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Kuwait opens hearts and wallets

Live campaign raises more than KD 15m

Sadu House weavers donate warm clothing

Kuwait's humanitarian campaign hailed

KRCS sends 42 tons of medical supplies



Women weave warm clothing at Sadu House. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Kuwait Red Crescent Society sends 42 tons of medical supplies. — KUNA



People donate relief supplies. — Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

KUWAIT: Kuwait launched a 12-hour "Kuwait by Your Side" campaign to help people affected by the earthquake in Syria and Turkey on Saturday, with a livestream on Kuwait TV to receive donations from noon till midnight. At the time of going to press, the campaign had raised more than KD 15 million, donated by around 100,000 individuals and entities.

The campaign, organized by the ministry of social affairs in cooperation with the ministry of foreign affairs and the ministry of interior, is tasked by the Cabinet to collect donations as part of Kuwait's continuous humanitarian role. Minister of Social Affairs and Women and Children's Affairs Mai Al-Baghlhi said

the campaign aims to ease the suffering of those affected by the deadly earthquake that has killed thousands in Syria and Turkey and destroyed buildings and houses.

Kuwait's relief initiative for quake-hit Turkey and Syria comes at the behest of HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, said the minister of information and culture. The fundraising campaign, also directed by HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah, is meant to alleviate the woes and anguish of quake-affected

people in Turkey and Syria, said Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi while launching the initiative in a televised statement.

No sooner did the powerful earthquake strike, Kuwait, at both official and unofficial levels, moved to stand side by side with both Syrian and Turkish peoples, reflecting Kuwait's enduring commitment to aiding the needy, said Mutairi, who is also minister of state for youth affairs. He underlined the media coverage by the ministry of information, through its bodies, correspondents and Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), of the powerful earthquake, along with Kuwait's relief

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efforts for quake-hit people. The minister urged Kuwaiti citizens and residents alike to join the fundraising initiative in order to ease the agony of both Turkish and Syrian peoples.

Al-Sadu House held a charity drive on Saturday, in collaboration with Kuwait Textile Art Association (KTAA), Khayt Group and the Turkish Embassy to produce warm clothing for those affected by the devastating earthquake in Turkey and Syria. Volunteers made a total of 502 pieces, including 270 hats, 100 scarves, 67 blankets, 45 pieces of children's clothing, nine jackets, six pairs of socks and five pairs of gloves.

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Kuwait regrets Philippine labor deployment ban

KUWAIT: The Philippines Embassy announced Kuwaiti Assistant Foreign Minister for Asian Affairs Sameeh Hayat met Philippine Ambassador to Kuwait Jose Almodovar Cabrera on Thursday. The two sides discussed a Feb 8 decision to suspend the deployment of first-time domestic helpers to Kuwait. Hayat expressed his disappointment at the decision of the Philippines' Department of Migrant Workers and conveyed the Kuwaiti government's desire to resolve this issue as soon as possible.

"The Department of Migrant Workers indicated that the postponement only applies to domestic workers who have not worked before in Kuwait and are deployed to Kuwait for the first time. The administration is studying reforms and measures to enhance procedures that help ensure the safety of domestic workers, especially those working in Kuwait for the first time," Cabrera said.

The partial ban came after the charred remains of Filipino domestic worker Julebee Ranara, 35, were discovered in the Salmi desert last month. It was reported she was pregnant and had been subjected to blunt-force trauma. The 17-year-old son of her employer has been arrested by police on murder charges.

Meanwhile, a commercial delegation from the Philippines comprising of 26 Filipino food exporters will visit Kuwait on Feb 13-14 in order to boost economic cooperation with countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council. The team will also visit Bahrain, Qatar and the UAE.

Miracle rescues as quake toll passes 25,000

KAHRAMANMARAS, Turkey: Rescuers pulled a two-month-old baby and an elderly woman from the rubble on Saturday, five days after an earthquake devastated Turkey and Syria, leaving more than 25,000 dead. Tens of thousands of local and international rescue workers are still scouring through flattened neighborhoods despite freezing weather that has compounded the misery of millions now in desperate need of aid.

However, Austrian soldiers and German rescue workers called off their searches for several hours in southern

Hatay, citing a difficult security situation and clashes between local groups. In the midst of destruction and despair, miraculous tales of survival continue to emerge. "Is the world there?" asked 70-year-old Menekse Tabak as she was pulled out from the concrete in the southern city of Kahramanmaraş - the epicenter of Monday's 7.8-magnitude tremor - to applause and cries praising God, according to a video on state broadcaster TRT Haber.

In the city of Antakya, a two-month-old baby was found alive 128 hours after the quake, state news agency Anadolu reported. A two-year-old girl, a six-month pregnant woman, plus a four-year-old and her father, were among those rescued five days after the quake, Turkish media reported. In southern Turkey, families clutched each other in

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NURDAGI, Turkey: Rescuers search for survivors among destroyed buildings in the hard-hit region of Gaziantep on Feb 11, 2023. — AFP

Iran celebrates 44th anniversary of revolution

TEHRAN: Tens of thousands of Iranians rallied Saturday in Tehran and other major cities to mark the 44th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, as their president said months-long protests had been defeated. For the past two years, the 1979 overthrow of the Western-backed shah was commemorated mainly by Iranians who drove around cities in their cars or on motorcycles due to COVID restrictions.

But this year, waving flags, they took to the streets of Tehran on foot and converged on Azadi (Freedom) Square, one of the capital's most prominent landmarks, despite chilly temperatures. People held up pictures of Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei as well as the late Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, founder of the Islamic republic, and revered general Qasem Soleimani, killed in a US air strike on Baghdad airport in January 2020. They held placards reading "We stand to the end", "A united, strong and stable Iran" and "We obey the leader".



TEHRAN: Iranians gather in Azadi Square to mark the 44th anniversary of the 1979 Islamic Revolution on Feb 11, 2023. — AFP

Sejil ballistic missiles and Shahed 136 drones were on display around the square where President Ebrahim Raisi said people had gathered to renew their "allegiance" to the revolution. "This pledge of allegiance is much greater than a vote" of confidence in the Islamic republic, said the ultra-conservative president. Raisi also declared victory over the nationwide protest movement triggered by the death in custody of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini following her arrest for an alleged breach of Iran's dress code for women.

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US shoots down 'high-altitude object' over Alaska

WASHINGTON: A US fighter jet shot down an unidentified object drifting high over Alaska on Friday, the White House said, just six days after the downing of an alleged Chinese spy balloon sparked a fresh diplomatic rift with Beijing. White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said it was unclear what the purpose or origin of the new object was, but said that it was taken down because, floating at 40,000 feet, it was a threat to civil aviation.

"The president ordered the military to down the object," Kirby said. Questioned about the incident by reporters at the White House, Biden said the shoot-down "was a success". Kirby said the object was much smaller than a huge Chinese balloon that crossed the United States last week and was shot down by a US fighter jet off the Atlantic coast on Saturday. It was "roughly the size of a small car," he

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Local



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti women produce warm scarves and hats at the Sadu House in Kuwait City on February 11, 2023, to be sent to those affected by the deadly earthquake that hit Turkey and Syria. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Sadu House organizes charity drive for earthquake victims

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Al-Sadu House held a charity drive on Saturday, in collaboration with Kuwait Textile Art Association (KTAA), Khayt Group and the Turkish Embassy to produce warm clothing for those affected by the devastating earthquake in Turkey and Syria. Chairperson of Al-Sadu House Sheikha Bibi Duaij Al-Sabah told Kuwait Times some of the members of the body, textile association and Khayt wanted to donate their products and time to collect the largest number of mittens and blankets to help those affected by the earthquake in Turkey and Syria.

"We always see such humanitarian efforts by individuals in Kuwait, who are always ready to donate their crafts for the needy. We wanted to open the way for everyone to come to Sadu House to give and donate to charitable work and enjoy at the same time," she said. Sheikha Bibi said the Secretary General of the Kuwait National Council for Culture, Art and Letters attended along with the Turkish ambassador to Kuwait to encourage humanitarian activities, "which are a gesture from our people to the Turkish and Syrian people", noting the Turkish Embassy also brought the Turkish community in Kuwait to participate in the event.

Nawal Al-Baker, Vice President of Al-Sadu House and Khayt Group founder, said: "Sadu House is always present in times of crises to help the needy. I asked every woman crocheting to work on two or three hats,



and I was surprised we received a larger quantity of pieces." She said the pieces that were sewn and crocheted will be collected at the end of the day by the Turkish Embassy, pointing out it is possible the aid will also reach the Syrians through Turkish authorities.

"Sheikha Bibi Al-Sabah allowed us to use Al-Sadu House to create as many warm hats, scarves and blankets as possible for those affected by the earthquake in Turkey and Syria. People are really coming forward to help us out - we have a lot of donated yarns, fabrics, threads, needles and much more. The support is amazing; Kuwait has always funded charity programs like this. We are happy to be part of today's event along with Khayt Group," Dr Batoul Al-Sayegh,



President of Kuwait Textile Art Association, told Kuwait Times.

"It is a one-day event, but we dedicated this weekly Wednesday meeting to charity at Sadu House to make as many warm pieces for those in need. We will always be involved with any kind of charitable work. People come together to not only feel good, but to know that they are helping a fellow in need. We do not want it to be a selfish hobby," Sayegh added. Maddie El-Issawi, a coordinator at KTAA, said they came together in solidarity with their brothers and sisters in Syria and Turkey, noting she brought fabrics and sewing machines to make baby blankets as well as upcycle old sweaters and turn them into blankets.



Dr Batoul Al-Sayegh



Shymaa Al-Ameen



Nawal Al-Baker



Maddie El-Issawi

KNPC organizes awareness program for expat workers

KUWAIT: The Kuwait National Petroleum Company has presented principal medical services to expatriate workers in Fahaheel industrial area within its professional health day organized under the banner "Let's collaborate to make each other healthier" with the attendance of KNPC CEO Wadha Al-Khatib and medical emergency department director at the health ministry, Dr Ahmad Al-Shatti. Within the activities of this day, workers were educated about healthy habits and how to prevent diseases, in addition to conducting free medical examinations, and providing them with the necessary treatments under the supervision of consultants and specialists, in the same location, with the aim of facilitating the workers, whose working conditions and places of residence prevent them from being able to obtain these services. "The company is always keen to carry out its social responsibility, especially in the health aspect, by organizing medical awareness activities and campaigns, including this campaign directed at the workers of the Fahaheel and Ahmadi industrial areas, as they are from the areas surrounding the company's refineries," Al-Khateeb said.

"The company has organized an occupational health day annually since 2015, alternating between these two regions, which witness a large presence of expatriate workers of various nationalities, noting that the company was forced during the past two years to stop this initiative as a result of the effects of the COVID pandemic, and this year it resumed it again," she clarified.

Executive Vice President of Support Services Abdulaziz Al-Duaij said: "Health campaigns and activities provided by the company contribute to the early detection of chronic problems and diseases, especially those related to the work environment, which contributes greatly to the speedy recovery of the worker before serious symptoms appear on him, and thus ensuring that they enjoy good health that enables them to live and work optimally."

The head of the company's medical team, Dr Walid Al-Harbi, explained that on the "Occupational Health Day" the worker is presented to the company's doctors, to ensure that he is healthy and free from any disease that his neglect may lead to serious future complications indicating: "Examinations include measuring weight, height, pressure, pulse, sugar levels, cholesterol levels, measuring breathing power to check lung function, measuring hemoglobin to check for anemia, measuring hearing power, and if necessary, an EKG is also performed, and measuring the cumulative sugar rate."

It is noteworthy that the Central Blood Bank participated in the activities of this day, by providing the opportunity for visitors to donate blood, and a number of medical companies were present through pavilions that displayed modern medical devices and new medicines intended to treat chronic diseases.

Food security is a 'pivotal pillar' of national security

CAIRO: Kuwait lawmakers affirmed, Saturday, the importance of achieving food security in the Arab world, saying that it was one of the most vital issues in the ever-shifting global affairs. Speaking at the Fifth Congress for Speakers of Arab Councils and Parliaments, organized by the Arab Parliament, Kuwaiti MP Khaled Al-Otaibi stressed that achieving food security was one of the major issues facing Arab countries.

Al-Otaibi told the conference-focusing on the Arab parliamentary document outlying a vision for enhancing food security-the lack of strategic stockpile of food in the last few years must push Arab parliamentarians to seek means to bolster food security. The welfare of future generations are at stake, he indicated, stressing the need to formulate a plan and seek investments that would provide food security for the region regardless of the shifting developments globally. He said that food supplies were weaponized to pressure other countries into obedience.

The solution must come through cooperation and boosting commercial exchange amongst Arab countries in addition to finding sustainable resources for food, he affirmed. Providing his input to the event, Kuwaiti MP Dr Mohammad Al-Huwaila hoped that the approved document to enhance Arab food security would serve the need of Arabs. He revealed that Kuwait had contributed immensely to the document especially in the importance of finding an Arab food security coalition that would address the needs of regionally countries.

Al-Huwaila also pointed out that the document also called for establishing a fund backed by Arab development and sovereignty funds to find a suitable environment for Arab food security integration. The Kuwaiti delegation to the conference is headed by MP Al-Otaibi, and the delegation includes MP Al-Huwaila, and Kuwait's Ambassador to Egypt and Permanent Representative at the Arab League Ambassador Ghanim Al-Ghanim.

Meanwhile, the speaker of the Arab Parliament Adel Al-Asoomi said that the problem of Arab food security has become a pivotal pillar of national security and constitutes a challenge that cannot wait. This was in a speech by Al-Asoomi at the opening of the Fifth Congress of Speakers of Arab Councils and Parliaments entitled "Parliamentary Vision for Enhancing Arab Food Security."

This conference is taking place while the nation is facing many crises, he said, pointing out that as soon as the COVID-19 pandemic and its negative repercussions passed, the Russian-Ukrainian crisis



CAIRO: The Speaker of the Arab Parliament Adel Al-Asoomi (center) addresses the summit. The Speaker of the Arab Parliament on Saturday affirmed that the problem of Arab food security has become a pivotal pillar of national security and constitutes a challenge that cannot wait. —KUNA

came and caused damage to the global economy which imposed many challenges on Arab economies. One of these challenges that cannot afford the luxury of waiting is the problem of Arab food security, which is a matter of life or death, he explained.

He mentioned they are keen for Arab parliamentarians to contribute to this problem, as the Arab Parliament prepared a document on the problem of food security, noting that the document was discussed through a committee that included representatives of Arab parliaments and councils. The document presented the most prominent challenges facing food security, and it also includes some proposals that help in one way or another to solve the problem of food security, he indicated, underlining the need to achieve self-sufficiency.

In another context, Al-Asoomi referred to the growing challenges facing the Arab nation, especially the Palestinian issue, and it is firmly rooted in the conscience of every Arab. He also referred to the recent escalation of the Zionist occupation's practices of killing civilians, desecrating sanctities, and destroying homes, which exacerbates the political and humanitarian situation, underscoring the need for a real move by the international community to confront the blatant violations against Palestinians and reach a just and comprehensive solution that restores the rights to their owners.

He warned against repeating the crimes of burning copies of the Quran with the knowledge and under the eyes of the official authorities in

many European countries, stressing that this violates international laws and calls for a serious stance that is greater than mere denunciation, but rather calls for an international criminalization of insulting religions and sanctities. He urged for collective action from Arabs, Africans and Islamic parliaments to issue a recommendation to the General Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, to be held in Bahrain next March, to set a binding legal framework criminalizing these practices.

Meanwhile, the Speaker of the Pan-African Parliament (PAP) Fortune Charumbira called in his speech on the Arabs to invest in Africa, especially in the fields of infrastructure and agriculture, pointing out that the continent is rich in natural resources and investors come from the West, but there is a need for Arab investments to enter. There should be room for coordination between the Arab Parliament and PAP to enhance economic cooperation between both sides, Charumbira pointed out.

He underlined the need for Arabs and Africa to cooperate together against insulting religions, emphasizing the freedoms of belief and rejecting racism, as well as confronting attempts to impose some orientations that contradict Arab and African values. The Kuwaiti delegation to the conference is headed by MP Khaled Al-Otaibi, and the delegation includes MP Dr Mohammad Al-Huwaila, and Kuwait's Ambassador to Egypt and Permanent Representative at the League of Arab States Ambassador Ghanim Al-Ghanim. —KUNA

Local

Volvo BNK Automotive sponsors Abolish 153 talk at Volvo Studio



Ashraf Tamim, General Manager of BNK Automotive - Volvo (center) with Aliya Mawani, Ambassador of Canada and Charge d'Affaires US Embassy James Holtsnider.



The attendees at the event.



Australian Ambassador Melissa Kelly arrives to participate in Abolish 153 conversations - on ending gender-based violence in Kuwait.



Abolish 153 campaign co-founder Sundus Hussein talking at Volvo Studio.



Charge d'Affaires US Embassy Kuwait James Holtsnider speaking with Sundus Hussein.



James Holtsnider speaking with Aliya Mawani.

KUWAIT: Volvo BNK Automotive has taken the initiative by sponsoring the Abolish 153 talk at Volvo Studio, raising awareness on an application launched for women in need of assistance to be able to handle a better life on their own. It is all about educating and helps create a safety plan. It connects survivors with life coaches and medical professionals, spreading hope and positivity to people in need.

In my view

Regional, international context for protection of migrant workers

By Atiyab Al-Shatti



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Kuwait ratified the Arab Charter on Human Rights through law 84/2013 dated 14/02/2013. The charter recognizes that every worker has the right to the enjoyment of just and favorable conditions of work, regulates working hours, rest and holidays with pay, as well as the rules for the preservation of occupational health and safety and the protection of women, children and disabled persons in the place of work.

Each state party shall ensure the necessary protection of migrant workers in accordance with the laws in force. Kuwait has been an ILO member state since 1961. Since its accession, it has ratified 19 ILO conventions, including seven of the eight fundamental conventions, which constitute the fundamental principles and rights at work.

However, the convention among the fundamental conventions that Kuwait has not ratified is Convention C100 - Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No 100). Therefore, Kuwait shall be committed to respecting, promoting and realizing the rights contained in all the fundamental conventions, even if not all of them have been ratified under the 1998 declaration. Kuwait also ratified international charters and conventions on human rights, which require it to pay full attention to the rights contained in these conventions and to all individuals present on its territory, ranging from citizens to migrants, including domestic workers.

