Federal Reserve could slow interest rate hikes further or even reverse them later this year.

"The key takeaway from the report is that it has the market questioning its own conviction about the prospect of the Fed cutting rates before the end of the year," said market analyst Patrick O'Hare at Briefing.com. The dollar bounded higher after the data was released, and the yield on US government bonds climbed higher. But the jobs figures and other recent data also helped relieve concerns about a recession. In Europe, London's blue-chip FTSE 100 index on Friday soared to a record peak, lifted by the weak pound and record annual profits at oil major Shell.

"A Friday feeling of optimism has surged through markets, pushing the FTSE 100 to a record high after US jobs growth powered ahead, and investors shrugged off recession worries," said Hargreaves Lansdown analyst Susannah Streeter. Frankfurt stocks ended the day lower but Paris finished with a gain. In Asia, shares in Indian conglomerate Adani fell further.

Beleaguered Indian tycoon Gautam Adani on Friday denied that his rise to become Asia's richest man-a title he has lost in a phenomenal stock rout this week-was due to his connections with Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Combined market capitalization in Adani's listed units has collapsed by about \$120 billion-or half their previous value-since US short-seller Hindenburg Research, which makes



**ANNAPOLIS, US:** A person walks out of the Apple Store in Annapolis, Maryland. — AFP

money by betting on shares falling, released an explosive report last week.

It accused Adani of accounting fraud and artificially boosting its share prices, calling it a "brazen stock manipulation and accounting fraud scheme" and "the largest con in corporate history".

Critics say Adani's close relationship with Modi, who is also from Gujarat state, has helped him win business and avoid proper oversight. Adani on Friday called the allegations "baseless". — AFP

## GCC-China free trade agreement likely in 2023

**RIYADH:** Trade and investment relations between China and the six-member GCC economic bloc could soon receive a major boost, especially in the new energy sector, as the two sides edge closer to signing a free trade agreement, according to reports.

While a Gulf-China FTA has been on the table for nearly two decades, the deal received fresh impetus after China's new Foreign Minister Qin Gang this week called for finalizing it "as soon as possible" during a telephone conversation with Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan.

"It is important that the two sides further expand cooperation in areas such as economy and trade, energy, infrastructure, investment, finance and high-tech ... strengthen the China-GCC strategic partnership, and build a China-GCC free trade zone as soon as possible," he said.

Nasser Saidi, president of Nasser Saidi & Associates and former chief economist of the Dubai International Financial Centre, says an FTA could be signed as early as this year. "The China-GCC FTA negotiations have been ongoing since 2004. While it has taken a long time, agreements have been reached on most trade-related issues," says Saidi, who also previously served as Lebanon's minister of economy and industry and deputy governor of the country's central bank.

"This is the last mile for negotiations, and considering the GCC's plans to increase economic diversification, the agreement is likely to focus beyond just oil, and into trade and services including digital, tech sectors and both portfolio and direct investments."

Chinese President Xi Jinping's historic visit to Saudi Arabia in December heralds a "major shift" in the strategic relationship between China and the GCC. "President Xi's visit will give a strong impetus and I anticipate an initial FTA could be signed in 2023," says Saidi. Lombard Odier macro strategist Homin Lee says the deal could be signed soon. "We can expect a quick wrap-up of the negotiations as soon as both sides have the resolve to move forward on key issues that have been holding them back," he says.

Mr Saidi says trade between the GCC and China has been steadily rising and doubled between 2010 and 2021, with China accounting for about 16.7 per cent of the Gulf region's total trade in 2021.

China's imports from the UAE stood at \$45.41 billion, up about 59 per cent, while its exports to the Emirates also grew more than 23 per cent to \$53.86 billion, he said. The Asian nation has become the UAE's largest non-oil trading partner, while the Emirates is China's second-largest trading partner and the largest export market in the Arab region, Yiming told state news agency Wam in November. —Agencies

## Turkey's inflation slows for third month ahead of poll

**ISTANBUL:** Turkey's inflation rate slowed for a third successive month in January, official data showed Friday, after a record that threw the economy into chaos and imperiled President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's chances in May 14 polls.

Consumer prices grew at an annualized rate of 57.7 percent in January compared to 64.3 percent in December, according to the state statistics agency. It peaked at 85.5 percent in October-the highest rate of Erdogan's two-decade rule. The reading delivers a welcome boost for Erdogan heading into a close presidential and parliamentary election in which he will seek to extend his mercurial rule until 2028. Economists attribute the slowdown in part to a slide in the price of Turkey's energy imports.

Natural gas prices have fall back to early 2022 levels after soaring in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. But a part of the slowdown is also linked to a statistical anomaly that compares the past months' prices to a meteoric pace that followed a late 2021 currency collapse. The rate "will drop further this quarter, perhaps below 45 percent year-on-year in March, as the surge in prices following the 2021 currency crisis falls out of the annual price comparison," Capital Economics said in a report. —AFP

## US climate subsidies unsettle Europe's green industry plans

**HEIDE, Germany:** An empty field near Heide in a corner of Germany known more for its cabbage farming is the chosen site for a huge battery factory and potential pillar of the country's future green economy.

Manufacturer Northvolt chose the location in the northern region of Schleswig-Holstein primarily for the abundance of renewable energy produced by the wind whipping in off the North Sea. With that power the Swedish company hopes to build the "cleanest" battery factory in the world-which would eventually produce cells for one million electric vehicles a year-reducing Europe's reliance on Chinese manufacturers.

But massive green subsidies on offer in the United States-totalling \$370 billion (339 billion euros) — have unsettled the plans and sent European policymakers scrambling to find a response. The financial incentives for domestic industries, approved by Washington under the banner of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) in August, have put a question mark over the Northvolt project in Heide.

Combined with the surge in energy prices in Europe following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Northvolt was "at a point where we can give priority to expansion in the United States" with other projects delayed, CEO Peter Carlsson said in October.

## 'Committed'

In Heide, officials were "surprised" by Northvolt's comments but remain optimistic that the factory will be built. The potential for thousands of jobs and creating a new local industry was "very important" for the region, as well as Germany and Europe, Heide



**BRUSSELS:** European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen gives a press conference on presented proposals to support industry in face of energy crisis and US, Chinese subsidies after a college meeting at the EU headquarters in Brussels. —AFP

mayor Oliver Schmidt-Gutzat told AFP.

Germany's future as an "auto nation" depended on having a domestic industrial base capable of building "the most important components in terms of added value", including batteries, local IG Metall union leader Martin Bitter told AFP. "Europe has to react" to stop industries and jobs from drifting towards the United States, the union official said, calling for more state support.

For its part, Northvolt remained "committed to its expansion in Europe", a spokesman said.

The battery maker was not "stepping on the brake" but pushing forward with discussions on the factory, Bjoern Joergensen, a local government official representing the communities around Heide, told AFP. Were European officials to agree a response to the IRA, "then they (Northvolt) are more likely to be here", said mayor Schmidt-Gutzat. —AFP



Business

# Gulf Bank records net profit of KD 62 million in 2022

Net profit jumps 47% over 2021 • BoD recommends a cash dividend of 10 fils per share

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank KSCP (Bank) announced its financial results for the year ended 2022. The bank reported a net profit of KD 61.8 million, an increase of 47 percent compared to the year 2021.

Earnings per share were up 46 percent to 19 fils and the Board of Directors is recommending a distribution of a cash dividend of 10 fils per share, representing a 51 percent cash payout ratio, in addition to 5 percent bonus shares, for shareholders' approval at the annual general meeting to be held in March 2023.

Gulf Bank recorded an operating income of KD 181.1 million for the year 2022, an increase of 6 percent compared to the year 2021. The increase in the net profit was mainly driven by KD 9.9 million or a 7 percent increase in net interest income, a 3 percent or KD 1.1 million improvement in non-interest income, and a decline of 37 percent or KD 17.6 million in total provisions and impairments.

As for asset quality, the non-performing loans (NPL) ratio stood at 1.1 percent as of 31 December, 2022, compared to the prior year level of 0.9 percent. Additionally, the bank continues to have significant non-performing loans coverage ratio of 504 percent including total provisions and collaterals.

Total credit provisions ended 2022 at KD 313 million whereas IFRS 9 accounting requirements (ie, ECL or expected credit losses) were KD 190 million. So, the bank has very healthy excess provisioning level of KD 124 million, above and beyond what is required by the IFRS9 accounting requirements.

Compared to 2021, total assets increased by 5 percent to KD 6.9 billion, loans and advances to customers climbed by 7 percent to KD 4.9 billion, and shareholders' equity increased by 8



Jassim Mustafa Boodai

percent to reach KD 720 million. In addition, customer deposits reached KD 4.2 billion for the year ended 2022. Looking at the bank's regulatory capital ratios as of 31 December, 2022, Tier 1 ratio was 14.2 percent, that is 3.7 percent above the regulatory minimum of 10.5 percent and the Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR) was 16.4 percent, that is 3.9 percent above the regulatory minimum of 12.5 percent.

**Strategic momentum**

Commenting on the results, Jassim Mustafa Boodai, Gulf Bank's Chairman said: "Our results of 2022 demonstrate excellent strategic progress with Gulf Bank delivering strong net profit, sustained by the growth momentum in our core businesses. We made tremendous strides towards our key strategic priorities centered around digital transformation initiatives to improve the customer experience, accelerate development and further drive operational efficiencies."

**Strong performance**

Within this uncertain environment, Gulf Bank remained resilient, reflecting its strength, stability, and its support towards stakeholders. Boodai added: "Building on the positive momentum generated throughout 2022, I am

pleased to announce that Gulf Bank has delivered a strong financial performance, with an increase of 47 percent in net profit for the year end 2022 compared to last year. Our asset quality profile and balance sheet fundamentals position us very well to achieve our strategic aspirations. We enjoy a strong financial position that enables us to deliver sustainable returns for our shareholders while supporting the future growth of the Bank."

**Viability upgrade**

Gulf Bank continues to be well recognized in terms of its creditworthiness and financial strength internationally. During the year 2022, Fitch Ratings has upgraded Gulf Bank's Viability Rating to

**Sustainability**

Sustainability is an important and integral part of Gulf Bank's strategy. Boodai commented: "We believe that integrating sustainability and ESG considerations into our practices and activities will enable us to further strengthen our customer experience, offering sustainable products and services for the market, and positioning us as a key leader of sustainability initiatives amongst local and regional financial institutions. We remain committed towards our stakeholders, community, and the overall Kuwaiti economy."

**Recognition**

As a testament for its endeavors to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the

**Appreciation**

Boodai concluded his remarks by stating: "On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to thank our shareholders for their ongoing trust, and our employees for their commitment and dedication. I would also like to thank the Central Bank of Kuwait for their continuous support. Last but not least, I want to thank our customers for their loyalty, and reiterate our commitment to offering them the best banking experiences."

**Key positive indicators**

- 2022 net profit of KD 61.8 million, an increase of 47 percent over the year 2021.
- 2022 earnings per share were up 46 percent to reach 19 fils.

- Results of 2022 demonstrate excellent strategic progress with Gulf Bank delivering strong net profit, sustained by the growth momentum in our core businesses.
- Gulf Bank enjoys a strong financial position that enables us to deliver sustainable returns for our shareholders while supporting the future growth of the bank.
- We continued to make significant headway and progress towards our 2025 strategy, focusing on providing our customers with simple and innovative services.

