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## Dialogue 'key' to end disputes

Sheikh Salem decries lack of progress on Palestine, calls for nuclear-free Mideast



MUNICH: Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah (center) participates in a panel discussion with Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al-Saud (left) at the Munich Security Conference. —KUNA

MUNICH: To resolve disputes and crises worldwide, countries must seek balanced dialogue and effective policies to proliferate peace and end violence, Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah said on Sunday. Speaking at a discussion panel at the 59th Munich Security Conference, Sheikh Salem indicated the Middle East region has witnessed some worrisome developments, especially those connected with the Zionist entity's ongoing violence against Palestinians and their holy places in Jerusalem.

Finding solutions to issues like the Palestinian cause and the war in Ukraine required coordination amongst global players to find suitable and viable solutions, he added. Sheikh Salem said Kuwait has always been a big supporter of a nuclear-free Middle East, adding Gulf countries would like to be part of any negotiations regarding Iran's nuclear program. The Kuwaiti foreign minister has held several meetings with fellow participating officials, discussing a wide-range of regional and international issues as well as mean to bolster ties.

In an interview with Reuters, Sheikh Salem reaffirmed Kuwait's stance in support of the Palestinian people to have a homeland and for there to be a two-state solution. He said peace deals with the Zionist entity have brought no progress to the situation with Palestine. "The Abraham Accords were done two years ago and what has come of that? The situation of the Palestinians is still as dire as it was ever before," he told Reuters. "I don't see how the Abraham Accords are bringing closer a two-state solution."

Speaking on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference, Sheikh Salem revealed Kuwait and Iraq will hold a round of legal and technical talks on Sunday as they look to bring an end to the maritime border dispute. A deal could open the door to closer cooperation, from the construction of ports, management of border oilfields and the general ease of trade and transport between the two states. Sheikh Salem also indicated that Kuwait has no plans to follow other Arab states in re-engaging with Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad despite the earthquake that ravaged the country. — Agencies

### News in brief

#### Woman kills children, self

KUWAIT: An Indian woman committed suicide after killing two of her children in Fahaheel. "The children were smothered to death and their mother jumped from the top of the building she lived in," sources said. Meanwhile, the public prosecution ordered the detention of an Asian man who allegedly molested four children and forced them to perform sexual acts. In other news, a two-car collision on Fahaheel Expressway resulted in the death of an Iranian and critically injured two Kuwaiti women.

#### Cold to continue throughout Feb

KUWAIT: Meteorologist Eisa Ramadan said the fall in temperatures is not natural, as the country experiences an extreme cold wave. Ramadan warned the unusual cold will last throughout February, especially since this period has usually been the start of the spring season. "The cold wave will continue during the weekend, and chances of rain will gradually decrease," Ramadan said, adding temperatures at night will drop below 5 degrees Celsius.

#### Kuwaitis urged to keep low profile

KUWAIT: Kuwait's foreign ministry has called on Kuwaiti citizens in Lebanon to keep a low profile and steer away from chaotic areas, and follow the guidelines of concerned authorities. It also urged them to communicate with the Kuwaiti Embassy in Beirut if they need help or in case of emergency. — KUNA

#### Carter receiving hospice care

WASHINGTON: Jimmy Carter, the 98-year-old former US president who led the nation from 1977 to 1981, is receiving hospice care at home, where he will spend his "remaining time", his nonprofit foundation said Saturday. Carter, the oldest living former president and a Nobel peace laureate, resides in Plains, Georgia, with his wife, Rosalynn. — AFP

## Demarcation of maritime borders with Iraq urged

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: MP Khaled Al-Otaibi called on Sunday for demarcating maritime borders with Iraq to serve the national interests of the country, as the foreign minister is scheduled to hold technical and legal talks with

an Iraqi delegation. Otaibi said in a statement the demarcation will strengthen Kuwait's sovereignty, safeguard territorial waters and start the long-delayed development of the northern parts of the country.

Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah was scheduled to start technical and legal talks with Iraq on Sunday in a bid to resolve a host of outstanding issues, including the demarcation of the maritime borders. Otaibi expressed hope the two neighboring countries succeed in resolving all outstanding issues to pave the way for cooperation between them and exploit investment opportunities. He added that reaching final solutions to the issues between Iraq and Kuwait will help, among other

issues, stop illegal incursions of Iraqi military boats into Kuwait's territorial waters.

Meanwhile, MP Abdullah Al-Mudhaf said on Sunday he and other lawmakers are planning to submit an amendment to the Assembly's internal charter to clearly state that Assembly sessions can be held without the need of the presence of ministers. Since its inception in 1962, the Assembly has adjourned all sessions when there was no minister in the chamber. The practice was at times based on a controversial article in the constitution, which stipulates that the representation of the government in Assembly sessions is mandatory.

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## Zionist air strike kills 15 in Damascus

BEIRUT: A Zionist air strike on Damascus killed 15 people early Sunday and badly damaged a building in a district housing state security agencies, a war monitor said. Civilians, including two women, were among those killed in "the deadliest (Zionist) attack in the Syrian capital" since the civil war began, said Rami Abdel Rahman of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

The overnight strike cratered a road and wrecked the adjacent 10-storey building in the Kafr Sousa district, which is home to senior state officials

and Syrian intelligence headquarters, said the Britain-based Observatory. A woman was also killed in the Mazraa district, possibly hit when Syrian anti-aircraft munitions crashed down, it added. It was not immediately clear who was the intended target of the strike, which AFP correspondents reported shook Damascus and left a gaping hole in the street.

Other missiles overnight hit a warehouse used by pro-regime Iranian and Hezbollah fighters near Damascus, said the Observatory, which relies on a wide network of sources inside Syria. Iranian news agency Tasnim said "no Iranian was harmed", adding that the strikes hit "exactly the spot" where Hezbollah's top commander Imad Mughniyeh was killed in a 2008 car bombing that the

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DAMASCUS: Syrian security forces' members inspect a building damaged in a reported Zionist missile strike on Feb 19, 2023. — AFP

## Zionist envoy ejected from AU summit

ADDIS ABABA: The Zionist entity accused arch-foe Iran of orchestrating the ejection of one of its senior diplomats from the African Union summit on Saturday, with the help of Algeria and South Africa. The incident occurred on the first day of the summit, where leaders are discussing a slew of challenges facing the continent, including a record drought in the Horn of Africa and several deadly conflicts.

A video circulating on social media shows guards escorting the Zionist

entity's deputy director general for Africa, Sharon Bar-li, out of the AU assembly, which opened on Saturday in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa. A Zionist foreign ministry spokesman described the incident as "severe", noting Bar-li was "an accredited observer with an entry tag". "It is sad to see the African Union taken hostage by a small number of extremist states like Algeria and South Africa, which are driven by hatred and controlled by Iran," he added.

The incident follows a long-running dispute over the Zionist entity's accreditation as an observer to the 55-member bloc in 2021. The decision by AU Commission chief Moussa Faki Mahamat triggered loud protests by powerful member states, notably

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ADDIS ABABA: Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh shakes hands with AU Chairperson and Senegalese President Macky Sall as AU Commission Chairperson Moussa Faki and UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres look on on Feb 18, 2023. — AFP



## Local

# Kuwait 'first in organ donation after death' in the Arab world

## Shortage of donated organs - a global crisis

By Ghadeer Ghloom

**KUWAIT:** After a patient reaches final stages of organ failure that may lead to severe illness and death, doctors recommend an organ transplant, which can save lives. However, the actual challenge lies not in the failure of organs or success of the operation, but in securing donated human organs, since finding donors remains a global issue for doctors who are trying to save their patients' lives. Kuwait is first among Arab countries and second in the Middle East in organ donations after death, but the challenges doctors are facing still necessitate more donations.

### Difficulties facing doctors

About the difficulties that doctors face over organ transplantation, President of Kuwait Transplant Society and head of organ procurement Dr Mustafa Al-Mousawi, who is a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons, told Kuwait Times: "The most difficult thing facing us as specialists in organ transplantation is to get enough donors. There's an organ shortage all over the world, and not only in Kuwait or the Middle East. The number of patients that require organs is always greater than the number of donors available," he said.

According to Dr Mousawi, the shortage of donated organs forms a global crisis, as the list of waiting patients is growing, whereas the number of available organs remains small. To support his claim, Dr Mousawi mentioned a credible website that provides daily updates on the number of patients who need an organ transplant. "In the United States, United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS) shows hundreds and thousands of patients who are waiting for different types of organs, and some of

them die while waiting." Despite rapid medical development that gives hope for many victims of organ failure, the lack of donated organs keeps the risk of death present. Dr Mousawi said in Kuwait, there are around 600 patients on the waiting list, with the majority waiting for kidneys, pancreas and livers.

### The categories of donors

Both living and deceased donors occupy an essential part in organ transplants. According to Mousawi, living donors can be split into two categories: Relatives and nonrelatives. In case the donor is a nonrelative, they have to be approved by the ethics committee. "Unrelated donors have to be interviewed by the ethics committee, which is based in Jahra Hospital and not at the transplant center. The ethics committee decides if the donor can donate or not because they need to make sure the donor is not paid for donation. Once the donors are approved by the ethical committee, then doctors can conduct an organ transplant surgery," he said.

Compared to deceased donors, the number of living donors is fewer and limited to certain types of organs. Thus, organ donations mainly depend on people who die or who are brain dead. "With brain death, the heart still beats, which keeps the organs living even when the person is dead neurologically," explained Dr Mousawi. He said donors are both Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti, but the majority are non-Kuwaiti due to various reasons including the fact that the number of expats in Kuwait are larger than the number of Kuwaitis, in addition to the incentives that the ministry or the Cabinet gives to non-Kuwaiti donors' families.

"For example, if the deceased is from a



Dr Mustafa Al-Mousawi

certain country, the body is repatriated to that country at the expense of the Ministry of Health in Kuwait. Also, the ministry supports the deceased donor's family if they are poor and in need of help" Dr Mousawi. Supporting non-Kuwaiti donors' families has dual advantages, since it encourages a lot of people from the expat community to donate and help the patients on the waiting list survive, and it benefits the donors' families by providing different kinds of support in return.

"Many of the deceased are poor workers with very low salary; therefore, they find the ministry's support very beneficial. In other cases, the patients who receive donated organs promise to help the donor's family. Hence, we connect both parties and they can help the donors' relatives whenever they wish and some provide help on more than one occasion," Dr Mousawi said.

Another encouraging benefit that Kuwait gives to non-Kuwaitis, because



they form the majority of donors, is that the Ministry of Health and the transplant center give them organs from deceased donors for free. "Expats who are on the waiting list receive the organ for free and the transplant operation in Kuwait is free for expats," said Mousawi.

### Most demanded organs

Dr Mousawi emphasized on the significant demand for kidneys compared to other organs, despite the urgent need for all types of organs. "Kidney failure is the commonest type of organ failure, not only in Kuwait but all around the world, followed by the need for livers," he said. According to Dr Mousawi, kidney donations and transplants constitute the largest number of transplants annually in Kuwait and globally.

He also said that the majority of living donors choose to donate kidneys. Some people also choose to donate a part of their liver, since it is possible to donate half of the liver during one's lifetime, and sometimes people donate a lobe of the lung to somebody who requires a lung.

Focusing on Kuwait's annual organ transplants, Dr Mousawi said: "In Kuwait we do about 100 kidney transplants every year. Last year we did 50 kidney transplants from deceased donors and 49 from living donors." He said the transplant center had a program for liver transplants in Kuwait, which stopped during the pandemic and has not resumed. Most patients still go to neighboring countries such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates for liver transplants.

## Kites light up Kuwait skies

**KUWAIT:** Kites illuminated with national colors were ubiquitous across the skies above Kuwait's Shuwaikh beach on Sunday, as a wave of patriotic fervor grips the country. The kites, designed by a team of Kuwaiti volunteers, ran circles around the sky as part of festivities in store for Kuwait's national celebrations, team leader Omar Buhamad told KUNA. Since its inception in 1995, the Kuwaiti team has assembled a vast array of kites as part of its contributions towards festive occasions, he said. —KUNA



Kites with Kuwait's flag colors.



KUWAIT: Foreign ambassadors and their staff attend the event at Al-Azayez Farm.



Sheikh Ali Al-Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah cutting the cake at the annual gathering at Al-Azayez farm. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## No plans to reduce number of Kuwait's diplomatic missions

By Faten Omar

**KUWAIT:** Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi attended the annual gathering at the farm of Sheikh Ali Al-Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. Foreign ambassadors and their staff also attended the event at Al-Azayez Farm. In a statement to the press, Otaibi revealed new ambassadors will be appointed to fill vacancies at Kuwaiti embassies abroad in the coming weeks. "There are no plans to reduce the number of Kuwait's diplomatic missions abroad, but they may be increased if necessary," he said.

On the diplomats gathering at Azayez, he said: "It is an opportunity for diplomatic families to communicate with others and enjoy their day in a friendly atmosphere away from work." He affirmed this is an opportunity for him to get to know ambassadors closely, especially since he was appointed as deputy foreign minister only six weeks ago.

Otaibi expressed his gratitude to Sheikh Ali Al-Jaber for his annual invitation to diplomats at Azayez Farm. He noted the importance of these friendly meetings in supporting and strengthening bilateral relations, describing this initiative as generous, especially as it coincides with Kuwait's national days.

Sheikh Ali indicated the gatherings he holds annually at Azayez Farm are a continuous annual tradition that did not stop except briefly during the COVID pandemic, referring to the royal directives of HH the Amir for the continuation of these gatherings, pointing out the gathering was for diplomats, media, foreign ambassadors and their families. "I am



Sheikh Ali Al-Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah with his family.

honored to attend this large gathering of diplomats, most of whom were posted during the pandemic, and I was pleased to know them," he said.



Sudanese Ambassador Awad Al-Karim Balla cuts the cake with Social Affairs Minister Mai Al-Baghli.



KUWAIT: Attendees stand for the national anthem during the event. On the occasion of Sudan's 67th Independence Day, the Embassy of Sudan held a reception on Thursday at Al-Baraka Ballroom at Crowne Plaza Hotel. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



## Sudan embassy celebrates 67th Independence Day

By Faten Omar

**KUWAIT:** On the occasion of Sudan's 67th Independence Day, the Embassy of Sudan held a reception on Thursday at Al-Baraka Ballroom at Crowne Plaza Hotel. Sudanese Ambassador Awad Al-Karim El-Rayah Balla said Sudan gained its independence on Jan 1, 1956 after a long journey of struggle and

sacrifice. "As I stand before you to celebrate our glorious Independence Day, I wouldn't forget to extend my deepest condolences and sincere sympathy to the victims of the earthquake that struck the two brotherly countries of Syria and Turkey, praying to the Almighty to heal those who are injured and help those who lost their shelter," he said.

"Sudan and Kuwait have eternal relations. Since the independence of Kuwait, Sudan has dispatched the best of its youth and experts in various fields to contribute to the renaissance of the sisterly state of Kuwait. Conversely, Kuwait is always proactive in its supportive position in the economic, humanitarian, political and social fields," he pointed out.

Balla added Sudan's celebration coincides with the celebrations of Kuwait, marking the 62nd National Day

the 32nd Liberation Day. "With honor, I and the government and people of the Republic of Sudan congratulate His Highness the Amir of the country Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and his trustworthiness Crown Prince, His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the government and people of Kuwait on this occasion," he said.

The Sudanese ambassador revealed Kuwait is considered one of the leading countries investing in Sudan, as it provided a model for intelligent and practical investment that served the Sudanese citizens and brought great benefit to both parties.

"The Kenana sugar project, for example, is considered one of the largest sugar cultivation and production projects in Africa. There are also investments in the telecommunications sector (Zain

Telecommunication Company) and the hotel sector (Sudanese Kuwaiti Hotels Company). Besides, Kuwait has provided grants and loans for development and infrastructure projects. Kuwait has funded many roads and dam projects, including the Marawi Dam and the heightening of the Aali Atbara and Setate dams," Balla said.

"We are celebrating our independence day after a long absence that lasted for several years due to the pandemic and its consequences that affected both social and cultural activities and ceased the holding of public and private social events. I would like to take this opportunity once again to express to you my utmost thanks and appreciation for your presence today and your participation in this glorious day," he concluded.

Local

# Committee announces festivities commemorating national days

## ASCC celebrates national days in style

**KUWAIT:** The permanent committee for national celebrations announced on Sunday that the festivities, commemorating the 62nd National Day and 32nd Liberation Anniversary, would include a variety of activities and would be held in cooperation with public and private bodies. The committee told KUNA that a fireworks show would kick-start celebrations and it would be visible from the Gulf road, the Green Island, and Kuwait Towers.

The show would be accompanied by laser lighting displays, stunning visual performances and more, the committee added. A number of exhibitions and functions would be held throughout the national festivities in commemoration of those joyful occasions, it affirmed. The committee extended its congratulations to the coun-

try's leadership and to all people living in Kuwait. Celebrations would be held on February 25th and the 26th.

Meanwhile, the Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Cultural Center (ASCC) announced on Sunday that it would organize special celebrations on the occasion of Kuwait's national celebrations for visitors to the center, who will enjoy a modern technical art exhibition called Renaissance from February 23-27. Speaking to KUNA, ASCC said that this exhibition comes in honor of the late Amir Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, who was nicknamed the father of the modern renaissance, as the fine arts center is named after the late Ibrahim Al-Shatti.

ASCC will host the poet Bader Bourisli, to recite patriotic poetry, and many well-known

bands, so that visitors can enjoy listening to patriotic songs, the center said. The center does not forget its young visitors, as it confirmed that it will provide them with scientific and entertaining workshops, such as make a rocket, make perfumes, and other entertaining experiences.

The visitors will also see the center's dinosaurs to interact with them and take some photos, it explained. The center pointed to the presence of a large number of small and large youth projects at a food fair to provide some snacks in the square overlooking the Arabian Gulf. ASCC receives its visitors throughout the national holidays from 2:00 p.m. until 8:00 p.m., to know more details, view the daily programs on the center's Instagram page at ASCCKW. —KUNA



**KUWAIT:** The Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Cultural Center announced on Sunday that it would organize special celebrations on the occasion of Kuwait's national celebrations for visitors to the center, who will enjoy a modern technical art exhibition called Renaissance from February 23-27. —KUNA

## Gulf Bank supports local entrepreneurs and SMEs

**KUWAIT:** Following a great turnout on the first day at the booth, Gulf Bank, a main sponsor of the event, continued to support entrepreneurs and SMEs at the second Qout Market, which took place on the 18th of February 2023. Qout Market is one of the largest markets in Kuwait, that brings together local talents, entrepreneurs, craftsmen, and food enthusiasts in one place.

The second Qout Market witnessed a significant increase in the number of participants - with around 80 SMEs taking part from various sectors; in addition to an increase in the number of visitors, of which exceeded 15,000. Gulf Bank's booth received a record turnout from the public, due to the fun activities presented at the booth, that created a joyous and interactive atmosphere for the visitors.

On this occasion, Manager of Corporate Communications at Gulf Bank, Lujain Al-Qenaei said: "At the second Qout Market, which took place at Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmed Cultural Center (JAAC), and in alignment with the National Day celebrations, Gulf Bank was keen to establish the principles of sustainability and support local talents. Therefore, we distributed reusable bags with artistic drawings by Kuwaiti artist, Noura Al-Mufarrej, that showcased the different environmental, cultural, and monumental aspects of Kuwait and all it has to offer."