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, ratified by law 12/1996, states that each state party to the covenant undertakes to respect and to ensure to all individuals within its territory and subject to its jurisdiction the rights recognized in the covenant, without distinction of any kind, and no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, and no one shall be held in slavery; slavery and the slave-trade in all their forms shall be prohibited, and all persons are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law.

In this respect, the law shall prohibit any discrimination and guarantee to all persons equal and effective protection against discrimination on any grounds. The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, ratified by Kuwait by law 33/1968, undertakes to prohibit and eliminate racial discrimination in all its forms and guarantee the right of everyone, without distinction, as well as the right to just and favorable conditions of work.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, ratified by Kuwait by Amiri decree 24/1994, affirmed the elimination of discrimination against women in the field of employment, in particular the right to work as an inalienable right of all human beings and the right to the same employment opportunities, including the application of the same criteria for selection in matters of employment.

The Convention Against Torture, and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, ratified by Kuwait by virtue of law no. 1/1996, states that each state party shall take effective legislative, administrative, judicial or other measures to prevent acts of torture in any territory under its jurisdiction.

Furthermore, Kuwait ratified the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime by virtue of law No 5/2006, and the two protocols thereto, the first protocol being to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children, and the second being against the smuggling of migrants by land, sea and air, and the slavery convention on the suppression and punishment of the crime of apartheid. Therefore, Kuwait is legally bound by these ratified conventions to implement and enforce the rights contained therein for all individuals present on its territory.

UN-Habitat launches 'greening Kuwait' campaign

KUWAIT: The United Nations Human Settlement Program (UN-Habitat) on Saturday launched its "greening Kuwait" campaign for the fourth year in a row in coordination with Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) and the participation of several diplomatic missions. The campaign is aimed at planting 500 trees in Al-Abdaliya natural reserve.

Speaking to KUNA, Deputy Head of the UN-Habitat mission in the GCC and Kuwait Qusai Al-

Duaj said that the choice of Al-Abdaliya natural reserve by the oil sector in Kuwait reflected its commitment to environmental causes and efforts to boost carbon neutrality. He noted that choosing February as the start of this annual campaign was to reflect the notions of patriotism and love of country during Kuwait's national occasions.

Battling desertification and combating climate change were also essential messages propagated by the campaign, he affirmed. On the planted trees, Al-Duaj stressed that they were native to the desert environment of Kuwait and would fit in perfectly, adding that some 45 diplomatic missions in Kuwait were taking partake. On his part, KOC's Public Relations and Information Group Manager Mohammad Al-Basri indicated that the company was exerting tremendous efforts in the Al-Abdaliya

reserve, saying that a sustainable environment was an important aspect of the tree-planting efforts.

He said that the KOC gave priority to achieve Kuwait's sustainable development goals through cooperation with national entities and the UN-Habitat. Also delivering statement to KUNA was Zubaydullo Zubaydoza - Tajikistan Ambassador and dean of the diplomatic corps in Kuwait - who indicated that his embassy's involvement in the campaign reflected keen interest in protecting the environment in Kuwait and elsewhere.

The success of any campaign for the environment is success to the entire world and there is hope that this particular event would continue to thrive for the sake of a better future, he added. The Tajikistan embassy had imported several trees native to Tajikistan to be planted during the campaign. —AFP



Tajikistan's Ambassador plants a tree during 'greening Kuwait' campaign.



A group photo of campaign participants. —KUNA photos

MoI awards over 2,230 servicemen

KUWAIT: Interior Minister and acting Defense Minister Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Sabah has granted military medals of various degrees to around 2,233 servicemen in the Kuwait army. The awards are in tandem with the national celebrations and in honor of orders of HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah in appreciation of their sacrifices for the country.

Sheikh Talal granted the military duty medal of the excellent class to 34 officers of the rank of brigadier general, of the first class to 192 officers of the ranks of lieutenant colonel and major, and of the third class to 1,790 non-commissioned officers, in addition to awarding 217 officers of various ranks military service medals in the categories of gold, silver and bronze.

Sheikh Talal congratulated the members of the Kuwaiti army on receiving this honor from the political leadership, which confirms its keenness and interest in the affairs of its members of the armed forces, as well as its belief in their abilities and confidence in their capabilities, and the great sacrifices they make.

KISR foudns company for scientific research marketing and production

KUWAIT: Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR) has founded a new KD 6 million company called Kazema to take over mixed farming, aquaculture, marine fish farming, freshwater fish farming, operation of freshwater fish hatcheries, production and bottling of water, production and bottling of

mineral water on site, production and bottling of pure filtered water, water desalination, whole sale of bottled water of all kinds, as well as operation of freshwater shrimp hatchery ponds.

The company is managed by a board of directors consisting of three members. The term of membership is three years, subject to renewal. If it is not possible to elect a new board of directors on the specified date, the existing board will continue to manage the company's business until the obstacles are removed and a new board of directors is elected.

Mathematical Kangaroo competition launched

KUWAIT: The Sabah Al-Ahmad Center for Giftedness and Creativity of the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS) announced the launch of the Mathematical Kangaroo competition. Registration will open from Feb 12 until March 11, 2023.

"The Mathematical Kangaroo is considered one of the biggest competitions in mathematics, which was founded in France in 1991. The competition is organized annually in more than 70 countries around the world. More than six million students have participated. The first edition organized in 2022 by Sabah Al-Ahmad Center was a success, as more than 600 students registered and around 400 students participated," acting

talent management director Mohammed Al-Baqshi said.

"Registration for the competition is open to students of different educational levels, both Kuwaitis and residents in Kuwait. Registration will be free, and students can choose if they want to be tested in English or Arabic," Baqshi clarified. He stressed the importance of these types of competitions which have a positive impact on students, as they aim to increase passion in mathematics and apply its definitions in daily life, which develops their mental skills. He called on parents to encourage their children to register in the competition.



Mohammed Al-Baqshi

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News in brief

Kuwait crude oil up

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti crude oil rose by 32 cents during Friday's trading sessions to close at \$84.65 per barrel, compared with \$84.33 pb the day before, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said Saturday. Brent futures also went up by \$1.89 to \$86.39 pb and West Texas Intermediate by \$1.66 cents to \$79.72 pb. Meanwhile, oil contracts rebounded after Russia announced it would slash its crude output in response to a Western price cap that was imposed on exports after Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. Brent, the international benchmark, and its US counterpart WTI, which had been down earlier in the day, jumped more than two percent after Russian deputy prime minister Alexander Novak said production would be cut by 500,000 barrels per day, or five percent of output, in March. "Crude prices reacted positively to the news, considering that so far Russian oil production has been relatively resilient," said UBS analyst Giovanni Staunovo. "The move ... aims to improve oil revenues by narrowing the discount of Russian oil to Brent." —Agencies

Gulf leaders commended

RIYADH: The Gulf States leaders are commended for launching relief aid campaigns towards victims of the devastating earthquake, which hit Turkey and Syria last Monday, said a GCC official. In a press release, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Secretary General Jassem Al-Budaiwi affirmed that the relief aid campaigns, launched by members of the GCC states, would hopefully lessen the impact and suffering of those affected by this tragic event. He commended the official and popular response towards the relief aid campaigns, which reflected the sincere humanitarian feeling directed to those affected by the destructive natural disaster in both Turkey and Syria. —KUNA

Salmi accident kills one

KUWAIT: Two vehicles collided along Salmi road, killing an elderly man and injuring six people. The victims are from Saudi Arabia. Security men and the Kuwait Fire Force rushed to the scene and transferred the body and injured people to the concerned departments.

Photo of the day



KUWAIT: A vendor displays a winter abaya at the bisht market in Souq Mubarakiya. —Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

Gulf Bank participates in Corporate Directors training program

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank has announced its participation in the Corporate Directors training program, for the second consecutive year, organized by the International Finance Corporation (IFC) - a member of the World Bank Group, in cooperation with Tammayaz Foundation and Soroptimist International. This participation is part of the Bank's efforts to consolidate the principles of sustainability in society and to support women empowerment programs and initiatives.

Gulf Bank's Deputy General Manager of the Treasury Department, Maab Al-Qassim, and Assistant General Manager of Corporate Banking, Shamayel Al-Marzouq, participated in the 3-month training program, which started earlier this year, on the 21st of January. Last year's training program witnessed the participation of three female leaders from the Bank, namely Dalal Al-Dousari, Noura Al-Houti and

Marwa Hajjiah.

The Corporate Directors training program is uniquely designed to provide participants with tools to address and improve corporate governance practices that affect long-term planning and prepare them to better understand Corporate Boards. The program covers a wide range of corporate governance issues and aids in acquiring skills of strategic supervision and management control. This extensive learning experience teaches the participants about the vital role of corporate board directors, with disclosure and transparency, and helps them understand how to protect the rights of the shareholders.

The program also focuses on the corporate governance challenges faced by companies and the best practices to reduce these challenges. It goes beyond basic theories and provides a practical summary of how to implement the basic aspects of business governance. On this occasion, General Manager of the Human Resources Department at Gulf Bank, Salma Al-Hajjaj, confirmed that Gulf Bank is ardent about empowering women - through building the talents of female leaders in the Bank, and encouraging them to participate in specialized training programs; especially those organized by leading international institutions such as the International Finance Corporation.

She added: "We are proud to witness the participation of women leaders from the Bank in the Corporate Directors training program, for the second consecutive year. This program opens new possibilities for those in leadership positions, especially women, due to the extensive knowledge and skills provided to the trainees." She further mentioned that empowering women in the workplace increases the

ent and expertise of employees within the Bank - including male employees - as it expands the ideas and innovations in various activities and creates healthy competition to reach leadership positions.

Al-Hajjaj concluded her remarks stating, "Gulf Bank's interest in women stems from the 2025 strategy and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, as it is one of the signatories to the principles of women empowerment and gender equality in the workplace and society." Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the Future. The Bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large.

With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience. Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining robust developments in sustainability at environmental, social and governance levels through diverse sustainability initiatives, strategically selected to benefit both the internal and external community. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with various parties to achieve it.



Salma Al-Hajjaj



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Tamil People Service Center organizes blood donation campaign

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Tamil People Service Center organized its 4th year blood donation campaign on Jan 27 at Jabriya Central Blood Bank to mark the 74th Republic Day of India, where 152 people donated blood with more than 500 others joining the event. The chief guest was Kamal Sinha Rathore, Indian Embassy First Secretary, Dr M A Hythar, Chairman TVS Group and Rajendra, Manager Air India. The event started at 1 pm and ended at 6 pm. Other important members of Tamil Makkal Sevai Maiyam were also present, including Tamil Makkal



Sevai President Abu Daagair, Secretary Abdul Rashid, Treasurer Amjad Khan, event coordinator Ali bhai, Rajak Ahmed and Balu Selvaraj and Medical Secretary Siddiq Imam.

KRCS signs \$5 million deal to help Syrians

KUWAIT: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) signed on Friday a five-million-dollar international cooperation deal to help those affected by the catastrophic earthquake hitting northern Syria. Speaking to KUNA, KRCS chairman Dr Hilal Al-Sayer revealed that the deal was signed in cooperation with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and the Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS).

The deal would be geared towards providing urgent humanitarian relief aid and necessary items to those affected by the earthquake. Foodstuff, medical assistance, and tools to erect

shelters were essential part of the deal, he indicated. Al-Sayer noted that the deal was signed as part of the KRCS commitment to the directives of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah who called for providing immediate assistance to those affected by the earthquake that hit southern Turkey and northern Syria. The KRCS, so far, has sent 90 tons of relief aid material and provided assistance to those affected by the earthquake. —KUNA



Dr Hilal Al-Sayer



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Biden, Lula vow to defend democracy in Americas

Brazil, US renew commitment to protecting Amazon rainforests

WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden and his Brazilian counterpart Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva said Friday at the White House that the two biggest countries in the Americas have successfully seen off attacks on their democracies and will now work together on fighting the climate crisis. "Both our nations' strong democracies have been tested," Biden told Lula, and "both in the United States and Brazil, democracy prevailed." Meeting in the Oval Office, Biden and Lula expressed solidarity over their similar paths. Biden defeated Donald Trump in 2020, but two months later, a mob of Trump supporters stormed Congress believing his conspiracy theory that he'd been the real election winner.

In Brazil, Lula defeated right-winger Jair Bolsonaro and took office this January, but a mob of Bolsonaro supporters stormed government buildings shortly after. "We have some issues on which we can work together," Lula told Biden. "First is to never again allow" the anti-democratic mob attacks. Touting Brazil's return to the international arena, Lula said his predecessor's "world started and ended with fake news - in the morning, afternoon and at night. It seemed that he despised international relations." Biden, referring to Trump, quickly answered: "Sounds familiar."

Amazon financing

Biden and Lula stressed their mutual commitment to saving the Amazon rainforest and fighting global warming - efforts that Bolsonaro and Trump both sidelined. Biden said their "shared values... put us on the same page, particularly, especially, when it comes to the climate crisis." Brazil is seeking US participation in the Amazon Fund, an international scheme to finance anti-deforestation efforts in

Brazil, and Lula walked away from the Oval Office voicing moderate confidence that would happen. "I think they will," Lula told reporters. "I not only think they will, but I think that it's necessary they participate." He added that while the meeting had not specifically addressed the Amazon Fund, he had brought up "the responsibility of rich countries to assume responsibility to fund countries with rainforests and not only in Brazil." In a joint US-Brazil statement that followed the meeting, the White House said it hoped to "work with Congress to provide funds for programs to protect and conserve the Brazilian Amazon, including initial support for the Amazon Fund."

Lula told Biden in the Oval Office that during his 2003-2010 term as president, he had committed Brazil to drastic reductions in the deforestation of the world's largest rainforest, which is often described as the "lungs of the world" for its massive greenhouse gas absorption. However, "in the last few years, the rainforest in the Amazon was invaded by political irrationality, human irrationality, because we had a president who sent people to deforest, sent gold diggers into the Indigenous areas," he said, referring to Bolsonaro. Biden has made US leadership on fighting climate change one of his main priorities - starting by putting the United States back into the Paris climate accord after Trump exited the historic deal, which aims to slow global warming.

Ukraine divide

One area where Biden and Lula sharply disagree is over Ukraine, and the subject of Russia's invasion did not come up during their introductory remarks, before reporters were ushered from the Oval Office.



WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden and Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva walk together along the Rose Garden colonnade at the White House on February 10, 2023. — AFP

Biden has spearheaded an unprecedented Western effort to rally behind Ukraine, providing aid, weaponry, military training and diplomatic support as the country struggles to repel the Russian war machine. But several major democratic countries - notably India, South Africa and Brazil - have largely remained on the sidelines, refusing to help Ukraine militarily and sending mixed messages politically.

After the meeting was over, Lula told reporters that he wanted to assemble an international "group

of countries that aren't directly or indirectly involved in the war of Russia against Ukraine so that we can have a possibility to build peace." "That is, I'm convinced that we need to find a way out to end this war. I found Biden shared the same concern," he said. "The first thing is to stop the war." In a sign of rekindled chemistry between the two leaders, Lula invited Biden to visit Brazil, the joint statement said, "and President Biden accepted the invitation." — AFP

French-Iranian academic released from Tehran prison

TEHRAN: French-Iranian academic Fariba Adelkhah is "happy" to have been released from prison in Iran but uncertainties remain about when she could return to France, her lawyer said on Saturday. Adelkhah, who was first arrested in June 2019 and had been serving a five-year sentence, was released from prison on Friday night, the lawyer Hojjat Kermani told AFP. She was now in her family's home and "she is happy" to have left Evin prison in north Tehran, he added.

The lawyer said she had been released following a decision by supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei to pardon or reduce the prison terms of a "significant number" of convicts ahead of the 44th anniversary of the Islamic republic, which falls on Saturday. "The case is closed so there is no legal obstacle for her to leave the country," he said, while adding "we have to wait and see if there is political decision against her departure from the country."

A research director at Sciences Po university in Paris, Adelkhah was arrested in June 2019 along with her French colleague and partner Roland Marchal. Marchal was released in March 2020 in an apparent prisoner swap after France released Iranian engineer Jallal Rohollahnejad, who had faced extradition to the United States over accusations he had violated US sanctions against Iran. Adelkhah's case, however, is different as Iran does not recognize dual nationality for its citizens. She



PARIS: Colleagues of the French-Iranian academic Fariba Adelkhah hold placards in support of the researcher in this file photo taken on January 13, 2022. — AFP

was sentenced in May 2020 to five years in prison for conspiring against national security but was allowed home in Tehran in October 2020 with an electronic bracelet before being returned to jail in January 2022.

Up until Adelkhah's release, seven French citizens were being held by Iran, according to the French government. They are among two dozen foreign

nationals described by their families and supporters as innocent people. Iran recently freed prisoners including journalists and rights activists, many of whom were arrested during protests triggered by the September 16 death in custody of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old ethnic Kurd, who had been arrested for an alleged breach of the Islamic republic's dress rules for women. — AFP

EU leaders plan tougher asylum rules

BRUSSELS: EU leaders have agreed to toughen rules aimed at making it easier to expel asylum-seekers whose refugee applications are denied, European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen said Friday. The measures are a response to increasing European concern over rising irregular immigration that has become a hot-button issue in several member countries. That problem is "a European challenge that requires a European response," EU leaders said in a final document at the end of a 16-hour summit looking at that and other topics.

The low numbers of failed asylum-seekers being returned to their home countries is a central preoccupation for the European Union. The bloc is already hosting millions of refugees from conflicts in Ukraine, Syria and Afghanistan, while facing asylum claims from citizens of safer countries such as Bangladesh, Turkey and Tunisia, many of whom end up being deemed economic migrants ineligible for asylum. Von der Leyen said "pilot projects" relying on the EU's border patrol, asylum and police cooperation agencies would look to instill "fast and fair asylum procedures" at the bloc's external borders.