'bbb-' from 'bb+' and affirmed the bank's Long-Term Issuer Default Rating at 'A' with a Stable Outlook.

In addition to Fitch Ratings' Viability Rating upgrade and affirmation of Gulf Bank's Long-Term Issuer Default Rating at 'A' with a 'Stable' Outlook, the Bank has a Long-term Foreign Currency Rating of 'A+' with a 'Stable' Outlook by Capital Intelligence Ratings and a Long-Term Deposits rating of 'A3' with a 'Stable' Outlook by Moody's Investor Services.

Future, Gulf Bank was recognized by several prestigious organizations. During 2022, Gulf Bank was awarded with "Most Rewarding Prepaid Card" for its Mastercard MOUJ Cashback Prepaid Card. Moreover, Gulf Bank was awarded for the best launch experience in the Middle East and North Africa for the launch of the integrated and innovative "Click to Pay" service. Both awards acknowledge Gulf Bank's leadership in providing innovative services and solutions to its customers.

- 10 fils proposed cash dividends and 5 percent bonus shares.
- Loans and advances to customers climbed by 7 percent to reach KD 4.9 billion.
- Non-performing loan ratio for the year end 2022 was 1.1 percent, with a strong non-performance loan coverage ratio of 504 percent.
- Capital ratios as of 31 December 2022, Tier 1 ratio was 14.2 percent and Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR) was 16.4 percent.

Net Profit for Year 2022

62  
Million KD



Cash Dividend Per Share<sup>(1)</sup>

10 Fils

Bonus Shares<sup>(1)</sup>

5%

NPL Ratio

1.1%

Capital Adequacy Ratio

16.4%



<sup>(1)</sup> 2022 proposed cash dividends and bonus shares are subject to Annual General Meeting shareholders approval for the year 2022. Numbers as on or for the year 2022.



## Business

# Pakistan to agree to tough IMF bailout conditions amid crisis

## Our economic challenge is unimaginable: Sharif

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said Friday the government would have to agree to IMF bailout conditions that are "beyond imagination", as it battles a spiraling economic crisis.

An International Monetary Fund (IMF) delegation landed in Pakistan on Tuesday for last-ditch talks to revive vital financial aid that has stalled for months. The government has held out against tax rises and subsidy slashing demanded by the IMF, fearful of backlash ahead of elections due in October.

"I will not go into the details but will only say that our economic challenge is unimaginable. The conditions we will have to agree to with the IMF are beyond imagination. But we will have to agree with the conditions," Sharif said in televised comments. Pakistan's economy is in dire straits, stricken by a balance of payments crisis as it attempts to service high levels of external debt, amid political chaos and deteriorating security.

Foreign exchange reserves dropped again this week to \$3.1 billion, which analysts said would be enough to cover less than three weeks of imports, while the rupee is at a record low against the US dollar. The world's fifth-biggest population 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.

Data on Wednesday showed year-on-year inflation had risen to a 48-year high, leaving Pakistanis struggling to afford basic food items. "Poor people will not be able to survive," said Samina Bhatti as she shopped at a market in Islamabad.

"Petrol is so expensive, what will they do, will

they start travelling on foot? A daily wage earner can't afford the rent on his home," she said.

### Bowing to pressure

Years of financial mismanagement and political instability have damaged Pakistan's economy, worsened by a global energy crisis and devastating floods that submerged a third of the country. With the prospect of national bankruptcy looming, Islamabad in recent weeks began to bow to pressure prompting the IMF's last-minute visit. 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, and hiked petrol prices by 16 percent.

But the IMF wants further hikes to artificially cheap petrol, electricity and gas prices, designed to help low-income families, and the withdrawal of tax exemptions for the export sector and a boost to the pitifully low tax base. "Accepting IMF conditions will definitely increase prices, but Pakistan has no other choice," analyst Abid Hasan told AFP. "Otherwise, there is a fear of a situation like Sri Lanka and Lebanon." Rejecting conditions and pushing Pakistan to the brink would have "political consequences" for the ruling parties, but so will agreeing to IMF measures raising the cost of living, he said.

Pakistan had sketched out a \$6.5 billion dollar loan package with the global lender, which has so far paid out roughly \$4 billion.

### Political chaos

The next installment on the negotiating table is unlikely to induce an economic turnaround on its



KARACHI: People buy rice at a market on Feb 3, 2023. — AFP

own. However, friendly nations Islamabad usually approaches for help have indicated they may open their books once the IMF is on board. The tumbling economy mirrors Pakistan'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-confi-

dence 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 program 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. —AFP

## Europe in crossfire of US-China economic rivalry

BRUSSELS: The economic confrontation between the United States and China has put Europe in the crossfire, with Washington's plan to boost green industries threatening to cause collateral damage to a key ally. The United States has adopted the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), which contains \$370 billion in sweeping investments, subsidies and tax cuts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, making it the largest-ever US program to combat climate change.

But some of its provisions have been criticized by European Union officials as discriminatory against European carmakers, with some saying it smacks of protectionism. French Economy Minister Bruno Le Maire and his German counterpart Robert Habeck travel to Washington to meet Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen on Tuesday and try to resolve the impasse.

EU leaders will hold a summit later in the week that aims to begin crafting a response to the US measures. The IRA aims to bolster green industries that will be key to the future economy, such as the manufacturing of batteries and solar panels.

US firms will be able to receive subsidies similar to those their Chinese rivals receive, on the condition that they manufacture domestically. "One of the key objectives of the IRA is to exclude Chinese suppliers from clean energy supply chains," said Tobias Gehrke, a fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations.

He said the priority was reducing US dependence on Chinese imports. China dominates the electric vehicle sector, with 78 percent of the global production of battery cells and three-quarters of the big plants to manufacture the lithium-ion batteries they use, according to a study by the Washington-based Brookings Institution.

### 'An afterthought'

The IRA has sent chills down the spines of European leaders, who fear the generous support will encourage firms to shift production to the United States. The EU has called on the United States to provide European firms exemptions-like those granted to trade bloc partners Canada and Mexico.

However, attempts to find a resolution have so far failed to bear fruit. Gehrke said Washington was thinking about manufacturing jobs and reducing dependence upon Chinese imports first and foremost, and the impact on its European, Japanese and South Korean allies was more of an "afterthought".

"I don't think America wants to punish Europe ... I don't think they thought about Europe at all," he said. Cecilia Malmstrom, the EU's former trade commissioner and now a senior fellow at the Peterson Institute think tank in Washington, agreed. "Europe has become a bit of collateral damage in this" effort to reduce dependence on China, she said. "I do not think it was intentional to target the Europeans," she added. Rather, it is a product of the trade war with China started during Donald Trump's presidency. First, Trump imposed punitive customs taxes on China in 2018, which President Joe Biden has maintained-along with Washington's combative tone towards Beijing. —AFP

## No power, no water: S Africans fume at cascading crisis

JOHANNESBURG: Already struggling without electricity for hours a day, many South Africans are now having to do also without water, as power outages batter the supply system. A power failure at a pump station feeding reservoirs and water towers caused taps to run dry in parts of Johannesburg and Pretoria, provincial utility Rand Water said this week.

This further aggravated residents who for months have had to plan mundane activities such as cooking and do laundry based on a daily blackout schedule. Thomas Mabasa, a rail worker, said he had taken to showering at work-a luxury not afforded to his children. "(They) have to go to school without bathing," the 43-year-old said. He was among frustrated locals who took to the streets in Soshanguve, a township north of the capital, this week to protest the situation. Demonstrators disrupted traffic, blocking roads with stones and waste. "Sometimes we wait to see if the water will come back in the middle of the night to wake the kids up so they can shower before it runs out again," Mabasa said, as tyres burned on the street behind him.

### Theft and vandalism

Africa's most industrialized economy has been crippled by record power cuts in the past year, as troubles at debt-laden state energy firm Eskom worsened. The utility provides about 90 percent of the country's electricity. But for years it has failed to



JOHANNESBURG: Members of #StandUpSA and #NotInMyName movement shut down a mock electricity switch lever during their march to Eskom Megawatt Park, the headquarters of Eskom power utility company, in Johannesburg. —AFP

keep pace with demand as it struggles to maintain its ageing coal-powered infrastructure.

Water and sanitation ministry spokeswoman, Wisane Mavasa said the government was working with water utilities "to improve the situation". "(The) energy crisis is impacting the water infrastructure," she said. One problem is that machinery is constantly being restarted because of power cuts, and this accelerates breakdowns, the government said.

Pump stations and water-treatment, which need a steady flow of power to work properly, have been badly impacted, it said. Criminality has also contributed to the crisis, with Johannesburg's municipality saying hundreds of water tanks were stolen

or vandalized in 2022.

Hospitals and schools have not been spared. Kalafong hospital in Pretoria, endured two days of no water at the weekend. Journalism student Ethel Malatji, 21, said her and colleagues at the Tshwane University of Technology in Pretoria were unable to cook, clean or bathe. "We don't even have water to drink," she said. Her studies have also been disrupted by protesters burning tires on a road she crosses to access part of the campus, she said. The problems have especially hit Johannesburg's Gauteng province, but not exclusively. Cape Town has had to close some of its beaches due to a sewage spill following electrical faults at some of its sewer stations. —AFP



LONDON: An employee stands in an empty train departure hall at Saint Pancras train station in London on February 3, 2023. — AFP

## Disruption across England as train drivers strike

LONDON: Railway commuters across England faced travel misery on Friday as train drivers staged their second stoppage over pay this week, the latest in a wave of UK industrial action. Millions of people were forced to make alternative travel plans or work from home as the majority of train companies on the country's fragmented network said they were running no services.

Central London railway stations such as Euston were nearly deserted, with rail hubs elsewhere in England also emptied. Following a strike on Wednesday, members of ASLEF and the Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT) walked out again in a long-running dispute over pay and conditions.

Wednesday was the biggest single day of UK industrial action in more than a decade, as half a million workers, including teachers and Border

Force staff, also staged strikes. Public-sector staff across the UK economy are at loggerheads with the government as they demand big pay rises to cope with decades-high inflation—currently running at nearly 11 percent—and a resulting cost-of-living crisis.

Tens of thousands of nurses who began unprecedented strikes in December will stage another stoppage on Monday. Simon Weller, of the ASLEF union representing train drivers, said the months-old rail dispute was going "backwards" due to a lack of progress in ongoing talks and shortcomings in the latest pay offer. "We are being asked to give up collective bargaining and effectively agree to a no-strike deal," he added.

"Obviously it was going to be rejected—it was destined to fail."

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has insisted the UK, which is predicted to enter recession this year, cannot afford double-digit salary increases, as he vows to halve inflation this year. "We've got to stick to the path," he told broadcaster TalkTV, in an interview to mark the end of his first 100 days in power.

Asked for his message to the public, Sunak said: "It's have hope. Have hope because I can make it better, and I will make it better." —AFP

## China could boost global growth but doubts remain: IMF

BEIJING: China's economy is expected to contribute a quarter of global growth this year, the International Monetary Fund said Friday, although uncertainty around COVID-19 and the property sector could stifle momentum. After almost three years of stringent health restrictions, Beijing in December abruptly ended the zero-COVID policy that had battered the economy and provoked widespread protests.