She added: "We were keen to support Kuwaiti talents by utilizing Noura Al-Mufarrej's artistic



drawings, and we also expanded our support to different SMEs participating in the event. To give back to local businesses, we cooperated with five different SMEs at the second QoutMarket, and granted paid tokens to people participating at our booth. Anyone who received a Gulf Bank token, was able to use it to purchase food or beverages at any of the five booths, to help support the businesses."

Al-Qenaei pointed that this year's Qout Market, with its distinguished location at Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmed Cultural Center, was an opportunity to spend a special day with family and friends, witness the production of a distinguished group of entrepreneurs, food manufacturers and craftsmen, and simply enjoy the great food diversity in Kuwait. She continued: "We are very pleased with

the visitors' interactions with the activities provided at Gulf Bank's booth, which has successfully achieved our main objective of supporting entrepreneurs and SMEs."

Al-Qenaei expressed her excitement about Gulf Bank's decision to renew its partnership with Qout Market, to continue its wonderful role in supporting young entrepreneurs, local talents, and SMEs. Qout Market is a great creative outlet to display products and creations in a distinctive atmosphere, and to engage with the public easily and flexibly. She further stated that Gulf Bank is keen on being actively present in all activities and occasions that support the youth and SMEs, as promoting sustainability in society and supporting SMEs, is one of the prominent themes in the Bank's 2025 strategy.



**KUWAIT:** Charge d'Affaires at the US Embassy in Kuwait, James Holtsnider, addresses the press.

## US calls for Russia withdrawal from Ukraine

By Faten Omar

**KUWAIT:** The US Embassy held a press conference on Thursday, marking one year of the unjustified Russian invasion of Ukraine on Feb 24, 2022, to emphasize US' support for Ukraine's sovereignty and call for the immediate withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine. Charge d'Affaires James Holtsnider said there were many impacts of Russian's war on Ukrainian people, economy and food security.

"This has been a choice that Russia's president Vladimir Putin has made; he can choose to end it any time and withdraw from the country. We are always open to diplomacy, but unfortunately, Putin is not interested at this point," he said. "In the last few days, we gathered at the Ukraine Defense Contact Group, and more than 50 countries came together to support Ukraine and its people, providing \$30 billion in assistance and committed to supporting and defending the people of Ukraine," he added.

"With the commencement of attacks on February 24, 2022, a large number of other countries began applying sanctions with the aim of devastating the Russian economy. I think international sanctions are working. We aim to make it clear to Russia that this kind of behavior is not tolerated; at the same time, we want to protect Ukraine. There will also be talk about sanctions on energy and others," Holtsnider said. "Sanctions are complicated; it takes a while to be announced and takes longer to be implemented, but they have an impact over time. Many people were connected to Russia's economy before the invasion, but you can see the impact of the sanctions."

Holtsnider revealed there is cooperation with a wide variety of international partners over Ukraine over the past year. "This week will also witness conversations about Ukraine, and there will be a focus on the priority of ensuring international unity against the unjustified Russian invasion. The only countries supporting Russia are the ones causing problems in the world. We have seen Iran cooperating with Russia and exporting weapons to Russia, which is the best example," he noted.

Holtsnider praised the role of Kuwait. "I would like to thank Kuwait for the position it is taking at the UN and other forums. The Kuwaiti government's position on the Russian invasion has been obvious in its condemnation of Moscow and its support for Ukraine. Kuwait also provided some humanitarian assistance to the Ukrainian people, which is not a surprise. Kuwait is known for its humanitarian support around the world. I think a lot of Kuwaitis see what is happening in Ukraine and are very sympathetic and understand the experience since they were in a similar situation," he explained.

Holtsnider affirmed Kuwait is a leader in diplomatic and humanitarian activity around the world, as well as a leading diplomatic partner, noting that meeting Kuwaiti Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah was a chance to discuss troubling developments like Iranian weapon exports to Russia.

On US intervention, he indicated the Ukrainian people are fighting for their freedom. "I think we were very clear that we will continue to supply them with resources to be able to defend themselves. We do not have American troops in Ukraine - this is a Ukrainian fight to defend themselves and their homeland," he said.

## Kuwait launches first medical research and innovation center

By Abdellatif Sharaa

**KUWAIT:** The surgical department at Jaber Hospital announced the opening of the Center for Research and Innovation, which is considered the first of its type in Kuwait and the region. Head of the surgery department at Jaber Hospital and Director of Kuwait Board of Surgery Dr Sulaiman Al-Mazeedi said the importance of this center is that it enables doctors to help patients in a better way. He added medicine in the past relied solely on doctors' experience, but today this has changed in favor of evidence-based medicine that is used in treatment.

Mazeedi appreciated the health ministry's role in supporting developmental work at Jaber Hospital, thanking Health Minister Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi and Undersecretary Dr Mustafa Redha. The head of plastic surgery at Jaber Hospital Sarah Al-Youha said the laboratory has space for 3D printers at the innovation center, adding the idea behind this lab and its existence gives many opportunities to innovate to doctors and surgeons.

"We have custom-designed equipment made for patients who suffer from fractures and wounds, and among its features is that it enables us to have accurate measurements for patients to manufacture detailed tools for them to help them nurse their



**KUWAIT:** The surgical department at Jaber Hospital announced the opening of the Center for Research and Innovation, which is considered the first of its type in Kuwait and the region.

injuries. In addition, three dimensional printing enables us to prepare for tumor surgeries in a modern fashion, as it became possible to use CT scans of patients to print models for the body's organs, liver or the colon, and use them for accurate planning before surgical procedures," she added.

Head of the hepatobiliary and transplant unit Dr Mohammad Jamal said: "We are happy as doctors at the surgery department of Jaber Hospital, especially when we recall the past with Jaber Hospital and the challenges related to it as when we started work in 2018. It was a huge building that required much work, and many people did not

think that we will reach to what we achieved today."

He said the opening of the innovation and research center at the hospital is clear evidence of this, adding it instills the principle that modern medicine relies on innovation and research. "The good thing about it is that it is done by Kuwaiti doctors who cooperated for the sake of reaching this achievement," he added. Associate professor at Kuwait University's College of Medicine and head of endocrine surgery at Jaber Hospital Dr Salman Al-Safran said the research and innovation center will help form a link between academic and clinical work in the interest of patients.

restaurant. Invitees included chief executives, industry leaders, chef-owners, culinary experts, and prominent food bloggers and influencers.

Canada's Ambassador to Kuwait, Aliya Mawani, stated "The Taste of Canada Trade Mission is an important platform to promote Canadian agri-food products. It's great to be able to celebrate the introduction of Canadian beef in Kuwait for the first time, and I am very pleased to have some of Canada's top suppliers here in Kuwait. Canada provides a variety of wholesome and healthy products to satisfy the most sophisticated appetites around the globe."

Abdalla Al-Muzaini, CEO/Partner of Prime Cuts, stated "Prime Cuts is honored to be partnering with the Canadian Embassy in celebrating this special, first-ever "Taste of Canada" event, reflecting the strong bilateral relationship between Kuwait & Canada. We are truly excited to introduce new Canadian products to Kuwait!"

Kemal Sirtikirmizi, General Manager of Waldorf Astoria Kuwait, stated "We are proud to host this year's "Taste of Canada" event for a culinary collaboration between the Embassy of Canada and Waldorf Astoria Kuwait, taking us on a gastronomic tour with the finest Canadian ingredients pre-



pared by our world-class Chefs."

The participating Canadian companies in the trade mission included: A Spice Affair; CanMar; Floating Leaf Fine Foods; Gidney Fisheries; Lobster PEI; MadeGood; Moncton Fish Market; and Prairie Halal Foods. The Taste of Canada Mission was sponsored by the Embassy of Canada to Kuwait; Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada; Canada Beef; and the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

## Embassy welcomes Taste of Canada trade mission

**KUWAIT:** The Embassy of Canada to Kuwait welcomed a group of eight Canadian companies as part of a Taste of Canada Trade Mission to Kuwait on 15 February 2023. The aim of the trade mission was to introduce premium quality Canadian beef for the first time in Kuwait, as well as a variety of premium seafood from some of Canada's top suppliers, and other quality Canadian ingredients, spices and organic products.

The Embassy of Canada partnered with Prime Cuts and Waldorf Astoria Kuwait. The Taste of Canada Trade Mission program included an Open House and Product Showcase at Prime Cuts - Arabella, which brought together executive chefs, food buyers, wholesalers and distributors from Kuwait's leading companies. The day culminated with an exclusive dinner featuring a special Canadian-inspired menu at Waldorf Astoria's AVA

## Local

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## MoI Organize traffic awareness

**KUWAIT:** The Australian University (AU) joint force and Ministry of Interior (MoI) Traffic Department led by General Ibrahim Jallal, accompanied by Dr Mishal Al Hadhoud, Major Engineer Ali Bourabih and Colonel Legal Mohammad Al Ajmi in addition to many members from the Traffic Department organized an awareness event about road safety and traffic violations entitled: "Your Life is a Trust".

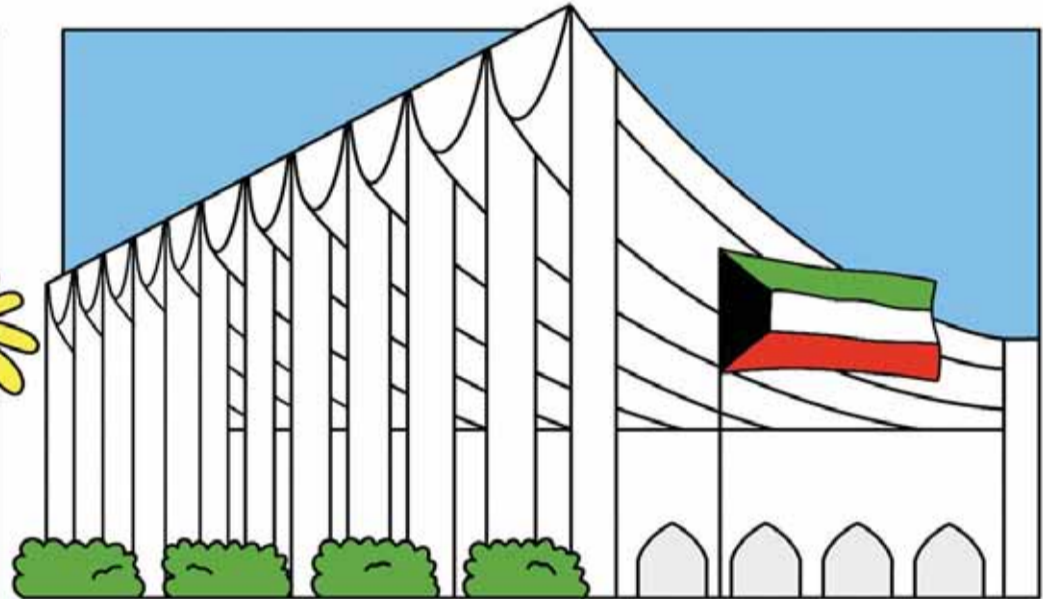
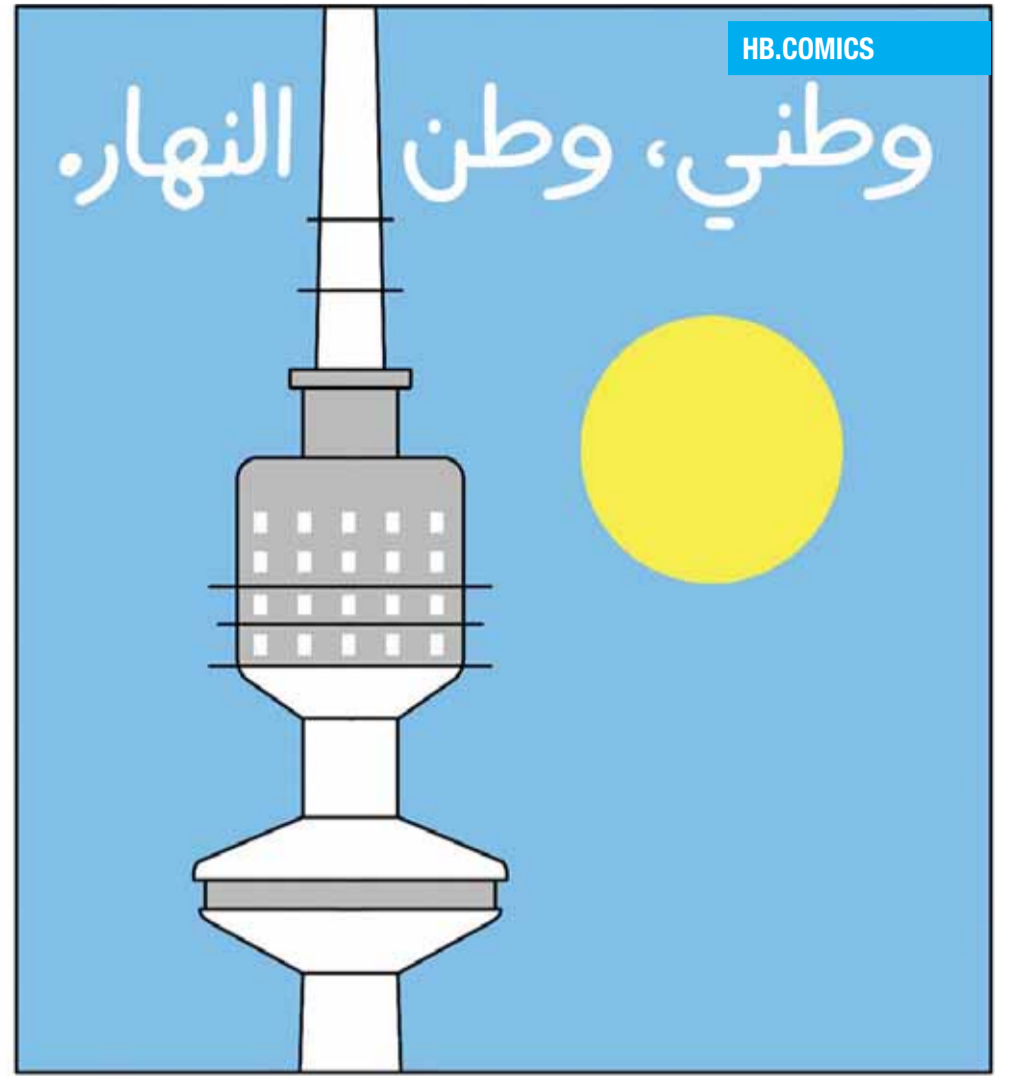
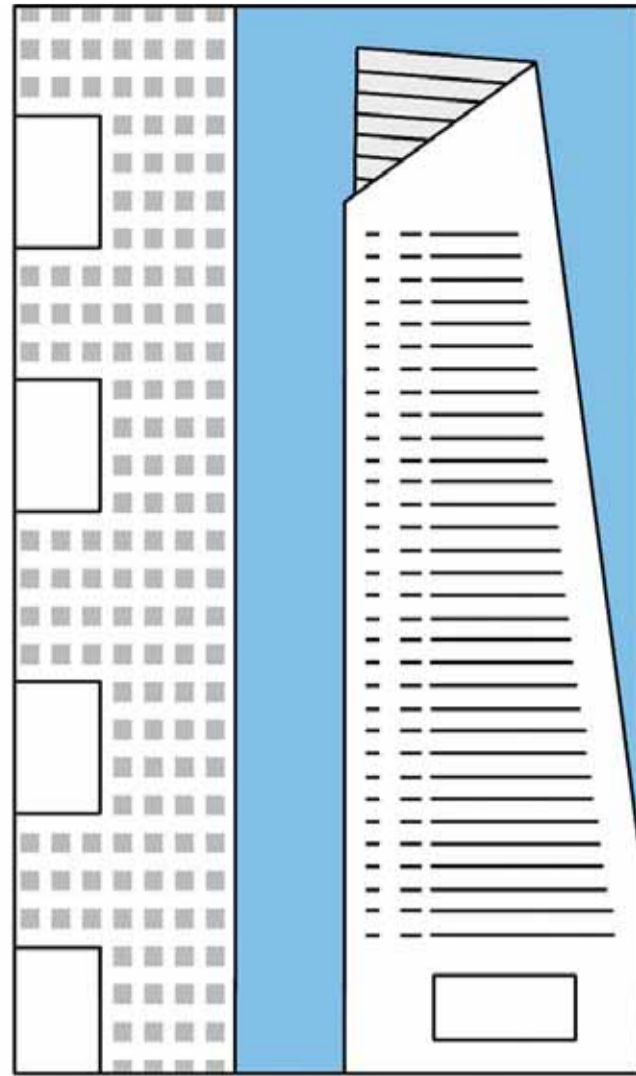
The awareness lecture highlighted many essential topics related to traffic violating rules and recent 6th generation CCTV monitoring cameras placed on highways. Also, the lecture touched several important common traffic violations, traffic injuries resulting from inattention and non-compliance with traffic laws along with their impact on the lives of individuals. In addition to the lecture, there was a collection of questions - related to traffic mechanisms to familiarize with the systems and their role in regulating traffic. Winners received multiple prizes offered by MoI.

Commenting on the success of the event, Abdulmohsen Al Refai, Senior Manager of the Department of Health, Safety and Security at AU, highlighted the importance of organizing such events and noted their role in educating the community.

## Kuwait's oil price down

**KUWAIT:** The price of Kuwaiti oil dropped by \$1.85 to \$83.28 per barrel, compared to \$85.13 pb the previous day, said the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC). The Brent crude in the global market went down \$2.14 to \$83 per barrel, and do did the West Texas Intermediate, which fell by \$2.15 to \$76.34 pb. Meanwhile, Algerian Minister of Energy Mohammad Arkab said the OPEC+ alliance continues working effectively to ensure stable supplies to the global oil market and contribute to economic growth.

The alliance spares no effort in maintaining equilibrium of the oil market, he told reporters on the fringes of the second International Conference on the Economic Intelligence which opened in Algiers earlier today. "For sure, the main aim of all partners is to provide the global market with this vital material in a stable and sustainable way," Arkab affirmed. —AFP



# Kuwait Minister commends KFF rescue team's efforts in Turkey

## KRCS delivers disaster relief to quake-hit people

**KUWAIT:** First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Interior and Acting Minister of Defense Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Sabah has applauded the humanitarian efforts made by the rescue team of Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) in Turkey. He received the rescue team members who arrived back from the mission in Turkey on Saturday and appreciated their gracious efforts, according to a statement from the KFF.

Sheikh Talal also thanked the employees of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for their work in easing and facilitating the tasks of their delegates and the Embassy in Turkey, including the Health and Communications Ministry's involvement, along with the Air Force's efforts. In attendance was KFF's Chief, Khaled Al-Mekrad, and Battalion Chief Jamal Nasser, along with Turkish Ambassador Toubia Sonmez, the Air Force's Assistant Commander Vice Marshal Bandar Al-Muzain, and a number of Firefighters and Airman.

Meanwhile, Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) said its team distributed humanitarian

aid to the families displaced by the recent powerful earthquake on the outskirts of Kilis city, south central Turkey. The emergency relief, including tents, blankets, heating appliances and foodstuffs, comes as part of the "Kuwait by Your Side" campaign in keeping with the instructions of the political leadership of Kuwait, said head of KRCS mission in Turkey Nabil Al-Hafeth.