The EU leaders called on the commission "to immediately mobilize substantial EU funds" to reinforce that external border with "protection capabilities and infrastructure, means of surveillance, including aerial surveillance, and equipment," according to the summit document. The summit also reached agreement on a "principle" under which one EU country can use a court decision in another EU member state to return an irregular migrant to their home country. That would try to prevent "asylum shopping" whereby migrants go to a different country to apply to stay after being turned down in an initial one. The EU leaders also agreed "to increase the use of the safe-country concepts" that will open the way to the bloc formulating a common list, von der Leyen said. — AFP



RIJEKA, Croatia: A migrant in transit warms up in a sleeping bag on a platform at the railway station in Rijeka, on the Adriatic coast in western Croatia on February 6, 2023. — AFP

Three arrested as UK anti-migrant protests continue

LONDON: UK police have arrested three people on suspicion of violent disorder during an anti-immigration demonstration by far-right protesters outside a hotel used to house asylum seekers near Liverpool. The protest came amid heightened tensions as record numbers of migrants are crossing the Channel in small boats, prompting the interior ministry to come up with a controversial plan to send such asylum seekers to Rwanda.

Merseyside Police said "missiles" had been thrown at officers and a police vehicle was damaged after several hundred demonstrators rallied late Friday outside The Suites Hotel in Knowsley. Assistant Chief Constable Paul White said: "The scenes... were completely unacceptable, putting those present, our officers and the wider community in danger." Merseyside police commissioner Emily Spurrell told Radio City station: "It was incredibly dangerous and there were a couple of injuries amongst the police officers." The Liverpool Echo newspaper said a police riot van was set alight. The Home Office has been using the hotel to temporarily house asylum seekers since last year, according to local media.

Protesters outside the hotel shouted slogans such as "Get them out," one pro-refugee group, the



KNOWSLEY, United Kingdom: A workman treats the ground damaged by a fire outside the Suites Hotel in northwest England on February 11, 2023. — AFP

Merseyside Pensioners Association, said. Its activists were holding a counter-protest at the same time, standing outside the hotel with placards saying "Refugees welcome". Claire Mosely, founder of refugee charity Care4Calais, who was also at the scene, told Sky News that protesters "got to the police van and they set it on fire and it actually broke into a really big fire and exploded." "Then they broke through again and they started fighting with the police," Mosely said. "I was really shocked... how quickly it got worse."

White nationalist group Patriotic Alternative

denied it was the organizer, after holding a protest outside the hotel last week and leafleting locally. One of its campaigners posted a video showing he was at the scene on Friday, however. Hope Not Hate website, which researches the far right, wrote that the events took place "in a context of swelling anti-migrant hatred". "Far-right groups like Britain First (BF) and Patriotic Alternative (PA) had made visits to the hotel in recent weeks, although the protest appears to have been largely locally-driven, rather than organized by far-right groups outside the area," it said. — AFP

International

Hungarian resistance mounts against Chinese battery plant

Locals concerned plant will exacerbate climate crisis

DEBRECEN, Hungary: Even as diggers turned over land for one of Europe's biggest electric battery plants, environmental protesters vowed to run the Chinese project out of town. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán is keen to woo foreign manufacturers and promote the country as a global hub for electric vehicle (EV) batteries. The market for greener vehicles is expected to surge in response to consumers' worries about climate change, with top carmakers shifting towards developing less-polluting vehicles. But the groundswell of opposition in Hungary's second biggest city of Debrecen is a rare grassroots challenge to the nationalist premier.

Chinese giant CATL is pouring €7.3 billion (\$7.8 billion) into building a lithium-ion EV battery plant, under a deal announced in August. Rancorous public hearings followed in January, with angry locals confronting officials over worries about the mega-factory's demands for water and energy, and pollution risks. "Our most basic need is clean water, clean air and healthy land, not batteries," said protest co-organiser Julia Perge, a 56-year-old civil activist. Alarm and resistance only grew after last summer's drought, which dried up a lake near the city, a long-time stronghold of Orbán's ruling Fidesz party. Hungary has more than 20 EV battery plant projects under way and hopes to become the EU's second biggest producer in GWh (gigawatt per hour) terms by 2030 behind Germany. Some of these other sites, too, have been targeted by protesters voicing similar environmental fears.

'Decisive' for future

The government drive is in line with priorities of the European Union, which aims to produce a quarter of the world's batteries by 2030, compared to just three percent in 2020. The CATL 100GWh factory in Debrecen will reportedly produce enough to power more than a million new cars annually. It is expected to employ 9,000 workers. The project also tallies with Orbán's long-standing policy to look East - offering lucrative tax breaks, infrastructure and job creation subsidies to lure Asian factories. It is a pillar of his overall economic strategy - dubbed Orbánomics by analysts - but Hungary's economic performance is sliding, hit by record inflation which is among the highest in the EU and a weakening local currency. Defending the new Chinese factory on the same day as a protest last weekend, Foreign Minister Peter Szijarto stressed there was "huge competition" to attract such investment. "This will be the decisive industrial sector of the future, economic growth will go where these



DEBRECEN, Hungary: People protest against the Chinese battery giant CATL EV battery factory on February 4, 2023. — AFP

(EV) investments go," he said. German carmakers Audi and Mercedes already have plants in Hungary and have been switching their focus to electric vehicles, while BMW recently also chose Debrecen for a two-billion-euro EV plant.

'Strictest environmental rules'

With placards reading "Without water, there is no life!", hundreds of flag-waving protesters filled Debrecen's main square on Saturday demanding a halt to the plant. "People living here were not properly informed, or asked if they wanted this," software engineer Gabor Bogos, 42, complained. CATL told AFP it was "open for questions and comments" from the local community. In an emailed comment, it said that it "strives to become a partner in the sustainable development of Debrecen and the wider region". The government expects the factory to comply with the "strictest possible environmental protection rules". Orbán's chief of staff Gergely Gulyas told reporters on Thursday. He said that many of the protesters' con-

cerns were "based on fake news about the factory".

'False' promise

The promise of new jobs resulting from the factories has also been met with skepticism. Analysts say they will likely be filled by migrant workers from Asia due to a local labor shortage, as has happened at other new plants. "The promise that young people will stay local with the construction of factories is false," said professor Dora Györfly at Budapest's Corvinus economic university. State support should be directed at Hungary's crumbling education, social care and health sectors, she said. Such plants "are not only environmentally destructive, but also do not help economic catch-up" as Hungary itself does not develop batteries, she told AFP. But few believe the protest will stop the construction - or that it will grow into a wider wave of discontent against Orbán. "An objection to a particular local issue cannot be easily transformed into a general objection to the government nationally," political analyst Bulcsu Hunyadi said. — AFP

welcomed the development, and said it would "actively consider reciprocally resuming the issuance of short-term visas for South Koreans visiting China," a foreign ministry spokeswoman said.

South Korea said other restrictions, including testing requirements, would remain in place. Travelers from China must provide a negative test before departure and undergo a PCR test within the first day of arrival. Those testing positive are required to be quarantined for a week. South Korea had removed pre-flight and on-arrival testing requirements for travelers from all other countries last year. Seoul recently dropped limits requiring people to wear masks in most indoor spaces, ending one of the country's last major pandemic restrictions as COVID-19 cases dwindle. — AFP

US calls for 'dialogue' with Nicaragua govt

WASHINGTON: Top US diplomat Antony Blinken on Friday spoke with his Nicaraguan counterpart in a rare high-level exchange, a day after the Central American nation released 222 detained regime critics and exiled them to the United States. Ties between the countries have sharply deteriorated in recent years with Washington imposing a slew of sanctions over leftist President Daniel Ortega's crackdown on Nicaragua's political opposition.

The 222 prisoners were previously detained in a wave of repression that followed 2018 anti-government protests demanding Ortega cede power. Secretary of State Blinken and Foreign Minister Denis Moncada discussed the prisoners as well as "the importance of constructive dialogue," US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said in a statement. After weeks of behind-the-scenes talks with Washington, Ortega's government allowed the detainees to board a chartered flight to Washington.

Price previously said everyone in the group had consented to travel to the United States, except two who chose to stay in Nicaragua. US officials said they would allow the former prisoners to stay for at least two years and would provide medical and legal support. A court official in Nicaragua's capital Managua had said the prisoners were "deported" and called them "traitors to the homeland."

Nicaragua's legislature has moved to strip the dissidents of their citizenship, which must be voted on this year to become law. Spain has offered them citizenship. The United States on Thursday welcomed the release of the dissidents but said the move was made unilaterally without any promises from Ortega. Ortega has denied the mass release was the result of negotiations with the United States. Catholic bishop Rolando Alvarez, one of the detainees who refused to travel to Washington, was sentenced to 26 years in prison on Friday, stripped of his citizenship and fined. Defeated in 1990 elections, Ortega returned to power in 2007, and has since engaged in increasingly authoritarian practices, quashing presidential term limits and seizing control of all branches of the state. — AFP



SAN JOSE, Costa Rica: A Nicaraguan holds a national flag against her chest as she celebrates after Nicaragua freed over 200 detained opposition members. — AFP

South Korea ends visa restrictions for China travelers

SEOUL: South Korea said Friday it would resume issuing short-term visas to travelers from China, ending a COVID-linked restriction that sparked a furious response and tit-for-tat measures from Beijing. In January, Seoul imposed travel requirements, including visa restrictions and PCR testing, on all visitors from China, as the world's most-populous country battled a

surge in coronavirus cases. But South Korea said the rate of passengers from China testing positive on arrival had dropped to 1.4 percent last week, down from 20 percent when the curbs were first introduced. As a result, Seoul will "remove short-term visa restrictions on China and resume issuing them starting from February 11", the country's disease control center said in a statement.

The drop reflects the current situation in China, it said, where there have been "no signs of new coronavirus spread or mutations after the lunar new year holidays". Days after Seoul stopped granting the visas in January, Beijing pushed back by calling the measures "discriminatory" and suspending the issuance of short-term visas for South Koreans. On Friday, Beijing

Kuwait opens hearts and wallets...

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Also, in support of efforts by Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) to help earthquake victims, Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry donated KD 250,000. People around the country also donated relief supplies at various collection points.

KRCS announced on Saturday that 42 tons of medical supplies were sent to the victims. Speaking to KUNA, KRCS Chairman Dr Hilal Al-Sayer said the current batch of supplies is part of Kuwait's overall campaign to aid those affected by the devastating earthquake. Sayer commended the assistance provided by both the ministries of defense and foreign affairs to KRCS in this humanitarian campaign. He reiterated calls towards civil society and private sector to step up support to the "Kuwait by Your Side" humanitarian

campaign, revealing KRCS has already sent 100 tons of aid to Turkey. Kuwait plays an integral role in relief aid and humanitarian efforts worldwide, said an international official on Saturday. Speaking to Kuwait Television on the sidelines of "Kuwait by Your Side" campaign, Hossam Al-Sharqawi - Regional Director at International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) for Middle East and North Africa - lauded the relentless efforts carried out by KRCS in the current campaign.

He noted that the natural disaster's impact might be felt for years to come, saying it was important to push for more relief aid. Meanwhile, the ministry of social affairs announced 50 percent of cooperative societies' charity collections will be directed towards the campaign. Some 37 charitable societies had submitted requests to join the campaign and all were approved. Around 12 charitable societies have collected over KD 2.3 million (\$7.54 million), which will be all directed towards the relief campaign that began at 12:00 pm local time on Kuwait TV and continued until midnight. — Agencies

between the two rival superpowers. Kirby said the new object was detected late Thursday, and shot down Friday afternoon Washington time. It went down in northern Alaska near the Canadian border and fell over a frozen body of water, making recovery feasible, Kirby said. "We do expect to be able to recover the debris," he said. Biden ordered the shoot-down because at the altitude it was flying, Kirby said, the object posed "a reasonable threat" to civil aviation.

Kirby said the US military sent a plane to observe the object before it was taken down and "the pilot's assessment was that this was not manned". The Chinese surveillance balloon had clear abilities to propel and maneuver itself, he noted. It "was clearly for intelligence surveillance and inconsistent with the equipment onboard weather balloons," a senior State Department official said Thursday. "It had multiple antennas to include an array likely capable of collecting and geo-locating communications," the official.

The official also tied the balloon to China's People's Liberation Army, without saying directly that it had been deployed by the PLA. The Pentagon's Ryder said the US recovery teams have finished mapping the debris field from the downed Chinese balloon and "are in the process of searching for and identifying debris on the ocean floor". — AFP

Miracle rescues as quake toll ...

Continued from Page 1

grief at a cotton field transformed into a cemetery, with an endless stream of bodies arriving for swift burial. Compounding the anguish, the United Nations has warned that at least 870,000 people urgently need hot meals across Turkey and Syria. In Syria alone, up to 5.3 million people may have been made homeless. A border crossing between Armenia and Turkey opened for the first time in 35 years on Saturday to allow five trucks carrying food and water into the quake-hit region.

Turkey's disaster agency said over 32,000 people from Turkish organizations are working on search and rescue efforts. In addition, there are 8,294 international rescuers. However, Austrian soldiers on Saturday suspended rescue operations in Hatay over a "worsening security situation", an army spokesman told AFP. Two dog handlers later resumed work under protection from the Turkish army. A similar decision to halt rescue operations was taken in Germany by the Federal Agency for Technical Relief (TSW) and an NGO specializing in helping victims of natural disasters, ISAR Germany, according to an NGO spokesman. "There are more and more reports of clashes between different factions, shots have also been fired," said ISAR spokesman Stefan Heine.

Iran celebrates 44th anniversary...

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Authorities say hundreds of people, including dozens of security personnel, have been killed and thousands arrested during the protests which they generally label as "riots". The judiciary has sentenced 18 people to death in connection with the protests, according to an AFP tally based on official announcements. Four people have been executed, triggering international outrage. In his speech on Saturday, Raisi repeated the accusation that the protests were provoked and fueled by the West. "See what the enemies did in this one year and what conspiracies they organ-

The UN rights office had on Friday urged all actors in the affected area - where Kurdish militants and Syrian rebels operate - to allow humanitarian access. The outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party, which is considered a terrorist group by Ankara and its Western allies, announced a temporary halt in fighting to ease recovery work. In Syria, where years of conflict have ravaged the healthcare system and parts of the country remain under the control of rebels, aid has been slow to arrive. World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus took a flight full of emergency medical equipment into the quake-stricken city of Aleppo on Saturday. Tedros toured damaged areas of the city tweeting: "I'm heartbroken to see the conditions survivors are facing - freezing weather and extremely limited access to shelter, food, water, heat and medical care".

The Syrian government said it had approved the delivery of humanitarian assistance to quake-hit areas outside its control in Idlib province. A convoy was expected to leave on Sunday. In Damascus, Suleiman Khalil, an official at the transport ministry, said 57 aid planes had landed at Syrian airports this week. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has urged the Security Council to authorize the opening of new cross-border aid points between Turkey and Syria. The council will meet to discuss Syria, possibly early next week. Turkey said it was working on opening two new routes into rebel-held parts of Syria. The winter freeze has left thousands of people either spending nights in their cars or huddling around makeshift fires that have become ubiquitous across the quake-hit region. — AFP

ized? But the history-making nation of Iran recognized the evil hand of the enemy and shone brightly on the stage and defeated the enemy," he said. "The issue of the enemy is neither women, nor life, freedom, human rights and nuclear (program) but rather they want to take away the independence, freedom and peaceful life of the Iranian nation," Raisi said.

"Woman, life, freedom" has been the main slogan of the protests triggered by the September 16 death of Amini, an Iranian woman of Kurdish origin. State television said celebrations for the 44th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution were held in 1,400 cities and towns across the country, and aired footage of large rallies in Isfahan, Mashhad, Shiraz, and Tabriz. The celebrations mark the day that the shah's government fell 10 days after Shiite cleric Khomeini returned from exile. Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi had already fled Iran in January 1979, after months of protests against his rule. — AFP

US shoots down 'high-altitude...

Continued from Page 1

said. "We do not know who owns it, whether state owned or corporate owned," he said. "We don't understand the full purpose." Pentagon spokesman Brigadier General Pat Ryder said an F-22 Raptor used an AIM-9X missile to bring down the object - the same aircraft and munition used to target the alleged Chinese spy balloon. The incident took place amid a new alarm over what US officials say is an ongoing program by China to fly surveillance balloons to collect intelligence around the world.

US officials said such balloons have flown over 40 countries, including at least four times previously over United States territory. The Chinese balloon last week sparked particular concern as it overflew areas where the United States keeps nuclear missiles in underground silos and bases strategic bombers. The incident led US Secretary of State Antony Blinken to cancel an imminent trip to Beijing that had been long in planning and aimed at improving communications

International

Earthquake brings 'first catastrophe' to Syria city

Thousands left homeless as whole apartment blocks collapse in Assad stronghold

JABLEH, Syria: Syria's coastal city of Jableh, a regime heartland, was largely spared the worst of war but a massive quake has now joined it in misery with the rest of the battle-scarred country. With flattened buildings, civilians trapped under rubble and residents forced to flee their homes, Jableh is no longer sheltered from the kind of devastation that has long plagued neighboring regions. "It's the first catastrophe of its kind in Jableh," said Abdulhadi al-Ajji. "I am 52 years old and I have never gone through anything like this in my life."

The father of four, whose cracked cinderblock home overlooks a building in ruins, said his city had always been a safe haven even at the height of Syria's nearly 12-year war. When rebels expanded their foothold across the country, Jableh sent men to fight, but never saw major battle on its own soil. "Even my mother who is 80 years old told me nothing like this has ever happened here," said Ajji, a carpenter. Jableh is located in Latakia, a province largely under government control and one of the worst impacted by the tremor. Monday's 7.8-magnitude quake that struck near the Turkish city of Gaziantep, about 40 kilometers (25 miles) from the Syrian border, killed more than 24,000 people, including at least 3,553 in Syria. In Latakia province alone, the quake killed at least 623 people, and the death toll continues to mount minute by minute, according to Alaa Moubarak, head of Jableh's civil defense.

'Nowhere to go'

Jableh's residential neighborhoods have long been dilapidated, though they have been spared the scars emblematic of the country's years of battle. But more than 50 apartment blocks in the city and its environs have completely collapsed because

of the quake, and at least 50 others are at risk of falling, Moubarak said. An estimated 4,000 to 5,000 residents have been forced from their homes, taking shelter in mosques, hospitals and the city's stadium, he added. On Friday, a rescue force from the United Arab Emirates operated on a completely flattened building that initially split in half when the quake hit. The first section fell immediately, with the remaining part following shortly after. At least 15 people were killed. Imad al-Daou barely made it out alive with his wife and two children when the floor crumbled beneath their feet. "This is the first catastrophe of its kind that I ever experienced in my life," said the 42-year-old merchant. "They had to pull me out using an excavator."