The Asian giant posted growth of just three percent in 2022, hammered by stringent lockdowns and a deepening crisis in the key property sector. "China's economy is set to rebound this year as mobility and activity pick up after the lifting of pandemic restrictions, providing a boost to the global economy," the IMF said in an annual assessment of the Chinese economy.

"That's good news for China and the world as the Chinese economy is now expected to contribute a quarter of global growth this year," it said. The IMF on Monday revised its 2023 growth forecast for China up to 5.2 percent, after upgrading its global growth forecast partially based on the country's reopening. Authorities in China have said the soaring virus case numbers that accompanied the reopening have now passed their peak, with a travel surge prompted by the biggest Lunar New Year holiday in years offering a much-needed boost to business. However, Friday's assessment also warned of "significant economic challenges" ahead. "The contraction in real estate remains a major headwind, and there is still some uncertainty around the evolution of the virus," it said.

The property sector, which along with construction accounts for more than a quarter of China's GDP, has been hit hard since Beijing started cracking down on excessive borrowing and rampant speculation in 2020. —AFP



Business

# EU, G7, Australia reach deal on price caps for Russian fuel

## Move an international push to limit Putin's war chest

BRUSSELS: European Union member states, the Group of Seven industrialized countries and Australia said Friday that they have reached an agreement on price caps for Russian petroleum products.

The move is the latest part of an international push to limit Russian President Vladimir Putin's war chest for his assault on Ukraine by targeting his key exports. The caps involve two price levels, \$100 per barrel for more expensive fuel like diesel and \$45 on lower-quality products such as fuel oil, according to officials. Sweden, which holds the rotating EU presidency, called it an "important agreement as part of the continued response by EU and partners to the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine."

The EU in December imposed an embargo on Russian crude oil coming in by sea and-together with its G7 partners-set a \$60-per-barrel cap for exports around the world. The second embargo, on Russian fuel, is set to come into force on Sunday or soon after. It targets Russian refined oil products such as petrol, diesel and heating fuel, arriving on ships. At the same time, the EU and the G7 group of wealthy democracies have also agreed to impose a price cap on Russian shipments of those products to global markets.

The G7 and Australia statement added that the price cap coalition will undertake a review of the crude oil cap in March. The price caps on those transported products work by establishing a ceiling for the cost of fuel that can be transported on ships. The price caps agreed were in line with a proposal from the European Commission, the EU's executive arm. It had to balance tough demands

from sanction hawks, such as Poland and Baltic nations, against the need to ensure the West does not cut off Russian supplies to world markets entirely, which would send global prices soaring.

EU diplomats called the agreed price levels "well-balanced" and hitting the goal to "reduce Russia's income while guaranteeing access for third countries." In a separate statement, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen applauded the latest decision and said it built on earlier efforts. "The caps we have just set will now serve a critical role in our global coalition's work... we are forcing Putin to choose between funding his brutal war or proping up his struggling economy," she added.

### Kremlin warns of market 'imbalance'

The Kremlin lashed out at the EU ahead of the embargo coming into force, insisting it will "lead to a further imbalance of the international energy markets". "We are taking measures to hedge our interests against the risks associated," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

Moscow's war in Ukraine has provided a harsh wake-up call for the EU, which for years had been reliant on cheap fossil fuels from Russia to power its industries. Brussels says the embargo on crude oil has seen the bloc cut out some 90 percent of Russian imports, after exceptions were granted for supplies flowing by pipeline to landlocked countries like Hungary. European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen on Thursday estimated during a visit to Kyiv that the existing price cap on Russian oil was already



KYIV: This picture shows the Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky (center) attending a work session during an EU-Ukraine summit in Kyiv. — AFP

costing Moscow around 160 million euros (\$175 million) every day. On Friday, she said the bloc was readying a new round of sanctions against Russia-its 10th package since the war started a year ago. "We must continue to deprive Russia of the means to wage war against

Ukraine," she said, also highlighting the EU's import ban on Russian petroleum products from Sunday.

"With the G7 we are putting price caps on these products, cutting Russia's revenue while ensuring stable global energy markets," she said. — AFP

## Warba profits jump 21% to KD 19.3m in 2022

KUWAIT: Warba Bank announced its annual financial results for the year ending on December 31, 2022, the results showed that the bank achieved net profits of KD 19.3 million, equivalent to 7.38 fils earnings per share, compared to net profits of KD 15.9 million, equivalent to 6.02 fils earnings per share, with a growth rate of 21 percent, while the financing revenue amounted to KD 129.3 million, growing 35.5 percent compared to the same period in the year 2021, which amounted to KD 95.4 million.

The financing portfolio grew by 26.5 percent reaching KD 3.13 billion, while the total assets of the bank increased reaching KD 4.2 billion, with an increase of KD 621 million by 17.3 percent, compared to the previous year, which amounted to KD 3.58 billion and the depositors accounts increased reaching KD 2.7 billion, with an increase of KD 386 million in the year 2022, with a growth rate of 16.8 percent compared to the year 2021. In addition, the capital adequacy ratio reached 16.94 percent, exceeding the minimum required by the regulatory authorities, the ratio that proves the stability of the financial position of "Warba".

Commenting on the Bank's annual financial results, Hamad Musaed Al-Sayer, Chairman of Warba Bank, indicated that the financial results "Warba" achieved during the year 2022 confirms the success of the Bank's strategy and the strength of its financial and operational performance. He highlighted the growth in all the basic indicators, the maintenance of remarkable rates with regard to capitalization, maximizing profitability, return on assets, return on equity, cost optimization, improvement of asset quality indicators, and rates of covering bad debts from provisions. These are the matters that led to the Board of Directors' proposed to distribute cash dividends for the year 2022 at the rate of 3 percent and bonus shares at the rate of 3 percent as well to the shareholders.

He added: "We achieved strong financial results despite the challenges in the macroeconomic environment, in light of rising levels of inflation, slowdown in economic activity and uncertainties of probable recession. Our strong results are driven by our customer-focused approach, quality products and services excellence, as well as diversification and innovation to achieve sustainable profits."

### Strategic efficiency

He pointed out that the strategy of sustainable profits is achieving its desired goals the matter that is demonstrated by the reported sustainable and balanced growth, emphasizing on moving forward with implementing the strategy of focusing on basic banking core activities, in parallel with strengthening digital transformation efforts, in all banking and financing services, enhancing the customer experience, and providing them with easy and safe access to financial services and products, with a focus on accelerating the pace of innovation in digital banking solutions that meet the aspirations of customers.

He added, "The operating environment continued during the year 2022 to gain more momentum, in light of the continued recovery in the pace of commercial activity, the improvement in the pace of consumer spending, and the increase in oil production, which coincided with the rise in prices. This strengthened the public financial situation and gave optimism about an improvement in the pace of capital spending during the coming period. He explained that in addition to the strong financial performance achieved during the year 2022, the bank also continued to fulfill its obligations towards contributing to the promotion of sustainable development.

Al-Sayer stated that "Warba" is a fundamental pillar in supporting the national economy and acceleration of the development plan in Kuwait through its pioneering role in providing a wide range of financing solutions. It also plays the role of the lead arranger of major financing deals for institutions and governments.

He emphasized on the continuation of working from a position of strength from which the bank relies on a prudent strategy, financial stability and capabilities

that we possess to provide innovative products and insightful advice that our customers rely on, and our diversified business model continues to create long-term added value for our customers, our communities and our shareholders.

He indicated that Warba Bank presents a milestone in community services affairs that has been proven by the bank commitment and leadership in social responsibility, by participating in community initiatives in various fields such as health, education, the environment, disabled support, and other community related initiatives.



He stated that "Warba" seeks to expand its role in the small and medium enterprises sector and support youth entrepreneurs being substantial element of sustainability, and one of the most prominent pillars of "Warba" strategy during the coming period, which will enhance its leadership position in the market.

Al-Sayer appreciated the trust of shareholders and customers and the support of the Board of Directors, and praised the role of the regulatory authorities, and the efforts of employees, partners and stakeholders, stressing the keenness to continue efforts to maintain the leadership of "Warba" in light of the competition between banks. From his side, the Chief Executive Officer of Warba Bank, Shaheen Hamad Al-Ghanem, said that Warba Bank achieved strong financial results in the year 2022, and continued to achieve strong

operational performance across all major business sectors, benefiting from the improvement in the macroeconomic environment. He explained that the bank's strategy for sustainable growth tends to focus heavily on environmental governance and following the latest and best international standards, in addition to launching initiatives that contribute to advancing the transition towards a sustainable economy, as well as continuing to launch community initiatives in various health and educational fields.

Al-Ghanem stated that the Bank witnessed remarkable growth in deposits and the financing portfolio, which supported the improvement in margin levels. The bank also continued to report strong growth in its main business sectors, which included Islamic banking services and asset and wealth management.

He stated that Warba Bank was able to maintain a good level of deposit composition, as the good contribution from current and savings account deposits of the total deposits at the end of the year 2022, and the percentage of customer deposits to the total financing has reached 71 percent reflecting the quality composition of funding components and strength of liquidity levels.

He continued, saying that: "The Non-Performing Loan ratio improved to reach 1.07 percent (according to the calculation principles of the Central Bank of Kuwait) for the year 2022 compared to 1.08 percent as in 2021, and the Bank's provisions coverage ratio reached 275 percent at the end of the year 2022 compared to 244 percent for the year 2021.

Al-Ghanem clarified that the main reason for the increase in fee and commission revenues by KD 1.54 million was due to the increase in the volume of trade finance transactions related to the main banking activities and the expansion of the asset and wealth management activities.

Al-Ghanem added; that the bank is executing its continuous growth strategy, investing in digital technologies with the aim to achieve the best returns for shareholders, stressing the bank's tireless efforts to focus on designing innovative products for its valued

customers and constantly expanding its digital offerings, which were recently crowned with many prestigious awards in the category of best digital savings application - Hassala - in Kuwait for the year 2022 from the International Finance Magazine, in appreciation of the Bank's digital efforts and the distinguished services and digital products it provides and advanced payment solutions throughout the year.

Al-Ghanem explained that the bank will continue to strive towards achieving leadership, taking extra miles in its excellence journey and boosting its growth rates during the coming period capitalizing on encouraging our professional calibers, improving the competitive advantages of our products and developing technological services to meet the needs and expectations of all customers' segments, and attract new segments in order to increase its market share.

He added that the bank's human resources are considered the real wealth and the secret behind the bank's achievements and consecutive successes, stressing the keenness of Warba Bank's management to develop these resources and invest in them by all possible means in accordance with the latest international standards, including the executive team of experts with focus on the fundamentals of the banking industry including customer service quality, investment in digital banking services, and human resources, with particular focus on Kuwaiti manpower.

Al-Ghanem pointed out that Warba Bank is considered one of the highest private institutions in employing national manpower, which is currently close to 81 percent on the other hand the female employees percentage has reached more than 14 percent of the bank's total workforce.

It is worth mentioning that Warba Bank is one of the banks that achieved great successes in a short period, as it occupied a leading position in the field of Islamic digital banking services for individuals, and it is also considered one of the largest local banks in terms of number of shareholders, this is considered one of the most important factors that makes the bank close to all members of the society.

**WARBA BANK**

## Financial Results for 2022

GROWTH IN NET PROFIT

21%

3%

Bonus Shares

3%

Cash Dividends

Warba Bank Board of Directors recommendation to distribute dividends to shareholders for the financial year ended 31 December 2022.