The Society's field team, who toured the hard-hit areas in Turkey to assess the needs of the population there, decided to distribute 450 meals on a daily basis, he told KUNA. "The KRCS team is working with Turkish Red Crescent to provide housing, healthcare, sanitation, and food assistance to the displaced people," Al-Hafeth noted, adding that the aid signals "Kuwait's solidarity with sisterly Turkey." The death toll has reportedly jumped to over 40,000 from the magnitude-7.7 earthquake that rocked southern Turkey and northern Syria on Monday, February 6, besides extensive material damage. —KUNA



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KRCS delivers disaster relief to quake-hit people Southern Turkey. —KUNA



Turkey quake survivors rescue belongings for uncertain future

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## North Korea says ICBM a warning to US, Seoul

### Missiles capable of hitting mainland United States: Japan

**SEOUL, South Korea:** North Korea said Sunday it had test-fired an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) as a warning to Washington and Seoul, saying the successful "surprise" drill demonstrated Pyongyang's capacity to launch a "fatal nuclear counterattack". In response, the US and South Korea staged joint air drills featuring a strategic bomber and stealth fighter jets, Seoul said.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un ordered the "sudden launching drill" at 8:00 am Saturday (11:00 pm GMT Friday) and a Hwasong-15 missile - a weapon first tested by the North in 2017 - was fired from Pyongyang airport that afternoon, the official KCNA reported. South Korea's military said it detected an ICBM launch at 17:22 (8:22 am GMT) Saturday, which Japan said flew for 66 minutes before splashing down in its Exclusive Economic Zone, with their analysis indicating it was capable of hitting the mainland United States.

North Korea's leadership hailed the test - the country's first in seven weeks - saying it showed "the actual war capacity of the ICBM units which are ready for mobile and mighty counterattack", KCNA said. The launch was "actual proof" of the country's "capacity of fatal nuclear counterattack on the hostile forces", it added. The South Korean military said Sunday it had staged joint air drills with the United States featuring at least one US B-1B long-range bomber.

"The exercise displayed the timely and immediate deployment of the US extended deterrence assets to the Korean peninsula," demonstrating the "overwhelming force" of the allies, the ministry said in a statement. The sanctions-busting North Korean launch came just days before Seoul and Washington are due to start joint tabletop exercises aimed at improving their response in the event of a North Korean nuclear attack. Pyongyang had last week warned of an "unprecedentedly" strong response to upcoming drills, which it describes as preparations

for war and blames for the deteriorating security situation on the Korean peninsula.

#### New milestone

The Saturday test is significant as "the event was ordered the day-of and so this is not so much a traditional 'test', but an exercise," US-based analyst Ankit Panda told AFP. "We should expect to see additional exercises of this sort," he added. The exercise appeared to be "Kim's way of telling the US and ROK that his country is continuing to hone its ballistic missile capabilities for eventual use in a real-time scenario", said Soo Kim, a former CIA Korea analyst who now works at management consulting firm LMI.

"The weapons aren't for display only," she told AFP. "This layer of imminence is probably intended to intimidate the allies, notably as they're making efforts to strengthen deterrence in the Korean Peninsula." Park Won-gon, a professor at Ewha University, said it marked the first time that North Korea had given a detailed account of the order-to-launch process. "The clear indication of Kim Jong Un's order is significant," Park said. "The Sunday test shows that these weapons are all deployed for actual combat and ready to launch at any time."

But the nine-hour process from Kim Jong Un's order to the actual launch was "a long time", Soo Kim said, suggesting Pyongyang may face "greater challenges in launching in a realistic scenario". Relations between the two Koreas are already at one of their lowest points in years, after North Korea declared itself an "irreversible" nuclear state and leader Kim called for an "exponential" increase in weapons production, including tactical nukes.

In response, South Korea's President Yoon Suk Yeol has sought to boost cooperation with the US, pledging to expand joint military exercises and improve Washington's so-called extended deterrence offering, including with nuclear assets. On



PYONGYANG: This picture taken on Feb 18, 2023 and released on Feb 19, 2023 shows the test-firing of the intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) "Hwasong-15" at Pyongyang International Airport. — AFP

Sunday, North Korea spokeswoman and Kim's sister Kim Yo Jong claimed it was these moves by Seoul and Washington that "further endangers the situation every moment, destroying the stability of the region", according to a KCNA report. "I warn that we will watch every movement of the enemy and take corresponding and very powerful and overwhelming counteraction against its every move hostile to us," she added.

#### Food shortages

All of this points to "the start of high-intensity provocations from North Korea", Professor Park of Ewha University told AFP. "What's different from

2022 is that last year their justification was that the launches were part of their five-year military plan," he said. "Now they are making clear that they will counter the United States and South Korea."

Park said the redoubled aggression from Pyongyang could also indicate the domestic situation had worsened. South Korean officials recently warned the country could be facing severe food shortages after years of pandemic-linked isolation. "North Korea always takes a hardline approach and creates external crisis as part of its 'siege mentality' tactic to overcome internal struggles. It is a typical North Korean behavior to unite the people by highlighting the South Korea-US threat." —AFP

## US accuses Russia of 'crimes against humanity' in Ukraine

**MUNICH, Germany:** US Vice President Kamala Harris on Saturday accused Russia of committing "crimes against humanity" in Ukraine, saying Moscow's forces had conducted "widespread and systemic" attacks on the country's civilian population. She made the comments at the Munich Security Conference, days ahead of the first anniversary of the Russian invasion that unleashed war in Europe for the first time in decades.

"The US has formally determined that Russia has committed crimes against humanity," she told world leaders at the gathering, the first time the United States has designated Russia's actions in Ukraine as such. "Their actions are an assault on our common

values and our common humanity," she said. "Russian forces have pursued a widespread and systemic attack against a civilian population."

Harris levelled a list of allegations at Moscow's troops - "gruesome acts of murder, torture, rape and deportation, execution-style killings, beatings and electrocution". The former prosecutor added: "I say to all those who have perpetrated these crimes and to their superiors who are complicit in these crimes: you will be held to account ... Justice must be served."

#### 'Genocidal war'

Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba welcomed the US statement, saying that Russia had started a "genocidal war". "Everything that stems from that is crimes against humanity, war crimes and various other atrocities committed by the Russian army in the territory of Ukraine," he said in Munich.

But he also expressed fears that there would not be enough evidence to prosecute "specific individuals". The International Criminal Court is investigating war crimes and crimes against humanity in Ukraine,

and EU chief Ursula von der Leyen floated last year the idea of a "specialized court" to put Russia's top officials on trial over the war.

The three-day conference is being attended by senior figures including the presidents of France and Germany, China's top diplomat Wang Yi, and a large US delegation including Harris and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken. Russia, which normally sends Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov to the event, was not invited this year. The second day of the conference on Saturday also heard calls for more military support for Ukraine, with Kyiv reiterating pleas for quick weapon deliveries to launch a successful counter-offensive. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg urged allies to "give Ukraine what they need to win and prevail as a sovereign, independent nation in Europe". After weeks of hesitating, Berlin last month agreed that German-made Leopard tanks could be sent to Ukraine, but it has struggled to get commitments from allies to form a coalition to deliver the most modern types.

And Zelensky's requests for Western backers to

give combat jets to Kyiv have generally received a cool response. Britain however has said it will start training Ukrainian pilots and consider sending jets in the long term. British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak went further in comments to British media in Munich. "We will happily provide assistance to any country that is able to provide Ukraine with fighter jets right now," he said. "The UK stands ready to support those countries as well."

There have been concerns that China is deepening ties with Russia despite the conflict, but Wang insisted that Beijing was playing a constructive role, and would support dialogue and potential peace talks. He added that China would publish on the anniversary of the war a document setting out its position on the "peaceful settlement" of the conflict. At a meeting with Wang on the sidelines of the conference, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken warned him that there would be consequences "if China provides material support to Russia or assistance with systemic sanctions evasion", a State Department official said. — AFP

## Search underway after plane crash in Philippines

**MANILA:** Rescuers struggled on Sunday to reach the slopes of an active volcano in the central Philippines where a small plane is believed to have crashed, officials said, with the fate of those on board still unconfirmed. The Cessna 340 aircraft with four on board went missing shortly after departing for Manila from Bicol International Airport in Albay province, several kilometers from Mayon volcano, on Saturday.

Manila-based Energy Development Corporation said the missing plane belonged to the company and it was seeking to confirm if the wreckage spotted on Sunday in "very steep terrain and high altitude of about 6,000 feet" was theirs. Two of the four passengers on board the missing plane were Australian, Bicol police said, adding rescue teams with sniffer dogs had been deployed to find the crash site.

"The problem is the weather is bad and it hampers the visibility of the ground search," Civil Aviation Authority of the Philippines spokesman Eric Apolonio told AFP. Albay disaster officer Cedric Daep said a Cessna aircraft had been seen 300 to 350 meters (984 feet to 1,148 feet) from the crater. But he warned the rumbling volcano could erupt at any time, which was complicating rescue efforts. "There might be a sudden ash explosion and we could be added to the casualties," Daep told local radio DZBB. An aerial search will continue Monday to locate the missing people. "We are not discounting the possibility that they could still be alive," Daep said.

Another Cessna plane went missing last month, on January 24, in the northern province of Isabela. That plane's wreckage has still not been found, Apolonio said. In a separate incident, two Philippine air force aviators were killed in a training exercise last month when their SF260 Marchetti plane crashed into a rice paddy in Bataan province, near Manila. — AFP

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## International

# US general warns China biggest threat in space

## US not behind evolving adversaries in space arms race, says general

MUNICH: Space has "fundamentally changed" in just a few years due to a growing arms race, a US general said, singling out China as the "most challenging threat", followed by Russia. "We are seeing a whole mix of weapons being produced by our strategic competitors," General Bradley Chance Saltzman, the US Chief of Space Operations, told a select group of media, including AFP.

"The most challenging threat is China but also Russia," he said, speaking late Saturday on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference, listing technologies including anti-satellite missiles, ground-based directed energy and orbit interception capacities. "We have to account for the fact that space as a contested domain has fundamentally changed. The character of how we operate in space has to shift, and that's mostly because of the weapons (China) and Russia have tested and, in some cases, operationalized," he said.

His words carry even more weight given surging US-China tensions - highlighted by tense exchanges in Munich Saturday between Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Beijing's top diplomat Wang Yi over a suspected Chinese spy balloon. Blinken warned Wang that China must not repeat such an "irresponsible act" of sending a balloon over US airspace, while Wang said the Washington's reaction - it shot the craft down - had damaged their countries' relations.

### Space arms race

The space arms race is nothing new. As early as 1985, the Pentagon used a missile to destroy a satellite in a test. Since then, the United States' rivals have been seeking to show they can compete - China did the same in 2007, and India in 2019. In February 2020,

an American general noted that there were two Russian satellites placed into orbit that were tracking a US spy satellite. And in late 2021, Russia destroyed one of its own satellites with a missile fired from Earth, in a show of force condemned as an irresponsible act by NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg. "Adversaries are leveraging space ... targeting and extending the range of their weapons," said General Saltzman. "That's really the change that happens inside the domain."

Countries are increasingly secretive when it comes to their military activities in space but the race is such that in 2019, the year that the Pentagon launched its Space Force, it predicted that Russia and China could potentially overtake the United States. Saltzman rejects the idea that Washington is behind. But the fight has evolved, shifting from the idea of destroying satellites with missiles or "kamikaze" satellites, to that of finding ways of damaging them with laser weapons or powerful microwaves. "I am always going to make sure that I preserve capabilities to do the most critical functions, like national command and control, or nuclear command and control," said the general.

### 'Responsible behavior'

The Ukraine war has served as a reminder of the fundamental importance of space in conflicts today and in the future. "Space is important to the modern fight," said Saltzman. "You can attack space without going (into) space, through cyber networks or other vectors. We have to make sure we are defending all these capabilities." The growing military activity, combined with increasing commercial production, does however raise the potential problems of collateral damage, destructive debris and,



In this file photo, US Navy sailors recover a high-altitude surveillance balloon off the coast of Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, in the Atlantic Ocean. — AFP

more broadly, an international code of conduct.

Saltzman has never held talks with his Chinese and Russian counterparts, his aides told AFP. In Munich, he met Norway's defense minister and participated in a panel. "We talked about responsible behavior," he said. "There is proper way to behave in space, that is not

debris-generating, that does not interfere, that has safe distances and safe trajectories, and we communicate when we have problems." Space will become "more and more congested", he added. "If we can operate with a clear understanding of what the standards are, we are going to be a lot safer." — AFP

## 'Why hold onto them?': Houston residents turn in their guns

HOUSTON: Marilyn Bragg had five guns in her car - they were her late husband's, but she no longer wanted them in her home. Over the weekend, she joined a long line of vehicles to turn the weapons in to police in Houston, Texas, a state rocked by mass shootings. "I'm just trying to get guns out of the house. I don't even know how to shoot a gun," the 64-year-old retiree said. "I have grandkids and I don't want my grandkids to get hold of them."

Dozens of cars were waiting on Saturday in the gun drop-off line at Harris County's Deussen Park, where police weapons experts attended to them one by one. Gun owners had to leave their weapons in the trunk or back seat, where they were retrieved by an officer, checked to make sure they were unloaded and registered in a document. Several people had brought at least a dozen guns, which were received without question.

Over the course of the day, 793 guns were handed in. In return, participants got gift cards worth \$50 for a non-functioning weapon, \$100 for a working shotgun or rifle, \$150 for a pistol and \$200 for a semiautomatic weapon. This is the county's third such drive in the past year, with another 2,000 guns already collected as part of a plan to reduce crime. "I think it's a good program. It helps me get rid of some guns I haven't used and that are of no value to me," said 62-year-old Stuart Wolf, who was dropping off 11 guns in his truck.



HOUSTON: A police officer hands off rifles to another officer during a gun buyback program on February 18, 2023. — AFP

"There are really no safe ways other than this to get rid of them." Also waiting in the drop-off line with his wife Loretta was Kenneth Blackmon, 69, who was turning over seven guns. "We have enough weapons, and some of the ones we're getting rid of, we don't need. So why hold on to them? Just get rid of them," he said. "And not to mention the crime going on. Naturally, we don't leave our weapons in the car, but a lot of people do, and that's how a lot of the criminals... steal the weapons."

Every day, police in cities across the state report shooting incidents. "Since 2009 more people have died in mass shootings in Texas than in any other state," said Rodney Ellis, a county commissioner, citing a report from a prominent gun control organization. "And over the past decade, gun thefts in Texas increased by 16 percent." According to 2020 figures from the FBI, the violent crime rate in Texas - at 446.5 incidents for every 100,000 people - was markedly higher than the national average, at 398.5. In 2019, there were 1,379 murders in Texas, which has a population of about 30 million people. — AFP

## Blinken, Yi in 'candid talks' amid balloon spat

MUNICH: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken warned China not to repeat its "irresponsible act" of sending a spy balloon into American airspace, as he held rare talks Saturday with China's top diplomat Wang Yi. The highly anticipated meeting of the two senior officials came on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference amid growing tensions between Washington and Beijing.

The US has been in a state of alarm since a huge white balloon from China was spotted over a series of secret nuclear weapons sites, before being shot down just off the east coast on February 4. The incident led Blinken to abruptly call off a rare trip to China. Beijing denies it uses spy balloons and says the craft was for weather research. Subsequently it accused Washington of sending its own espionage balloons over Chinese territory, which the US has denied.

During their encounter Saturday, Blinken "directly spoke to the unacceptable violation of US sovereignty and international law by (China's) high-altitude surveillance balloon in US territorial airspace, underscoring that this irresponsible act must never again occur", State Department spokesman Ned Price said. "The Secretary made clear the United States will not stand for any violation of our sovereignty," he added.

He also warned Wang "about the implications and consequences if China provides material support to Russia or assistance with systemic sanctions evasion",



MUNICH: China's Director of the Office of the Central Foreign Affairs Commission Wang Yi delivers a speech at the Munich Security Conference. — AFP

Price said. Blinken was "very direct and candid" during the talks, which lasted around an hour, according to a senior State Department official. He was also "quite blunt" as they spoke about Russia, the official said.

In turn, Wang told Blinken that their countries' relations had been damaged by how Washington reacted to the balloon. Wang "made clear China's solemn position on the so-called airship incident", and "urged the US side to change course, acknowledge and repair the damage that its excessive use of force caused to China-US relations," state news agency Xinhua reported. Speaking earlier Saturday at the gathering of world leaders in Munich, Wang had condemned the US reaction to the balloon as "hysterical and absurd". In uncharacteristically strong remarks against Washington, Wang said President Joe Biden's administration had a "misguided" perception of Beijing. And he accused the United States of trying to "smear" the Asian giant while Washington itself was implementing policies that ran counter to its paradigms, such as free trade. — AFP



DAMASCUS: People inspect damage in the aftermath of a Zionist air strike that hit the medieval Citadel of Damascus on Feb 19, 2023. — AFP

## Zionist air strike kills 15...

Continued from Page 1

Lebanese Shiite group blamed on the Zionist entity. Syria's defense ministry gave an initial death toll of five, including one soldier, and 15 wounded civilians, some in critical condition. Shortly after midnight "the (Zionist) enemy carried out an aerial aggression from the direction of the occupied Golan Heights targeting several areas in Damascus and its vicinity, including residential neighborhoods", a statement said. Defense forces "shot down several missiles", it added.

Historic buildings near the medieval Damascus citadel were also "severely damaged", said the head of the Syrian antiquities department, Nazir Awad, blaming "a (Zionist) missile". Syrian Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad said Sunday that the strike was "a crime against humanity, especially as Syria races against time to face the disastrous consequences of the devastating earthquake".

Syria is currently seeking to recover from the Feb 6 earthquake, which did not affect Damascus but killed more than 44,000 people across the

country's north and west, and southern Turkey. A Zionist military spokesperson said: "(The Zionist entity) does not comment on reports in foreign media." Syrian government ally Russia condemned the strike, with foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova also urging the Zionist entity "to put an end to armed provocations" against Damascus that could endanger "the entire region".

The Zionist entity, during more than a decade of war in Syria, has carried out hundreds of air strikes against its neighbor, primarily targeting the army, Iranian forces and Hezbollah, allies of the Damascus regime. "We will not allow Iran to obtain nuclear weapons and we will not allow it to entrench on our northern border," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told Sunday's cabinet meeting, without referring directly to the Damascus strike.

In Tehran, foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani "strongly condemned the attacks of the Zionist regime against targets in Damascus and its suburbs, including against certain residential buildings". The raids had left "a number of innocent Syrian citizens" dead and injured, he said. The Gaza-based Palestinian militant groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad also denounced the strikes. An Islamic Jihad official told AFP that none of its members were killed or wounded, requesting anonymity as he was not authorized to speak to the media. — AFP

## Zionist envoy ejected from...

Continued from Page 1

South Africa. Last year's AU summit suspended a debate on whether to withdraw the accreditation and established a committee to address the issue, but the bloc has not said whether it would be discussed this year.

An AU official told AFP the individual who was "asked to leave" was not invited to attend the meeting, with a non-transferable invitation only issued to the Zionist entity's ambassador to the AU, Aleli Admasu. "It is regrettable that the individual in question would abuse such a courtesy," Faki's spokeswoman Ebba Kalondo said. Asked about the Zionist entity's accusations, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa's spokesman Vincent Magwenya told AFP: "They must substantiate their claim."