Jableh is part of a Syrian coastal region that includes the government strongholds of Latakia and Tartus - too, largely spared the impact of the conflict. The area is known as a recruiting ground for President Bashar al-Assad's forces, with much of his military hailing from the area. Assad's Russian allies also have major stakes in the region. The Russian airbase in Hmeimim is five kilometers (three miles) from Jableh, and the naval port of Tartus lies roughly 60 kilometers to the south.

'Tent on the street'

Syria's war, which started in 2011 with a brutal crackdown on anti-regime protests, has killed nearly half a million people and has forced at least half of the country's pre-war population from their homes. The vast majority of the country has seen major population movement due to fighting. But the residents of Jableh were not forced to flee their homes until the quake hit. In the city's Al-Fayed neighborhood, dozens of evacuees huddled in a mosque-turned-shelter waiting to hear if their



JABLEH, Syria: A Syrian boy searches building rubble for items to salvage in the regime-controlled town of Jableh on February 10, 2023. —AFP

homes are safe for return. With nowhere else to go, they have been living there for five days, barely able to afford food, let alone temporary accommodation.

"I'll pitch a tent on the street" if I can't go back home, said Fatima Hammoud. The 42-year-old mother of three fled her damaged home with her husband and children on Monday, fearing the roof

would cave in over their heads. "I can't sleep. Anytime I feel a minor movement I remember all the shaking," she said. Sprawled on the floor nearby, Halima al-Aswad also said she has been stalked by dread since the disaster. "Where will I go? The only safe place is the mosque," the mother of three said, fighting back tears. "Wherever is safe, I will go there." —AFP

Armenia-Turkey crossing opens for first time in decades

ISTANBUL: A border crossing between Armenia and Turkey opened for the first time in 35 years on Saturday, to allow humanitarian aid through after the massive earthquake that hit the region, an official said. Five trucks with aid including food and water arrived in Turkey from the Alican border crossing, tweeted Serdar Kilic, Turkey's special

envoy for dialogue with Armenia. State news agency Anadolu said this was the first time the crossing had opened since 1988, when Turkey sent aid to Armenia after the country was hit by an earthquake that killed between 25,000 to 30,000. Kilic in his tweet thanked Armenia and the Armenian national assembly's vice president Ruben Rubinyan. The aid also included medicine, he said. "Happy to have been able to assist," Rubinyan said on Twitter.

The two countries have never established formal diplomatic relations and their shared border has been closed since the 1990s. Their relationship is strained by World War I-era mass killings of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, atrocities

Yerevan insists amount to a genocide. But in December 2021, the two countries appointed special envoys to help normalize relations - a year after Armenia lost to Turkey's ally Azerbaijan in a war for control of the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region. Turkey fiercely rejects the genocide label, arguing that 300,000 to 500,000 Armenians and at least as many Turks died in civil strife when Armenians rose up against their Ottoman rulers and sided with invading Russian troops. In February 2022, Turkey and Armenia resumed their first commercial flights in two years. The land border between the two countries has remained closed since 1993 however, forcing trucks to transit through Georgia or Iran. —AFP

Cotton field turns into cemetery after quake

ANTAKYA, Turkey: Softly patting the ground, the tearful mourner bids farewell to the deceased - one among 1,000 resting in a hastily-made cemetery that used to be a cotton field in southern Turkey. All he has to identify his loved one, who died in Monday's massive quake, is a concrete slab with a number. "97" is one of more than 24,000 people killed after the 7.8-magnitude earthquake hit Turkey and Syria. Dozens of sheep graze meters away from the freshly dug graves in the city of Antakya in Hatay province. The road leading to Antakya is blocked by vans carrying more bodies as the death toll mounts with each passing day.

A white van arrives at the field. Inside, there are four bodies in black body bags. Six men lift each bag, placing them gently in the newly dug graves. A man begs them to wait, in tears: "One minute, one minute", he says, repeating just one name - "Emine". Within a few minutes, the bodies are covered by earth and the concrete slabs spray-painted with the numbers 94, 95, 96 and 97 serving as temporary tombstones. More bodies arrive. Around 600 people were laid to rest on Friday, among the more than 5,000 people who died in Hatay, including Antakya. Families hug each other tightly near the graves. A group of women weeps as volunteers try and console them.

'Terrible'

In the car park nearby, vans carrying bodies struggle to find parking space. The vehicles came from all over Turkey - Antalya province in the south, Bursa in the northwest and even Kars in the northeast 14 hours away - to carry the bodies from Hatay. The stench of death is overpowering. A volunteer, in a black coat and blue vest,



HATAY, Turkey: A Syrian man and his grandson walk in the debris in the Antakia historical city in Hatay on February 11, 2023. —AFP

hands out gloves and surgical masks. Behind folding tables, around 15 people wearing masks wait for relatives to sign death certificates for victims who have been identified. But almost no one comes to find them. Close to the tables, an imam is sitting on the ground. He came from Usak province, 900 kilometers (560 miles) away from Hatay. "Some 400 imams from all over Turkey have been sent to Hatay to perform the funeral prayers," Yusuf Ozcan said.

The scale of the tragedy has been overwhelming. "It's terrible," he said, fatigue etched onto his face. Ozcan cannot even say how many prayers he has performed. "A

lot," said the imam, in blue jeans and vest. On the other side of the road looking over the makeshift cemetery just 200 meters (650 feet) away, the Deniz family watch the non-stop arrival of vans and excavators. They can no longer live in their home behind them so they have been sleeping in a white tent set up 10 meters from the road. "The governor and officials came two days to take the land. We thought they had come to set up tents for survivors," Kemal Deniz, 35, said. The field where the bodies lie used to grow cotton and wheat, the mechanic said. "From now on, we will wake up every morning to this. It's hard, but we have no other choice," he added. —AFP

PKK suspends 'operations' after quake

ANKARA: Kurdish militants from the outlawed PKK group announced a temporary halt in fighting to facilitate rescue work after the huge earthquake that struck southeastern Turkey and parts of Syria. The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) has been proscribed as a terrorist organization by Ankara and its main Western allies for waging a brutal insurgency that has claimed tens of thousands of lives since 1984. Monday's earthquake struck a multi-ethnic region that has witnessed some of the heaviest fighting between Turkish government forces and the PKK.

The group's co-leader Cemil Bayik told the PKK-linked ANF news agency that "thousands of

our people are under the rubble" and urged a focus on recovery work rather than waging war. "We call on all our forces engaged in military actions: stop the military actions in Turkey, in metropolises and cities," he said in comments published on the site late Thursday. "We have decided to not conduct any operation as long as the Turkish state does not attack," he said. Bayik said the pause in fighting would stay in place "until the pain of our people is relieved and their wounds are healed". "Of course, the attitude of the Turkish state will also be decisive in our decision," he added.

Turkish officials did not respond to Bayik's comments. The government has been trying to ban the Kurdish-backed Peoples' Democratic Party - the Turkish parliament's third-largest - over its ties to PKK. Turkey's top court was considering whether to ban the party ahead of elections that President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has proposed holding on May 14. But most state institutions have suspended operations to focus on earthquake relief work. —AFP

WHO chief brings aid to quake-hit Aleppo

ALEPPO: World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus arrived on Saturday in Syria's quake-stricken city of Aleppo, state media reported. Tedros "arrived at Aleppo airport to tour some hospitals and shelters with (Syria's) health minister and the governor of Aleppo", the official news agency SANA said. Upon his arrival, Tedros said he was accompanying "emergency medical supplies of around 37 metric tons". "We are very happy that we could come with the supplies," he told reporters at Aleppo airport. "This is the first supply we are sending."

He added that the WHO would continue to provide emergency medical services and bring in more emergency supplies necessary for "trauma management". "Tomorrow, there will be another round with more than 30 metric tons," he said. He expressed concern over the after-effects of the earthquake, especially the disruption of services. "People are exposed to diarrheal diseases ... and other health problems especially mental health problems," he said. "We will work together to address the impact of the earthquake, not only the emergency services during the earthquake."

Syria's Health Minister Hassan al-Ghabash welcomed Tedros at the airport, saying his visit was "of great importance in many aspects". "He will first see the reality and what this disaster caused," he said. "We hope that Dr Tedros sees the reality of hospitals and what they lack," he added, calling on the WHO to help provide equipment which is lacking. Syria's health care system has been ravaged by years of conflict.

"Many hospitals, almost 50 percent of health-care facilities are not functioning, and those which are functioning are lacking equipment, lacking staff, lacking medications," according to Ahmad Al Mandhari, WHO regional director for the Eastern Mediterranean. The organization will issue "an appeal for Turkey and Syria for over \$40 million." WHO regional emergency director Richard Brennan said. The White Helmets rescue group had accused the UN on Friday of botching its quake response in rebel-held areas of northwestern Syria. —AFP



KAHRAMANMARAS, Turkey: This aerial view shows tents set up by Turkey's Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) in the grounds of the Kahramanmaraş stadium on Feb 10, 2023. —AFP

Business

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2023

EY annual tax seminar explores latest trends shaping Kuwait's tax landscape

Businesses in Kuwait prepare for global, regional and local tax developments

KUWAIT: EY organized a seminar covering key tax topics relevant to businesses operating in Kuwait. The event provided the latest updates on the local, regional, and global tax environment, tax policies, recent tax trends across the MENA region with a focus on the GCC as well as sustainability.

Ahmed Eldessouky, EY Kuwait, Qatar and Oman Tax Leader, says: "In this fast-evolving tax environment, it is a new imperative for businesses to keep themselves updated on and aligned with local, regional, and global tax developments and manage related risks. Companies may need to revisit their operating models to consider tax as a function alongside finance and enhance their use of technology to address the new requirements. To be thoroughly prepared for changes in taxation, they must start the process well before the government makes any new official announcements."

The tax seminar saw the participation of tax officials from the Ministry of Finance as well as over 200 CFOs, tax directors, tax and finance managers, lawyers, and business owners. EY global and regional tax leaders shared their insights on various topics, such as CT in the UAE, updates on Kuwait tax and zakat, governance in family businesses and ESG components related to tax. They also discussed common challenges, such as the impact of BEPS 2.0 and the global minimum tax of 15 percent, as well as differences in the interpretation of laws and regulations that result in increasing tax disputes in the region.

Foreign taxpayers and the Ministry of Finance of Kuwait are addressing international tax disputes through mutual agreement procedures (MAP) under the relevant tax treaties that provide effective resolution mechanisms.

In 2018, Kuwait signed the Common Reporting Standard (CRS) framework, approved by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Council. The framework calls on jurisdictions to obtain information from their financial institutions and automatically exchange that information with other jurisdictions on an annual basis.

Ahmed Al-Esry, EY MENA tax leader, says: "The

tax landscape in Kuwait is constantly evolving to accommodate new regulations from both the local government and international directives. Ensuring comprehensive, accurate, and timely reporting is critical so that businesses can avoid fines or over-paying their dues. Businesses should be assessing their technology capabilities and current talent from now to more easily prepare for future updates. In addition, it is recommended that companies work with their finance teams to build a buffer into their budget for additional taxes that may become payable in the future."

Kuwait's tax system comprises corporate income tax (CT) on foreign business entities, zakat (Islamic tax) or contribution to the state's budget (CSB) on Kuwaiti shareholding companies, National Labor Support Tax (NLST) on Kuwaiti listed companies, and customs duties. There is also an annual compulsory contribution to the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS), imposed on Kuwaiti shareholding companies. The government is currently considering including Kuwaiti businesses within the scope of CT.

Regional tax landscape

Tax developments in the GCC are happening at an unprecedented pace, aligning the region with the international tax landscape. Companies must prepare for an increasingly digitized tax environment, requiring accurate, often transaction-level data and advanced digital capabilities.

Double tax treaty (DTT) networks between countries of the region are expanding, resulting in enhanced tax certainty. For instance, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) signed an initial draft of a DTT that is yet to be ratified. With the UAE gearing up to introduce 9 percent Corporate Income Tax (CT) in June 2023, Bahrain will remain the only GCC country without a broad-based corporate tax; however, this may change soon. Meanwhile, Oman is the first country in the region to consider launching personal income tax.

Moreover, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) is implementing e-invoicing for VAT, which will increase efficiency in transactions for the Zakat, Tax

restrictions, rebounded further on the news from Novak, who in charge of Moscow's energy policy.

Russia is part of a 23-nation alliance with the OPEC crude cartel that already agreed in October to reduce output by two million barrels per day until the end of this year.

Rate jitters

Elsewhere, Wall Street extended losses at the opening bell, but both the Dow and S&P 500 finished higher, lifted in part by a surge in petroleum-linked shares like Chevron and oil services company Halliburton. Briefing.com analyst Patrick O'Hare said investors are in "wait and see" mode ahead of next week's consumer price index report, which will influence the outlook for future Fed interest rate hikes.

Having spent January optimistic that the days of central bank tightening would soon come to an end, traders have been brought back down to earth this month as they contemplate borrowing costs going higher and staying there longer than previously expected.

UK skirts recession

Government data showed Britain registered zero growth in the final quarter of last year, in line with expectations after shrinking 0.3 percent in the previous three months, according to the Office for National Statistics. The report means the British economy skirted a technical recession, defined as two straight quarters of negative growth. But the

he noted that "our economy is more resilient than many feared".

'No celebrating in street'

The technical definition of a recession is two straight quarters of negative growth. "While we can't slap the badge of recession on the economy, it's clear the UK is struggling and everyone is feeling the effect of the malaise in the country's economy," said AJ Bell analyst Laura Suter. "This economic no-man's land of no contraction or no growth won't have people celebrating in the street."

Bank of England (BoE) governor Andrew Bailey on Thursday expressed concern over persistently high inflation even if the rate of price increases shows signs of cooling. His remarks to a cross-party committee of MPs raised expectations of more hikes to British interest rates, analysts said.

At its most recent regular monetary policy meeting last week, the BoE hiked its interest rate for a 10th time in a row as global authorities race to combat runaway inflation.

The bank lifted UK borrowing costs by a half-point to four percent, the highest level since late 2008 during the global financial crisis. That ramped up mortgage and other loan repayments, weighing heavily on economic activity and worsening the cost-



KUWAIT: Participants of EY Kuwait annual tax seminar pose for a group photo.

and Customs Authority (ZATCA) as well as businesses operating in the country. Other GCC nations are expected to follow suit.

Global developments

To resolve tax challenges arising from the digitalization of the economy, OECD launched the two-pillar base erosion and profit shifting (BEPS) project. More than 140 nations across the globe, including the G20, EU, and five GCC countries, have joined the Inclusive Framework (IF) on BEPS, which intends to ensure that multinational enterprises (MNEs) pay a fair share of tax wherever they operate.

Pillar 2 of the package will require MNEs with minimum consolidated revenues of A750 million and effective tax rate below 15 percent to pay a top-up tax. Countries may be incentivized to implement the

global minimum tax rules.

IF members will commence executing this consensus-based solution in 2023-24. Notably, Kuwait is not an IF member, and has made no official announcement concerning joining BEPS 2.0 either. However, BEPS will affect Kuwaiti businesses operating internationally.

ESG on the rise

MENA governments are showing growing interest in ESG as part of their strategy frameworks. The Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA) has applied an independent globally recognized ESG standard. If they have not already done so, companies in the region should start looking into integrating ESG in management practices, reducing their carbon footprints, and assessing opportunities and the potential impacts on the cost of doing business.

Oil rises as Russia cuts output after Western price cap

LONDON: Oil contracts rebounded Friday after Russia announced it would slash its crude output in response to a Western price cap that was imposed on exports after Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. Brent, the international benchmark, and its US counterpart WTI, which had been down earlier in the day, jumped more than two percent after Russian deputy prime minister Alexander Novak said production would be cut by 500,000 barrels per day, or five percent of output, in March.

"Crude prices reacted positively to the news, considering that so far Russian oil production has been relatively resilient," said UBS analyst Giovanni Staunovo. "The move ... aims to improve oil revenues by narrowing the discount of Russian oil to Brent." An EU-wide ban on Russia oil products—like diesel, gasoline and jet fuel—came into effect Sunday alongside a Group of Seven (G7) price cap on the same items.

That expanded on the EU embargo on seaborne oil deliveries introduced two months ago—when it also established with G7 partners a \$60-per-barrel cap for Russian exports. Oil, already bolstered by the reopening of top consumer China after lengthy pandemic

Britain avoids recession but 'not out of woods'

LONDON: Britain's economy has narrowly avoided recession, official data showed Friday, but finance minister Jeremy Hunt warned it was "not out of the woods yet" over surging inflation. Gross domestic product registered zero growth in the final quarter of last year, in line with expectations after shrinking 0.3 percent in the previous three months, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said.

Britain's flat growth in the fourth quarter contrasted with Europe's biggest economy Germany, whose GDP shrank 0.2 percent in the same period on fallout from the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Overall, the UK economy expanded 4.1 percent last year after growth of 7.4 percent in 2021, the ONS added in a statement. Sky-high consumer prices have sparked a cost-of-living crisis in Britain—and mass strikes.

Transport walkouts weighed on December's output, the data showed. "We are not out of the woods yet, particularly when it comes to inflation," Hunt said, but



FTSE 100 still slipped 0.5 percent after having hit record highs earlier this week.

"In reality, the nuances of whether the UK is or isn't in a recession are likely to be lost on the majority of people, many of whom are struggling with their finances on a day-to-day basis," said market analyst Michael Hewson at CMC Markets. Bucking the downward stock market trend, Tokyo rose Friday on a weaker yen, though the currency rallied after the market closed on reports that the Japanese government would nominate Kazuo Ueda to replace Haruhiko Kuroda as head of the country's central bank. Ueda is an economist and former member of the Band of Japan policy board. But analysts said the yen's advance may be more to do with the fact deputy governor Masayoshi Amamiya would not take the post, which would have likely seen a continuation of the current dovish approach. —AFP

of-living crisis. Those who have spare cash to save, however, are gaining from rate rises.

Soaring inflation

UK inflation slowed to 10.5 percent in December—still around 40-year highs and more than five times the BoE's official target-level of two percent. Central banks the world over are seeking to cool high energy and food prices, fuelled by Russia's invasion of Ukraine one year ago, by hiking interest rates.