	31/12/2022	31/12/2021	Growth rate
Earnings Per Share	<b>7.38</b> Fils	6.02 Fils	<b>%22.59</b>
Total Assets	<b>4.20</b> Billion KD	3.58 Billion KD	<b>%17.34</b>
Financing Receivables	<b>3.13</b> Billion KD	2.47 Billion KD	<b>%26.53</b>

19.29

Million KD

31/12/2022    31/12/2021

Moody's Baa2    Fitch Ratings A



## Lifestyle | Features

## THE YEAR OF BEYONCE? MUSIC'S ELITE HEAD TO THE GRAMMYS

The brightest stars in pop music vie for the industry's top awards at the Grammys in Los Angeles on Sunday (Pacific Standard Time), with a Beyonce-Adele rematch set to take center stage. Kendrick Lamar, Harry Styles and Taylor Swift are also among the frontrunners at the gala primed to be the most star-studded in recent memory.

The performance-heavy ceremony will include songs from major contenders Styles, Bad Bunny, Lizzo and Mary J. Blige at the 65th annual show, hosted once again by comedian Trevor Noah. Beyonce leads the pack with nine chances at Grammy gold, followed by rapper Lamar with eight. Adele and fellow balladeer Brandi Carlile scored seven nods each. Music's biggest night follows a year of blockbuster albums, including Beyonce's "Renaissance" - a pulsating collecting of club tracks - and Adele's introspective ode to the ugly cry, "30".



Beyonce is shown in this file photo taken on August 28, 2016. The brightest stars in pop music will vie for the industry's top awards at the Grammys in Los Angeles on February 5, 2023, with a Beyonce-Adele rematch set to take center stage. — AFP photos

Those records will face off in the most prestigious categories, six years after the British artist shut out Queen Bey's culture-shaking "Lemonade." Adele's sweep in 2017 left both women in tears, with the crooner calling Beyonce her "idol" and telling the audience her fellow megastar's paradigm-shifting record should have won. That contest fueled perennial criticism that the Academy consistently fails to pay Black artists their due. This year, Billboard predicts the Beyhive will rejoice over a best album win for their Queen, while the industry tracker thinks Adele has the top shot at best record - the award for overall performance of a song - for her single "Easy On Me".

But as the shock upsets of Grammys past prove, it's really anyone's game. Either way, with this year's new nominations, Beyonce continues to forge a history-making path: she moved into a tie with her husband, Jay-Z, as the most nominat-

ed artists ever with 88 each. Already the woman with the most Grammys, Beyonce could overtake classical conductor Georg Solti for the most wins by any artist, with four victories on Sunday; she's tied for second place with music power player Quincy Jones.

Grammy categories.

Styles, Lizzo and Doja Cat all figure among the top nominees, while pop juggernaut Swift could finally win the Song of the Year prize that has evaded her for years. The superstar-who has been making good on a vow to re-record her first six

Best New Artist frontrunners - Olivia Rodrigo, Megan Thee Stallion and Billie Eilish - Sunday's race is wide open. The category has grown increasingly eclectic and reflective of the internet age's impact on popular music, and many of the nominees including Brazil's Anitta, Eurovision

nering a handful of nominations. After wowing audiences with a show-stopping performance at the 2019 Grammys, the big-voiced Carlile will take the stage once more as she competes in the top categories as well as for roots and Americana honors. Asked on a recent red carpet

## KEY NOMINEES FOR THE 2023 GRAMMY AWARDS

Here is a list of nominees in the major categories for the 65th annual Grammy Awards, which will be handed out on Sunday in Los Angeles. Beyonce leads all contenders with nine nominations, followed by rapper Kendrick Lamar with eight, and pop diva Adele and balladeer Brandi Carlile tied at seven each.

## Album of the Year

"Voyage," ABBA  
"30," Adele  
"Un Verano Sin Ti," Bad Bunny  
"Renaissance," Beyonce  
"Good Morning Gorgeous (Deluxe)," Mary J. Blige  
"In These Silent Days," Brandi Carlile  
"Music of the Spheres," Coldplay  
"Mr. Morale & the Big Steppers," Kendrick Lamar  
"Special," Lizzo  
"Harry's House," Harry Styles

## Record of the Year, recognizing overall performance on a song

"Don't Shut Me Down," ABBA  
"Easy On Me," Adele  
"Break My Soul," Beyonce  
"Good Morning Gorgeous," Mary J. Blige  
"You and Me on the Rock," Brandi Carlile featuring Lucius  
"Woman," Doja Cat  
"Bad Habit," Steve Lacy  
"The Heart Part 5," Kendrick Lamar  
"About Damn Time," Lizzo  
"As It Was," Harry Styles

## Song of the Year, recognizing songwriting

"abcdefu" - Sara Davis, Gayle & Dave

Pittenger, songwriters (Gayle)  
"About Damn Time"-Lizzo, Eric Frederic, Blake Slatkin & Theron Makiel Thomas, songwriters (Lizzo)  
"All Too Well" (10 Minute Version) (The Short Film) - Liz Rose & Taylor Swift, songwriters (Taylor Swift)  
"As It Was" - Tyler Johnson, Kid Harpoon & Harry Styles, songwriters (Harry Styles)  
"Bad Habit" - Matthew Castellanos, Brittany Foushee, Diana Gordon, John Carroll Kirby & Steve Lacy, songwriters (Steve Lacy)  
"Break My Soul" - Beyonce, S. Carter, Terius "The-Dream" Gesteelde-Diamant & Christopher A. Stewart, songwriters (Beyonce)

"Easy On Me" - Adele Adkins & Greg Kurstin, songwriters (Adele)  
"God Did" - Tarik Azzouz, E. Blackmon, Khaled Khaled, F. LeBlanc, Shawn Carter, John Stephens, Dwayne Carter, William Roberts & Nicholas Warwar, songwriters (DJ Khaled Featuring Rick Ross, Lil Wayne, Jay-Z, John Legend & Fridayy)  
"The Heart Part 5" - Jake Kosich, Johnny Kosich, Kendrick Lamar & Matt Schaeffer, songwriters (Kendrick Lamar)  
"Just Like That" - Bonnie Raitt, songwriter (Bonnie Raitt)

## Best New Artist

Anitta  
Omar Apollo  
DOMI & JD Beck  
Samara Joy  
Latto  
Maneskin  
Muni Long

Tobe Nwigwe  
Molly Tuttle  
Wet Leg

## Best Music Video

"Easy on Me," Adele  
"Yet to Come," BTS  
"Woman," Doja Cat  
"The Heart Part 5," Kendrick Lamar  
"As It Was," Harry Styles  
"All Too Well (The Short Film)," Taylor Swift



Pop diva Adele is nominated for seven Grammy awards. She is shown in this file photo at the BRIT Awards 2022 in London.

## Best Rap Album

"God Did," DJ Khaled  
"I Never Liked You," Future  
"Come Home The Kids Miss You," Jack Harlow  
"Mr. Morale & the Big Steppers," Kendrick Lamar  
"It's Almost Dry," Pusha T

## Best Rock Album

"Dropout Boogie," The Black Keys

"The Boy Named Li," Elvis Costello & The Imposters  
"Crawler," Idles  
"Mainstream Sellout," Machine Gun Kelly  
"Patient Number 9," Ozzy Osbourne  
"Lucifer on the Sofa," Spoon

## Best Pop Vocal Album

"Voyage," ABBA  
"30," Adele  
"Music of the Spheres," Coldplay  
"Special," Lizzo  
"Harry's House," Harry Styles

## Best Dance / Electronic Album

"Renaissance," Beyonce  
"Fragments," Bonobo  
"Diplo," Diplo  
"The Last Goodbye," Odesza  
"Surrender," Rufus du Sol

## Best Global Music Album

"Shuruaat" - Berklee Indian Ensemble  
"Love, Damini" - Burna Boy  
"Queen Of Sheba" - Angélique Kidjo & Ibrahim Maalouf  
"Between Us... (Live)" - Anoushka Shankar, Metropole Orkest & Jules Buckley Featuring Manu Delago  
"Sakura" - Masa Takumi

## Artists with Most Nominations

Beyonce - 9  
Kendrick Lamar - 8  
Adele - 7  
Brandi Carlile - 7  
Harry Styles - 6  
Mary J. Blige - 6  
DJ Khaled - 6  
Future - 6

— AFP

## Swift top songwriter?

Bad Bunny, indisputably the world's biggest commercial artist, has three Grammy chances off his major drop "Un Verano Sin Ti," which is in the running for Album of the Year. It's the first time an all Spanish-language album has a chance at that coveted award, and it's the first time the Puerto Rican reggaeton megastar has landed a solo nomination in the major

albums to gain control of her rights to them-has a chance at the prestigious award celebrating songwriters for her 10-minute version of "All Too Well". The original song came out in 2012 on Swift's album "Red," but qualified for inclusion because the expanded version contained more than 50 percent new material.

## TikTok newbies

After several Grammy years with clear

rockers Maneskin and rapper Latto have all found viral fame on TikTok. South Korea's boy band sensation BTS - who last year declared they were taking a hiatus - meanwhile is hoping for a first elusive Grammy.

The Academy - comprised of music-makers including artists, composers and engineers - also shortlisted a coterie of the industry's enduring stars, with Bonnie Raitt, Willie Nelson and ABBA each gar-

about her slate of nominations, Carlile said she was "ecstatic." "Those kinds of accolades are life-affirming," she told AFP. "Especially because the Grammys is my peers, it means other musicians think I did a good job this year. 'That's why it feels so good.'" — AFP

## Fashion designer Paco Rabanne dies at 88

Spanish fashion designer Paco Rabanne, known for his eccentric clothing designs and for founding one of the world's best-known fragrance brands, died on Friday at the age of 88. Rabanne's death was confirmed to AFP by the parent company of his brand, who said he had "marked generations with his radical vision of fashion and his legacy will live on".



In this file photo taken on January 20, 1999, Spanish Designer Paco Rabanne checks a dress before his 1999 Spring/Summer haute-couture collection, in Paris. — AFP

Nicknamed "Wacko Paco" in the 1960s for his often-unwearable designs, Spain's Paco Rabanne became best-known in later years for his globally popular line of fragrances as well as his eccentric beliefs. Dismissed as "the metal worker" by Coco Chanel, his influence nonetheless carried through many generations and he famously dressed global superstar Lady Gaga in outfits made entirely of paper for her 2011 appearance at the MTV Europe Music Awards.

He also designed Jane Fonda's iconic costume for 1968 sci-fi film "Barbarella", and dresses for French icons Brigitte

Bardot and Françoise Hardy. Rabanne started out as a co-creator of the 1960s space-age movement in fashion alongside designers such as Pierre Cardin, who incorporated the era's giddy excitement around the future and technological advancements into their clothes.

His 1966 show brought immediate fame and notoriety when he stunned the audience with "12 Unwearable Dresses", his models dancing barefoot down the catwalk in outfits made of sharp metal and other unlikely materials. "I have always had the impression of being a time accelerator," he wrote in typically enigmatic style for a retrospective at Antwerp's fashion museum MoMu in 2016. "Of going as far as is reasonable for one's time and not indulge in the morbid pleasure of the known things, which I view as decay."