All eyes are on the AU to see if it can achieve ceasefires in the Sahel and the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, where M23 rebels have seized swathes of territory and sparked a diplomatic row between Kinshasa and Rwanda's government, which is accused of backing the rebels. At a mini-summit Friday, leaders of the seven-nation East African Community pushed for all armed groups to withdraw from occupied areas in the eastern DRC by the end of next month and for an immediate ceasefire.

On Saturday, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres urged African leaders to take "action for peace". "I am deeply concerned about the recent rise in violence by armed groups in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and the rise of

terrorist groups in the Sahel and elsewhere," he told the summit. "The mechanisms for peace are faltering." Guterres said other challenges faced by the continent of 1.4 billion people included "a dysfunctional and unfair global financial system that denies many African countries the debt relief and concessional financing they need" and charges "extortionate" interest rates.

Comoros President Azali Assoumani, leader of the small Indian Ocean archipelago of almost 900,000 people, echoed those views as he took over the one-year rotating AU chairmanship from Senegal's Macky Sall. Assoumani called for a "total cancellation" of African debt but did not elaborate on how this could be achieved.

Guterres also announced that the UN's Central Emergency Response Fund would release \$250 million to support some of the most vulnerable people in the world, including those at risk of famine in the drought-hit Horn of Africa. He said 339 million people were in need of humanitarian aid, up 25 percent on last year. Junta-ruled Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea, which have been suspended from the AU, cannot participate in this weekend's summit, but have sent diplomats to Addis Ababa to lobby for readmission. "In some countries, hard-won democratic gains are disappearing," Guterres warned.

Faki had announced there would be a meeting of the AU's Peace and Security Council to discuss lifting their suspension but gave no date. He told the summit on Saturday that the bloc needed new strategies to counter the backsliding of democracy. "Sanctions imposed on member states following unconstitutional changes of government... do not seem to produce the expected results."

The summit, largely held behind closed doors, was also aiming to kickstart the faltering African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) launched in 2020. — AFP

## Demarcation of maritime borders...

Continued from Page 1

But Mudhaf claims this article had been wrongly interpreted to make the presence of at least one minister essential for Assembly sessions to be legal. He insisted the correct meaning of the article is that

the government must attend Assembly sessions and cannot shun them. The current Cabinet has stopped attending Assembly sessions since Jan 10 over allegations the Assembly is pressing with populist laws that are costly to state coffers.

The government also resigned about a month ago and no one has been asked to form a new Cabinet, which MPs say has obstructed the work of the Assembly and the interests of the people. Mudhaf said the amendment will clearly state that Assembly sessions are legal even if the government does not attend them.

## International

## Turkey quake survivors rescue belongings for uncertain future

**'It's been hard to pack up and leave. I've got lots of memories here.'**

**ANTAKYA, Turkey:** "We don't know when we'll be able to come back," said Bilal Jawir as he finished loading a van with his family's things and prepared to leave the earthquake-hit Turkish city of Antakya. During last week's tremor that rocked southeastern Turkey and northern Syria, killing more than 44,000, Jawir, his wife and two daughters sheltered in a cluster of orange trees that adjoins their property.

They survived unscathed but witnessed their neighbors falling from balconies. "We have no hope. We have no work, no life, how could we return to live here?" Jawir said. "My heart aches. It's hard." Though none of Jawir's family were hurt and their yellow and white plaster home escaped serious damage, they do not want to stay for fear it has been weakened. "Coming back will depend on there being (public) services" in Antakya, he said as he twisted a ring on his dirt-caked hand.

Beyond those whose homes collapsed, millions of others across the region now face the dilemma of whether to risk re-entering their homes, wait for structural tests, or move elsewhere. "It's been hard to pack up and leave. I've got lots of memories here," added Jawir, a builder. "My daughters were born here, we got married here." Then, with help from his uncle Hadi, 63, he tied down the truck's bulging cargo with a chain and pink twine. Jawir and his uncle then headed to the older man's home in Adana, a city three hours away by car that was spared the worst of the quake's destructive force.

**'Waiting to see'**

All that remained of their life at 16 Degirmen Street was a broken toy and a sturdy pair of boots. Jawir's neighbors were also packing up their lives in Antakya's Kislasaray neighborhood and preparing to move on. Adnan and his daughter Dilay were loading a pickup truck with large bags of clothes. "We don't know what will become of this house, will it be destroyed, we don't know what will happen."



**ANTAKYA:** Mustafa Ozdimir (C) helps his family as they collect goods from their collapsed shop in Antakya on February 19, 2023. —AFP photos

said Adnan who declined to give their family name. Like the Jawirs, they did not want to gamble on whether their apartment building's foundations had been weakened by the quake. In their kitchen, 26-year-old Dilay's mother despaired at the broken glass and smashed jars strewn on the floor. "I can't take anything from here," she said. They were uninjured by the earthquake, having run outside in just their pajamas, and will now move into a flat in Mersin, 270 kilometers (170 miles) away from Antakya on Turkey's Mediterranean coast.

A street away, a white car had been completely flattened by falling masonry and was surrounded by left-behind items - a portrait of a man and a woman, a vinyl record, a potted plant. A platform lift opera-

tor working in the city's north was quick to cash in on the disaster. He told AFP he had upped his prices to \$80 an hour to use the apparatus, capable of reaching a fifth-floor window, in addition to billing \$50 per mover and \$50 for a truck. "We put our prices up because of the danger," said the operator, who claimed to move six or seven apartments every day, as the platform descended loaded with a carpet, framed photographs and a hand mixer.

**'We will clean up'**

In Antakya's old town, optician Cuneyt Eroglu, 45, sifted through the wreckage of his glasses shop. "Mrs Hacer, if you see me, your lenses have arrived," he laughed as he threw into a cardboard box package



**ANTAKYA:** Bilal Jawir, 36-year-old Syrian man shows pictures of his two daughters collected from his damaged house.

retrieved from the deep rubble that has enveloped his Ottoman-era stone storefront. "We will clean up and continue living here," he said surrounded by twisted glasses paraphernalia including an Emporio Armani spectacles board and contact lens solution. He said finding his secondary school certificate in the wreckage of one of his four stores had left him overjoyed. Unlike other parts of the old town, the street in front of his shop has not yet been cleared of the vast quantity of rubble and twisted metal that engulfed much of the city. Eroglu, whose family escaped the earthquake uninjured, is now staying in a tent in a village outside Antakya. "Leaving is easy, staying is important," he said. "After this, I want to stay in this street for the rest of my life." —AFP

## Turkey ends nearly all rescue efforts

**ANTAKYA:** Turkey has ended rescue efforts in all provinces except the two hardest hit by last week's massive quake that killed tens of thousands of people, the Turkish disaster agency said Sunday. "In many of our provinces, search and rescue efforts have been completed. They continue in Kahramanmaraş and Hatay provinces," the agency's chief Yunus Sezer told reporters in Ankara.

The epicentre of the 7.8-magnitude earthquake on February 6 was in Pazarcik district in Kahramanmaraş. The tremor hit 11 Turkish southeastern provinces in total. Sezer said search and rescue efforts continued at around 40 buildings in the provinces on the 14th day but expected the number to fall by late Sunday.

There had been abundant coverage of rescue teams finding survivors but it has now slowed down, with no survivors found in at least 24 hours. On Saturday, rescuers found a man and a woman alive in the 296th hour in the southern Turkish city of Antakya but their three children did not survive, local media said. That came after four people including a 14-year-old boy were rescued Thursday and Friday.

The disaster agency head also said Turkey's death toll had risen to 40,689. The total death toll including Syria is now 44,377. Turkish Vice President Fuat Oktay said Saturday that some 105,000 buildings either collapsed, needed to be demolished or were severely damaged in the quake.



**HATAY:** A Syrian woman sits in a tent near the wreckage of a road destroyed in a small Turkish village in Hatay. —AFP

In a message on Twitter, the disaster agency urged quake victims not to enter severely damaged buildings, "even briefly", to get their belongings inside. The government has not given an exact number for how many people have been left homeless. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan however said Tuesday around 2.2 million have been evacuated or left the provinces affected.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced \$100 million in fresh humanitarian aid on a visit to Turkey Sunday. Washington's top diplomat met his Turkish counterpart Mevlut Cavusoglu at Incirlik air base in southern Turkey, through which the United

States has shipped aid. Blinken then accompanied Cavusoglu in a helicopter to view the damage wrought by the disaster in Hatay province.

The new aid "will be moving soon. Sadly, it's less about search and rescue but long-term recovery. This is going to be a long-term effort", he told reporters. "It's going to take a massive effort to rebuild but we're committed to supporting that effort," he added, saying the United States had now contributed \$185 million in assistance to Turkey and Syria. The trip had been planned before the earthquake, the worst natural disaster to hit Turkey in its post-Ottoman history. —AFP



**DEMIRKOPRU:** A girl stands looking at the edge of a crack collapsed cobbled stoned street in Demirkopru, Hatay. —AFP photos



**DEMIRKOPRU:** Two young men walk past pooled water across the upturned cobbled stoned street in Demirkopru.

## Quake splits village in two

**DEMIRKOPRU, Turkey:** The small, grey house in southern Turkey that once looked out onto the road might appear untouched by last week's huge earthquake but it is now one floor lower. Surrounding the building in Demirkopru village, home to 1,000 people, are bits of debris floating in murky water, broken pavements and lopsided houses. The February 6 earthquake and its aftershocks that ravaged swathes of Turkey and Syria and killed more than 44,000 people have split Demirkopru in two.

"The houses sank four meters (13 feet)," said Mahir Karatas, a 42-year-old farmer and owner of

the grey house. "The ground went up and down."

Half a dozen buildings, close to Karatas' house, seem to have suffered the wrath of God. The body of a black and white cow is stuck in dried mud inside what remains of a farm shed. Fortunately, no one died in Demirkopru despite the heavy damage, but some were injured. Rescue efforts in Hatay province have largely focused on Antakya, an ancient city that has been torn apart by the quake, 20 kilometers (12.5 miles) away from Demirkopru.

During the tremor, water rose from below ground then stagnated, residents said. The ornately paved road no longer exists. Some bits are now a meter higher than others. "Here, it became like an island," Murat Yar, a 38-year-old roofer, said. "It went up, down, up, down, and then it slid down 30 meters. We saw water and sand gushing out," he

added, mimicking the tremor's waves with his hands.

**'Really scared'**

Residents could "jump out from the windows of their one and two-story homes", Yar said, unlike in Antakya where people lived in multi-story homes. When the quake hit, the villagers scrambled to safety in an area designated by authorities in case of any tremors. But such was its force, even that cracked. In front of a school whose gate was thrown 20 meters away is a yawning gap that zig zags but no damage is visible on the building's facade. Further away four buildings belonging to another school appear like dominoes piled on top of a large earthen mound. "I told myself: 'We're dead, we're finished,'" Yar said. Hatice Sahar, a 58-year-old woman wearing a headscarf, summed up how everyone felt on February 6: "We were really scared." —AFP

## 'Rifts' to surface in Iranian regime: Son of last shah

**MUNICH:** Rifts already exist within the Iranian regime and they will become more apparent, eventually contributing to cutting down Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's power, Reza Pahlavi, the son of the last Shah of Iran, said Saturday. "The full control of Khamenei makes it almost impossible for those who are closely associated with him to take position against him," said Pahlavi, who is one of several forces opposing the Iranian regime.

Nevertheless, according to "testimonies that we receive and leakage of information ... there will be some rifts that will become more apparent", he told journalists at the Munich Security Conference. Pahlavi was among key players of the Iranian opposition invited to the gathering of world leaders in the southern German city. Pahlavi said Khamenei was "trying to push for his son (Mojtaba Khamenei) to basically replace him" - a move that could eventually backfire. "At that point, the clout that Khamenei has had over his own internal mechanism will weaken tremendously," Pahlavi said.

Iran has been rocked since September by nationwide protests after the death in custody of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini following her arrest for an alleged breach of Iran's dress code for women. Since then, the regime has come under unprecedented pressure. Even Iran's former president Mohammad Khatami and former premier Mir Hossein Mousavi have come out to call for political changes. Mousavi, 80, said the protest movement began in the context of "inter-dependent crises" and proposed holding a "free and healthy referendum on the need to change or draft a new constitution". He also called the current system's structure "unsustainable". "What Mousavi said two weeks ago was different than what he said earlier," Pahlavi said. "Back then he was still considered a loyal opposition, still within the context of the existing constitution."

Several factions of the divided Iranian diaspora have embarked on assembling common ideas for a transitional council to prepare elections and to draw up a new constitution. The son of the shah, who was overthrown in 1979, pointed to a "grey spectrum" of government officials tempted by the opposition wave but who are reticent about publicly expressing their backing. "The question is how many of them will start defecting," Pahlavi said. While it was not possible to predict a timeline, "right now the momentum is to more and more separations or defections," he said. —AFP



**MUNICH:** Reza Pahlavi, activist, advocate and oldest son of the last Shah of Iran, looks at his watch as he attends a panel discussion at the Munich Security Conference. —AFP

# Business

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2023

## Zain Kuwait, ZainTech and Microsoft unveil joint national cloud initiative

### Collaboration aims at empowering organizations in the country

**KUWAIT:** Zain Kuwait, the leading digital service provider in the country, and ZainTech, the one-stop digital and ICT solutions powerhouse of Zain Group, announced a joint collaboration initiative with Microsoft to introduce a national cloud offering for public and private sectors in the country.

All three entities have impressive cloud offerings regionally, and this latest alliance will see the development of a cloud environment combining Microsoft's extensive portfolio, Zain's private cloud infrastructure, and ZainTech's expertise, enabling data and applications to be shared between them. The solution will give businesses in Kuwait greater deployment options and the ability to easily scale computing resources while still maintaining interoperability with their on-premises systems. The cloud offering is being introduced as a solution for Kuwaiti clients, as full adoption of the hyperscale cloud is not currently possible due to data residency and sovereignty regulations.

With a clear data classification strategy in place, the national cloud offering in Kuwait can help organizations modernize their data centers by bringing cloud techniques, such as software-defined data centers, self-service, and elasticity based on virtualization, into their data centers. Using a single centralized perspective, the national cloud offering can enable organizations to efficiently manage compliance with proliferating standards and infrastructure that is expanding across on-premises, public cloud, and multi-cloud implementations.

The collaboration is also set to encourage entities in Kuwait to integrate innovative techniques and technology into their applications, including Artificial Intelligence (AI) and machine learning, the Internet of Things (IoT), mobile, and security at speed without complex hardware procurement and configuration hassles. The national cloud offering is capable of supporting companies across industries in handling emergency needs or cyclical demands without overprovisioning large amounts of hardware, allowing for a flexible utilization of resources.

Commenting on this collaboration, Hamad Al-



- Joint effort will provide government entities and private sector organizations across industries with greater deployment options and the ability to easily scale computing resources
- Using a single centralized perspective, Kuwait's national cloud offering can enable businesses to efficiently manage compliance with proliferating standards and infrastructure

Marzouq, Zain Kuwait Chief Enterprise Business Officer said, "Cloud offerings are driving efficiencies that have never been experienced before, and the Kuwait government has been quick to realize its benefits and has been investing in cloud infrastructure accordingly. Our alliance with Microsoft and

ZainTech is geared towards supporting and accelerating these developments further and comes from a shared vision of the benefits the flexibility of cloud offerings has on driving digitization in our country."

Dr Ammar Al-Husaini, Deputy Director General at the Central Agency for Information Technology

highlighted the importance of this launch in accelerating the country's cloud adoption and digital transformation journey, a main pillar of the new Kuwait vision (Kuwait 2035). He said, "Such investments and initiatives are key to enabling organizations across sectors in Kuwait to drive efficiencies, optimize operations, deliver better services, and accelerate the pace of innovation."

"Kuwait's forward-looking leadership has laid the foundation of the country to become a digitally advanced society through the early adoption of technology, and through our partnership with Zain and ZainTech we will deliver on our commitment to enabling businesses across Kuwait to leverage the power of the cloud to accelerate their digital transformation in line with Kuwait Vision 2035," said Alaeddine Karim, Country Manager of Microsoft Kuwait. "Microsoft trusted cloud services will deliver unprecedented opportunities for organizations of all sizes and across all industries to innovate, better serve their customers and achieve their business goals - ultimately supporting continued economic growth in Kuwait."

Andrew Hanna, CEO of ZainTech, commented, "Kuwait has been an early adopter of enterprise cloud solutions, which has helped successfully drive the economy forward for many years. The cloud market remains nascent and rapidly developing, with strong competition from both local and international cloud providers. Our collaboration with Zain and Microsoft offers a combination of the best technical products and solutions, client relationships, subject matter experts, and experience that has never before been available in Kuwait, and we believe it is the right collaboration necessary to supercharge the cloud ambitions of organizations in Kuwait."

ZainTech supports private and public organizations in regulated and non-regulated industries in leveraging the power of the cloud to deliver transformational IT outcomes. It provides high-quality capabilities to customers, as well as outcome-driven engagements with flexible pricing that helps optimize and reduce businesses' total cost of ownership.

## ChatGPT sparks AI 'gold rush' in Silicon Valley

**SAN FRANCISCO:** ChatGPT, Silicon Valley's latest app sensation, has investors rushing to find the next big thing in generative AI, the technology that some hail as the beginning of a new era in big tech.

Artificial intelligence (AI) has been increasingly present in everyday life for decades, but the November launch of the conversational robot from start-up OpenAI marked a turning point in its perception by the general public and investors. "Every so often we have platforms that come along and result in an explosion of new companies. We saw this with the internet and mobile, and AI could be the next platform," said Shernaz Daver of California-based Khosla Ventures.

Generative AI, of which ChatGPT is an example, wades through oceans of data to conjure up original content - an image, a poem, a thousand-word essay - in seconds and upon a simple request.

Since its discrete release in late November, ChatGPT has become one of the fastest growing apps ever and pushed Microsoft and Google to rush out projects that had until now stayed carefully

guarded over fears that the technology wasn't yet ready for the public. "Just five days after its release, a million people used ChatGPT - about 60 times faster than it took Facebook to reach one million users," said Wayne Hu, a partner at SignalFire, another venture capital firm.

"Suddenly investors are all talking about how ChatGPT might eliminate millions of knowledge worker jobs, disrupt trillion-dollar industries, and fundamentally change the way we learn, consume, and make decisions," he said. The explosion of generative AI comes at an otherwise morose time for the tech sector, with tens of thousands of layoffs cascading through the world's biggest companies as well as smaller ones that are struggling for survival.

"While other categories are facing a contraction in valuations and raising capital, generative AI companies are not," said Daver. Hu said that the market valuations for generative AI companies have been sky high, while they have contracted for everything else.

### 'Hard to keep up'

OpenAI, the ChatGPT creator, is valued by Microsoft at nearly \$30 billion despite still burning through money at a high speed, he said. Entrepreneurs specializing in generative AI say they no longer need to scream out for attention when hunting for cash or walk through the details of what they are trying to offer. "It's helped us a lot," said Sarah Nagy, founder of Seek AI, a start-up that



allows nonspecialists to extract technical data from a database using queries in everyday language.

"Before ChatGPT... I had to explain what generative AI is, and why it matters," she added. Now the appetite for ChatGPT-like capabilities is seemingly limitless, and not only from investors. "The demand from customers has increased a lot," said Nagy. "It's even hard to keep up, because we're still a small company."