Conservative Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, whose government is partially subsidizing energy bills for businesses and households, has vowed to halve UK inflation this year—although much is down to central bank policy and market forces. Sunak is seeking to turn around his government's currently dismal fortunes before a general election expected next year. The Conservatives—in power since 2010 — are trailing the main opposition Labor party by wide margins, polls show. Recession still looms—the BoE last week said the UK economy would shrink in every quarter of 2023.

"We suspect the drags from high inflation and high interest rates will trigger a recession this year," Capital Economics analyst Paul Dales said Friday. The International Monetary Fund delivered another blow to Sunak when it predicted the UK would be the only

Moody's cuts Ukraine debt rating

WASHINGTON: Moody's said Friday it has downgraded Ukraine's debt rating over a protracted war with Russia, but shifted its outlook from negative to stable.

The ratings agency cut the grade a notch to Ca from Caa3, a rating that suggests a near-default state—close to a year since Russia's invasion. The downgrade is "driven by the effects of the war with Russia that are likely to pose long-lasting challenges to Ukraine's economy and public finances," said Moody's Investors Service in a statement.

"These challenges increase risks to government debt sustainability, making a debt restructuring with significant losses for private-sector creditors very likely," it added. According to Moody's estimates, the country's GDP contracted by around 30 percent last year following Moscow's invasion.

Despite financial support from donors for repairs and reconstruction, the war will likely cause lasting damage to the productive capacity of key economic sectors, Moody's added. But it also said that although there is uncertainty around timing and form, "a debt restructuring has become highly likely in light of the sustained economic disruption and the large fiscal costs of the war," in providing justification for the stable outlook. —AFP



LONDON: A sign reading 'closed' is displayed on the window of a business in Islington neighborhood, centre north of London, on February 10, 2023. — AFP

country in the group of seven rich nations with negative growth in 2023. The UK in 2020 suffered the biggest contraction among the G7 owing to COVID fallout. The nation is also the only G7 member that has not yet returned to its pre-pandemic level of output. British economic activity is 0.8 percent below its 2019 level, the ONS confirmed Friday. —AFP

Business

Pakistan looks to boost trade volume with Kuwait: Official

Ambassador Farooq hopes to strengthen Pakistani workforce in Kuwait



KUWAIT: Members of the Pakistani trade delegation pose for a photo. — Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh

By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: The trade volume between Pakistan and Kuwait reached \$525 million in 2021, said Senior Vice President of Pakistan Sialkot Chamber of Commerce and Industry Wahub Jahangir, noting the country is hoping to boost the trade value between the two countries in 2023. Jahangir was speaking to Kuwait Times on the sidelines of a dinner reception organized by the Pakistani Embassy in honor of a visiting delegation of Sialkot Chamber of Commerce and Industry to Kuwait and celebrating the conclusion of the Pakistani products exhibition held last week at the Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Jahangir said Pakistan's trade volume with Kuwait is considered "very low", since many Pakistani products are currently exported from Pakistan to Kuwait indirectly. "Those products actually are exported from Pakistan to UAE or European countries and from there they are sent to Kuwait. We hope this indirect trade is curbed to help increase trade value between Pakistan and Kuwait," he said. Talking about the exhibition, Jahangir said it succeeded in establishing a business-to-business link and received an overwhelming response from both the



Wahub Jahangir

Kuwaiti and Pakistani communities.

"It was a very useful collaboration between the two countries. We got in touch with many Kuwaiti companies to work on certain plans and deals in matters related to importing products and improving business relations," Pakistani Ambassador to Kuwait Malik Muhammad Farooq said. He pointed out that due to the strong trade ties between the two countries, Pakistan hopes to increase trade activities with Kuwait in the future.

"There are lots of potential opportunities available in the trade sector, and this was one of the main reasons we organized this event with the support of Kuwait's ministry of foreign affairs and Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry. We are thankful for this great



Malik Muhammad Farooq

collaboration," he said.

Boosting Pakistani workforce

Regarding cooperation on increasing the Pakistani workforce in Kuwait, the ambassador said: "In 2020, we had an agreement with the Kuwaiti government to provide doctors and nursing staff, especially as Kuwait is looking forward to increasing the country's workforce by more than half a million in different sectors, whether in education, IT or engineering. In Pakistan, we have a large skilled workforce. So, definitely we are working on bringing more people from Pakistan to Kuwait who are competent to work in various sectors and play a crucial role in the economic development of Kuwait."

Al-Tijaria upgraded to Premier Market on Boursa Kuwait

KUWAIT: The Commercial Real Estate Company (Al-Tijaria) has succeeded in obtaining the qualification from the Main Market to join the "Premier Market" in the Kuwait Stock Exchange (Boursa Kuwait) as of Sunday (Feb 12, 2023). The premier market is also known as the "flagship of markets", and targets companies with high liquidity and medium to large market capitalization, raising the market's ability to attract local and foreign investors.

Marafie stated that Al-Tijaria's achievement has proved the strength of its financial position and its commitment to consistent success. Moreover, during the past two years of the Boursa's annual review, the daily and capital value of the company's shares has reached a minimum of KD 78 million to qualify and no penalties were issued on Al-Tijaria from regulators, which confirms the company's adherence to all the applicable standards, given the fact that Al-Tijaria continuously commits to corporate governance and transparency in order to strengthen and enhance the confidence of stakeholders. Furthermore, Marafie appreciated the Board of Directors, executive management, and staff for their valuable efforts and endeavors to make this strategy successful.



Eng Abdulmutaleb Marafie

The CEO of Al-Tijaria, Eng Abdulmutaleb Marafie, affirmed that Al-Tijaria's qualification to the premier market is the result of the years of efforts and hard work to fulfill the upgrading requirements of Boursa Kuwait with regards to the minimum market capitalization of KD 78 million and daily trading volume.

Adani's links to foreign firms

MUMBAI: The troubled business empire of Indian tycoon Gautam Adani has links to foreign firms in a broad range of sectors including banking, energy and food. Adani's conglomerate has taken a massive hit in the stock market since short-seller US investment group Hindenburg Research accused it of accounting fraud, which the company denies.

Asset management analysts Bernstein said Monday it expects "more volatility in India" this year in the wake of Adani's market turbulence rather than foreign contagion, but that could change if foreign partners feel they need to cut ties, even at a steep loss.

Financial partners

The Adani empire is made up of several listed firms, the main one being Adani Enterprises Limited. The top shareholder is the Adani family with 64 percent of the shares. Only some 20 percent of shares are regularly traded. Top Wall Street names such as Vanguard, BlackRock and Goldman Sachs, directly or via subsidiaries, could be found among the top 20 Adani Enterprises shareholders until recently.

They have not indicated if they still hold their shares or have unloaded them. Norway's \$1.2 trillion sovereign wealth fund, the world's largest, said Thursday it has completely divested its assets in the Indian conglomerate. The fund, which is set up to put the country's oil and gas revenues to work, held some \$200 million worth of shares in the group at the end of 2022.

Commercial partners

Singaporean agribusiness giant Wilmar International, owned by the family of billionaire



GURUGRAM: Employees walk past the Adani House corporate building at the institutional area in Gurugram. —AFP

Robert Kuok, holds an equal stake in the joint venture Adani Wilmar Limited (AWL), a listed company that specializes in kitchen staples. "We will continue to support our Indian associate, Adani Wilmar Limited (AWL)," a Wilmar spokesman told AFP.

US retailing giant Walmart said it did not have any particular information to convey concerning its Indian subsidiary Flipkart, an online retailer which in 2021 concluded a commercial partnership with Adani Logistics. Data centre operator EdgeConneX created the AdaniConnex joint venture with Adani Enterprises in 2021. "The Hindenburg accusations have had no effect on AdaniConnex, our joint venture with Adani," an EdgeConnex spokesman told to AFP. "We continue to focus on investing, building, and operating data centers."

Earlier this month French oil and gas giant TotalEnergies described its \$3.1-billion exposure to Adani as "limited". It owns half of the joint venture Adani Total Private Limited, which provides for oil and gas exploration, as well as half of AGEL23, a joint venture with Adani Green Energy Limited (AGEL) for the operation of three gigawatts of solar projects. — AFP

namely their role in deforestation and their high greenhouse gas emissions.

The business empire of Indian billionaire Gautam Adani lost around \$120 billion in value after US short-selling investment group Hindenburg Research accused it of artificially inflating share prices in a report released in January. It clawed back some of that this week after pledging to repay \$1.1 billion worth of early loans in a move meant to reassure investors.

Hindenburg accused Adani of artificially boosting the share prices of its units by funneling money into the stocks through offshore tax havens. Adani has repeatedly denied the allegations and accused the US investment firm of a "maliciously mischievous" reputational attack.

Last year, the Norwegian fund divested from a record 74 companies worldwide, judging their ESG practices to be detrimental to their profitability, and from 13 others after recommendations from an ethics council. The fund has investments in about 9,000 companies, as well as bonds and real estate, and is governed by ethical rules that prohibit it from investing in companies that commit serious human rights abuses, manufacture nuclear weapons, or are involved in coal and tobacco. — AFP

Norway's sovereign wealth fund pulls out of Adani

OSLO: Norway's \$1.2 trillion sovereign wealth fund, the world's largest, said Thursday it has completely divested its assets in the troubled Indian conglomerate Adani. The fund, which is set up to put the country's oil and gas revenues to work, held some \$200 million worth of shares in the group at the end of 2022. It had a stake of 0.14 percent in Adani Green Energy, 0.17 percent in Adani Total Gas and 0.3 percent in Adani Ports & Special Economic Zone.

"Since year-end, so the five weeks since year-end, we have further reduced our exposure in Adani companies significantly," said Christopher Wright, the head of environmental, social and governance (ESG) risk monitoring at the fund. "So today for all intents and purposes, we have no exposure left," Wright added. Between 2014 and 2023, the fund had already divested from six subsidiaries of the Adani conglomerate, mainly for environmental reasons,

Business

Forbes Middle East celebrates 100 most powerful businesswomen 2023

Shaikha Al-Bahar ranks first in Kuwait, fourth regionally

ABU DHABI: The 2023 ranking of the Middle East's 100 Most Powerful Businesswomen celebrates business titans from 27 different nationalities across 27 sectors. Forbes Middle East has revealed its flagship annual list of the region's most powerful businesswomen for 2023, ranking the female leaders championing business success in the Middle East and beyond. The list was constructed based on the size of the business, the individual's impact, achievements, and performance over the last year, and the scope of CSR and other initiatives led by the person.

Hana Al-Rostamani, Group CEO of the First Abu Dhabi Bank (FAB), climbed two spots to land first place this year. In June 2022, FAB completed a merger with Bank Audi Egypt under the umbrella of FABMISR, making it one of the largest foreign banks in Egypt, with assets worth \$10 billion as of March 2022. Raja Easa Al-Gurg, Chairperson and Managing Director of Easa Saleh Al-Gurg Group, and Lubna S Olayan, Chair of the Saudi British Bank and Chair of the Executive Committee and Deputy Chair of Olayan Financing Company, rounded up the top three.

NBK's Shaikha Khaled Al-Bahar ranks first in Kuwait and fourth regionally. Al-Rostamani and Al-Gurg were also both recognized on Forbes' 2022 list of the World's 100 Most Powerful Women. Eaman Al-Roudhan, the CEO of Zain Kuwait, is another influential woman from Kuwait who ranked in the Forbes

list. The 2023 ranking celebrates business titans from 27 different nationalities across 27 sectors. Emirati and Egyptian women dominate the list, with 15 and 12 entries, respectively. They are followed by Saudi with 11, Kuwait with eight, and Lebanon, Oman, and Qatar with six each. Leaders working in the banking and financial services make up 23 of the 100 listed. Diversified conglomerates and the investments industry follow with 11 and eight women, respectively.

Three industry disruptors entered the top 10 for the first time: Shaista Asif, Co-founder and Group COO of PureHealth Group; Hanan Mohamed Al-Kuwari, Managing Director of Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC); and Wadha Ahmed Al-Khateeb, CEO of the Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC). Half of the top 10 ranked women work within the banking and financial services industry. Many of the businesswomen on this year's ranking are placing significant importance on education and empowerment initiatives. The Apparel Group, led by Founder and Chairwoman Sima Ganwani Ved, launched its Digital Learning Academy in October to offer bilingual courses in the GCC. Rawya Mansour, Founder and Chairwoman of RAMSCO, spearheaded a partnership with the National Council for Women to empower women in Africa through an organic farming project and entrepreneurs' initiative for zero-waste ecovillages. And Hind Bahwan, Founder and



Eight Kuwaiti women on Forbes Middle East list

- 1- Shaikha Al-Bahar - NBK Deputy Group CEO (4th overall)
- 2- Wadha Al-Khateeb - KNPC CEO (6th)
- 3- Adana Nasser Al-Sabah - KIPCO Group CEO (12th)
- 4- Henadi Al-Saleh - Agility Chairperson (20th)
- 5- Eaman Al-Roudhan - Zain Kuwait CEO (22nd)
- 6- Jihad Al-Humaidi - AUB CEO (34th)
- 7- Nadia Al-Hajji - PIC CEO (35th)
- 8- Nadia Akil - UPAC CEO & Vice Chair person

Chairperson of Bahwan CyberTek Group, signed an MoU with Dubai's Heriot-Watt University to offer internships and deep work

immersions to students to tackle the growing demand for emerging technologies like AI, ML, and IoT. —Forbes Middle East



Deliveroo partners with The Burrow

KUWAIT: Deliveroo is kicking off 2023 with a campaign designed to encourage everyone to adopt healthier habits and lifestyles. The food delivery platform is partnering with local gym, The Burrow, to offer both new and existing subscribers free 'Deliveroo PLUS' for a period of 3 months.

Plus is a membership service that allows customers unlimited free delivery from all restaurants, cafes, and grocers. Seham Allhusaini, the General Manager of Deliveroo, commented: "We are excited to partner with The Burrow to offer existing and new gym members free subscriptions to Deliveroo Plus. With both a gym membership and Deliveroo Plus on their side, we are confident that users will be able to sustain healthier habits throughout the year."

Jassim Al-Mudhaf, the CEO of The Burrow, said: "We are excited to partner with Deliveroo to offer our gym members a chance to pair their fitness routines with healthier nutrition choices - a winning combo that will undoubtedly set them on the path to success. We can't wait to start ordering our favorite foods and nutritious snacks through Deliveroo Plus."

Turkmenistan fires economy minister

ASHGABAT, Turkmenistan: Turkmenistan's president has sacked his economy minister and two deputy ministers covering the energy sector, according to decrees published on Saturday in the central Asian nation reliant on gas exports. Head of state Serdar Berdimoukhamedov signed the decrees in a country, which according to British oil company BP, can boast the world's fourth largest natural gas reserves.

Turkmenistan depends on exports to China and to a lesser extent Russia and Iran. Last autumn, the ex-Soviet republic voiced readiness to export gas via the Caspian Sea to Europe, which faces shortages following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. —AFP

Yen strengthens on reports Ueda picked as BoJ chief

TOKYO: Japan's government plans to nominate economics professor Kazuo Ueda as Bank of Japan chief, reports said Friday, an unexpected pick that sent the yen rallying against the dollar. Current governor Haruhiko Kuroda, the central bank's longest-serving leader, is due to step down when his second term ends on April 8. In his decade at the helm, Kuroda has championed a series of extraordinary monetary easing measures, from a negative interest rate to spending vast sums on government bonds, in an attempt to

Hyatt Hotels roadshow in Kuwait

KUWAIT: As part of its Gulf roadshow tour, Hyatt hosted a dinner and networking event at Grand Hyatt Kuwait where representatives from Hyatt Hotels across the region met with leading travel and tourism agencies, valued partners, business leaders and key media in the country.

No deal as IMF leaves crisis-hit Pakistan

ISLAMABAD: An IMF team left Pakistan on Friday after crisis talks with the government failed to deliver a deal on financial aid that would help the South Asian country avert economic collapse. After months of deadlock, the International Monetary Fund delegation arrived last week for last-ditch negotiations with a government fearing the political consequences of enforcing bailout conditions in an election year. 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.

Inflation has rocketed, the rupee has plummeted and the country can no longer afford imports, causing a severe decline in industry. "Considerable progress was made during the mission on policy measures to address domestic and external imbalances," the IMF said in a statement. "Virtual discussions will continue in the coming days to finalize the implementation details of these policies." The IMF is demanding that the nuclear-armed nation boost its pitifully low tax base, end tax exemptions for the export sector, and raise artificially low petrol, electricity and gas prices meant to help low-income families.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif previously called the conditions for the \$1.2 billion loan instalment "beyond imagination". Finance Minister Ishaq Dar addressed the nation after the IMF team left the country on Friday morning, saying talks had "concluded successfully" and that a draft memorandum on broadly agreed policies had been shared by the lender with the government.

He said petrol prices would rise by roughly four percent and additional taxes would be imposed, without giving further details. Economic analyst

revive Japan's sluggish economy.

But the BoJ's adherence to its longstanding ultra-loose policy has run counter to other central banks' rate hikes aimed at tackling inflation, causing the yen to lose ground against the dollar over the past year. Reports in Japanese media including the Nikkei business daily said the decision to nominate Ueda, a former BoJ policy board member, will be presented to parliament on Tuesday.

The ruling coalition's majority means it is almost guaranteed to pass. Days ago, the Nikkei said deputy governor Masayoshi Amamiya had been approached about taking the top job-news that prompted the yen to drop as traders anticipated a continuation of the bank's stimulus policies.

But Friday's reports said Amamiya had turned the offer down, and the yen rallied in the afternoon, with the dollar buying 129.82 yen, against



Abid Hasan, a former adviser to the World Bank, said "there will be disappointment in the business community". "The only way stability can be achieved is through a deal. This has heightened the uncertainty," he told AFP in the capital Islamabad.

'So expensive'

Years of financial mismanagement and political instability have damaged Pakistan's economy-exacerbated by a global energy crisis and devastating floods that submerged a third of the country. After months of holding out in search of alternatives, the government began to bow to IMF pressure in mid-January, loosening 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. Authorities also hiked petrol prices by 16 percent.

Rana Sadiq, a 65-year-old real estate worker, has had to sell his car and commute on a motorbike to save money. "Gas bills, electricity bills, petrol prices, fruit and vegetable prices have all doubled in the last few months," he told AFP from a market in Islamabad.