## Fleeing Franco

Francisco Rabaneda-Cuervo was born in 1934 in Spain's Basque region, near the city of San Sebastian, where his mother was a seamstress for the designer Cristobal Balenciaga and his father was an army general. Rabanne's life was uprooted by the Spanish Civil War when the army of dictator Francisco Franco turned on his father, a commander of the Guernica garrison, and gunned him down in 1936.

In 1939 his family fled to France and Rabanne went on to study at the Beaux-Arts university in Paris, graduating with a diploma in architecture. He began his fashion career creating accessories - jewellery, ties, buttons - that caught the attention of Christian Dior, Yves Saint-Laurent and Pierre Cardin. After the media furor around his own line, Rabanne signed a deal in 1968 that brought him under the ownership of the Barcelona-based Puig family, heavyweights in the fashion and fragrance industry. It marked his entry into perfumes that would see his name become synonymous with cologne, ultimately even eclipsing his fame as a designer. Rabanne had a penchant for mysticism. He claimed to have had multiple lives, to have been some 78,000 years old and to have been visited by aliens. — AFP

Shah Rukh Khan is Bollywood's most popular star, whose silver-screen repertoire of dance, romance and shoot-em-up heroics made him the cinematic avatar of a changing India. "King Khan" - whose moniker reflects decades of box office dominance - is a rare unifying figure across India's multiple geographic, linguistic and religious fault lines. His latest film "Pathaan" was an event akin to a national celebration, shrugging off boycott calls by Hindu hardliners and packing out theatres with boisterous crowds.

Fans regularly make the pilgrimage to the gates of his Mumbai mansion and wait through the day to catch a brief glimpse of a man who basks in his status as a public icon. "I am very happy being a star. I can never be tired of it," Khan told AFP in a 2013 interview. "I love the amount of people that love me, the crowds that collect, the controversies, the responsibilities I have, the success and even the failure. It's an exciting life."

Khan was born to a Muslim family in New Delhi and did not hail from an established acting dynasty. His early 1980s TV roles showcased his natural charisma but it took him several years to break onto the big screen, and he risked being typecast as a villain after his riveting performance as an obsessed stalker in "Darr" (Fear). But the biggest Indian blockbuster of 1995 catapulted him to international stardom and resonated with the profound social changes underway in his country. "Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge" (The Big-Hearted will Take the Bride) saw Khan play a Londoner who falls in love with another diaspora Indian while sightseeing in Europe.

They decide to wed - against the wishes of her father, who has promised her in marriage to another man back in India. It was released in a decade when the country's economy and its urban middle class were liberalizing, with young men and women enjoying a lifestyle more affluent than their parents while chafing against their rules. The film remains one of the most popular in the Bollywood canon, and it has screened at one Mumbai cinema every day - except for a Covid interruption - for the 27 years since its release.

## Shah Rukh Khan: Indian heartthrob, King of Bollywood



Bollywood actor Shah Rukh Khan gestures during a media event of his Hindi-language film 'Pathaan' in Mumbai on January 30, 2023. — AFP

## 'Feelgood India'

Film critic Namrata Joshi wrote that Khan spearheaded a new kind of "romantic family hero" in Indian cinema, displacing the angry young man archetypes that matched the angst-ridden national mood of earlier decades. "Many see SRK embodying... the spirit of post-liberalization, feelgood, ambitious, assertive India," she said. Along the way, Khan's self-deprecating humor and striking good looks cemented his place as India's chief heartthrob. The book "Desperately Seeking Shah Rukh", published in 2021, discusses the intimate desires of modern Indian women through their shared fandom for Khan and the sensitive masculinity he represented.

No film in his extensive repertoire has done more to burnish this persona than 1998's "Dil Se." (From the Heart), in which Khan pursues a mysterious woman across India's most spectacular natural landscapes. Today it is fondly remembered for its dazzling choreography - elaborate even by Bollywood standards - including Khan's serenade to dozens of dancers atop a moving steam train.

## 'So much love'

Khan's visage on movie posters became a virtual license to print money and a string of hits over the next two decades made him fabulously wealthy. His assets include the Kolkata Knight Riders cricket team in the Indian Premier League, and a film production company. Recent years have seen a string of personal and professional setbacks, including the 2021 arrest of his son in a drug related case that was later dropped. Khan, like other acting stars from India's Muslim minority, has also increasingly been targeted for criticism by Hindu nationalists.

"Pathaan", Khan's secret agent action thriller comeback after a five-year absence from the silver screen, was the latest of several highly anticipated Bollywood films subject to a boycott campaign. Ultimately Khan's star power triumphed over his critics, and ticket sales for "Pathaan" smashed India's opening day box office record. Khan afterwards was lavish in his praise for fans who made the film a success. "There is so much love from all sides," he said, "and we can never show enough gratefulness". — AFP



Lifestyle | Features



A young boy in colorful dress poses for a picture during the opening of the Ghadames festival.



Young girls in colorful dress and traditional jewelry pose for a picture.



## FESTIVAL SEEKS TO ATTRACT VISITORS TO LIBYA'S 'PEARL OF THE DESERT'

Young girls in colorful dress and traditional jewelry gathered to sing at a festival in Libya's Ghadames, an oasis city that was relatively unscathed by the past decade's chaos and is seeking to attract visitors. Under tents strung up with red and ochre patterned material, baskets were on display as a woman sat weaving one together with a large wooden needle, silver rings tracing the movements of her hands as she worked. Ghadames, known as the "pearl of the desert", is located nearly 500 kilometers (310 miles) southwest of the capital Tripoli.

The UNESCO-listed oasis city, a pre-Roman Berber settlement and a key stop on Saharan trade routes, has unique multi-level architecture with whitewashed, covered alleyways. In 2016, it was one of

five Libyan sites added to the UN cultural body's list of World Heritage in Danger after Libya plunged into lawlessness and armed conflict following the 2011 toppling of dictator Muammar Gaddafi. The crafts festival, which also highlights Tuareg traditions, aims to bring visitors to the desert gem near the border with Tunisia and Algeria.

"It's a great honor for Ghadames to host this shopping and heritage festival," said Mayor Qasem Mohammed al-Manea, 74, highlighting the "traditional industries and handicrafts made by Libyan hands". He noted the presence of "people from various parts of Libya and even from abroad like Tunisia", expressing hope to see tourists if a nearby border crossing is re-opened.

A United Nations-guided peace

process, which following the last major fighting in 2020 led to the appointment of a prime minister in 2021, who led a Tripoli-based Government of National Unity, now contested by an administration in the east. Clashes between the two camps repeatedly shook Libya last year, notably Tripoli. Since July 2021, the country has been trying to have Ghadames removed from the UNESCO danger list, arguing that it has been largely sheltered from fighting. Authorities say the only relatively recent damage to traditional houses was due to heavy rain - a new climate phenomenon in the region. — AFP

Visitors are pictured at a market during the opening of the Ghadames festival in the Libyan town of Ghadames on February 1, 2023. — AFP photos



## Japan's ice festival showcases beauty of 'Shikotsu Blue'

Lake Shikotsu Ice Festival, held in Japan's northernmost prefecture Hokkaido, is back for its annual run. Akin to an outdoor ice museum, the festival boasts about 30 ice sculptures of all sizes lined up for display till mid-February. The sculptures, which are made by spraying and freezing the water of Lake Shikotsu, include the "Blue Tower" standing 13 meters high. The lake's unique "Shikotsu Blue" color

shines through the sculptures during the daytime. At night, they are lit up with various colors, creating a beautiful and colorful landscape.

Formed in a volcanic crater about 32,000 years ago, Lake Shikotsu's is known for its "Shikotsu Blue" color, which is a reflection of its clear waters. It is the second-deepest lake in Japan and has exceptional water quality, winning the top spot in the Ministry of the Environment's water quality ranking 18 times. Although stage performances and various activities are canceled in this year's festival due to the COVID-19 pandemic, visitors can still enjoy the beauty of "Shikotsu Blue" and appreciate the artistry of ice sculptures. — KUNA



Sculptures on display at the Lake Shikotsu Ice Festival were made by spraying and freezing the clear blue waters of the lake. — KUNA photos

## Endangered monarch butterflies face perilous storm

As devastating storms pounded California, nature lovers feared for endangered monarch butterflies that spend winter there as part of a seemingly magical migration pattern. The colorfully winged insects that travel vast distances over the course of generations have been closely watched in the US state since they neared extinction just three years ago. As the sun rose one January morning, volunteers began counting monarch butterflies, finding them clustered atop cypress and eucalyptus trees in various sites along the California coast. The butterflies huddled in clusters of gray colonies until one spread its wings to reveal the orange spots for which they are known.

The sight provided a bit of reassurance for Stephanie Turcotte Edenholm,

who counted more than 1,000 monarchs at a sanctuary in the California coastal town of Pacific Grove. The educator spent much of the morning explaining the lives of the butterflies to young school students. They got to watch as dozens of butterflies took flight, believing - mistakenly - that the mild temperature signaled the end of winter. "It's too early for them to get so agitated, they're using up their fat reserves," Edenholm fretted. She worried, too, that they would mate and the females would fly off in search of milkweed plants to lay eggs on. Milkweed is all what baby caterpillars eat once the eggs hatch, but it was too early in winter for the plants to be growing. Volunteers counted more than 330,000 "western monarch" butterflies at the end of November, according to the Xerces Society conservation group.

### Pesticides and climate change

That number came as a relief compared to the 2,000 butterflies counted at the end of 2020, and an encouraging step up from the 250,000 or so butterflies tallied in 2021. But the ranks of butterflies

were far from the millions observed in the 1980s, due to threats including habitat loss, pesticides and climate change, according to Xerces. The monarch was added last year to the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List of threatened species and Xerces has asked the US Fish and Wildlife Service to place monarchs on its endangered list. Such a designation would help monarch defenders fight real estate developers out

to raze trees or build on terrain needed by migrating butterflies.

The question of whether to protect monarchs is a philosophical one, since the insects are known more for incredible migrations than being crucial for pollinating crops or flowers, according to Xerces biologist Emma Pelton. "We wouldn't lose human crops or wild plants in particular if the monarchs disappeared," Pelton said. But the world would lose butterflies "that

perform a really incredible migration, and that people are very attached to, emotionally and culturally, throughout North America." Some species of monarchs travel thousands of miles, from Canada to Mexico, while the lifespan of any single butterfly is typically measured in weeks.

Bill Henry remembers a childhood here filled with butterflies. "It was kind of a magical thing to be immersed in the abundance of the natural world," said Henry, now director of Groundswell Coastal Ecology group in Santa Cruz, not far from Pacific Grove. "It paints a picture, it's something that dreams are made out of." Flourishing monarchs are also a sign of enough milkweed and habitat along the long migration corridor, Henry said. "Milkweed is linked to healthy landscapes, and it's linked to healthy floodplains, which means that our rivers are doing well," he told AFP. "It also means that there aren't a lot of impasses to their migration, such as swaths where the pesticides that kill them are being used." — AFP



Monarch butterflies seen as they overwinter in and around the Pacific Grove Monarch Sanctuary in Pacific Grove, California on January 26, 2023. — AFP

## Ukrainian ballet group dance in spite of the war

When the United Ukrainian Ballet took the stage this week at Washington's Kennedy Center, the dancers performed works of art and also undertook a diplomatic and cultural mission of sorts. Composed of dancers driven into exile by the Russian invasion, the ballet company sees its mission as more than dance. To dance in spite of the war is a way of fighting "on the cultural front," a troupe member, Yuliia Kuzmych, 27, told AFP. Kuzmych danced at the Opera in Kyiv before joining the company. US audiences have responded enthusiastically.