The entrepreneur wants to grow her team and, according to Daver, while the trend is to downsize, "we are currently hiring" in generative AI. In the last few weeks, it is mainly the giants that have been in the news, first and foremost Microsoft, OpenAI's partner and investor, followed by Google, which is trying to keep up. But in their shadow, a galaxy of start-ups have ideas on offer too. —AFP

## Aramco refining unit profit surges 32% on higher sales volumes

**RIYADH:** Saudi Aramco Base Oil Company, or Luberef, posted a 32 per cent rise in full-year net profit last year, driven by an increase in sales volumes and improved base oil crack margins. Net profit after zakat and tax rose to \$527 million, up from 1.5 billion riyals in 2021, Luberef said on Sunday in a statement to Saudi Arabia's Tadawul stock exchange. Revenue jumped 20 per cent year-on-year to 10.6 billion riyals due to higher crack margins in base oils and by-products, the refining unit of the state-owned oil producer said.

"The company recorded its highest net income in its history in 2022," Luberef said. Base oil crack margins increased 10 per cent on an annual basis to 2.5 billion riyals in 2022, Luberef said. Refining margins are also known as cracks.

The annual results come after Luberef began trading on the Arab world's largest stock market in December after it raised \$1.32 billion in its initial public offering. The refining unit of oil company Saudi Aramco sold more than 50 million shares, or about 29.7 per cent of the company's issued share



capital, with the IPO drawing strong demand from investors in the kingdom and internationally.

Luberef's IPO came amid a bumper year for company listings in the Gulf and MENA regions, which is bucking the global slowdown in global market. Saudi Arabia and the UAE make up the majority of new listings. The Arab world's two biggest economies have expanded at their fastest pace in over a decade on the back of higher oil prices, an accelerated rebound from the pandemic-induced slowdown, with strong demand registered in the property, travel and tourism sectors. Luberef was Saudi Arabia's third-

largest IPO in 2022 after Americana, the largest quick-service restaurant operator in the Mena region, raised \$1.8 billion from its IPO listing and following Nahdi Medical, the kingdom's biggest pharmacy chain, which raised \$1.36 billion. Luberef's EBITDA of 2.5 billion riyals in 2022, grew from 2.1 billion in 2021, an increase of 20 per cent year-on-year. Its gearing ratio dropped to 3 per cent by the end of 2022 from 17 per cent in 2021, represent a "strong financial position", it said. The company's free cash flow increased 14 per cent on an annual basis in 2022 to reach 1.96 billion riyals. — Agencies

## Jordanian economy on path to recovery, says CBJ governor

**AMMAN:** The Jordanian economy is making progress towards recovery, moving forward with economic reforms that have helped the country face local and regional challenges with high efficiency, and respond to the requirements of the moment with "great flexibility", Governor of the Central Bank of Jordan (CBJ) Adel Sharkas said on Saturday.

Addressing the 2023 Jordanian Banking Summit, which was held by the Jordan Banks Association and brought together the Kingdom's banking leaders, Sharkas highlighted the strength of the Jordanian banking system and its ability to deal with various developments, as well as its increasing role in the national economy. The Kingdom's banking system operates according to the highest levels of governance and sound management, leading to its effective performance in the country's economy, he added.

The summit's first session, which discussed "The Economic Prospects of the MENA Region," featured the attendance of the Resident Representative of the International Monetary Fund in Jordan, Kareem Ismail, according to the Jordan News Agency, Petra.

Jordan has a reasonable margin to borrow from international markets, with a high ability to access global financial markets and foreign financing sources at interest rates lower than many countries in the region, and for long periods, reflecting investor confidence in the stability of the Jordanian economy in the medium and long term, especially in light of Jordan's clear vision for its economic path in the next decade, Ismail said. The second session focused on the main trends affecting regional and global banking systems and the prospects of the Jordanian banking sector. The session also saw the participation of Christos Theofilou, vice president and Senior Analyst of the Financial Institutions Group at Moody's Investors Service.

The third session featured a presentation from the executive director of the CBJ Research Department, Nidal Azzam, on the economic model, discussing the most important local and global economic and monetary indicators and their expected prospects in 2023 and 2024. — Agencies



## Business

# Luxury sector eyes reopening of China to deliver expansion

## 2022 results dented by disruption in China's coronavirus-related restrictions

BEIJING: After a year of record sales and profits despite slowing global growth the luxury sector is looking to the reopening of China to deliver further expansion in 2023.

The world's largest luxury group LVMH posted a 23-percent jump in sales to a record of 79 billion euros (\$86 billion) in 2022 and saw profits climb 17 percent to 14 billion. The company's chief executive, Bernard Arnault, wants to continue along that path in 2023, "at the risk of becoming boring".

LVMH's rivals also managed blistering growth in sales and profits last year. Sales at Hermes jumped 29 percent to 11.6 billion euros and profits soared 38 percent to a record 3.4 billion.

Kering, despite a tough time for its flagship brand Gucci, still managed a 15-percent increase in sales to 20 billion euros, while profits rose 14 percent to 3.6 billion. Ferrari also saw sales race to a new record of five billion euros, delivering 13,221 vehicles last year.

The 2022 results were barely dented by the disruption in China linked to end of its coronavirus-related travel restrictions and their pro-

gressive lifting at the end of the year, with LVMH calling the month of December an "air pocket". Only Hermes escaped unscathed.

"There was no drop in traffic in our stores," said Hermes chief executive Axel Dumas. The company's sales rose 30.7 percent in its Asia-Pacific region excluding Japan. The gradual reopening of China—which abandoned the last of the draconian travel restrictions of its zero-COVID policy on January 8—should help its economy expand by 5.2 percent in 2023, according to the International Monetary Fund's latest forecast.

### 'Volcano ready to explode'

With the restrictions having restrained consumption, the reopening of the Chinese economy is being looked at as a growth opportunity for 2023. Analysts at UBS say 2023 will be the "year of the Chinese consumer", noting that the pandemic restrictions pushed down the share of Chinese consumers in global luxury spending to 17 percent last year, compared with 33 percent before the pandemic.

"The Chinese clientele is much more important

than it was in 2019," LVMH's financial director Jean-Jacques Guiony told journalists. Guiony does not expect Chinese tourists to return to Europe, where they traditionally spent heavily on luxury goods, before next year.

Instead, luxury groups are focusing on Chinese consumers at home. LVMH's Arnault said it was no secret that China needs growth and that the government would likely take steps to facilitate economic expansion as the country reopens. "If that is indeed the case—and it began in the month of January—we have every reason to be confident, even optimistic about the Chinese market," he said at the presentation of LVMH's 2022 results.

China is a "volcano ready to explode," said Arnaud Cadart at asset manager Flornoy Ferri. "There is an incredible amount of savings that has been built up, an incredible reserve in the hands of the well-off class which wants to purchase luxury goods," he added. Cadart estimated the luxury market in China could jump by 30 percent this year.

Kering's chief executive Francois-Henri Pinault visited China at the end of January and said he



PARIS: This file photograph taken on December 20, 2017, shows the logo of the French fashion house and luxury goods manufacturer Hermès, in the fashionable and luxurious street "Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honore" in Paris. —AFP

was amazed by the people thronging stores "like the virus had never been in China". "This is a good sign," said Pinault, who also welcomed moves by Chinese authorities to boost domestic consumption. —AFP

## BIG Holding holds workshop on 'Doing Business in Kuwait'

KUWAIT: Beyout Investment Group (BIG Holding) organized through one of its subsidiaries KRH the first-ever International Stability Operations Association (ISOA) workshop in Kuwait titled "Doing Business in Kuwait", in collaboration with American Business Council Kuwait (ABCK-AmCham Kuwait). Experts, business leaders and specialists from all over the world attended the workshop.

The workshop discussed the business mechanism in Kuwait and the available means for foreign companies to enter the local market. The workshop discussed several issues including digital transformation and cybersecurity, women's leadership at work, how to legally conduct business in Kuwait, as well as labor rights and fighting human trafficking.

BIG Holding CEO Abdulrahman Al-Khannah said in a press statement "the workshop comes within the framework of growing development projects in

the country, which requires the entry of companies that have experience and technological capabilities". He said the group aims at helping these companies participate in vital projects that reflect Kuwait's economic vision.

Khannah said foreign companies face many difficulties once they enter the local business environment, either due to governmental procedures or political issues, adding the workshop discussed the available opportunities for foreign companies, in addition to discussing mechanisms and means of helping and guiding them on the procedures that must be followed to participate in the projects.

He stressed on the importance of foreign companies' entry to participate in the implementation of major development projects that require a certain expertise, specialized caliber and advanced technology that can turn projects into reality. "We are trying as a private sector to link development projects with experiences that are looking forward to contribute to the implementation of such projects, as we seek to become local partners of foreign companies, especially since we will present them with the required support and locally trained talent," Khannah said.

Khannah discussed during the workshop his vision towards cooperation between the government and



Abdulrahman Al-Khannah

private sector, focusing on the important role both are playing in supporting the growth of business and development in Kuwait. He said Kuwait is a developing market with a wealth of investment opportunities for businesses, both local and international. "We are committed to supporting the growth and success of business in Kuwait and always seek to contribute to strengthening the local economy through contributions to creating a healthy business environment that attracts foreign investments," he added.



## Getty Images targets AI firm for 'copying' photos

WASHINGTON: US firm Getty Images on Tuesday threatened to sue a tech company it accuses of illegally copying millions of photos for use in an artificial intelligence (AI) art tool. Getty, which distributes stock images and news photos including those of AFP, accused Stability AI of profiting from its pictures and those of its partners.

Stability AI runs a tool called Stable Diffusion that allows users to generate mash-up images from a few words of text, but the firm uses material it scrapes from the web often without permission.

The question of copyright is still in dispute, with creators and artists arguing that the tools infringe their intellectual property and AI firms claiming they are protected under "fair use" rules.

Tools like Stable Diffusion and Dall-E 2 exploded in popularity last year, quickly becoming a global sensation with absurd images in the style of famous artists flooding social media.

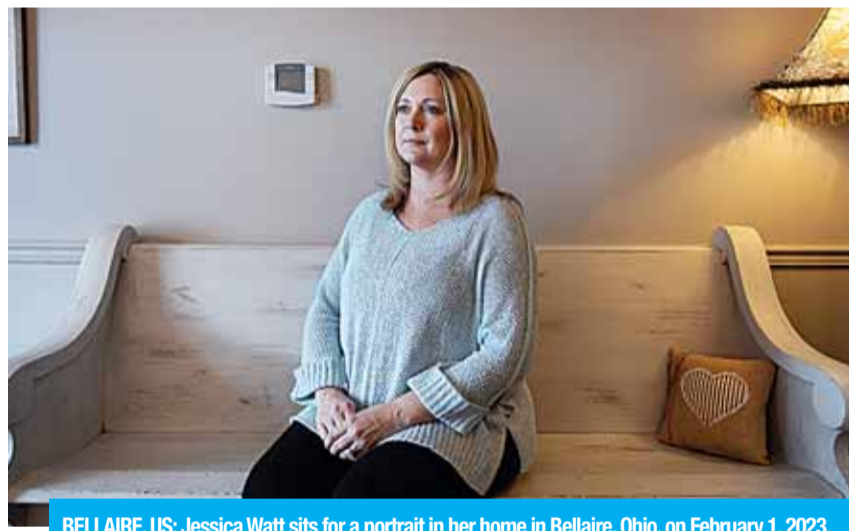
But the increased visibility also attracted the attention of artists, photographers, other creators and their lawyers. Stability AI is already facing a class action lawsuit in the United States, launched last week by three artists who claim their copyright has been infringed.

Getty said it had started legal proceedings at the High Court in London.

"It is Getty Images' position that Stability AI unlawfully copied and processed millions of images protected by copyright," the firm said in a statement. The photo firm said it had provided licenses tailored to firms that wanted to train AI models. "Stability AI did not seek any such license from Getty Images and instead, we believe, chose to ignore viable licensing options and long-standing legal protections in pursuit of their stand-alone commercial interests."

A Stability AI spokesperson said: "Please know that we take these matters seriously. It is unusual that we have been informed about this intended legal action via the press.

"We are still awaiting the service of any documents. Should we receive them, we will comment appropriately." —AFP



BELLAIRE, US: Jessica Watt sits for a portrait in her home in Bellaire, Ohio, on February 1, 2023.

## 'Watched my father die': Tech firms face ire over legal shield

WASHINGTON: Poring over family photographs, Jessica Watt Dougherty voices anguish over her father's death—which she attributes to misinformation on an online platform, an issue at the heart of a knotty US debate over tech regulation. The US Supreme Court will this week hear high-stakes cases that will determine the fate of Section 230, a decades-old legal provision that shields platforms from lawsuits over content posted by their users.

The cases, which are among several legal battles nationwide to regulate internet content, could hobble platforms and significantly reset the doctrines governing online speech if they are stripped of their legal immunity. "I watched my father die over the screen of my phone," Dougherty, an Ohio-based school counselor, told AFP.

Her father, 64-year-old Randy Watt, refused to get vaccinated and died alone in a hospital last year after struggling with COVID-19. After his death, his family discovered that he had a secret virtual life on Gab, a far-right platform that observers call a petri dish of misinformation and conspiracy theories.

To his vaccinated family members, his Gab activities explained why he chose not to get inoculated against COVID-19, a decision that ultimately had fatal consequences. The influence of vaccine misinformation on

Gab was also apparent after Watt drove himself to the hospital and started what his family called an "illness log," documenting to his followers how he treated himself for the coronavirus. He wrote that he was on drugs such as ivermectin, which US health regulators say is ineffective, and in some instances dangerous, to use as a treatment for COVID-19. Gab, which has millions of followers, is rife with posts promoting ivermectin.

"I feel very, very strongly that the content (on Gab) is careless and disrespectful, racist and scary," Dougherty said. "My dad spent a lot of time virtually surrounded by people with ideas about the pandemic being a hoax, COVID being fake, the vaccine being unsafe, the vaccine being deadly... Those are the belief systems (he) took on."

### Game changer

Such assertions that platforms are responsible for false or harmful user content are at the core of the Supreme Court cases. The most closely watched case will be heard on Tuesday. A grieving family asserts that Google-owned YouTube is liable for the death of a US citizen in the 2015 attacks in Paris claimed by the Islamic State (IS) group. Her relatives blame YouTube for having recommended videos from the jihadists to users, helping cause the violence. And on Wednesday, the same justices will consider a similar case involving the victim of an IS attack at a nightclub in Turkey, but this time asking if platforms should be subject to anti-terrorism laws, despite their legal immunity.

### The court's ruling is expected by June 30.

Lobbyists for the platforms fear a flood of lawsuits if the court rules in favor of the victims' families, a



BELLAIRE: Jessica Watt holds a memorial candle for her father, Randy Watt, at her home in Bellaire, Ohio, on February 1, 2023. — AFP photos

## US Supreme Court takes on immunity for tech giants

WASHINGTON: The US Supreme Court this week examines a quarter-century old law that has protected tech companies from lawsuits and prosecution for content posted by their users, with a chance that the rules govern-

ing the internet will no longer stand. Enacted when Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg was just 11 years old and Google's creation still two years off, Section 230 is seen as a fundamental law of the internet and considered inviolable by its staunch defenders.

Section 230 was part of the Communication Decency Act, an anti-pornography law signed in 1996, that helped set the rules of the road for the internet, which was still in its infancy as an online playground for all.

The idea was to protect the then embryonic internet sector from cascading lawsuits and to allow it to flourish, while encouraging tech companies to moderate their content. At the time most of the attention went on limits put on

sexual content, a part of the bill that was backed by then president Bill Clinton and that was later struck down by the Supreme Court in a landmark case.

But inserted into the legislation was Section 230 which stated that "no provider or user of an interactive computer service shall be treated as the publisher" or hold responsibility for content that came from an outside party. This immunity is largely seen as the regulatory tweak that would eventually free the way for Google search and sow the seeds for the social media revolution.

Under the protection of Section 230, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter or YouTube became the conduits of a world conversation without ever being at risk of

lawsuit by someone taking offense at a tweet or a controversial video.

The law also protects Wikipedia or classified ads sites such as Craigslist whose success would also depend traditional media. But opponents to the law would like to see platforms get sued for drug deals, cyber stalking and violent threats that take place on their sites.

To be sure, Section 230 is not free speech absolutism as endorsed by Elon Musk, the multibillionaire owner of Twitter. Stung by scandals, big tech companies hire thousands of workers to moderate their platforms in order to preserve their huge audiences and big advertisers as well as avert closer government scrutiny. —AFP

## Business

# Earthquake sends tremors through Turkey's economy

## Quake damages energy facilities, infrastructure, irrigation and logistics

ISTANBUL: Turkey was already battling runaway inflation and relying on rich allies for funding to keep its economy afloat when a massive earthquake killed tens of thousands, razed entire cities and left millions needing urgent help.

Now, it must pour billions of dollars into rebuilding 11 southeastern provinces flattened by the February 6 tremor—the worst disaster of its post-Ottoman history. That money will have to come on top of the billions of dollars in election promises that President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has made in the run-up to crucial polls still tentatively planned for May 14.

All this cash could turbo-charge consumer spending and industrial production—two key indicators of economic growth. The problem for Erdogan, however, is that Turkey is very short of funds. The central bank's vanishing coffers have been replenished by assistance from Russia and oil-rich Gulf states, which has helped Turkey spend tens of billions of dollars propping up the lira in the past few years.

But economists believe that money is only sufficient to keep Turkey's finances in order—and the troubled lira from collapsing—until the May polls. Now, Erdogan must repair some \$84.1 billion in quake damage, according to an estimate from a prominent business group. Other experts' estimates are more conservative, putting the total closer to \$10 billion.

### Reconstruction boost

With elections in mind, Erdogan has already promised to provide new homes to the millions affected within a year. Should he find the cash, leaning heavily again on foreign donors, Erdogan will need to allocate much of it to the construction sector to rebuild parts of Turkey from the ground up.

Although contractors are now being blamed for following lax standards that allowed so many build-

ings to crumble, Erdogan relied on the sector to modernize much of the country with airports, roads and hospitals. "The boost to output from reconstruction activities may largely offset the negative impact of the disruption to economic activity," the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) said.

For the overall economy, at least, there are glimmers of hope. The area affected is one of Turkey's least developed, contributing only nine percent to gross domestic product (GDP).

But Turkey's agricultural production could take a hit. Unay Tamgac, associate professor of economics at Ankara's TOBB ETU University, said the region creates 14.3 percent of Turkey's total agriculture, fishing and forestry output. The region is a global exporter of food such as apricots, she added, warning there could be a knock-on effect on prices. The UN's Food and Agriculture Organization has warned of disruptions to basic food production in Turkey and Syria.