"I can't meet the monthly expenses. Before, my children used to eat fruit every day—now I take fruit home once in a week." Batool Zehra, who runs a baking business from home in Lahore to support her family, is struggling to make a profit as prices soar.

"The ingredients are so expensive now... and that's if they are available. I have been unable to complete orders because half the time I realize there is no gas," she told AFP. "I don't think I will be able to continue the business. But I also don't know how my family is going to make ends meet without this extra income."

Import backlog

On Thursday, the central bank released data saying its foreign exchange reserves had plunged by \$170 million in a week, standing at just \$2.9 billion as of last Friday. Since January, the world's fifth most populous nation is no longer issuing letters of credit, except for essential food and

131.54 yen before the news emerged.

Ueda has a PhD in economics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and was a member of the BoJ's policy board between 1998 and 2005. More recently he has worked as an economics professor and dean at the University of Tokyo, and would be the first career academic to become governor. The Nikkei said Ueda worked at the BoJ when it introduced its zero-percent interest rate policy, and cast a vote against lifting the measure in 2000.

He is therefore seen as a safe choice who will not move too quickly to ditch the bank's easy-money policies, even as it seeks an eventual exit strategy, the newspaper said.

A commentary Ueda wrote for the Nikkei in July was titled "Japan, Avoid Hasty Tightening". After Kuroda became governor in 2013, he soon unleashed a barrage of massive asset purchases.



KARACHI: A broker talks on phone as he looks an index board showing the latest share prices at the Pakistan Stock Exchange in Karachi on February 10, 2023. —AFP

medicine, causing a backlog of raw material imports the country can no longer afford.

The logjam coupled with the rupee devaluation has sparked a major decline in manufacturing, including textiles and steel, and building projects. "This situation has triggered fears the construction industry will close down very soon, plunging thousands of laborers into unemployment," Syed Ashfaq Hussain, head of the Constructors Association of Pakistan, told AFP.

While the IMF cash injection will not be enough to rescue Pakistan on its own, the government hopes it will boost confidence and open the doors for friendly nations such as Saudi Arabia, China and the UAE to offer further loans. "We will get temporary relief but it's not a permanent solution for the economy. More reforms are needed at the government level," a senior government official told AFP.

Pakistan has brokered and broken more than a dozen IMF deals in recent decades as parties renege on agreements that hurt their political survival. Political analyst Michael Kugelman, director of the South Asia Institute at the Wilson Center in Washington, previously warned that "barring difficult, large-scale reforms, the next crisis could be just around the corner". —AFP

The move went hand-in-hand with then-prime minister Shinzo Abe's

ambitious plan, dubbed "Abenomics", to stimulate growth and banish the deflation that had plagued Japan's economy since the end of the 1980s boom. Japanese inflation hit a multi-decade high of four percent in December—above the BoJ's longstanding two-percent target—fuelled partly by soaring energy bills.

But because the trend is not driven by demand or steady wage increases, the BoJ under Kuroda has said it sees no reason to abandon its dovish policies. —AFP



Kazuo Ueda

Lifestyle | Features



This picture shows cafe owner Kim Bum-soo (right) making coffee drinks at his cafe in Seoul. — AFP photos



This picture shows accountant Lee Dae-hee drinking an iced Americano during an interview with AFP on a street in Seoul.



This picture shows people holding iced Americanos during an interview with AFP on a street in Seoul.

COFFEE SO COLD IT'S HOT: SOUTH KOREA'S LOVE OF ICED AMERICANO

K-pop stars BTS drink it. It appears in K-dramas. Fans are so dedicated to consuming it year-round they've coined a new South Korean proverb: "Even if I freeze to death, iced Americano!" The humble coffee-shots of espresso served over ice, topped up with water-has become South Korea's unofficial national drink, outselling its hot counterpart even during the depths of winter, Starbucks data shows. Office worker Lee Ju-eun, clad in an ankle-length puffer jacket, shivered on the pavement in downtown Seoul as she clutched her iced coffee during a polar Vortex cold snap in January, when temperatures hit minus 17 degrees Celsius (1.4 degrees Fahrenheit).

"I only drink this. Iced Americano is easier to drink and also tastier, so I enjoy drinking it even in winter," she told AFP, gingerly holding the edge of her frozen plastic cup. "I'm cold but it's okay. I can

endure it," she said.

Accountant Lee Dae-hee told AFP he drank iced Americanos exclusively because it was a faster and more efficient caffeine hit, essential in South Korea's hard-driving "ppalli-ppalli"-hurry-hurry-work culture. "I quickly drink iced Americano to wake up and work," Lee said as he tried to shield his large cup of coffee from the driving snow while rushing back to his office after lunch. "It doesn't make me cold because I go straight to the office and I don't spend much time outside," he said.

'Ah-Ah'

South Koreans take their coffee seriously. The average South Korean drinks 353 cups per year, more than double the global average, according to a 2019 study by the Hyundai Research Institute. Coffee culture has even spawned its own language.

Iced Americano is known as "Ah-Ah" and its die-hard drinkers are known as "Eoljuka", a contraction of a new proverb proclaiming they'd freeze to death for their drink. The trend has been noticed by corporate coffee giant Starbucks Korea, which ran an "ice challenge" promotion where "Eoljuka" got a free size upgrade when they ordered in late January's sub-zero temperatures.

Iced drinks accounted for 76 percent of total sales at Starbucks stores in South Korea in 2022, the company said. Even during January's cold snap they sold more iced Americanos — 54 percent than hot ones. "People's tendency of consuming goods, food and beverages regardless of the weather seem to have become a new trend," Park Han-jo from Starbucks Korea told AFP.

Independent coffee shops said their data showed the same thing. Kim Bum-soo, who owns a cafe in downtown

Seoul, said around half his coffee sales were iced Americanos, all year round. "It does seem that Koreans prefer cold drinks," Kim told AFP, adding that foreign tourists, especially Chinese, tended to order warm tea even in summer. Consuming cold water and iced beverages is forbidden in traditional Chinese medicine. However, "Koreans just drink whatever they want, regardless of whether it's cold or hot outside," Kim said.

Cold noodles

One reason Seoul office workers love iced Americanos could be that their workspaces are too hot and stuffy, cafe owner Kim said. Self-confessed "Eoljukah" Jeong Jae-won, 30, agreed. "It's warm inside the office so I'm going to drink it there," she said. It's not just office workers who love the beverage. K-Pop megastar Suga of BTS is frequently photographed with an iced Americano in

hand, despite telling fans he was trying to cut back on caffeine.

Foreign K-pop fans have discussed at length in online forums NCT Dream's Jaemin's preferred version of "Ah-Ah": eight shots of espresso served over ice. South Korea's "Ah-Ah" addiction could be linked to its cuisine, said Jang Jun-woo, a food columnist who runs a tapas wine bar.

Food such as the cold noodle dish naengmyun, which is served with ice cubes in the broth, is an integral part of local tradition but rarely seen elsewhere. "Even in Japan people don't actually put ice in their cold udon noodles," Jang told AFP. "The degree of cold food culture is more extreme in Korea and that may explain the popularity and prevalence of iced coffee here." — AFP

Reviewers rave for 'Hogwarts Legacy' video game despite backlash

The highly anticipated video game "Hogwarts Legacy" was met with largely positive reviews after its release Friday, despite some gameplay quibbles and the controversy that has dogged the Wizarding World's original creator. In the game, developed by Avalanche Software and edited by Warner Bros' Portkey Games, players virtually explore the "Harry Potter" universe as a student attending the magical Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry in the 1800s.

The so-called open world format allows characters to roam around inside the fictional Scottish castle, attending magic classes and casting spells as they compete in quests. Even before its release, "Hogwarts Legacy" elicited strong opinions online, as "Harry Potter" author JK Rowling has faced accusations of transphobia for putting an emphasis on biological sex over gender identity.

Still, review aggregator site Metacritic awarded the release a score of 85 out of 100, based on more than 60 different critics' opinions. Specialty video game site IGN gave the title a nine out of 10, saying it "absolutely nails the vibe of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry" and calling the adventure sequences "stupefyingly good," though it took away a point for plot holes and graphics glitches.

And despite the universe's decades of back material to draw on, the site Gaming Age said the game "doesn't just bathe in the reflected warm glow of nostalgia," but also offers new contributions. The site Digital Trends, however, gave "Hogwarts Legacy" 2.5 stars out of five, panning a "cold and clinical" undertaking with a design that "lacks imagination."

Some gamers and streamers have publicized their decision to boycott the game in protest of Rowling's views on transgender rights, though the official "Hogwarts Legacy" website says the author was not directly involved in its creation. Writing at tech website Wired, game reviewer Jaina Grey, who is a transgender woman and former "Potter" fan, called the gameplay "dated" and "lifeless."

But Grey said her real issue with the game is the "hurt" she feels from Rowling's comments about trans women. "There are places we can't return to. Places like Hogwarts," Grey said. Despite the friction surrounding its debut, "Hogwarts Legacy" has already logged an impressive opening, topping the charts on the Steam download platform Friday. It is available on PlayStation 5, Xbox Series and PCs, and is set for release on Nintendo Switch later this year. — AFP



Record-breaking Vermeer show opens in Amsterdam

A blockbuster exhibition of paintings by Dutch master Johannes Vermeer opened in Amsterdam on Friday, boasting the largest gathering of his works in one place. Classics such as "Girl with a Pearl Earring" and "The Milkmaid" are among the 28 masterpieces on display, with galleries and private collections from the United States to Japan lending their prized works.

The unprecedented exhibition at the Rijksmuseum, which runs until June 4, has already sold more than 200,000 advance tickets, the most in the history of the Netherlands' national museum. "February and March are totally sold out and April is going fast," a Rijksmuseum

spokesman told AFP.

Queues of visitors waiting to see the Vermeer show formed outside the museum in the Dutch capital on Friday. "We don't mind queueing, but I'm here to see my favorite painting in the whole world, the 'Girl with the Pearl Earring,'" said Athos Millington-Ward, 83, from the Dutch town of Oegstgeest.

"I've seen her so many times on her own in The Hague (at her usual home in the Mauritshuis museum), but today she's here with all her friends." Vermeer is famed for his hauntingly lit domestic scenes of 17th century Dutch life, with the paintings themselves doing the talking as little is known of the life of the "Sphinx of Delft".

"This intense beauty and this moment where time stands still, that's something that you really see in this show," Rijksmuseum Director Taco Dibbits said. "You can only see when you're confronted with the painting by Vermeer. And here you have it 28 times, so it's incredibly exciting," he told AFP earlier this



This undated handout image shows Debra from the San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance holding the Guinness World Record certificate of 'Pat', a Pacific pocket mouse fondly named after actor Sir Patrick Stewart.

Make it so: Mouse named after Patrick Stewart is world's oldest

A mouse named after "Star Trek" actor Patrick Stewart is officially the world's oldest in captivity, a US zoo has announced. Pat the Pacific pocket mouse—the smallest species of mouse in North America—bagged the title when he hit nine years and 209 days on Wednesday. Officials from the San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance confirmed Pat was still going strong on Thursday.

The tiny creature—whose longevity was recognized by Guinness World Records—weighs less than six grams (a fifth of an ounce). And unlike his namesake, who as Captain Jean-Luc Picard commanded the Starship Enterprise, Pat the Pacific pocket mouse is covered in hair.

The species got its name because of pouches in its cheeks, which are used to

carry food and nesting materials. The animals are found in coastal scrublands, dunes and riverbanks close to the Pacific Ocean. Human encroachment left the species struggling and it was thought to be extinct until a tiny population was discovered in 1994.

Experts at San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance, whose breeding program has helped bring the Pacific pocket mouse back from the brink, said the little animals are vital to ecosystems because they distribute seeds and encourage plant growth through their digging. "This



This undated handout image shows 'Pat', a Pacific pocket mouse fondly named after actor Sir Patrick Stewart. — AFP photos



In this file photo British actor Sir Patrick Stewart arrives to Paramount Star Trek Day held at Skirball Cultural Center in Los Angeles, California.

acknowledgement is also a symbol of appreciation for species that people don't know much about because they're not charismatic megafauna, but are just as critical for ecosystem function," said Debra Shier of the wildlife alliance. "These overlooked species can often be found in our own backyards—like the Pacific pocket mouse." — AFP

week. Vermeer also painted relatively few works, with only around 35 authenticated ones still in existence—meaning that some three quarters of his remaining oeuvre is now in one place.

'More precious than pearls'

Novelist Tracy Chevalier, whose 1999 book "Girl with a Pearl Earring" sparked a Hollywood film and a wave of interest in Vermeer, explained the enduring appeal

of the painter's technique. "Like a curtain sometimes literally is drawn back, but the subjects, often women, in a domestic setting are placed back from us," Chevalier told AFP.

"You think 'wow', he's really privileged this domestic moment and there must be something special about it. And I think we can relate to that." The show's once-in-a-lifetime status also comes from the fact that Vermeer's works rarely travel due to

their age and value, and that they are the prized possessions of many museums around the world. Highlights also include three works from the Frick Collection in New York, the newly restored "Girl Reading a Letter at the Window" from Dresden, and "Woman Holding a Balance" from the US capital's National Gallery.

Art critics have hailed the Vermeer exhibition as a must-see. The New York Times described it as a "show more precious than pearls". "It will, almost surely, go down in history as the definitive exhibition of this artist, never to be replicated," the US newspaper said. The Washington Post said there will "never be another Vermeer show as great as this one" while Britain's Guardian newspaper described it as an "unmissable feast". — AFP



In this file photo a banner advertising a Vermeer show hangs outside the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. — AFP

Lifestyle | Fashion



Models walk the runway at the Collina Strada show during New York Fashion Week in New York City. -AFP photos



YOUNG BRANDS IN VOGUE AT NEW YORK FASHION WEEK

New York Fashion Week got underway Friday with several big names absent from the runway but a calendar packed full of young designers and emerging labels—increasingly the event's trademark. Rodarte opened the Fall-Winter 2023 parade, one of the few major brands to return this year.

model "meowed" in front of the delighted audience, followed by a model with a rhinoceros horn and another with a pig snout.

The street-wear touch of the brand is still there, but the colors are less psychedelic, more sober and elegant. Those who like theatrical shows will also enjoy the

But the program, which ends Wednesday in the middle of the Big Apple's cold month of February, again has a notable absence of high-profilers such as Tommy Hilfiger, Ralph Lauren and previous CFDA lead Tom Ford. Pop icon Rihanna, who has exhibited her lingerie collection Fenty at New York in the past,

instead, the collection of ready-to-wear designs serves up a large helping of young talents and new brands, such as Elena Velez. The 28-year-old was named "emerging designer of the year" at the 2022 CFDA awards for her non-traditional creations that merge high fashion with the metalsmith heritage of her hometown Milwaukee.



Models pose at the Jahnkoy show during New York Fashion Week 2023 at Location05 in New York City.

Rodarte, the upscale brand of California sisters Kate and Laura Mulleavy, offered a Gothic and mystical show with models parading in black dresses with flared sleeves and occasionally plunging necklines. The Collina Strada show was an ode to animals in a menagerie atmosphere. One bewhiskered

return to New York—with a show on Tuesday of Thom Browne, who succeeds Tom Ford at the head of the American fashion union (CFDA). Among the other headliners are regulars Proenza Schouler, Altuzarra, Coach, Sergio Hudson, Carolina Herrera, Gabriela Hearst and Michael Kors.

will instead be performing at the much-watched Super Bowl half-time show on Sunday.

"Very few names are brands that are prominent in the US market," said Jacqueline Quinn of the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT), confiding that her students are focusing on Paris and Milan

'Era of renaissance'

Some 20 designers are under 30 years old, including the Nigeria-born, New York-based Taofeek Abijako and his label Head of State, Indian Kanika Goyal (KGL) and Emma Gage (Melke), who uses recycled materials for a more sustainable fashion. For Velez, the COVID-19 pandemic has spurred an "era of renaissance."

"I think there's a renewed lust for life and a reminder of the precariousness of life that inspires young people like myself to embolden ourselves with our passions," she told AFP. And Velez is determined to enjoy it while it lasts. "If we're being honest, the shelf-life of a startup fashion brand isn't exactly lengthy," she added.

Denmark's Christian Juul Nielsen, the creative director at Herve Leger, already has several years of experience behind him having worked at Dior, Nina Ricci and Oscar de la Renta. In 2019, he launched his own brand, Aknvas, whose designs "focus on drape, flattering silhouettes, innovative knits and an elevated palette," according to its website.

"I try to translate the drama I got from John Galliano and the modernity I got from Raf Simmons," he told AFP. For Nielsen, and others like him, New York presents an opportunity. "A lot of small brands in Paris, they just don't get on the calendar. In America, there is this excitement of newness (and) I want to be part of making the New York fashion scene exciting," Nielsen added. —AFP



Adidas 2022 income drops, more pain ahead after end of Kanye tie-up

Adidas's net income fell heavily in 2022, according to preliminary results released on Thursday, with the German sportswear giant predicting major operating losses this year after ending a tie-up with Kanye West. Net income for last year was 254 million euros (\$272 million), a nearly 83 percent drop from 1.49 billion in 2021, the figures showed. The end of the partnership with controversial rapper West would be a major contributor to the company suffering operating losses of up to 700 million euros this year, Adidas said.

"The numbers speak for themselves. We are currently not performing the way we should," said Adidas CEO Bjorn Gulden, who was named to the job in November, as part of efforts to turn the company around. "Adidas has all the ingredients to be successful... We need to put the pieces back together again, but I am convinced that over time we will make Adidas shine again."

"But we need some time." Adidas halted its tie-up with West—now known formally as Ye—in October after he made a series of anti-Semitic outbursts. The firm said it would end production of the highly successful "Yeezy" line designed together with West, which has brought in huge profits.

In its financial guidance for 2023 published Thursday, Adidas said there would be a "significant adverse impact" from not selling existing Yeezy stock. This would lower revenues by around 1.2 billion euros, and operating profit by around 500 million euros, it said. Adidas also

expects one-off costs of up to 200 million euros in 2023 — and it said it could report an operating loss of as much as 700 million euros.