The ballet performed "Giselle" Wednesday night on the stage of the Kennedy Center, a national performing arts facility. The audience gave a standing ovation to the dancers, who sang the Ukrainian national anthem hand over heart at the end while waving flags from their embattled homeland. The ballet company brings together dozens of professional artists from all over Ukraine, who now live in exile. "It started out as quite a small idea, which turned out to be something huge," said Dutch prima ballerina Igone de Jongh, who initiated the project, based in The Hague. The underlying idea was to offer a safe place to the dancers and to allow them to continue dancing, she told AFP. But it is also "the best way to keep the Ukrainian culture alive and visible," she added.

### 'Slava Ukraini'

While the dancers initially ended up in the same place "due to tragic circumstances," they are slowly "becoming a company because they are all united by the idea that they represent the country," said renowned choreographer Alexei Ratmansky, a Ukrainian flag pin

attached to his jacket. "They represent the culture of this country and they are not military people. They are dancers... and they fight in their field," said Ratmansky, who worked at the Bolshoi in Moscow but now uses only harsh words for "the dictator" Vladimir Putin. At first, only women were allowed to join the company, Ratmansky said, since men of fighting age needed special permission to leave Ukraine.

for the second performance of "Giselle" in Washington.

Since then, he considers his work with the United Ukrainian Ballet to be a "diplomatic mission." "Our performances are important because we make contact with ordinary people. We unite Ukrainians, Americans and people from other countries in an emotional way," he said. "We are all fighting for the freedom of Ukraine, and we do it through art,"



Performers with the United Ukrainian Ballet dance during a dress rehearsal at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC, on February 1, 2023. — AFP

But the Ukrainian ministry of culture - "which saw this project as an important cultural message to the world" - eventually issued exit permits to all dancers. That is how Oleksii Kniashkov, 30, who worked at the National Opera in Kharkiv, was able to travel to the Netherlands. At the time of the invasion, he was preparing to perform "Romeo and Juliet." "It wasn't so easy" to get permission to leave, he told AFP before warming up

added Svitlana Onipko, 27, a dancer from Kyiv who joined the ballet in The Hague in September. On Wednesday night, some of the audience at the Kennedy Center waved Ukrainian flags while others wore brightly colored Ukrainian shawls. "Slava Ukraini!" ("Glory to Ukraine"), a young woman in the audience shouted to a round of applause. — AFP



## Sports

# 5 ejected in Magic-T'Wolves brawl as Suns shock Celtics

## NBA suspends Brooks; Mitchell fined \$20,000

LOS ANGELES: Five players were tossed from Orlando's win at Minnesota on Friday as the second NBA brawl in as many days overshadowed Phoenix's upset of the league-leading Boston Celtics. The wild scenes in Minneapolis erupted in the third quarter with an exchange between Orlando's Mo Bamba and Minnesota's Austin Rivers. Bamba, Orlando's 2.13-meter tall center, left his seat off the bench and punches were thrown, sparking a scrum that had security scrambling to separate players.

It ended with Bamba and Rivers ejected along with Orlando point guard Jalen Suggs and Minnesota's Taurean Prince and Jaden McDaniels. "When someone gets up like that and gets in your face it can go one of two ways," Rivers said. "He threw a punch and it missed. And then Suggs, I think, grabbed me by my neck. That's a big no-no."

Rivers said he'd heard talk from a player he didn't know on Orlando's bench more than once during the game and far from trying to incite more he'd asked him to "just keep it respectful, bro." "I feel bad that I got thrown out of a game and I feel like I let my team down and in the process, two other guys, important players for our team, got thrown out as well," Rivers said. Minnesota coach Chris Finch was clearly irked that more Timberwolves players than Magic players were tossed.

He said he didn't see any exchanges to spark the row, but "guy coming off the bench and throwing a punch—pretty egregious." Orlando coach Jamahl Mosley also missed the start of the incident. "I turned and looked back and it was just a lot of guys trying to pull guys away from each other and trying to keep our guys on the bench," he said. One day earlier, Memphis' Dillon Brooks and Cleveland's Donovan Mitchell were tossed from a game after a shoving match that followed Brooks's blow to Mitchell's groin.

The NBA suspended Brooks for one game for sparking the confrontation and fined Mitchell \$20,000 for his incensed reaction. The Magic, who were leading 83-73 when hostilities erupted with 1:32 left in the third, went on to win 127-120, led by 20 points from reserve point guard Cole Anthony. In Boston, the absence of injured Devin Booker and Cam Johnson was



ADELAIDE: Serbian tennis player Novak Djokovic hits a return during his semi-final match against Russian Daniil Medvedev at the ATP Adelaide International tournament in Adelaide on January 7, 2023. — AFP

no hindrance to the Suns, who bounced back from a blowout loss to Atlanta to beat the Celtics 106-94.

With Johnson and Devin Booker sidelined by injury, the Suns looked unlikely to turn the tide two days after a 32-point loss to the Atlanta Hawks. But the Celtics, the owners of the best record in the league and the second-ranked scoring team, were held to less than 100 points at home for the first time since December. Jaylen Brown scored 27 points for Boston, but Jayson Tatum scored just 20 on dismal three-for-15 shooting as the Celtics connected on just 38.7 percent of their shots from the floor.

Phoenix, led by 25 points from Mikal Bridges, led by as many as 20 in the second quarter and were up 57-44 at halftime. Robert Williams's jump shot to end the third cut the deficit to one point but Phoenix, with their second unit on the floor to open the fourth, used an 8-0 scoring run to rebuild their lead. Chris Paul added 15 points for the Suns, Dario Saric and Deandre Ayton had 14 apiece, and Damion Lee added 11 off the bench.

### Simons leads Blazers

The Portland Trail Blazers shook off a slow start that saw them trailing by 20 in the first quarter to beat the Washington Wizards 124-116. Anfernee Simons scored 20 of his 33 points in the third quarter when he made six of his nine three-pointers to help the Blazers grab the lead. Damian Lillard added 29 points for Portland who ended the Wizards' six-game winning streak.

The Indiana Pacers bounced back from a tough, one-point loss to the Los Angeles Lakers on Thursday with a 107-104 victory over the Sacramento Kings. The Pacers snapped a four-game losing streak, but not before their 19-point lead in the third quarter dwindled to one midway through the fourth. Buddy Hield scored 21 points for the Pacers against his former team, draining a three-pointer after Sacramento had cut the deficit to one. Hield also pulled down 10 rebounds, including one off his own miss in the final minute that helped preserve the lead.— AFP

## LIV Golf stars crash out of Saudi International

KING ABDULLAH ECONOMIC CITY: Mexico's Abraham Ancer retained his one-shot lead at the halfway stage of the Saudi International on Friday as a slew of big names from the rebel LIV Golf tour failed to make the cut. Reigning Open champion Cameron Smith, six-time major winner Phil Mickelson, Bubba Watson and Bryson DeChambeau—all star signings for the Saudi-backed tour—dropped out at the par-70 Royal Greens Golf & Country Club.

Ancer added a four-under par 66 to his 63 on Thursday to move to an 11-under par 129, keeping American star Cameron Young at bay by one shot. Young, who finished second to Smith at last year's Open and has climbed up the world rankings with some outstanding displays over the past couple of years, shot a second straight 65.

South African Louis Oosthuizen, Australian Marc Leishman and young Thai star Sadom Kaewkanjana were tied for third at eight-under par. The afternoon conditions were not as difficult as the opening round at the \$5-million Asian Tour season opener, where Ancer has had just one bogey in two days. The world number 37 said it was "very frustrating" to drop a shot at the 17th hole but that he was satisfied with his performance going into day three.

Young, who in 2022 was a runner-up four times and had three third-place finishes, was bogey-free for the round. "My iron play has been very good so far and I've driven it nicely," said the 25-year-old, who is yet to win on the PGA Tour. "I've controlled my ball really well and given myself probably more opportunities for birdies than most guys have had out here," he added, saying it was tough to predict a winning number on the course in King Abdullah Economic City.

"It all depends on the wind. If the wind stays kind of like today, I think 20-under would have a really nice chance. If it picks up, then staying at 10 could be an achievement," he said. Thailand's 15-year-old Ratchanon Chantananuwat, popularly known as "TK", started with five birdies in seven holes before settling down for a four-under par 66. He is tied for sixth place with PGA Tour star Lucas Herbert of Australia.— AFP



Abraham Ancer of Mexico



## Kuwait's karate clubs dominate top positions

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait Karate clubs dominated top positions in the Fifth Arab Karate Championship as the host Yarmouk Club and Kuwait Club won five gold medals. Yarmouk came out first with four gold medals while Kuwait came second with one gold and two bronze. Shabab Al-Ahli (from UAE) took third place with one gold and one bronze medal.

The closing ceremony was attended by the acting Director of Public Authority for Sport (PAS) and tour-



nament patron Hamid Al-Hazeem, Kuwait Olympic Committee Board Member Sheikh Mubarak Faisal Al-Nawaf, President of Arab Karate Federation Ibrahim Al-Qannas, President of Kuwait Karate Federation Mohammad Al-Jassim, Chairman of Kuwait Club Khalid Al-Ghanim, Yarmouk club Chairman Ahmad Al-Jarki, KOC board member Fatima Hayat and Japanese Ambassador to Kuwait.

The final day recorded very high level of competitions. Sayyed Mohammad Al-Mousawi (Yarmouk) won the gold medal of the Kata singles; Rakan Al-Badri (Saudi Nasr) took second while the third place was shared by Bayar Mustafa (Itihad Al-Basra, Iraq) and Waleed Al-Enezi (Kuwait). In the women's Kata singles, Zahraa Farhani (Yarmouk) won the gold; Zainab Wahidee (Shabab) grabbed second position while Yasmeen Al-Mutawaa (Fatat) and Hala bin Haidar shared third place.

In the teams' competition, Yarmouk continued its dominance - winning two gold medals out of four. Yarmouk took first; Saudi Nasr grabbed the second position while Itihad Basra and Kuwait secured the third place. Yarmouk women team won the Kata Gold medal, Fatat took second and third went to Saudi Nasr ladies.

The combat men's event was extremely tough. Kuwait's five players won the gold medals following strong competition with UAE's Sharqa. Third place was shared by Shabab Buraiaqa (Algeria) and Saudi Nasr. In the women's combat, Shabab Al-Ahli (UAE) defeated Sharqa (UAE). The third place went to Buralki (Algeria) and Falat.

### News in brief

#### Navarrete grabs title

LOS ANGELES: Mexico's Emanuel Navarrete survived a knockdown on the way to a ninth-round technical knockout of Australian Liam Wilson Friday to claim the vacant World Boxing Organization super featherweight world title. Navarrete, the WBO's featherweight champ and a former super bantamweight world champion, claimed the title formerly held by Shakur Stevenson in a tense fight in Glendale, Arizona. But Wilson gave the heavily favored champ a scare, knocking down Navarrete in the fourth round and hurting him again in the sixth. But Navarrete, who improved to 37-1 with 31 wins inside the distance, turned the tables in the seventh and eighth with quick flurries that put Wilson on the defensive.