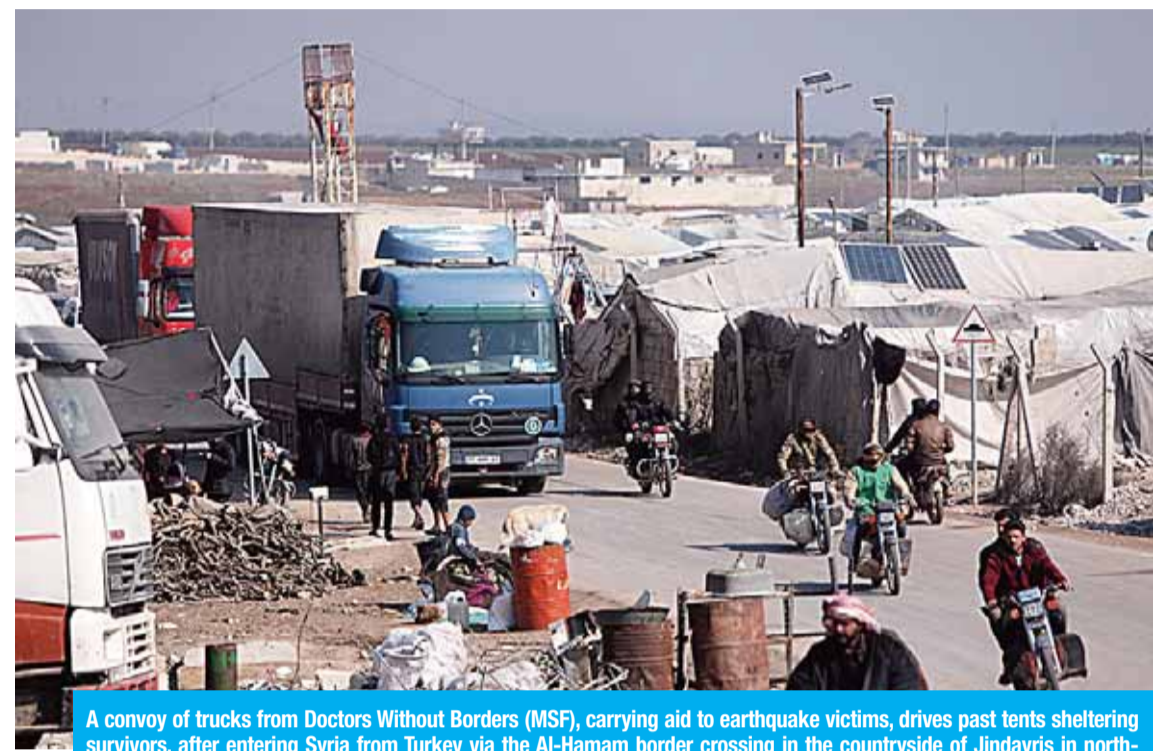
### Better than 1999?

The quake also damaged energy facilities, infrastructure, transportation, irrigation and logistics, added Tamgac. Some look back to history for guidance. Mahmoud Mohieldin, an executive director at the International Monetary Fund (IMF), said the 7.8-magnitude tremor could hurt the economy less than a 7.6-magnitude quake in 1999, which claimed more than 17,000 lives.

An IMF spokesperson later said Mohieldin was speaking in a private capacity and not representing the fund's official view.

The Turkish economy weakened by around 0.5 to 1.0 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 1999. But that tremor hit the country's industrial heartland—including economic powerhouse Istanbul.

The economy quickly rebounded, however, growing by 1.5 percent of GDP in 2000 thanks to recon-



A convoy of trucks from Doctors Without Borders (MSF), carrying aid to earthquake victims, drives past tents sheltering survivors, after entering Syria from Turkey via the Al-Hamam border crossing in the countryside of Jindayris in north-western Syria. —AFP

struction efforts, the EBRD said. Last week's quake also "did not affect areas farther west favoured by foreign tourists, who have become one of Turkey's most important sources of foreign exchange", Wolfgang Piccoli, an analyst at Teneo consultancy, said in a note.

### Headwinds

The focus, then, is where Erdogan will get the cash to spend on rebuilding. "It's clear there will be a need for foreign currency," said Baki Demirel, asso-

ciate professor of economy at Yalova University, since Turkey will now import more. Turkey's sovereign debt levels are relatively low, meaning the government has some leeway to issue long-term debt.

On the downside, foreign investors have shunned Turkey because of Erdogan's unorthodox economic views, which include an ill-fated attempt to fight inflation by slashing interest rates. When the quake hit, Turkey's annual inflation rate had slowed from a two-decade high of 85 percent last year to 58 percent.—AFP

## Row erupts over Soros remarks on Adani scandal

NEW DELHI: A remark on the ongoing turmoil in Gautam Adani-led group's affair by globally-renowned hedge fund manager George Soros has triggered a political slugfest in India with the ruling party on Friday accusing Soros of plotting against the 'democratic system' of India and 'democratically-elected government'.



George Soros

The billionaire investor has recently opined that the turmoil being created in India after the Hindenburg report on Adani group companies will weaken the PM Narendra Modi-led government. Speaking at the Munich Security Conference on Thursday, Soros had said Modi would "have to answer questions" from foreign investors and Parliament on allegations the Adani Group is facing. He had also said that the turmoil at Adani may open the door to a democratic revival in the country. He went on to say "India is an interesting case. It's a democracy, but its leader Narendra Modi is no democrat".

According to Soros, the turmoil engulfing Gautam Adani's business empire that has sparked a punishing stock market selloff and shaken faith in India as an investment opportunity may open the door to a democratic revival in the country.

"Modi is silent on the subject, but he will have to answer questions from foreign investors and in parliament," Soros said in a speech ahead of the Munich Security Conference. "This will significantly weaken Modi's stranglehold on India's federal government and open the door to push for much-needed institutional reforms. I may be naive, but I expect a democratic revival in India."

Soros, who has a net worth of about \$8.5 billion, is the founder of the Open Society Foundations, which gives grants to groups and individuals that promote democracy, transparency and freedom of speech. The damning short-seller report in late January accusing the Adani Group of accounting fraud and stock manipulation sparked a stock rout that's wiped out more than \$120 billion of the empire's market value and saw the man who was once the world's second-wealthiest tumble down the rankings of the Bloomberg Billionaires Index. The crisis has also put the spotlight on Modi's relationship with Adani. India's opposition has been drawing attention to the pair's close ties and to the business tycoon's meteoric growth that mirrors Modi's political journey to the top elected office. Modi has not directly addressed the issue. The latest focus in the Adani saga is on the empire's debt. After a borrowing blitz in recent years, a spike in yields and questions about access to overseas financing following the short-seller report has prompted warnings that the group's more highly-leveraged companies having little capacity to absorb higher interest rates. —Agencies

## CBK honors banks for supporting 'Diraya' campaign

KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) honored Kuwaiti banks for supporting the banking awareness campaign "Diraya" by leveraging all their capabilities and tools to spread awareness and increase financial literacy through digital and social media as well as activities to engage the community on a wide scale. The campaign was launched by CBK in collaboration with Kuwait Banking Association (KBA) and all local banks.

CBK praised the exemplary efforts by Kuwait Finance House, the National Bank of Kuwait and the Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait, and the level of interaction with, and response to, the campaign by all Kuwaiti banks, adding that the efforts made by all the banks contributed to the success of the campaign and delivering its messages to the widest segment of banking sector customers.

The CBK concluded by affirming that it spares no effort to spread financial and banking awareness and protect customers' rights in light of the development of banking services and associated risks, most notably electronic fraud and its various techniques that call for continuous awareness and expanding the



role of Kuwaiti banks in social responsibility. It is noteworthy that "Diraya" Campaign cooperated with official and private entities including the Ministry of Information, the Ministry of Interior, the Capital Markets Authority, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation, the Kuwait Financial Intelligence Unit, the

Kuwait Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha), the Credit Information Network (Ci-net), Zain, Kuwait Telecommunications Company (STC) and National Mobile Telecommunications Company (Ooredoo) as well as Tamdeen Real Estate Company, National Real Estate Company and Al-Hamra Mall.

## Back from dead, IPOs picking up again on Wall St

NEW YORK: The IPO parade of the early pandemic years crashed to Earth in 2022, but there are hints of a potential 2023 rebound despite plenty of lingering caution. Last year the US IPO market "ground to a halt," according to Renaissance Capital, with only \$7.7 billion raised, down a whopping 95 percent from 2021 and a record low since the firm started recording data on companies going public 31 years ago.

The dramatic decline came as financial conditions tightened following US Federal Reserve interest rate hikes and a rout in the stock market. While worries over the economy have not vanished, last week saw the sort of initial public offering (IPO) buzz that had eluded Wall Street for months, with two notable deal completions.

Nexttracker, which provides tracker and software technology for the solar panel industry, raised \$638 million through a share offering on

the Nasdaq, overshooting its original goal by close to 20 percent.

During the same week, laser sensor manufacturer Hesai raised \$190 million in the biggest IPO by a Chinese company in 18 months. "It's still well below historical norms, but there's definitely a pickup," said Avery Spear, senior data analyst at Renaissance Capital. "Last year, risk was not something that people were looking to take on, IPOs being somewhat inherently risky."

Some 293 companies are currently registered to go public, up 39 percent compared to this time last year, according to a Nasdaq spokesperson. In addition, several other well known corporations are also contemplating offerings, namely the payment processing platform Stripe, recently valued at \$63 billion; sports merchandising giant Fanatics (\$31 billion); and grocery delivery service Instacart (\$10 billion). "There's a lot of capital that can be deployed, (and) would like to be deployed," said Mark Roberts, head of capital markets at the Blueshirt Group. "But there's going to be more due diligence, and the bar is higher."

### Window of opportunity?

Roberts thinks it will take a leap into the IPO realm by one of the big companies con-



templating going public in order to revitalize the market. Renewable energy companies are viewed as especially well positioned for offerings following the passage of the US Inflation Reduction Act in Congress, with nearly \$400 billion in tax incentives, grants and loans dedicated to accelerate the transition from fossil fuels. Nexttracker is an example of that trend, as is Israel's Enlight Renewable Energy, which was already listed on the Tel Aviv Stock Exchange but raised \$252 million on Wall Street last week through a share offering. —AFP

## Stocks slide as traders eye higher rates

NEW YORK: Global stocks mostly fell Friday to conclude a lackluster week as markets grappled with fresh inflation data that raised worries of further central bank tightening. After a down day on European and Asian equity bourses, US stocks also opened lower in the wake of hawkish comments from some Federal Reserve officials. US equities moderated later in the day as the yield on the 10-year US Treasury note edged lower, cut-

ting losses on the Nasdaq and lifting the Dow to a modest gain. Analysts pointed to limited volume in US trading ahead of a holiday on Monday in observance of President's Day.

"It isn't just Fed expectations that are rising, traders are also expecting the (European Central Bank) to send rates much higher," said Oanda's Edward Moya. "It looks like global growth will definitely take a harder hit as monetary policy gets even more restrictive over the next few months," he added. The broad-based S&P 500 ended down 0.3 percent, pushing the index into a modest loss for the week.

Stocks have been volatile this week as investors weigh hopes of a "soft landing" from a period of elevated inflation against worries that

central bank actions could prompt a serious recession.

St Louis Fed boss James Bullard and his Cleveland counterpart Loretta Mester on Thursday became the latest monetary policymakers to warn further hikes were in the pipeline. "My overall judgment is it will be a long battle against inflation, and we'll probably have to continue to show inflation-fighting resolve as we go through 2023," warned Bullard. He also said he would not rule out doubling the next rate increase to 50 basis points next month, a view shared by Mester.

The prospect of more aggressive Fed rate hikes also weighed on crude oil prices, along with worries about demand. Separately, European TTF

natural gas prices sank under 50 euros for the first time in nearly a year and a half, as the mild winter curbed heating demand.

Among individual firms, Deere & Company jumped 7.5 percent after reporting higher profits and offering an upbeat assessment of its market, with "low machine inventories" boosting demand for agriculture equipment. British bank NatWest posted a jump in annual profits to £3.34 billion (\$4 billion) as it trimmed costs and the sector benefitted from rising interest rates.

But its shares tanked as much as 9.5 percent, which analysts blamed on profit-taking after the bank's stock value climbed strongly in the final quarter of 2022. —AFP

Lifestyle | Features



Egyptian architect Alaa El-Habashi, owner of the restored historical "Beit Yakan" house in the Al-Darb al-Ahmar district of Cairo, speaks to visitors on Dec 6, 2022. — AFP photos



People walk down the street as a woman uses a mobile phone to scan a mural to tell local residents about their heritage in a Cairo neighborhood.

# In Old Cairo, residents reconnect with their heritage

For most of their lives, children from historic Cairo's Al-Khalifa district only saw the mausoleums, mosques and madrasa schools that pepper their neighborhood from outside heavy bronze doors. In one of the world's oldest Islamic cities, communities were becoming increasingly separated from the centuries-old buildings they lived alongside - prompting architect and heritage management expert May Al-Ibrashy to launch a program to "foster a sense of ownership over this heritage".

Believing a sense of belonging is integral to protecting heritage, her "participatory conservation initiative" has included bringing the young through those once-closed doors. "The first time we opened a heritage monument to children, they were ecstatic," Ibrashy said. "Every day they had passed in front of this historic site, but had never been allowed inside".

The Athar Lina initiative, whose name means "the monument is ours" in Arabic, has carried out workshops, tours and summer camps in the Egyptian capital since 2012. After years of slowly earning the neighborhood's trust with the children's program - including play dates in the famous ninth-century mosque of Ibn Tulun, one of the oldest in Africa - Athar Lina expanded the workshops to include adults.

In one of the first buildings Athar Lina renovated at the community's request - an unfinished mosque that is now the Al-Khalifa Community Centre - the sound of children playing echoes off ancient stone, while their mothers learn traditional embroidery skills.

**'Lock and key'**

On the outskirts of the sprawling



Egyptian architect and heritage management expert May Al-Ibrashy speaks during an interview in Cairo on Jan 11, 2023.

megacity of Cairo, ancient tombs, pyramids and temples hug the edge of the desert. But the iconic domes and minarets of Islamic Cairo - listed on the UN's World Heritage List for its "absolutely unquestionable historical, archaeological and urban importance" - are embedded into the labyrinthine alleys of tight-knit working-class neighborhoods.

However, since the 1980s, the authorities increasingly protected monuments by keeping "them under lock and key", said conservation and cultural heritage expert Omnia Abdel Barr. "This idea is rooted in 19th-century beliefs that Egyptians don't deserve their heritage, that you have to erect fences or else they'll ruin it", she added.

Experts worried younger generations were growing alienated from their heritage. "We noticed that the

older generations knew a lot more about the monuments and had a much deeper connection to them, because they had all these childhood memories that today's children didn't," Ibrashy said, speaking from the Athar Lina office rooftop, framed by twin 14th-century minarets.

Abdel Barr said that supporting "living heritage" projects - such as creating childhood memories and organizing community events - helps "make people feel like they belong to these spaces". That, she argues, "is a better conservation strategy".

**'Community is the soul'**

One example of the change is the 17th-century building of Beit Yakan, once known locally as "the dump". The crumbling historic house, used by a butcher as a slaughterhouse, was condemned to be demolished. But Alaa Habashi, pro-



This picture shows a view of a mashrabiya, a balcony enclosed with carved wood latticework in traditional Islamic architecture, at the historical "Beit Yakan" house.

fessor of architecture and heritage conservation at Egypt's Menoufia University, bought the building in 2009 and spent a decade turning it into a community space.

Today its elegant restored courtyard, with a gentle breeze wafting through aromatic plants under intricately latticed "mashrabiya" windows, hosts locally led heritage crafts workshops and conservation awareness campaigns. Such courtyards played "a key social and economic role" as community centers, Habashi said, a role he works hard to revive.

Under a half-Mamluk, half-Ottoman patterned library ceiling, Habashi said there were once around 600 historic houses with similar courtyards - all built facing northwest to catch the cool wind-but just 24 are protected as heritage monuments. "The rest, those of them that

are still standing, who knows what state they're in?" he said. "Every day, another one gets torn down." Habashi warned the loss of such heritage would be irreparable. "These buildings are only the body, the surrounding community is the soul", he said.

Public space is increasingly rare in crowded Old Cairo, often smothered in dangerous smog from traffic-packed streets, and sizzling summer heat rising amid global warming. "There are very few places where people can come together, away from cramped apartments and congested streets," said Abdel Barr, who hopes the old houses could help solve modern problems. "They can bring some peace of mind to the neighborhood... I would love for these houses to become your local parks, where women can bring their kids and sit in the garden." — AFP



## IWG visits Palestinian Heritage Exhibition

A delegation of International Women's Group (IWG) headed by Ghada Shawky, wife of the Ambassador of Egypt, which included a number of ambassadors' wives and active members organized by Rima Al-Khalidi, wife of the Ambassador of Palestine and Vice-President of the group, visited the Palestinian Heritage Exhibition as part of the Palestinian Cultural Week organized by the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters in cooperation with the Embassy of Palestine, Women's Social Cultural Association and Palestinian Heritage Center.

The delegation was received by President of the Palestinian Heritage Center Maryam Jabr, President of the Women's Social and Cultural Association Dr Suhail Al-Fulaij and exhibition coordinator Faten Abu Ghazaleh. The delegation toured the sections of the exhibition, which included Palestinian embroidery, Palestinian handicrafts and books related to the Palestinian cause, in addition to popular Palestinian food. The group listened to a detailed explanation from Abu Ghazaleh about the exhibition, and was very impressed with its contents.

At the end of the visit, Shawky presented a certificate of appreciation on behalf of the group's board and members to the Palestinian Heritage Center. It was received by Jabr, who thanked the group for this honor.



## Bird man in Turkey vows to tend to flock after quake

Murat Guzel scatters bird feed on the roof as the sun sets over the Antakya restaurant at which he used to work before the earthquake that destroyed the southern Turkish city. Birds, mostly pigeons, some motley and scruffy, others pristine and plump, scabble for the feed as Guzel, 40, calls to them. "We take care of our birds the way we take care of our children - and will continue to look after them," he says.

On the rooftop above Antakya's old town, he now keeps 40 birds following last week's 7.8-magnitude quake, having taken 110 back to the village he now calls home. To reach the birds, Guzel walks through a debris-littered pantry, now covered with jam jars smashed during the tremors, up a narrow staircase to the rooftop of the traditional Turkish townhouse. Two large white and brown birds nestle in a dovecote made of wire mesh and wood, while more than 20 others perch on a ledge in anticipation of food.

Before the quake that shattered tracts of southeastern Turkey and northern Syria

killing more than 43,000 people, Guzel was the cook at the Antakya Breakfast House where guests would eat olives and cheese in the courtyard of the 300-year-old building. "There's five of us at home, and the five of us came out safe and sound," he said after they were caught up in the quake in Antakya. Guzel has three children aged nine, 15 and 17 - the youngest of whom, Eren, has inherited his father's interest in birds.

"Every morning we come to our birds and feed them (and) attend to their food, feathers and illnesses," he said. The building, which was reinforced with steel girders and escaped with only cosmetic damage, is surrounded by destroyed homes and businesses in the heart of the city's historical quarter. Antakya had been a popular tourist destination with visitors from Turkey and abroad.

Nearby orange trees that withstood the shocks stand half buried in rubble from broken stone walls and twisted wooden door frames. Guzel gently grips a snow-colored pigeon he called "white rose" and explained how healthy wings are vital to the bird's survival. Diggers and excavators picking through ruined buildings could be heard nearby. His father became a bird fancier before he was born but gave up the hobby following Guzel's arrival. — AFP



Murat Guzel scatters bird food on the roof of a restaurant where he worked before the earthquake, in Antakya south of Hatay, on Feb 17, 2023, after a 7.8-magnitude earthquake which struck parts of Turkey and Syria. — AFP

## Lifestyle | Features



King Momo (the symbol of carnival) Djeferson Mendes da Silva, 34, holds the keys to the city of Rio during the official carnival opening ceremony at the City Palace in Rio de Janeiro on Feb 17, 2023. — AFP photos



Members of the "Constelacao" bate-bola street carnival band parade in Rio de Janeiro's suburb Vila Alianca on Feb 18, 2023.



A reveler performs during a street party.