This file combination of pictures shows US rapper Kanye West attending the Givenchy Spring-Summer 2023 fashion show in Paris, and the corporate logo of German sports equipment maker Adidas in Munich, southern Germany. — AFP

Lucrative tie-up

The company began a review of its relationship with West after he appeared at a Paris fashion show wearing a shirt emblazoned with "White Lives Matter", a slogan created as a backlash to the Black Lives Matter movement. Days later he was locked out of Twitter and Instagram over anti-Semitic threats. Weeks after ending its partnership with Kanye, Adidas also said it was investigating claims against him after a report detailed alleged inappropriate behavior.

The artist was associated with rival sportswear company Nike for years but broke away in 2013, lending his name to Adidas as they launched their first Yeezy shoe in 2015 — a partnership that went on to make him a billionaire. Along with Beyonce, Stella McCartney and Pharrell Williams, West has been one of the top names used by Adidas to boost sales, especially online. —AFP

Balenciaga designer apologizes for 'child abuse' ads

Balenciaga's creative director Demna has apologized for an ad campaign that appeared to reference child abuse and vowed to drop his provocative showmanship in an interview with Vogue. The ads, published late last year, featured children holding bags designed to look like teddy bears, but with studs and harnesses, and surrounded by adult items including wine glasses. It sparked huge condemnation online, including from celebrities close to Demna and the brand such as Kim Kardashian.

In his first published interview since the furore, Demna (who dropped his last name in 2021), told the fashion bible there was never any intention to reference abuse. "I have seen a lot of drama in my life, but this was particularly hard... a mistake to learn from," he said in the interview, published late Thursday.

"I realize that my work has been seen as provocative, but this specific situation would never be part of my, you know, provocative nature," he added. Demna told Vogue that the bears were a reference to punk, not BDSM. But he had no explanation for props used in another series of photographs, including a printout from a US Supreme Court ruling about child pornography. Balenciaga said it would sue the company that shot the campaign when the uproar happened.

"What I can definitely say is that it was not intentional by me or Balenciaga. If it was intentional by someone else, I don't know," Demna said. The Georgian designer said the episode had fundamentally changed his way of working, which had often involved high-profile celebrity

endorsements and stunt promotions, such as a range of trash bags that cost around \$1,800. "I will have to question absolutely everything now. It really changes my way of working, which has previously been more instinctive; doing something that

is making quality clothes—not making image or buzz." He did not address the other recent controversy around his ties with Kanye West, who opened Balenciaga's last show in Paris, walking out into a mud-filled hangar. Balenciaga cut all links with



would be seen as maybe provocative just because I was thinking, Oh, that's fun," he said.

His next show, at Paris Fashion Week next month, will be a stripped-down affair that focuses just on the clothes. "I have decided to go back to my roots in fashion as well as to the roots of Balenciaga, which

the rapper after his string of controversial comments, including an outburst denounced as anti-Semitic. — AFP

Sports

Tatum propels Celtics to a 127-116 win over Hornets

Bucks notch 10th straight win

LOS ANGELES: Jayson Tatum scored 41 points to propel the Boston Celtics to a 127-116 NBA victory over Charlotte on Friday as Giannis Antetokounmpo led Milwaukee to a 10th straight win. Tatum posted his eighth 40-point game of the season. But even with Jaylen Brown sidelined by a facial fracture and Al Horford out with a sore knee, he did not have to carry the offensive load alone.

Derrick White scored a career-high 33 points and handed out 10 assists. His output included eight of the Celtics' 25 three-pointers, which came on 55 attempts. "Shot was feeling good," White said. "I was getting some good looks and just letting it fly." The Celtics had a franchise-record 16 three-pointers in the first half, and even when the Hornets put together a 15-0 scoring run in the third quarter Boston's lead remained in double digits.

Tatum, 24, drained five from beyond the arc, and became the first NBA player to make 1,000 three-pointers before his 25th birthday. The Celtics improved their league-best record to 40-16 and remained one game ahead of the Bucks atop the Eastern Conference. For the second straight night Antetokounmpo put on a show in Los Angeles, following up his 38-point performance against the Lakers with 35 points in a 119-106 victory over the Clippers.

Brook Lopez added 22 points and 15

rebounds and Jrue Holiday added 19 points for the Bucks, who have their first double-digit winning streak since they won 18 in a row in the 2019-20 season. The Clippers were without Kawhi Leonard due to injury management while the Bucks were missing Khris Middleton. An aggressive Antetokounmpo set an early tone, dominating in the paint and connecting on 13 of his 25 shots from the field. The attention he forced from the Clippers defense allowed his teammates opportunities from outside, and the Bucks finished with 17 three-pointers.

The Philadelphia 76ers, third in the East, avenged a humbling Sunday defeat in New York City with a 119-108 home triumph over the Knicks. Philadelphia's star center Joel Embiid scored 35 points and grabbed 11 rebounds and Tyrese Maxey added 27 points off the bench as the Sixers rallied from 13 down to win. Julius Randle and Jalen Brunson scored 30 points apiece for the Knicks, Brunson pouring in 20 in the first quarter alone. But the 76ers turned the tide in the third quarter and trailed by just one going into the final period, when they out-scored the Knicks 27-15.

Things were close in Miami, where Jimmy Butler jammied home the game-winner with three-tenths of a second remaining in the Heat's 97-95 victory over the Houston Rockets. Tyler Herro led the Heat with 31 points, nine

rebounds and eight assists, Bam Adebayo added 20 points and Butler scored 16 - but the Heat looked in danger of losing to the league-worst Rockets when they trailed by five with 3:40 remaining. Houston guard Jalen Green's driving layup with seven-tenths of a second left knotted the score at 95-95, but on Miami's ensuing inbound Gabe Vincent found Butler for the alley-oop dunk.

Irving shines for Mavs

Elsewhere, Lauri Markkanen and Walker Kessler scored 23 points apiece to help the Utah Jazz erase a 12-point deficit with 4:53 remaining in a 122-116 victory over the Raptors in Toronto. In Memphis, Ja Morant scored 32 points with nine rebounds and nine assists and Desmond Bane added 20 in the Grizzlies' comfortable 128-107 victory over the Minnesota Timberwolves. Kyrie Irving, in his second game since the trade that took him from Brooklyn to Dallas, scored 25 points and handed out 10 assists to lead the Mavs to a 122-114 victory over the Kings in Sacramento.

Luka Doncic remained sidelined by a bruised heel, but the Mavs hoped he could team up with Irving for the first time when they play the Kings again on Saturday. Oklahoma City's Shai Gilgeous-Alexander had another big night, scoring 44 points in the Thunder's



Jayson Tatum #0 of the Boston Celtics

138-129 victory over the Trail Blazers in Portland. The Canadian's efforts saw the Thunder withstand a 38-point performance from Portland star Damian Lillard.

Phoenix downed Indiana 117-104, fueled by 22 points and 11 rebounds from Deandre Ayton and 21 points from Devin Booker. — AFP

5 memorable India-Pakistan T20 battles

NEW DELHI: Arch-rivals India and Pakistan clash on Sunday in a much-anticipated group match at the Women's Twenty20 World Cup in Cape Town. AFP Sport looks at five memorable T20 matches between the two cricket powerhouses:

Roy special

Indian spinner Priyanka Roy played a huge part in the team's first ever T20 match against Pakistan with match-winning figures of 5-16 and three catches in the 2009 World Cup. Roy's leg-spin proved too hot to handle for the Pakistan batters who were dismissed for a paltry 75, a total India eclipsed with five wickets and 14 balls to spare. Roy played just 15 T20 matches for India with her last game in 2011, but the bowling effort remained a highlight of her white-ball career.

Solid Raut

Top-order batter Punam Raut's gritty 25 made the difference for eventual winners India in 2012's low-scoring final of the Asia Cup in China. A 32-run partnership between Raut and Harmanpreet Kaur, who made 20, guided India to 81 all out in 20 overs after Pakistan skipper Sana Mir returned figures of 4-13. In reply, Pakistan were bowled out for 63 in 19.1 to suffer their second loss to India in the tournament.

Mandhana power

Star batter Smriti Mandhana hammered a match-winning 63 not out in India's opening win against Pakistan at T20 cricket's 2022 Commonwealth Games debut. India's bowlers set up victory after they dismissed Pakistan for 99, a total the Indian batters surpassed in 11.4 overs, with the left-handed Mandhana hitting three sixes in her 42-ball knock. The win paved the way for India's entry into the final where they lost the gold to Australia, but Mandhana remained in the top three run-scorers of the competition with an average of just under 40.

Spin force

Pakistan women recorded their first-ever T20 win over their neighbors at the 2012 World Cup when Nida Dar spun them to a narrow one-run win with figures of 3-12. Batting first, Pakistan could only muster 98-9 in 20 overs, skipper Sana Mir top-scoring with 26 against a disciplined opposition bowling. Dar, an off-spinner, then led Pakistan's spin charge alongside Bismah Maroof to choke India to 97-8 in Galle.

All-round Nida

Dar again took the mantle of wrecker-in-chief when she single-handedly demolished India with an unbeaten 56 and 2-23 in the most recent meeting between the two teams. Pakistan rode on Dar's 37-ball knock to post 137-6 after they elected to bat first in a group match of last year's Asia Cup in Bangladesh. Dar worked with fellow spinners including Nashra Sandhu (3-30) to dismiss India for 124 in a 13-run victory, winning player of the match. — AFP

Scheffler leads Rahm as darkness halts Phoenix Open second round

PHOENIX: Scottie Scheffler fired seven birdies in a seven-under-par 64 on Friday to take a two-shot clubhouse lead over Jon Rahm as the two chase Rory McIlroy's number one ranking at the Phoenix Open. World number two Scheffler, the defending champion in Phoenix, had a 10-under-par total of 132 and Spain's third-ranked Rahm was his nearest rival in the clubhouse after a five-under-par 66 for 134.

Overnight co-leader Adam Hadwin of Canada was eight-under through 10 holes when darkness halted play in the US PGA Tour event at TPC Scottsdale, which has been in catch-up mode since a morning frost delay on Thursday. Both Scheffler and Rahm have a chance to overtake Northern Ireland star McIlroy atop the world rankings this week. McIlroy was three-under for the tournament through 13 holes of the second round.

Scheffler teed off on the 10th and after a birdie at the 12th he electrified the raucous crowd at the par-three 16th with a tee shot that took a bounce and rolled toward the cup-only for a gust of wind to carry it off the green. "It should have been probably six feet on left side of the hole," Scheffler said. "It ended up being like 20 feet off the green. It was weird. Tough break."

He ended up with a par, but then reeled off four straight birdies-driving the green at the 17th then draining a 23-footer at 18. He made seven-foot

Woods confirms PGA Tour return at LA event

LOS ANGELES: Tiger Woods said Friday he will play in next week's PGA Tour event in Los Angeles, marking his return to competitive golf after a seven-month absence as he recovers from injuries sustained in a 2021 car crash. The former world number one, whose appearances have been limited in the past two years since the 2021 car accident that left him with severe leg injuries, last played at the British Open in July.

Writing on Twitter on Friday, Woods said he plans to play at the February 16-19 Genesis Invitational tournament at Riviera Country Club which he hosts and benefits his charitable foundation. "I'm ready to play an ACTUAL PGA Tour event next week @thegenesisinv," Woods tweeted. Woods did not play in 2021 following his accident, which required several surgeries and drastically restricted his mobility. However he made a stunning comeback at the Masters in Augusta last year, finishing in 47th place.

He returned to play in the PGA Championship in May, but withdrew after 54 holes following a third round 79. Woods played again at the British Open at St. Andrews, where he missed the cut after an emotional second round at the spiritual home of golf. The 47-year-old who won the last of his 15 major championships at the 2019 Masters had hoped to make his PGA Tour return at the Hero World Challenge in the Bahamas last December. He abandoned those plans after developing plantar fasciitis in his right foot, leaving him struggling to walk. "After consulting with my doctors and trainers, I have decided to withdraw this week and focus on my hosting duties," Woods said at the time.

He did play in The Match, a 12-hole exhibition event in December as well as the PNC



ARIZONA: Scottie Scheffler of the United States plays his shot during the first round of the WM Phoenix Open at TPC Scottsdale in Scottsdale, Arizona. — AFP

birdie putts at the first and second, and short-range birdies at the sixth and ninth. "I think around this place when you're hitting fairways and you're hitting it well, the golf course can kind of open up for you," Scheffler said. "But the opposite can happen in a hurry because there's trouble lurking on basically every hole with there being desert close by. When you're hitting it well you have to take advantage of it like I did today."

Scheffler posted his first US tour win in Phoenix last year, and went on to win at Bay Hill and The Masters before reaching number one with a victory at the WGC Match Play. McIlroy has since ascended to number one while Rahm is threatening to

return to the summit after victories at the Tournament of Champions and in La Quinta, California, this year.

Rahm also teed off on 10 and after an early bogey he birdied the 13th and eagled 15 with a hole out from a greenside bunker. He added a birdie at 16 and two more coming in at the second and third. "I played really good," Rahm said. "I hit a lot of great tee shots out there today. A lot of good iron shots that didn't end up in great spots. "I think seven, eight nine is a clear example of it. None of those was bad. All of them were off the green and I needed to get up-and-down to get the round going. "It's golf and it's what happens out here." — AFP



Tiger Woods

Championship, a low-key event alongside his son Charlie. In November, Woods indicated that he expects to play just a handful of events outside of major championships in future. "The goal is to play just the major championships and maybe one or two more. That's it," Woods said at the time. "I mean, that's physically, that's all I can do."

Woods was left hospitalized for weeks and unable to walk for months, with his right leg repaired with rods, plates and screws following his scary February 2021 rollover crash in California. Woods said during the British Open last year he had feared not being able to walk again following his car accident. "For the most part of my rehab I was just hoping that I could walk again, you know, walk normal and have a normal life and maybe play a little hit-and-giggle golf with my son or my friends at home," Woods said. — AFP

Lee Hae-in wins Four Continents women's title

LOS ANGELES: Lee Hae-in surged from sixth place with a near-flawless free skate to win the women's title at the Four Continents figure skating championships in Colorado Springs on Friday. Lee, 17, became the first South Korean woman to lift the title at the competition for non-European countries since Kim Yu-na in 2009. She edged compatriot Kim Ye-lim, who led after the short program but was third in the free skate to finish second.

America's 15-year-old national champion Isabeau Levito, who was second after the short program, withdrew shortly before the free skate because of illness. Lee garnered a personal-best 141.71 points for her free skate to soar up the standings with a total of 210.84 points. Kim earned silver with a total of 209.29 points and Japanese teenager Mone Chiba, seventh after the short program, was second in the free skate to take bronze with 204.98 points.

After earning silver at last year's Four Continents, Lee said that this time around she "tried to not think about the final result, to focus on my training process." "I think I did well," added Kim, who was shut out of the medals in two Grand Prix stops this season. The Four Continents marks the final major event ahead of next month's World Championships in Saitama, Japan.

Japan's Kao Miura takes the lead into Saturday's men's free skate after topping Thursday's short program by five points over Canadian Keegan Messing. Miura bobbed his opening quadruple Salchow but completed a triple Axel and quad toe-triple toe combination in his short programme and said his aim is to maintain the momentum in the free skate, something he struggled to do in Grand Prix competition, even though he claimed silver medals at Skate Canada and Skate America. — AFP

Sports

Nothing separates Chiefs, Eagles - until Super Bowl

Two strongest teams in NFL will go face to face

PHOENIX: The two top quarterbacks and the two strongest teams in the NFL will go face to face on Sunday when the Kansas City Chiefs take on the Philadelphia Eagles in what could be a Super Bowl for the ages. All the indicators, stats and form guides suggest that the clash will be one of the closest matchups the NFL's title game has produced.

Both teams are the top seeds from their conferences, have identical 16-3 records this season and incredibly have even scored the exact same number of points - 546. When it comes to the playmakers, Patrick Mahomes of the Chiefs is the top-ranked quarter-back in the NFL but the Eagles boast the number two in Jalen Hurts.

Led by the inspired, improvising Mahomes, the Chiefs have the number one passing offense but will have their work cut out against the NFL's best passing defense. There are star players all over the field - the Chiefs have the top tight-end in the NFL in Travis Kelce while the Eagles boast an elite wide-receiver in AJ Brown. But as Chiefs head coach Andy Reid pointed out at his pre-game press conference on Thursday, despite all the analysis and game plans, in the high-pressure atmosphere of a Super Bowl it is often an unheralded player who turns out to be decisive.

'The human element'

"That is the human element ... in this game there is going to be somebody that we haven't mentioned ... who is going to step up and you are going to go 'Wow that was a great job by that kid,'" said Reid, who was Eagles head coach for 14 seasons before joining the Chiefs in 2013. If there is an area where the teams can be clearly separated it is in the realm of experience where the Chiefs certainly have the edge.

Nothing is going to phase the 64-year-old Reid, who is in his 24th year as an NFL head coach and this is his team's third Super Bowl appearance with Mahomes in the last four seasons, with victory coming in 2019-2020. In contrast, this is just Eagles boss Nick Sirianni's second season as a head coach and his 24-year-old quarterback Hurts makes his Super Bowl debut in his second year as starter having played only three playoff games in his career.

But Hurts, who presents a potentially crucial unpredictable threat given his unmatched capacity to run with the ball, does not appear likely to be over-awed. Hurts, who was replaced during his college national championship final for Alabama, has been carrying a shoulder injury throughout the latter part of the season but the Chiefs have the bigger fitness concern with Mahomes hampered by a niggling ankle injury.

Eagles' point to prove

Mahomes will cement his status as the finest NFL quarterback of this post-Tom Brady generation if he can add a second Super Bowl ring to his two Most Valuable Player awards but will be wary of an Eagles defense which led the league in sacks. "They're on like a historic sack rate and the way they are able to get to the quarterback," Mahomes said this week. "So everybody knows that everything starts up front. It will be a great challenge for our offensive line to try to do what they can."

Mahomes and Hurts are the youngest quarterback pairing in a Super Bowl and Sunday's game also marks the first time that two black quarterbacks face each other in the biggest game. The Chiefs have the confidence of a team that has been to five straight



ARIZONA: Jordan Mailata #68 of the Philadelphia Eagles participates in a practice session prior to Super Bowl LVII at Arizona Cardinals Training Center on February 10, 2023 in Tempe, Arizona. — AFP

AFC Championship games but the Eagles have a chip on their shoulder. Sirianni was fired as an assistant from Kansas City by Reid and Hurts has been doubted by many pundits through his young career.