#### Zverev storms to victory

PARIS: Alexander Zverev defeated three-time major winner Stan Wawrinka in the Davis Cup on Friday as the German star returned to the courts for the first time since being cleared of domestic abuse. The 25-year-old Zverev swept past Wawrinka 6-4, 6-1 in Trier to bring Germany level with Switzerland after the opening day of their qualifier. On Tuesday, Zverev was told by the ATP that there was "insufficient evidence" to substantiate allegations against him of abusing a former girlfriend. Former world number two Zverev always denied the claims, describing them as "baseless". On Friday, Wawrinka, who helped his country win the 2014 Davis Cup, was returning to the team competition for the first time in eight years. Now ranked 135 in the world, he was comfortably beaten for the fifth time in five meetings by Zverev.

#### Kitayama grabs lead

SAN FRANCISCO: Kurt Kitayama steered a steady course in demanding conditions Friday to take a one-shot lead in the Pebble Beach Pro-Am, where he's chasing his first US PGA Tour title. The Californian, who has two European Tour titles on his resume, parred his first nine holes and had three birdies and a bogey coming in to post a two-under par 70 for a nine-under total of 134. He was one stroke clear of first-round leader Hank Lebioda, Kevin Mitchell, Brando Wu and Joseph Bramlett. "Today was really tough," said Kitayama, who played the par-72 Pebble Beach Golf Links, one of three courses in use over the first three rounds along with par-72 Spyglass Hill and the par-71 Monterey Peninsula course. "Overall, I'm really happy with where I'm at and how I played today." Of the group sharing second, three played at Monterey Peninsula, where Wu carded a 66, Mitchell posted a 68 and Bramlett carded a 67.

#### Estonia hints at boycott

TALLINN: Estonia's premier on Friday suggested her country might boycott the 2024 Olympics in Paris if Russian and Belarusian athletes are allowed to participate. "Participation of Russian and Belarusian athletes is just wrong. So boycotting is a next step," Prime Minister Kaja Kallas told reporters in Tallinn. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) said last week it was examining a "pathway" for Russians to take part in next year's Summer Games in Paris, probably as neutral athletes rather than under their national flag. That announcement sparked an immediate backlash from Kyiv, with a Ukrainian presidential aide accusing the IOC of being a "promoter of war". "Russia has killed hundreds of Ukrainian athletes including Olympic champions and world champions," Kallas said alongside her counterparts from Latvia and Lithuania.— From AFP

## Ford to return to F1 in 2026

NEW YORK: American car manufacturer Ford will return to Formula One in 2026 after more than two decades away with a link-up with world champions Red Bull, the company said on Friday. Ford announced they were entering a "long term strategic technical partnership for the development of the next-gen hybrid power unit to be used from the 2026 Formula 1 season onwards."

The company said they would provide the power units for both the Red Bull team and the Alpha Tauri team until at least 2030. "This is the start of a thrilling new chapter in Ford's motorsports story that began when my great-grandfather (Henry Ford) won a race that helped launch our company," said Bill Ford, executive chair. Ford last featured in F1 in 2004 when they were partnered with Jordan and their return is a further sign of the growth of the sport in the United States. This season will see three Grand Prix races in the U.S with Las Vegas joining Miami and Austin on the calendar.

The popularity of F1 in the country has soared since the Netflix series 'Drive to Survive' enjoyed huge success. Red Bull's Max Verstappen has won the past two drivers' titles in F1 and the Honda-powered team are the defending constructors' champions. Ford have played a part in 10 constructors' championships and 13 drivers' championships - making them the third most successful engine manufacturer in F1 history with their most recent success coming via Michael Schumacher's win with Benetton in 1994. Red Bull unveiled their new car for the upcoming season at an event in New York on Friday and team principal Christian Horner said he was looking forward to the link-up.—AFP



Sports

# Striker Berisha fires Augsburg to home win over Leverkusen

## Second-straight league loss for Leverkusen

BERLIN: Augsburg striker Mergim Berisha scored a crucial second-half goal to secure a 1-0 home German Bundesliga win over Bayer Leverkusen on Friday. Berisha headed in from a corner after 55 minutes to help an injury-hit Augsburg to just their sixth win of the season. It was a second-straight league loss for Leverkusen, who had put together five consecutive wins to push themselves into contention for the European placings. Chances were few in a first half played in teeming Bavarian rain.

Leverkusen's French forward Moussa Diaby had Augsburg goalkeeper Rafal Gikiewicz beaten in the 30th minute, but his floating strike hit the upright. Augsburg took the lead ten minutes into the second half, teenage midfielder Arne Engels curled in a corner, finding Berisha unmarked in the box. Berisha headed the ball past Leverkusen goalkeeper Lukas Hradecky with the goal Berisha's sixth for Augsburg since the German striker joined on a season-long loan from Turkish club Fenerbahce in August.

Leverkusen coach Xabi Alonso brought on creative midfielder Florian Wirtz to try and spark his struggling attack and the German teenager looked sharp, creating a number of chances behind the Augsburg defense. With a little over ten minutes to go, Alonso brought on English forward Callum Hudson-Odoi but the Chelsea loanee was unable to find a breakthrough as Leverkusen fell to a second successive league loss for the first time under Alonso.

The Leverkusen manager said his side was struggling to find penetration without injured striker Patrik Schick. "We don't have a striker, a number nine and a striker is important to attack and cause problems for the centre backs," the former Liverpool, Bayern Munich and Real Madrid player



AUGSBURG: Leverkusen's Argentinian midfielder Exequiel Palacios (left) and Augsburg's Finnish midfielder Fredrik Jensen (right) vie for the ball during the German first division Bundesliga football match between FC Augsburg and Bayer 04 Leverkusen on February 3, 2023. — AFP

said. "Hopefully it will soon be fine - we are trying to find a solution." Leverkusen midfielder Robert Andrich told German broadcaster DAZN that his side had "taken a step backwards".

"Augsburg were a bit faster and more venomous than us in the second half," he said. Even Berisha was surprised with the amount of space given to

him by the Leverkusen defenders, saying "I didn't even have an opponent. They left me free." Leverkusen sit in ninth place, but could end the weekend as low as 12th depending on other results. For Augsburg, the win was just their second since early October but took them five points clear of the relegation playoff spot. — AFP

## Bayern hunt for first league win of 2023

BERLIN: Winless in the Bundesliga in 2023 Bayern Munich travel to in-form Wolfsburg knowing they could be as low as third by the time they kick-off on Sunday. Normally several points clear at this stage in the season, several challengers are nipping at Bayern's heels. Four teams - Union Berlin, RB Leipzig, Borussia Dortmund and Freiburg - are within three points of first-placed Bayern.

## Derby danger for champions Milan; Napoli 'run away'

MILAN: AC Milan's crisis threatens to deepen as the champions head into Sunday's derby with Inter, miles off the Serie A title pace and in a battle to reach next year's Champions League. A full 15 points behind runaway league leaders Napoli and outside Italy's top four, Milan are possibly at the lowest point in Stefano Pioli's reign since a 5-0 hammering at Atalanta in 2019 almost led to his replacement as coach by Ralf Rangnick.

Pioli's team won just one of their seven matches in January in all competitions, extending what was a five-point gap between them and Napoli to the current chasm. They were also knocked out of the Italian Cup by Torino and were thumped by Inter in the Super Cup. That loss to Inter in Saudi Arabia was the first of

Despite a midweek 4-0 thrashing of Mainz in the German Cup, three consecutive 1-1 draws in the league drew accusations that the perennial German champions were in the midst of a crisis. "There are worse crises" manager Julian Nagelsmann said, telling the media "generally I find the word 'crisis' pretty hard." "We haven't got the results we wanted or that we should (and) we need to change that on Sunday in the Bundesliga, otherwise the lead we have (on the others) will be gone." "It's not a crisis, we just haven't got the right results."

Nagelsmann praised his side's "aggression" against Mainz, saying "we will also need that on Sunday in Wolfsburg to secure the three points". Bayern face an in-form Wolfsburg, who have lost just twice in their past 13 matches. Those two losses however have come in the club's past two games, including a surprise 2-1 defeat away at Werder Bremen and elimination from

three humiliating defeats in as many matches, followed up by a 4-0 spanking at Lazio and last weekend's stunning 5-2 home defeat at the hands of lowly Sassuolo. A sold out San Siro awaits both teams as Inter host the third and probably final derby of the season having supplanted Milan as Napoli's closest rivals for the Scudetto.

Despite Milan's collapse, Inter are only two points ahead of their local rivals and at the head of a pack of five teams separated by three in what looks to be an exciting race - barring an epic Napoli collapse - for the three remaining Champions League slots. Roma, Lazio and above all in-form Atalanta, who are at Sassuolo on Saturday night, will want to take advantage of the two Milanese giants playing each other. Napoli travel to struggling Spezia for Sunday's early match with a gale-force wind in their sails and the feeling that nothing can stop them claiming a first league crown since 1990.

In the aftermath of last week's dramatic win over Roma, owner Aurelio De Laurentiis was blocked at the exit of the Stadio Maradona by hundreds of delirious fans who danced around his car while roaring along to a trashy dance version of the chant 'il capolista se ne

the German Cup by the same scoreline at Union Berlin.

Prior to the midweek defeat in Berlin, Wolfsburg manager Niko Kovac drew the ire of football fans in the Bavarian capital by saying "at the moment I feel it's easier to play in Munich than in Berlin". Kovac, who coached Bayern to a league and cup double in 2018-19 but was sacked the following season, tried to row back on the comments after the Union match. When asked if his observation was a provocation, Kovac said "it's difficult to win in Berlin, it's also difficult to beat Bayern Munich at home", adding that the Bavarians are the "strongest team in the league on the road".

RB Leipzig's excellent recent form - nine wins in their past 10 competitive games - is all the more impressive when the injury-enforced absences of star forwards Timo Werner and Christopher Nkunku are taken into account. — AFP



AC Milan's French goalkeeper Mike Maignan

va', which can be roughly translated as 'we're running away with it'. Spirits are so high down south, that De Laurentiis happily messed around with a fan in a phone call which quickly went viral on social media, during which he joked that pizza in Naples "was disgusting" and made an obscene suggestion on what the club's fans could do if Napoli do not win the Champions League. — AFP

## Fulham frustrate Potter, Chelsea

LONDON: Chelsea manager Graham Potter pleaded for time to gel his expensive collection of new stars after the Blues were held 0-0 at home by Fulham on Friday. Enzo Fernandez made his Chelsea debut after becoming the most expensive player in British football history with a \$107 million move (\$132 million) from Benfica on transfer deadline day. Mykhailo Mudryk was also given his Stamford Bridge bow, while Noni Madueke and David Datro Fofana came off the bench for their Premier League debuts.

Chelsea's record investment of over £300 million in the January window took the total spend on players in their first season under new ownership to over half a

billion. Co-owners Todd Boehly and Behdad Eghbali were in attendance, but will not have been impressed as another chance to close on the top four slipped by. Potter's men sit ninth in the table, still nine points adrift of the Champions League places.

"New players are adapting to a new country and a new league. It's not straightforward. When the price tag is what it is questions will be asked, it's the nature of the business," said Potter. "The decision we took in the window you can see the profile in terms of age. We feel we have a very strong group of players. We have to gel and become a really good team. That's where the work is." Fulham had secured a first victory in the west London derby since 2006 when the teams met just three weeks ago. Marco Silva's men sit two points and three places above their local rivals in the table in their first season back in the top flight.