# Rio holds first all-out carnival since COVID

With a swirl of glitter, sequins and samba, Rio de Janeiro kicked off its famed carnival parades Sunday, the climax of the festival's first full-on edition since COVID-19 and Brazil's bitterly divisive elections. The world's biggest carnival, which officially opened Friday, was to hit peak party level at the all-night parade competition Sunday and Monday, where the city's top 12 samba schools will vie to become the champions with dazzling floats, thundering music and thousands of singers, drummers and dancers in skimpy, feather-covered costumes.

Mayor Eduardo Paes declared the party open Friday, symbolically handing the key to the city to "King Momo," the jovial "monarch" who "rules" Rio for the four-day free-for-all. "It is with great happiness, celebrating life, celebrating democracy, that I have the honor of handing the keys to the city to King Momo," said Paes, an avowed carnival lover.

Rio is ready to party after two pandemic-disrupted carnivals and a polarizing presidential election in October, in which veteran



A reveler performs during a street party called "Carmelitas" in Rio de Janeiro.

leftist Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva ousted incumbent Jair Bolsonaro - an ultra-conservative carnival critic accused of authoritarian tendencies. Rio canceled carnival in 2021, and held a reduced version last year, banning the epic street parties known as "blocos" and postponing the parades by two months because of the pandemic, which has



A reveler performs during a street party called 'Amigos Da Onca' close to Flamengo beach in Rio de Janeiro.

claimed nearly 700,000 lives in Brazil. Now, the full-on festival is back.

## Return to roots

"This is a moment of rebirth," said Pericles Monteiro, a founder of the massive annual street party known as "Heaven on Earth." "We went through a very dark peri-

od, in terms of both politics and the pandemic," he told AFP at the party's 2023 edition - one of hundreds of street parties being held around carnival for the first time in three years.

The samba schools, the pride of Rio's impoverished favelas, spend months assembling the costumes and creating the over-the-top floats that are the trademarks of the parades - in reality, huge shows that tell a story on a chosen theme. The parades were often politically charged during the Bolsonaro years, with thinly veiled criticism of the far-right government over issues such as racism, religious intolerance, environmental destruction and Brazil's disastrous management of Covid-19.

This year's parades are less political. Many of the schools are returning to their roots, choosing themes linked to founding figures of the samba genre, the Afro-Brazilian culture from which it emerged, and Brazil's northeast - the poor, majority-black and multiracial region that is the percussion-heavy musical style's spiritual home. — AFP



## Visitor accidentally smashes \$42,000 Koons sculpture

A collector visiting a contemporary art fair accidentally toppled over a small glass sculpture by renowned artist Jeff Koons, shattering it to pieces. The shiny blue sculpture, one of Koons' famous "balloon dog" series, was valued at \$42,000. The mishap occurred during a VIP preview at Art Wynwood in Miami, and some collectors thought it was performance art or a staged stunt.

The sculpture sat alone on an acrylic base emblazoned with Koons's surname. "I saw this woman was there, and she was tapping (the sculpture), and then the thing fell over and shattered into thousands of pieces," artist Stephen Gamson told a Fox News affiliate in Miami. Gamson told reporters he thought the woman tapped on the artwork to see if it was a real balloon. A bystander took a video as gallery employees swept up the glass shards. "I can't believe somebody would knock that over," a voice is heard to say on the video. — AFP

## Chagall painting stolen by Nazis on display after sale

A painting by Marc Chagall, stolen by Nazis in occupied Poland and returned last year to the owner's family who quickly auctioned it off, is on display through 2023 at the Jewish Museum in New York. The oil on canvas, which the Russian-born Chagall painted of his father in 1911 after moving to Paris, was sold last November for \$7.4 million at the Phillips auction house, capping a tumultuous history.

Purchased in 1928 by Polish-Jewish violin maker David Cender, "The Father" was left behind when his family was forced to move to the Lodz ghetto. Deported to Auschwitz, where his wife and daughter were killed, Cender survived and moved to France in 1958, where he died less than a decade later

## Police return Dali drawings to Barcelona owners

Two 100-year-old charcoal drawings by surrealist master Salvador Dali that were stolen from a Barcelona home last year have been found and returned to their owners, Spanish police said Friday. The artworks, which have a value of around 300,000 euros (\$320,000), were stolen from an upmarket neighborhood of Barcelona in Jan 2022, Catalan regional police said.

Police recovered the two drawings and

without regaining possession of the painting.

In the meantime, the work had reappeared in exhibitions and was remarkably purchased by Chagall himself, probably between 1947 and 1953 without knowing its provenance, according to Phillips and the French Ministry of Culture. After the artist, who was born in the Russian empire, died in 1985, "The Father" entered France's national collections. It was then assigned to the Pompidou Center and eventually deposited in the Museum of Jewish Art and History in Paris.

The French parliament unanimously adopted a law at the beginning of 2022 to return 15 works of Jewish families looted by the Nazis. The then culture minister, Roselyne Bachelot, had called it a historic "first step", noting that other looted works of art and books were still kept in public collections. The Jewish Museum's director Claudia Gould said she was "honored" to receive the painting on loan and to be able to display it.

"The vast and systemic pillaging of artworks during World War II, and the eventual rescue



A visitor looks at Le Pere (1911), a painting by Russian-born French artist Marc Chagall, at the Jewish Museum in New York City on Feb 17, 2023. — AFP

and return of many, is one of the most dramatic stories of twentieth-century art, and one that continues to have repercussions today," she said in a statement. "It is imperative that the Jewish Museum tell these stories." "The Father" will be on display until Jan 1, 2024. — AFP



A Catalan regional police officer handles one of two charcoal drawings by Spanish artist Salvador Dali, which were stolen last year in Barcelona. — AFP

arresting three brothers in their 50s who were involved in "highly-specialized" burglaries. The drawings - one of Catalan peasants, the other of traditional dances - were then sent

to the Gala-Salvador Dali Foundation to be authenticated. Experts concluded they were drawn by the Catalan artist in 1922 when he was 18 to illustrate a book about the local area called "Les Gracies de l'Emporda" ("The Charms of Emporda").

The three arrested brothers had been operating in wealthy Barcelona areas, choosing their targets after days of surveillance then breaking in when the owners were away, usually at weekends. Once inside, they were selective, taking only valuable works of art as well as coin collections and other antiques. The trio were arrested in May 2022 along with two accomplices, with police also seizing five prints by the Catalan artist Joan Miro which have yet to be analyzed by experts. They also found 55 watches along with coins and antiques. — AFP

## Pet leopard runs amok in Islamabad

A pet leopard escaped from a house in the Pakistan capital and roamed the streets for hours before being shot with a sedation dart, wildlife officials said Friday. In videos posted to social media of the six-hour jaunt on Thursday, the young male cat slips between cars before knocking down a man and leaping over a garden fence. "According to our initial investigation, it is a pet animal and not wild at all, but he is scared and is constantly roaring," Tariq Bangash, director of the Islamabad Wildlife Management Board, told AFP.

Pakistan last year banned the import of exotic mammals after large numbers were brought in or bred in recent years, causing problems for wildlife officials. Big cats are seen as symbols of wealth and power in the country. The leopard on the loose in Islamabad lightly injured four people before it was captured by officials, who took it to the city's former zoo that was shut down in 2020 over its treatment of animals.

The creature, aged between two and three years old, is now in the company of a

brown bear, a tiger and several monkeys rescued by wildlife authorities in recent months. "We have information that several people in Islamabad and upscale areas of Rawalpindi are keeping wild animals including leopards as pets," Bangash said. Police are now trying to track down the owner of the leopard. Islamabad is bordered by the Margalla Hills where a preservation zone has been set up to protect wild leopards in the area. — AFP



A pet leopard captured from a residential area reacts inside a cage in a former zoo in Islamabad on Feb 17, 2023. — AFP

## Japan bids farewell to four pandas returning to China

Thousands of Japanese fans on Sunday bade farewell to four beloved pandas which will be returned to China this week, with some visitors shedding tears. Visitors flocked to Tokyo's Ueno Zoo to catch a last glimpse of Xiang Xiang, who has been a massive draw for the park since her birth in 2017, and to a park in western Wakayama region for the other three pandas. In Tokyo, the final viewing of Xiang Xiang, the zoo's first baby panda since 1988, was limited to 2,600 visitors who won a lucky lottery ticket, but some fans who did not win still came.

"I wanted to breathe the same air," as Xiang Xiang, Mari Asai told the Asahi Shimbun daily. "Even if I cannot see her, my heart is filled with joy knowing she's there," the 48-year-old said. Another visitor told local media, crying, that she wanted to be closer to the five-year-old panda. "Everything about her is adorable, whether sleeping or awake," she said.

Ueno Zoo receives calls and emails



Female giant panda Xiang Xiang eats bamboo ahead of her return to China at Ueno Zoological Park in Tokyo on Feb 19, 2023. — AFP

every day from panda fans asking it to keep Xiang Xiang, the Tokyo Shimbun daily reported, citing a zoo official. The panda was initially set to head to China in 2021 but its departure was postponed multiple times due to travel restrictions linked to the pandemic. — AFP

Lifestyle | Features

# 'Everything Everywhere' duo win top Hollywood directing prize

**E**verything Everywhere All At Once won top honors from Hollywood's directors Saturday, as the quirky indie sci-fi movie from two relatively unknown young filmmakers upstaged more famous rivals ahead of next month's Oscars. Directing double-act Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert, both 35, fended off competition from the likes of Steven Spielberg to win the prize for best feature film at the Directors Guild of America's annual gala in Beverly Hills.

"What the hell? Guys, thank you so much. This has been an incredible year for our little film that somehow keeps going," said a visibly shocked Kwan. The movie stars Michelle Yeoh as an immigrant laundromat owner undergoing a tax audit who becomes drawn into an inter-dimensional battle to save the multiverse from a powerful villain. It became a huge word-of-mouth hit last year, has grossed more than \$100 million worldwide, and holds the most Academy Award nominations this year with 11.

Kwan and Scheinert, collectively referred to as "Daniels," made their start directing music videos, and were previously best known for the oddball Daniel Radcliffe comedy "Swiss Army Man". Scheinert thanked his co-director Kwan "for putting up with me when I asked to make our movie weirder." "Thank you for making our movie so much braver and more vulnerable. What an honor... this is crazy!"

### 'Shark movies'

The DGAs, though not broadcast on television, offer highly prestigious recognition from the industry's top directors, and are now in their 75th year. They are also considered a key Oscars predictor. Seventeen of the past 19 DGA winners have gone on to also win best director at the Academy Awards that year. The other directors nominated by the DGA were Martin McDonagh ("The Banshees of Inisherin"), Todd Field ("TAR"), Joseph Kosinski ("Top Gun: Maverick") and Spielberg, for his semi-autobiographical childhood memoir "The Fabelmans".

It was Spielberg's 13th DGA nomination - he has won three times - and nearly every nominee and winner on Saturday evening name-checked the famous director. Spielberg himself admitted he had been "terrified" that audiences would watch his latest, deeply personal film and respond: "So what? Your childhood wasn't all that interesting!" He joked that he had also dreaded being told: "Please get back to making scary movies, shark movies, alien movies. Those were fun." But, he concluded, "I have been calling 'Action!' for 55 years. So why the hell not?"

### 'Sacrificed their lives'

Elsewhere on Saturday, Sara Dosa won



Chinese filmmaker Chloe Zhao poses with US filmmakers Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert, winners of the Outstanding Directorial Achievement in Theatrical Feature Film award for "Everything Everywhere All at Once", in the press room during the 75th Directors Guild of America awards at the Beverly Hilton in Beverly Hills on Feb 18, 2023. — AFP photos



US filmmaker Steven Spielberg poses with the Feature Film Medallion award for "The Fabelmans".



US filmmaker Sara Dosa poses with the award for Outstanding Directorial Achievement in Documentary for "Fire of Love".

best documentary for "Fire of Love," her film about two French volcano scientists who fell in love and became celebrities for their daredevil and up-close approach to research. "Katia and Maurice (Krafft) literally sacrificed their lives for their filmmaking," said Dosa. "They died while attempting to capture a shot of a pyroclastic surge, which is one of the world's deadliest forces. "But 'Fire of Love' is not about Katia and Maurice's deaths, it's about how they lived. And they lived in love with each other and with volcanoes."

Charlotte Wells won the best first-time feature award for "Aftersun", but did not attend, with Britain's BAFTAs due to take

place in London less than 24 hours after the DGA gala. The independent film stars Paul Mescal as a troubled, single Scottish father trying to reconnect with his young daughter on a summer holiday in Turkey. On the television side, Bill Hader won his third DGA for directing "Barry", the dark hitman comedy in which he also stars.

The drama prize went to "Euphoria" director Sam Levinson, for the gritty HBO series about teenagers battling with addiction, infidelity and abuse, which stars Zendaya. The movie season-capping Academy Awards take place this year on March 12. — AFP

## Bruce Willis diagnosed with dementia: Family

**A**ction star Bruce Willis has been diagnosed with untreatable dementia, his family said Thursday, less than a year after he retired from acting because of growing cognitive difficulties. The 67-year-old US actor known for his role in the "Die Hard" franchise stepped away from Hollywood in March and has been out of the limelight since then. "Since we announced Bruce's diagnosis of aphasia in spring 2022, Bruce's condition has progressed and we now have a more specific diagnosis: Frontotemporal dementia," a statement said.

Frontotemporal dementia (FTD) is an umbrella term for disorders affecting the areas of the brain that deal with personality, behavior and language. "Unfortunately, challenges with communication are just one symptom of the disease Bruce faces," the family statement said. "While this is painful, it is a relief to finally have a clear diagnosis. "Today there are no treatments for the disease, a reality that we hope can change in the years ahead."

Doctors say the frontal and temporal lobes of the brain shrink in a patient with FTD. What causes this to happen is not known, but it can result in personality changes, or modifications in behavior that might make someone socially inappropriate, impulsive or apparently uncaring towards those around them. Other sufferers lose their ability to use language. —AFP



Bruce Willis

## Penn premieres love letter to Ukraine at Berlinale

**S**ean Penn premiered "Superpower", his admiring portrait of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky at war, telling the Berlin film festival Saturday the movie was also a wake-up call about Americans' own fragile democracy. The two-time Oscar winner was in Kyiv making a movie about Zelensky's rise from comedian to national leader when Russia invaded nearly one year ago. In interviews on that first terrifying night and during the initial months of the onslaught, Penn and Zelensky built up what they both call a close friendship.

"It was a very moving way to start to get to know somebody," Penn told reporters. "Aside from meeting my children at their birth, the highlight of (my life was) meeting and sensing a great human heart of courage that day with that man." Penn travelled to Kyiv again this week to show the documentary to Zelensky and his team. The president's chief of staff, Andriy Yermak, tweeted his thanks: "great film".

Zelensky joined Penn by video link at the festival's opening ceremony Thursday to ask for the entertainment industry's sustained help in keeping Western countries united behind Ukraine. "Cinema cannot change the world," said Zelensky. "But it can influence and inspire people who can change the world." — AFP



US actor and director Sean Penn attends a press conference for the film "Superpower" in the Special Gala program of the Berlinale, Europe's first major film festival of the year, on Feb 18, 2023 in Berlin. — AFP



Owner and manager of Achill Coaches, Alan Gielty poses for a photograph on Purteen harbor, one of the filming location of the movie "The Banshees of Inisherin".



Sheep stand on a cliff near the Keem beach on Achill Island.

## Remote 'Banshees' islands reap Oscars tourism boom

**C**olin Farrell had many people to thank following his best actor win at the Golden Globes for "The Banshees of Inisherin". He made a point of mentioning the locals of Achill Island and Inis Mor. "We were just one big family," the Irish actor told the Beverly Hills awards ceremony last month, before also name-checking his animal co-star in the critically acclaimed dark comedy, Jenny the miniature donkey.

Two weeks later the movie, filmed on location on the two remote islands off



Owner of the Lynotts pub Mick Lynch, poses with the sheep shearers used in movie "The Banshees of Inisherin", on Achill island.

Ireland's west coast, picked up nine Oscar nominations. "Of course we have fingers crossed for a win," Chris McCarthy, the manager of Achill Tourism, told AFP. "And we'll take any one of the nine nominations. We're not choosy," he quipped.

Between July and November 2021, Achill Island's dramatic landscape of rugged cliffs, peat bogs and sandy beaches was transformed. The island's Purteen Harbour, usually a working fisherman's wharf, became the location for a portside street scene with a 1920s shopfront. And the pub where much of the film's action takes place was built from scratch atop windswept cliffs on Achill's southwest coast.

### Atlantic atmosphere

McCarthy said the film's director, Martin McDonagh, wanted the actors "to feel the atmosphere of the Atlantic" when they opened the door of the pub. "They couldn't create this in the studio," McCarthy explained, standing at the beauty spot as February winds whipped sea spray onto the cliffs. Filming was an economic boon for Achill, injecting 1.7 million euros (\$1.8 million) into the area, home to fewer than 3,000 inhabitants.

Now it is looking to capitalize on a tourism bounce. Every time a clip from the film or an awards speech goes viral online, McCarthy and his team see a surge in bookings. Mick Lynch, owner of Lynott's Pub on Achill, explained over an evening pint that visitors had already begun inquiring about the film. Among the souvenirs lining the pub's walls are what Lynch calls the movie's "infamous" shears, used by actor Brendan Gleeson's



An employee of the Achill Island Tourism officer poses with a poster of the film "The Banshees of Inisherin", on the Achill Island, on Jan 31, 2023, off the west coast of Ireland. — AFP photos

character to chop off his own fingers.

Lynch said his tiny pub - a dry stone wall structure with a thatched roof built as a jail in the 16th century - is a true-to-life version of the pub created for "Banshees". "If these walls could talk, the stories they'd tell... this is the real thing," he explained. During filming, it served as a watering hole for Gleeson and fellow actor Pat Shortt, who runs the on-screen pub. — AFP

## Sports

# India crush Australia to take 2-0 Test series lead

## Jadeja stars, returns career-best figures of 7-42

**NEW DELHI:** India spinner Ravindra Jadeja on Sunday returned career-best figures of 7-42 to help India take an unbeatable 2-0 Test series lead with a six-wicket thrashing of Australia inside three days of a dramatic match. Jadeja, a left-arm orthodox bowler, teamed up with fellow spinner Ravichandran Ashwin to dismiss Australia for 113 in a morning session when the tourists' batting imploded, thanks to overusing the sweep shot on a tricky New Delhi pitch.

The hosts romped to their victory target of 115 in the second session, guaranteeing that they retain the Border-Gavaskar trophy in the four-match series. They have won their previous three series against Australia and are now close to securing a spot in the World Test Championship final. India lost skipper Rohit Sharma, run out after a fluent 31, and Virat Kohli, who surpassed 25,000 international runs during his innings, stumped on 20. Nathan Lyon took two wickets to return a match-haul of seven.

Cheteshwar Pujara stood firm with 31 in his landmark 100th Test to steer his team home with a winning four, as wicketkeeper-batsman Srikar Bharat, unbeaten on 23, looked on. "We were prepared for them coming out and playing shots," Rohit said of his team's bowling plan. "Our idea was to not panic and just hit the right areas, waiting for the mistake to happen, and that's exactly what happened." He added: "So our focus was keeping it tight in the morning, and these guys (Jadeja and Ashwin) are the masters of bowling in these conditions."