And while the coaches have tried to dampen talk of the game being Mahomes v Hurts, the Eagles quarterback certainly feels the unique responsibility and

pressure that comes with the most important role on the field in the biggest game of all. "I know there is a whole group of men looking at me and expecting me to go out and make things happen," he said. "Everyone needs to do their jobs but ... the leaders need to lead and you want your big time players to make big time plays in a game like this." —AFP

Super Bowl snack hurting Colombia farmers

PIJAO: During the Super Bowl between the Philadelphia Eagles and Kansas City Chiefs on Sunday, millions of armchair fans will tuck into a tasty snack of tortilla chips and guacamole. But unbeknownst to them, in far away Colombia, local farmers are paying the price for their gastronomic pleasure, while environmentalists are warning of water pollution. The explosion of avocado plantations in central-western Colombia resulted in changing land-use patterns that, in turn, left Jose Hernandez's coffee crops flooded.

Unlike his neighbors in the Pijao municipality in Quindio department, Hernandez refused to switch to growing the lucrative "green-gold." But rivers of water came cascading down from higher up in the mountains surrounding his farm and scouring out ditches up to two meters deep. The 64-year-old lost 4,000 coffee plants and he points the finger at avocado multinationals who use copious amounts of water and even divert natural streams to satiate their thirsty crops. "I lost 20 years of work with those waters that fell on me," Hernandez told AFP.

'More important than oil'

The Colombian countryside is rapidly being overtaken by crops of the Hass avocado that is mainly exported to the United States, the Netherlands, Spain and Britain. It is the main ingredient in guacamole. And demand peaks in the weeks leading up to the Super Bowl-American football's annual showpiece. According to Colombia's agriculture ministry,



QUINDIO: Aerial view showing avocado plantations and Palma de Cera palm trees, Quindio wax palm (Ceroxylon quindiuense), Colombia's national tree, which is threatened in Pijao, Quindio Department, Colombia. Far from the guacamole that seduces palates during the American football Super Bowl, where avocado salsa is the star food for viewers, in Colombia the growing production of avocado divides growers and environmentalists. — AFP

the country will send more than 1,400 tons of avocados to the United States for consumption specifically during Sunday's match. In 2021, total avocado exports were 97,000 tons with 55,000 hectares of planted crops. Colombia is the third-largest producer of avocados after Mexico (2.3 million tons) and Chile (186,000 tons).

But while leftist President Gustavo Petro has embraced this crop, saying "avocados are more important than oil," environmentalists warn that the crop can pollute water sources and lead farmers to intrude on protected areas. They add that multinationals have bullied villagers into selling their land on the cheap. In 2021, the state body charged with protecting the environment in Quindio accused avocado

producers of "illegal water harvesting," "pollution of water sources" and "illegal logging."

Pijao was once coffee-growing country but now has 789 hectares of avocado crops, a 245 percent increase in seven years, according to the local mayor's office. Initially, foreign companies were "unaware" of environmental rules, admits Diego Aristizabal, president of the avocado producers federation, although he claims they now follow them to the letter. Some from the industry complain of being "demonized" and point to the creation of 26,000 jobs. But an agro-industrial engineer, speaking to AFP under condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals, said the number of farmers like Hernandez being negatively impacted is mushrooming. — AFP

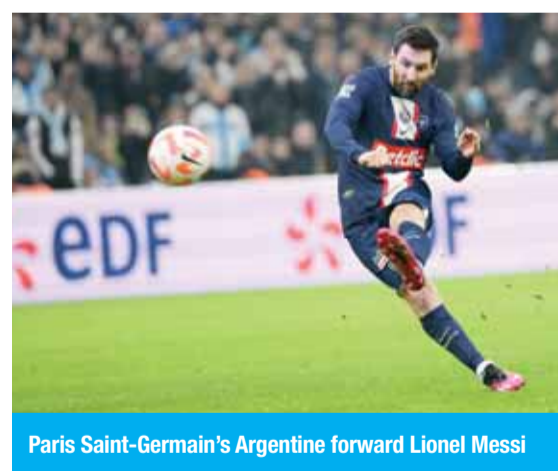
Messi, Mbappe and Benzema nominated for FIFA's best award

ZURICH: World Cup winner Lionel Messi, Kylian Mbappe and Karim Benzema were announced Friday as the three finalists for FIFA's The Best award for last year. Two-time Ballon d'Or winner Alexia Putellas of Spain, England forward Beth Mead and US star Alex Morgan were nominated for the top women's prize.

Paris Saint-Germain team-mates Messi and Mbappe, who faced each other in last year's World

Cup final, are competing along with Benzema to succeed Robert Lewandowski, winner of the FIFA award in 2020 and 2021. Benzema won last year's Ballon d'Or for his performances with Real Madrid but missed the World Cup because of injury.

Barcelona and Spain midfielder Putellas won the women's award last time and is nominated again despite being out since July after tearing the anterior cruciate ligament in her left knee. Arsenal striker Beth Mead, runner-up to Putellas for the Ballon d'Or in October, is also currently sidelined with a long-term knee injury. The winners will be revealed on February 27 in Paris. They will be voted for by a jury made up of national team coaches and captains as well as journalists and fans. There are also prizes for the best male and female coach, the best goalkeeper, and the Puskas Award for the best goal of 2022. — AFP



Paris Saint-Germain's Argentine forward Lionel Messi

Zamalek flop, Raja hit five in the CAF Champions League

JOHANNESBURG: Chabab Belouizdad of Algeria upset Zamalek of Egypt 1-0 and Raja Casablanca of Morocco hammered Vipers of Uganda 5-0 on Friday when the CAF Champions League group phase began. Cameroonian Lionel Wamba converted a 57th-minute penalty to earn Belouizdad a significant Group D victory in Cairo over five-time champions Zamalek. Hamza Khabba scored after only five minutes for Raja in Casablanca and Jamal Harkass, Mohamed Zrida, Yousri Bouzok and Roger Ahlou also netted. Four-time African champions Esperance of Tunisia, who host Al Merrikh of Sudan on Saturday, are the top seeds and favourites to win Group D.

The fight for the other ticket to the quarter-finals is expected to be between Zamalek and Belouizdad with Merrikh the outsiders. By winning away Belouizdad

have gained an important advantage as they strive to reach the last eight for the third consecutive season. A hand-ball led to the penalty, and Wamba placed his kick into the right corner as goalkeeper Mohamed Awad dived in the opposite direction.

Houssein Mrezigue, voted the outstanding player after the African Nations Championship this month, stood out in midfield for Belouizdad. Zamalek, whose recent domestic form has been poor, are desperate to do well after failing to get past the group stage in the last two Champions League competitions. When they were crowned African champions for the fifth time in 2002, fierce Egyptian and African rivals Al Ahly had lifted the trophy three times.

But Ahly have won the Champions League seven times since while the best Zamalek have managed is finishing runners-up twice. Raja won the last of three Champions League titles in 1999 and have been overshadowed in Africa recently by fellow Casablanca club Wydad, the 2017 and 2022 Champions League winners. While a five-goal triumph marks an impressive start, it is too soon to pass judgment as group debutants Vipers were outclassed having fallen two goals behind after only 11 minutes. — AFP

Guardiola pledges loyalty to Man City despite charges

MANCHESTER: Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola said he has no intention of leaving the English champions after the club were charged with more than 100 breaches of financial rules by the Premier League. City could face points deductions or even relegation from the English top flight if they are found guilty of the alleged breaches, between 2009/10 and 2017/18, by an independent commission. Guardiola has previously said he would walk away if he found he had been lied to by the City hierarchy over allegations that they broke financial fair play (FFP) rules.

However, the City boss, who has won four Premier League titles in the past five years, said he believed the latest case would end in the same manner as a previous UEFA charge. City were banned

for two years from UEFA competitions in February 2020 by European football's governing body for "serious financial fair play breaches", but the sanction was overturned by the Court of Arbitration for Sport later that year.

"My first thought is that we have already been condemned," Guardiola said at his pre-match press conference on Friday, ahead of Sunday's clash with Aston Villa. "In case we are not innocent, we will accept what the judge or the Premier League decide. But what happens if in the same situation that (the) UEFA (case) happened, we are innocent? What happens to restore or pay back our damage?"

Guardiola recently extended his contract at the Etihad until 2025. His seven-year stay in Manchester is already the longest of his managerial career. "I'm not moving from this seat. I can assure you more than ever I want to stay," he said. "Sometimes I have doubts because seven or eight years is a long time but now I don't want to move on. 'People say 'they lied to you'. They didn't lie to me. Look what happened at UEFA. 'Now it is the same case. Why should I not trust my people and trust the other CEOs of the other clubs?'" — AFP

Today's matches on TV

English Premier League

Leeds v Manchester United 17:00

beIN 4K HDR
beIN Sports 1 HD Premium
beIN Sports Connect

Man City v Aston Villa 19:30

beIN Sports 1 HD Premium
beIN Sports HD 1 English
beIN Sports Connect

Spanish League

Getafe v Rayo Vallecano 16:00

beIN Sports HD 1
beIN Sports HD 2 English
beIN Sports Connect
SuperSport LaLiga HD

Celta de Vigo v Atletico de Madrid 18:15

beIN Sports HD 1
beIN Sports 1 FR

Real Valladolid v Osasuna 20:30

beIN Sports HD 1
beIN Sports HD 2 English
beIN Sports FR 6 HD max
beIN Sports Connect

Villarreal v Barcelona 23:00

beIN Sports 1 HD Premium
beIN Sports HD 1
beIN Sports HD 1 English

Italian League Serie A

Udinese v US Sassuolo 14:30

beIN Sports FR 6 HD max

Bologna v AC Monza 17:00

AD SPORTS Premium 1

Juventus v Fiorentina 20:00

beIN Sports 2 FR

Napoli v US Cremonese 22:45

AD SPORTS Premium 1

German Bundesliga

Hertha v Borussia M'gladbach 17:30

beIN Sports HD 3

FC Koln v Eintracht Frankfurt 19:30

beIN Sports HD 3

beIN Sports HD 2 English



LONDON: Arsenal's English striker Eddie Nketiah (center) vies with Brentford's English defender Rico Henry (left), Brentford's German midfielder Vitaly Janelt (2nd left) and Brentford's English defender Ben Mee (right) during the English Premier League football match between Arsenal and Brentford on February 11, 2023. —AFP

Leaders Arsenal stumble again

Spurs thrashed 4-1; West Ham frustrate Chelsea

LONDON: Arsenal stumbled again as the Premier League leaders were held to a 1-1 draw by Brentford, while Tottenham's top four hopes were dented by an embarrassing 4-1 defeat at Leicester on Saturday. Mikel Arteta's side could have moved eight points clear of second-placed Manchester City with a victory at the Emirates Stadium. But Arsenal could not hold on to the lead given to them by Leandro Trossard's first goal for the club in his fifth appearance since his January move from Brighton.

Ivan Toney scored Brentford's equalizer to leave Arsenal without a win in their last three games in all competitions following defeats at Manchester City in the FA Cup and Everton in the league. The Gunners still control their destiny as they chase a first Premier League title since 2004, but champions City can move to within three points if they beat Aston Villa on Sunday. Arsenal host City on Wednesday in a clash that will go a long way to deciding the title race. Belgium forward Trossard came off the bench to make the breakthrough for Arsenal in the 66th minute.

Bukayo Saka floated his cross to the far post and Trossard was on hand to net with a clinical finish, his first goal for either Arsenal or Brighton since October. But Brentford drew level eight minutes later when Toney headed into an empty

net after the Arsenal defense had failed to deal with a high ball. Tottenham boss Antonio Conte was back at the helm after missing last weekend's 1-0 win against Manchester City following gall-bladder surgery, but his fifth-placed side were humiliated at the King Power Stadium.

Rodrigo Bentancur put Tottenham ahead in the 14th minute, meeting Ben Davies's flick with a close-range finish that survived a VAR check for offside. But Nampalys Mendy levelled in the 23rd minute when he bagged his first goal for the club with a rocket from the edge of the area. Two minutes later, James Maddison latched onto Kelechi Iheanacho's pass and produced a composed low finish. Iheanacho scored Leicester's third in first half stoppage-time with a curler into the bottom corner and Harvey Barnes completed the rout in the 81st minute.

Chelsea frustrated

Graham Potter admitted Chelsea are still "a work in progress" after their winless Premier League run extended to three games as Joao Felix's first goal for the Blues was cancelled out by Emerson in a 1-1 draw at West Ham. Potter's expensively assembled side once again failed to live up to their price tags as the pressure mounted on the Blues boss. Portugal forward Felix put

Chelsea ahead in his second appearance for the club, only for Italy defender Emerson to haunt his former team with an equaliser before half-time.

Ninth-placed Chelsea have won just one of their past eight games in all competitions and are nine points adrift of the Premier League's top four. "The second half was more of a reflection of where we are in terms of integrating new players and getting players up to speed in the Premier League," Potter said. "They are a good group and we are excited with the team and the potential but it is still a work in progress." Ten-man Wolves boosted their bid to avoid relegation with a 2-1 win at bottom of the table Southampton.

Carlos Alcaraz netted his first goal for Southampton midway through the first half. Wolves had former Southampton midfielder Mario Lemina sent off moments later for two bookings in quick succession. But Jan Bednarek's 72nd-minute own goal turned the tide before Joao Gomes won it for 15th-placed Wolves at the death. Crystal Palace's James Tomkins rescued a 1-1 draw against Brighton with a 69th-minute equaliser after Solly March put Albion ahead six minutes earlier at Selhurst Park. Goals from Willian and Manor Solomon gave Fulham a 2-0 win against Nottingham Forest at Craven Cottage. —AFP



DUBLIN: Ireland's scrum-half Conor Murray (centre left) and France's wing Ethan Dumortier (center) contest a high ball during the Six Nations international rugby union match between Ireland and France on February 11, 2023. —AFP

Ireland thump title holders France in Six Nations classic

DUBLIN: Ireland took a giant step towards the Six Nations Grand Slam by beating title-holders France 32-19 in a pulsating encounter between the world's top two sides at Lansdowne Road on Saturday. The Irish secured a winning bonus point with four tries, with Andrew Porter scoring one on his 50th cap, in what was a record 13th successive home Test victory. France saw their dreams of a successive Grand Slam success dashed while their national record run of 14 consecutive Test victories came to an end. The win also saw head coach Andy Farrell secure his first win over France since he took over after the 2019 World Cup.

"It was two great teams going at it with the French going for an unbeaten record and us going for the home record," Farrell told ITV. "At the end of the day it is a victory in a competition that we want to do well at." France skipper Antoine Dupont admitted the team was dejected over the loss. "For the moment, obviously it's a lot of disappointment, we can see the result, they have the bonus point, we have no defensive bonus point," he said. "We will have to recover and continue this tournament because it is not over. We know that a lot can happen."

France struck first with Thomas Ramos slotting over a penalty in the fifth minute. The Irish stormed into the lead with a sublime try when prop Finlay Bealham sold a dummy pass to Conor Murray and fed fullback Hugo Keenan who burst through the French defense to touch down. Irish skipper Johnny Sexton converted for 7-3 in the 10th minute. The trusty boot of Ramos reduced the gap on the quarter hour mark, converting a penalty for 7-6.

France then produced a dream try which began inside their own 22 before Anthony Jelonek passed to Damian Penaud who brushed off Murray before running in for his 22nd Test try. Ramos converted for 13-7. There was an immediate reply from the Irish as they regained possession when Ramos's clearance kick was deflected. The ball came out wide to James Lowe, who still had work to do but somehow managed to touch the ball down in the corner with his legs over the touchline but crucially with his feet not on the ground. —AFP

Bayern move 3 points clear; Dortmund 2nd

BERLIN: Bayern Munich strung three wins together for the first time since November, beating Bochum 3-0 at home on Saturday ahead of next week's Champions League clash with Paris Saint-Germain. Bayern lacked fluidity early against a strong Bochum side, who have been reinvigorated since the arrival of manager Thomas Letsch.

The home side were however gifted a goal late in the first half, when veteran forward Thomas Mueller pounced on an under-hit back pass from Bochum defender Saidy Janko and scored his second goal in two games. Bayern's Bochum-born midfielder Leon Goretzka almost doubled the lead one minute before half-time, but headed wide from right in front.

In-form French forward Kingsley Coman made it 2-0 on 64 minutes when he tunneled Bochum goalkeeper Manuel Riemann, while former Arsenal winger Serge Gnabry won and converted a penalty with just over 15 minutes remaining to give his side a comfortable 3-0 home win. Bayern, who started the season with three straight 1-1 draws, have now won three matches on the trot ahead of Tuesday's trip to face PSG in the Champions League. Borussia Dortmund made it six from six in 2023, winning 2-0 at Bremen to go three points behind Bayern at the top of the table.

Dortmund lost striker Youssoufa Moukoko after 26 minutes following a heavy tackle and the teenager was subbed out for Ivory Coast forward Sebastian Haller. With the match scoreless after 66 minutes, Dortmund manager Edin Terzic brought Jamie Bynoe-Gittens on for fellow youngster Gio Reyna and the change had an immediate impact,



MUNICH: Bayern Munich's Cameroonian forward Eric Maxim Choupo-Moting (left) heads the ball but fails to score during the German first division Bundesliga football match between FC Bayern Munich and VfL Bochum 1848 on February 11, 2023. —AFP

with the English teenager scoring a rocket just a minute later. Germany midfielder Julian Brandt missed a chance to put Dortmund 2-0 up 10 minutes later, but got a second with six minutes remaining to seal the three points for the visitors.

Leverkusen back on track

Elsewhere, Stuttgart defender Dan-Axel Zagadou gave away two second-half penalties to help Freiburg come from behind to win 2-1 at home, their second league win of 2023. Stuttgart, sitting in 16th place and embroiled in a relegation dogfight,

hit the lead early through Chris Fuehrich to take a 1-0 lead at half-time, but Vincenzo Grifo scored twice from the spot to seal a come-from-behind victory.

Leverkusen got back on the winners' board after two straight losses with a comfortable 3-1 win away at under-fire Hoffenheim thanks to goals from Robert Andrich, Moussa Diaby and Adam Hlozek. A double from South Korean midfielder Lee Jae-sung and a goal from Austrian forward Karim Onisiwo helped Mainz to a 3-1 home win over Augsburg, who got on the scoresheet thanks to a first-half penalty from Bosnian forward Ermedin Demirovic. —AFP