Fulham were seeking a first ever league double over Chelsea and came close to achieving it as

Andreas Pereira forced Kepa Arrizabalaga into a flying save low to his right. For the enormous sums spent by Chelsea's new owners, their lack of a clinical goalscorer was exposed once more. Kai Havertz had a hat-trick of big chances to break the deadlock before half-time. The German international failed to get enough contact on Thiago Silva's brilliant pass to divert the ball beyond Bernd Leno. Havertz then could not stretch to turn Mason Mount's dangerous cross on target. But his best opening came when he hit the post with a lob over Leno from Hakim Ziyech's defense-splitting pass.

Ziyech would have been a Paris Saint-Germain player this week had Chelsea not submitted the wrong paperwork in the minutes before Tuesday's transfer deadline. The Moroccan is just one of a wealth of wide options now available to Potter and he wasted no time in hooking Mudryk despite his price tag after a disappointing first 45 minutes. — AFP

### Today's matches

English Premier League	
Nottingham Forest v Leeds United	17:00
belN Sports HD 1 English belN Sports Connect belN Sports 1 HD Premium	
Tottenham v Manchester City	19:30
belN Sports HD 1 English belN Sports Connect belN Sports 1 HD Premium	
Spanish League	
Real Mallorca v Real Madrid	16:00
belN Sports HD 1 belN Sports 1 HD Premium belN Sports HD 3 English belN Sports 1 FR belN Sports Connect	
Girona v Valencia	18:15
belN Sports HD 1 belN Sports HD 3 English belN Sports Fr 7 HD belN Sports Connect	
Real Sociedad v Real Valladolid	20:30
belN Sports HD 1 belN Sports HD 3 English belN Sports FR HD 2 belN Sports Connect	
Barcelona v Sevilla	23:00
belN Sports HD 1 belN Sports 1 HD Premium	
Italian Serie A	
Spezia v Napoli	14:30
AD SPORTS Premium 1	
Torino v Udinese Calcio	17:00
AD SPORTS Premium 1	
Fiorentina v Bologna	20:00
AD SPORTS Premium 1	
Inter Mila v AC Milan	22:45
AD SPORTS Premium 1	
German Bundesliga	
VfB Stuttgart v Werder Bremen	17:30
belN Sports HD 3 belN Sports HD 2 English belN Sports Fr 5 HD max belN Sports HD 4 TR	
VfL Wolfsburg v Bayern Munich	19:30
belN Sports HD 3 belN Sports FR HD 1 belN Sports HD 4 TR	
French League 1st Div	
Clermont Foot v AS Monaco	15:00
belN Sports HD 2 belN Sports HD 4 TR belN Sports Connect	
AC Ajaccio v Nantes	17:00
belN Sports HD 4 belN Sports Connect	
FC Lorient v Angers	17:00
belN Sports HD 2 belN Sports Connect	
AJ Auxerre v Stade de Reims	17:00
belN Sports HD 6 belN Sports Connect	
RC Strasbourg v Montpellier	17:00
belN Sports HD 7 belN Sports Connect	
Stade brestois v RC Lens	19:05
belN Sports HD 2 belN Sports Connect belN Sports Max 1 HD	
Olympique de Marseille v Nice	22:45
belN Sports HD 2 SuperSport HD 3 alb	

# Classifieds

### Hospitals & Clinics

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

### Clinics

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

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

### Change of Name

I, **Arwa** holder of passport No. U0747940 do hereby change my name to Arwa (as given Name) Fouji (as surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name Arwa Fouji and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents.

I, **Husain** holder of passport No. V9368379 do hereby change my name to Husain (as given name) Company (as surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name Husain Company and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. (C#2847) - 3-02-2023

Automated enquiry about the CivilID card is 1889988



## Everton halt Arsenal's title charge

Liverpool's troubled season hit a new low; United survive Casemiro dismissal



LIVERPOOL: Arsenal's Belgian midfielder Leandro Trossard kicks the ball during the English Premier League football match between Everton and Arsenal on February 4, 2023. — AFP

LONDON: Mikel Arteta urged Arsenal to dig deep after a shock 1-0 defeat at Everton dented the Premier League leaders' title bid, while Liverpool's troubled season hit a new low with a woeful 3-0 loss at Wolves on Saturday. Arteta's side were beaten for just the second time in 20 league games this season as James Tarkowski headed Everton's winner in the 60th minute. The Gunners' only other league defeat came at Manchester United in September. Arsenal still lead second placed Manchester City by five points, but the champions can close the gap to two points if they win at Tottenham on Sunday.

"This is not going to be a rose pathway," said Arteta of Arsenal's road to the title. "This is going to be tricky and we will have to dig in and play much better than we did today." Everton came into the game on a run of four league defeats at Goodison Park for the first time since 1958. That disastrous form cost Frank Lampard his job and Sean Dyche's appointment got the desired bounce with a first win

in 11 games. "The minimum requirement is maximum effort and we saw that today," said Dyche after his first game in charge.

While third-bottom Everton boosted their bid to avoid relegation, their Merseyside rivals Liverpool crashed to a fourth defeat in their last seven games in all competitions, a miserable run featuring only one win. Jurgen Klopp's side are languishing in 10th place, 10 points adrift of the top four amid their worst season of Klopp's seven-year reign. It is the first time since 2012 that Liverpool have lost three successive away league games, while they have already conceded more league goals this season than they did in the entirety of last term.

Facing a struggling team who kicked off in the relegation zone, Liverpool immediately crumbled as Joel Matip deflected Hwang Hee-chan's cross into his own net after five minutes. Wolves debutant Craig Dawson doubled the lead after 12 minutes when the defender smashed in from 10 yards. With

Wolves fans taunting Klopp with chants of "you're getting sacked in the morning", Ruben Neves sealed the rout with a 71st minute finish from Adama Traore's cross.

### United survive

Ten-man Manchester United cemented their grip on third place with a 2-1 win against Crystal Palace.

Two days before the anniversary of the 1958 Munich air crash that killed eight United players on the way home from a match against Red Star Belgrade, Old Trafford paid an emotional pre-match tribute to the victims of the tragedy. In the seventh minute, United were awarded a penalty after VAR showed Will Hughes handled Marcus Rashford's cross, with Bruno Fernandes coolly converting from the spot. Rashford struck in the 62nd minute with a composed finish from Luke Shaw's cross.

United were reduced to 10 men in the 70th minute when Brazil midfielder Casemiro grabbed

Will Hughes by the throat. Jeff Schlupp's 76th minute strike set up a tense finish but United held on to win six successive home league games for the first time since 2017. Leicester twice came from behind to win 4-2 at Aston Villa. Villa went ahead after 10 minutes through Ollie Watkins, but James Maddison levelled two minutes later. Unai Emery's men regained the lead with a 32nd minute own goal from Leicester debutant Harry Souttar.

But Leicester equalized again in the 41st minute through Kelechi Iheanacho and Tete netted on his debut in first half stoppage-time before Dennis Praet wrapped up the points in the 79th minute. Brentford climbed to seventh place and pushed bottom of the table Southampton deeper into trouble with a 3-0 win at the Community Stadium, the goals coming from Ben Mee, Bryan Mbeumo and Mathias Jensen. Kaoru Mitoma's 87th minute header gave sixth placed Brighton a 1-0 victory against second bottom Bournemouth. — AFP

## Ireland thrash Wales in Six Nations opener

CARDIFF: Ireland started their Six Nations campaign impressively by thrashing Wales 34-10 on Saturday for their first win in Cardiff in the tournament since 2013. It took Caelan Doris, the Leinster No. 8, a mere 124 seconds to grab the first try of the 2023 Six Nations and take the wind out of Wales' sails on Warren Gatland's return as head coach. Andy Farrell's world ranked number one side were clinical and ruthless as they kicked-off their campaign with a bonus-point victory.

World Rugby Player of the Year Josh van der Flier grabbed the all-important fourth try in the 72nd minute when Wales were down to 14 men with Liam Williams in the sin-bin for a high tackle. "We came out, started really well which was really important having not won here for ten years," player of the match in Ireland full-back Hugo Keenan told the BBC.

"We probably slipped off a bit in the second half so there's still plenty to work on but we're delighted to get a bonus point and start the Six Nations with a win. "These are the occasions you want to be part of, in this stadium against a tough side." Farrell had to change his starting lineup before kick-off when scrum-half Jamison Gibson-Park pulled out with a hamstring strain - veteran Conor Murray came off the bench to replace him.

Gatland's last Six Nations game in 2019 had been against Ireland in Cardiff when Wales completed the third Grand Slam of the Kiwi coach's 12-year stint in charge. He had started his initial reign in 2008 with a win at Twickenham over England, but there was no repeat. "We're disappointed. We lacked discipline and accuracy in that



CARDIFF: Ireland's wing Mack Hansen (center) is tackled by Wales' Thys Webb (left) during the Six Nations international rugby union match between Wales and Ireland on February 4, 2023. — AFP

first half and that put us under pressure," Wales captain Ken Owens told the BBC. "We showed character in the second half, we kept pushing but mistakes at key moments let us down against the best team in the world.

"We've got to learn from this quickly on the hoof," he added. Ireland went onto the offensive from the kick-off and struck from their first attack with Doris crashing over. Skipper Johnny Sexton converted and the Welsh crowd were immediately silenced. Six minutes later it was second row James Ryan who barged over in similar style from close range and Sexton doubled the lead with his conversion.

Keenan then thwarted Wales' best chance of the opening quarter when he beat Rio Dyer to the ball as it dribbled over the line after a kick and chase. Dan Biggar did get the home side off the mark with a simple penalty, but his kick was matched four minutes later by Sexton. As Wales grew into the game, their hopes of getting back into the contest were dashed when James Lowe picked off a pass by Biggar and raced 70 metres for an interception try that made it 22 points in 21 minutes. — AFP

## Ronaldo gets off the mark for the new paymasters

AL-HASA: Cristiano Ronaldo got off the mark for his new Saudi paymasters Al Nassr on Friday with a stoppage-time penalty that rescued a 2-2 away draw against Al Fateh. The Portuguese, who turns 38 on Sunday, buried the spot-kick in the 93rd minute for a point that left the Riyadh club joint top of the Saudi Pro League with a game in hand over Al Shabab. Ronaldo broke his duck in his third appearance, after he fired blanks in the January 22 league

win over Ettifaq and in this week's Super Cup loss to Al Ittihad. Days before his Al Nassr debut, he scored twice for a Saudi composite team in an entertaining 5-4 loss to a Paris Saint-Germain side featuring his great rival Lionel Messi.

The five-time Ballon d'Or winner, who holds the all-time records for Champions League and international goals, will bank more than 400 million euros for his surprise move to Saudi, according to sources close to Al Nassr. The giant sum includes 200 million euros for promoting Saudi Arabia's expected joint bid to host the 2030 World Cup, the sources told AFP. Ronaldo has become a figurehead for the conservative kingdom's push to improve its reputation through sports - a process that has drawn accusations of "sportswashing", or trying to sanitize its human rights record. — AFP



AL-HASA: Nassr's Portuguese forward Cristiano Ronaldo (center) dribbles past Fateh's Saudi midfielder Mohammed Al-Fuhaid (left) during the Saudi Pro League football match between Al-Fateh and Al-Nassr on February 3, 2023. — AFP