Australia, who also lost the opening Test inside three days, crashed from their overnight

61-1 to be bowled out in 31.1 overs, after losing nine wickets for 52 runs in just over 90 minutes of mayhem. Jadeja improved on his previous Test best of 7-48, adding to the three he took in the first innings. Ashwin grabbed the remaining three in the Australian second innings. Off-spinner Ashwin struck in the first over of the day to get Travis Head caught behind for 43, three balls after the left-hander hit a boundary to add to his overnight score.

### 'This loss hurts'

Marnus Labuschagne attempted to take the attack to the opposition with the paddle shot and the reverse sweep, but was bowled by Jadeja for 35. David Warner's concussion substitute Matt Renshaw looked clueless against spin in his eight balls at the crease, before he missed an attempted sweep, giving Ashwin another lbw.

Wickets fell like nine-pins and Lyon narrowly averted a Jadeja hat-trick. The bowler kept up the charge to wrap up the Australian innings, which started on a promising note near the end of day two. "Everyone controls their own game, some balls just have your name," skipper Pat Cummins said on the overuse of the sweep. "But we need a review on the shot choice. "Both games were disappointing, this one in particular," he added. "We were ahead in the game and that doesn't happen often in India. This loss hurts." Man of the match Jadeja said the sweep shot was "not a good option" against him on this pitch, which saw low bounce.

Axar Patel set up victory with his counter-attacking 74 on Saturday, lifting India from a pre-



**NEW DELHI:** India's Ravindra Jadeja (left) celebrates with teammate Rohit Sharma after the dismissal of Australia's Nathan Lyon (not pictured) during the third day of the second Test cricket match between India and Australia on February 19, 2023. —AFP

carious 139-7 to just one short of Australia's first-innings total. The left-hander put on a key 114-run eighth-wicket stand with Ashwin to turn the tables on Australia, who kept coming back with Lyon leading the bowling charge. Lyon returned

figures of 5-67 with his off-spin and was supported by fellow spinners Todd Murphy and debutant Matthew Kuhnemann—both of whom took two each. The third match will be played in Indore from March 1. —AFP

## St-Germain shocks Shiffrin for gold

**MERIBEL:** Canada's Laurence St-Germain caused a massive upset by winning world slalom gold in Meribel on Saturday, outgunning favorite Mikaela Shiffrin who took silver. It meant the end of Shiffrin's bid for a fifth world slalom title after she dominated the first of two runs in the French resort, but floundered on the second to allow the Canadian in for a stunning victory. The result still saw the 27-year-old American leave the champs with giant slalom gold and a second silver from the super-G.

St-Germain had been third fastest after the first leg down the Roc de Fer slope in sunny, warm conditions and held her nerve on the second run for a winning aggregate time of 1min 43.15sec. It was a remarkable victory for the 28-year-old Quebec native who has never made a World Cup podium. The best result of her 13 top 10 finishes from her eight seasons on the circuit is a fifth place in a parallel slalom in St Moritz in December 2019.

"That is weird!" St-Germain said when asked how it felt to be the newly-crowned world champion. "I was really not expecting this obviously. I was really stressed, I was kind of nauseous. I had bit of a mistake but I was thinking 'go down, go down, go down', and it worked out." Shiffrin, whose attention will immediately turn to her bid to equal and then surpass Ingemar Stenmark's overall record of 86 World Cup victories, suffered a terrible second run to finish 0.57sec off the Canadian's pace, with Germany's Lena Duerr taking bronze (+0.69).

Italy's Lara Della Mea took up the early lead in the second leg, with a third of the course in the shade and course workers battling rapidly melting snow under the bright sun. That held through 15 racers until first Sweden's reigning Olympic giant slalom champion Sara Hector and then Norway's Mina Fuerst Holtmann went atop the leaderboard. The top eight readied themselves for their second descent, Sweden's Hanna Aronsson Elfman failing to bother the podium, while Croatian teenager Zrinka Ljutic disappointingly skied out and Slovenia's Ana Bucic came in just behind Della Mea.

The business end of the day's racing saw Slovakia's reigning Olympic champion Petra Vlhova, fifth fastest in the first leg, go second 0.14sec behind Holtmann. Germany's Duerr then nipped in ahead of the Norwegian, piling the pressure on the top three. First down was St-Germain, who not only refused to buckle but took the lead by 0.69sec in a swashbuckling display of aggressive slalom skiing. Switzerland's two-time Olympic slalom medalist Wendy Holdener looked prime to go top, but skied out with the line in view.

That left Shiffrin in the starthut, but a hesitant start saw the American lose time throughout, eventually clocking the 27th slowest time of the top 30 to finish second. The silver sees Shiffrin move clear of former Swedish racer Anja Paerson to a personal tally of 14 world medals. Only Germany's Christl Cranz (15) has more, but she was skiing between 1934-39, when world champs were held every year and ski racing was yet to evolve to what it is nowadays. Having also won slalom bronze in the 2021 worlds, Saturday's silver also saw Shiffrin become the first skier, male or female, to claim at least six world championships medals in a specific event. —AFP

## England crush New Zealand

**MOUNT MAUNGANUI:** England captain Ben Stokes fired an Ashes warning to Australia after crushing New Zealand by 267 runs in the first Test at Mount Maunganui on Sunday, saying his team has got more firepower on the way. England made it 10 wins from 11 Tests since Stokes was handed the captaincy and Brendon McCullum the coaching reins last year, introducing an attacking revolution that again proved decisive in the day-night Test at the Bay Oval.

Having used aggression and clever pink-ball tactics to get the upper hand, England closed out victory in the first session of day four, dismissing New Zealand for 126 after they resumed at 63-5. Veteran pace duo Stuart Broad and James Anderson both finished with four second-innings wickets as England notched a first win on New Zealand soil in 15 years and took a 1-0 lead in the two-match series.

Broad (4-49) was a menace on Saturday night under lights when he tore through New Zealand's top order, with all four wickets clear bowled to reduce them to 28-5 in pursuit of 394 for victory. Long-time new ball partner James Anderson (4-18) became the chief tormentor on Sunday, knocking over four tailenders as New Zealand added 63 more runs in 22.3 overs. Only Daryl Mitchell, unbeaten on 57, put up any resistance after resuming his innings on 13, striking two sixes on his way to a sixth Test half-century.

England tactically dominated the game, batting aggressively and deliberately timing the end of both their innings so New Zealand had to face a new pink ball in lively seam conditions under lights on days one and three. The visitors will be favorites to beat the struggling Black Caps in the second Test in

## Rahm grabs 3-shot lead; Woods fires impressive 67

**LOS ANGELES:** World number three Jon Rahm fired a bogey-free six-under par 65 on Saturday to grab a three-shot lead at Riviera, where Tiger Woods thrilled fans with a four-under par 67. Rahm, who can return to number one with a victory, hit just five of 14 fairways but moved past overnight leader Max Homa, putting himself in position to capture a third US PGA Tour title of 2023. His 15-under par total of 198 put him three clear of Homa, whose two-under par 69 for 201 kept him one in front of Keith Mitchell, who also posted a 69. "It's a great round of golf," Rahm said. "Really proud of today, heck of a round of golf."

Rahm opened his round with a birdie at the first, just missing a 12-foot eagle attempt. He rolled in birdie putts from inside eight feet at the

Wellington before turning their attention to the showdown with Australia in England's summer. Stokes suggested he was already excited at the prospect of unleashing England's fearless approach when they bid to reclaim the Ashes.

### 'Selection nightmare'

The captain said depth had become an England strength, naming three injured players—batsman Jonny Bairstow and pace bowlers Jofra Archer and Mark Wood—among a group who will be applying pressure on the current squad. "It's probably going to end up being a selection nightmare at some point but you'd much rather have that," Stokes said. "It's a great thing to be thinking about going forward—the amount of world class players that we've got, not only here at the moment but also sat at home, recovering from injuries or whatever it may be."

"I don't like to look too far ahead but I think it will be a good crop of players to be able to choose from when we come to the Ashes." Stokes said their attack-first approach, dubbed "Bazball", was working because the players had brought into it unequivocally and had the ability to execute. "Not only have I got an unbelievable bowling attack to be able to captain, I've also got a seriously skilled and very brave batting line-up to look at and watch them express themselves," Stokes said.

"They've got to take a lot of credit for the record I've had so far as a captain. "If we keep playing the way in which we're playing and we're executing the things that we want to do well then we're going to be giving ourselves an opportunity to win." "We're just always looking to put oppositions under pressure." New Zealand captain Tim Southee conceded England had outplayed his team but didn't think the margin between the sides was reflected in the result. He welcomed the return to traditional red ball cricket at the Basin Reserve, starting on Friday.

"I don't know if gulf is the right word, I think England strategically played it pretty well," Southee

fourth, eighth and ninth. He rolled in a two-foot birdie at the 11th, to take the solo lead at 14-under. Homa, who started the day with a one-shot lead, kept the pressure on. He drained a 19-foot birdie putt at the third and added a five-foot birdie at the sixth. He tied Rahm's lead with a birdie at the 10th and tied him again with a seven-foot birdie at the 13th.

Homa faltered, however, with back-to-back bogeys at the 15th and 16th, and Rahm closed his round with a final flourish — draining a 23-foot birdie putt at 18. "The only thing I was worried about was getting that ball to the hole," Rahm said. "I've hit that putt a million times, I've seen that putt hit a million times and we all leave it just a couple, a couple rolls short, so I just wanted to get it there. Felt good obviously making it, it's a huge bonus, right?"

Rahm is seeking a third title of the year after victories at the Tournament of Champions in Hawaii and at La Quinta, California, in his next event. His hot start followed a strong autumn in Europe, where he won a third Spanish Open title in October and the DP World Tour Championship in November. It all has him in position to grab the



**MOUNT MAUNGANUI:** New Zealand's Neil Wagner ducks a bouncer during day four of the first cricket Test match between New Zealand and England on February 19, 2023. —AFP

said "You look back to day one, the way that they scored allowed them to set up the match from there by declaring at the difficult time under lights. "The end result is big, but it could have been slightly different so you reassess and you move forward to a traditional Test match at a ground we enjoy playing at." The home side are set to regain the services of seam bowler Matt Henry, who was unavailable for the series opener to attend the birth of his child. —AFP



Jon Rahm of Spain

number one spot from American Scottie Scheffler, who supplanted Rory McIlroy with his Phoenix Open win last Sunday. —AFP

## Lillard grabs NBA three-point title

**SALT LAKE CITY:** Portland's Damian Lillard won the Three-Point Contest and unheralded Mac McClung captured the Slam Dunk Contest crown on Saturday at NBA All-Star Game weekend festivities. Seven-time NBA All-Star Lillard, a member of the US Tokyo Olympic gold medal team, was a college star at nearby Weber State, adding to his joy at winning the long-range shootout in his third attempt.

"It makes it that much more special," Lillard said. "They say the third time is the charm and I'm happy that it happened here. It's a perfect situation. I'm happy I could do it in my homecoming here to Utah." The shocker came in the Slam Dunk Contest when McClung, called up from the developmental G-League by the Philadelphia 76ers earlier in the week, captured the dunk crown with a perfect score in the final.

"It's great. I'm truly blessed and grateful to the NBA for giving me this opportunity," McClung said. "I don't get surprised by things like this but I'm very

appreciative." The 6-foot-2 (1.88m) guard from rural Virginia had played only four NBA games but from his high school days was known for acrobatic dunks and after accepting the trophy from Julius Erving vowed to defend his crown, something few NBA stars do. "If you'll have me I'll be back," McClung said.

McClung added his name to a history of dunk champions that includes Michael Jordan, Dominique Wilkins, Vince Carter and Kobe Bryant. Among past 3-point champions were Larry Bird, Ray Allen, Paul Pierce, Dirk Nowitzki, Kyrie Irving, Stephen Curry and Klay Thompson. "The

best shooters in the history of our game, most of them have one of these," Lillard said of the 3-point trophy. "To be in this competition a few times and not have one, I just wanted to get it done at least one time."

"I'm happy I got it. Now I can retire from it." Tyrese Haliburton and 2020 3-point contest winner Buddy Hield, both of the Indiana Pacers, joined Lillard in qualifying for the final. It was Lillard who shot last and eliminated Boston's Jayson Tatum and Utah's Lauri Markkanen. Hield began the final with 25 points but Lillard sank his last four shots from the left corner to score 26. —AFP

## Sports

# Arsenal regain pole position as City stumble in title race

## Under-fire Chelsea boss suffers another blow

**LONDON:** Arsenal regained pole position in the Premier League title race on Saturday as the Gunners fought back for a thrilling 4-2 victory at Aston Villa, while Manchester City were held to a damaging 1-1 draw at Nottingham Forest. Just three days after surrendering first place with a 3-1 defeat against City, Arsenal bounced back in impressive style to move two points clear of the champions. With just minutes left at Villa Park, Mikel Arteta's side were in danger of slipping up again in their bid to win the title for the first time since 2004.

Arsenal twice trailed to goals from Ollie Watkins and Philippe Coutinho, only for Bukayo Saka and then Oleksandr Zinchenko to haul them level. Deep into second half stoppage-time, Arsenal received a helping hand from their former keeper as Emiliano Martinez inadvertently deflected Jorginho's shot into his own net after it hit the bar.

Gabriel Martinelli capped Arsenal's remarkable escape when he tapped into the empty net in the final seconds after Martinez was caught upfield at a Villa corner. "We are back with more belief than before because you have to turn performances into results," Arteta said. "The team showed a lot of emotional qualities that are needed. I'm really happy." Arsenal's first victory in five games in all competitions will give them renewed belief they can pip City to the title.

The Gunners, who have a game in hand on the champions, were given a massive boost by their title rivals' stumble just hours later. Bernardo Silva put Pep Guardiola's men ahead four minutes before half-time, taking Jack Grealish's pass in his stride and drilling a clinical finish past Kyle Navas from 20 yards. But the tension mounted as City searched for a second goal and Guardiola was booked for manhandling the fourth official after Erling Haaland's penalty appeal was rejected following Joe Worrall's challenge.

### Profligate City

City were undone by their profligacy as Haaland missed a series of chances before Chris Wood tapped in Morgan Gibbs-White's cross in the 84th minute. "We had amazing chances but it's football. We have to score," Guardiola said. "It's one of the best games we played but we dropped two points. We should be more aggressive. There are many games still to play, we know it."

Liverpool got back into the hunt for a top four place after ending Newcastle's 17-game unbeaten league run with a 2-0 win at St James' Park. Darwin Nunez fired Liverpool ahead from just inside the area after 10 minutes and Cody Gakpo doubled the lead seven minutes later with a close-range finish. Newcastle keeper Nick Pope was sent



**BIRMINGHAM:** Aston Villa's English defender Tyrone Mings (center) manages to clear a close-range header from Arsenal's English striker Eddie Nketiah (right) during the English Premier League football match between Aston Villa and Arsenal on February 18, 2023. —AFP

off in the 22nd minute after handling the ball outside the area. Jurgen Klopp's eighth placed side - who were the last team to beat Newcastle in the league in August - are six points behind the Magpies with a game in hand.

Fourth placed Newcastle are winless in their last four league matches. "Both goals were outstanding. When you are not in your best moment you have to fight and that's what we did. It feels great to be honest," Klopp said. "It's too early to say we are there again, but we are a step further forward." Everton moved out of the relegation zone with a valuable 1-0 win against fellow strugglers Leeds at Goodison Park.

Seamus Coleman netted in the 64th minute when the veteran Everton defender hooked over a cross that caught out Leeds keeper Illan Meslier, who left a gap at his near post for the ball to squeeze into the net. Sean

Dyche's side have won two of their three matches since he replaced the sacked Frank Lampard and now sit one point above the bottom three, while managerless Leeds are in 19th place. Under-fire Chelsea boss Graham Potter suffered another blow as bottom of the table Southampton won 1-0 at Stamford Bridge.

James Ward-Prowse scored his 17th Premier League free-kick - one behind David Beckham's record in the competition - to give Southampton the lead in first half stoppage-time. Chelsea were booed off at full-time after a result that left them languishing in 10th place, with just two wins in their last 14 games in all competitions and none in their last five. Bournemouth climbed out of the relegation zone with a 1-0 win at Wolves. Sixth-placed Fulham won 1-0 at Brighton, while Brentford and Crystal Palace drew 1-1. —AFP

## Kuwait Disabled Athletics team in UAE

By Abdellatif Sharaa

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Disabled Athletics team left for the UAE to participate in an international championship. Kuwait's delegation is made up of 25 male and female players along with the technical and administrative officials. Sharqa championship will be held from 20-22 February with the participation of 350 players from 26 countries and will be followed immediately by Fazzaa International. Head of Kuwait delegation Mohsen Al-Ajmi said the two championships are among the important events in the region because they will qualify for the world championship and Paris 2024 Olympics.



when a lightning fast Davies sped up the sideline and cut the ball back for Eric-Maxim Choupo Moting, who rocketed in a one-touch finish.

Gladbach retook the lead after 55 minutes through Hofmann, who pressed Bayern into a mistake, playing a quick series of passes with Plea before smashing a near-range strike past Sommer. Gladbach's French striker Marcus Thuram sealed the win in the 84th minute when he tapped Hofmann's cross past the outstretched hand of Sommer. Teenage French striker Mathys Tel scored in injury time to give Bayern hope, but the home side held on for victory.

The loss, just Bayern's second of the season in all competitions, cemented Gladbach's status as Munich's bogey side. The German champions have beaten Gladbach just once in their past seven meetings. After the match, a frustrated Nagelsmann entered the referees changing room asking for an explanation after saying Plea "lost his balance" before the red card. Nagelsmann later apologized saying "I went too far", adding "we would have liked to win here, we didn't." Gladbach manager Daniel Farke praised his "brave" side, saying "the guys put in an exceptional performance. We will have a relaxed weekend."

### Nkunku back for Leipzig

RB Leipzig won 3-0 at Wolfsburg, ahead of Wednesday's home Champions League last 16 first leg with Man City. Emil Forsberg punted Leipzig into the lead after 14 minutes, taking advantage of Wolfsburg's failure to clear a dangerous ball on the edge of the box.

Leipzig's top scorer Christopher Nkunku, returning

saw in the reverse fixture (lost 3-1)," said Inzaghi to Sky. "It's a good victory that allows us to keep going." Lukaku gave Inter the lead from the penalty spot at the second attempt in the 20th minute, his first league goal since their opening match of the season at Lecce. But Sando Lovric gave the away side a deserved equalizer with a powerful strike two minutes before half-time. From there Inter struggled to break down spirited Udinese, Edin Dzeko missing a great chance a minute before a piece of magic from Mkhitarayan which swung the match in the hosts' favor.

Former Armenia captain Mkhitarayan swept home a beautiful first-time finish from Federico Dimarco's layoff in the 73rd minute to send a wave of relief around the San Siro. In the final minute substitute Martinez lashed in his eighth goal in all competitions since the World Cup after collecting Danilo D'Ambrosio's long pass, giving Inter a big win ahead of the Champions League visit of Porto on Wednesday. "Obviously it's really important to win the home leg," said Mkhitarayan to Sky.



**MONCHENGLADBACH:** Bayern Munich's Swiss goalkeeper Yann Sommer (center) reaches for the ball during the German first division Bundesliga football match between Borussia Moenchengladbach v Bayern Munich on February 18, 2023. —AFP

from an injury which ruled him out of France's Qatar World Cup campaign, set up his side's second for Konrad Laimer in the 85th minute. Dominik Szoboszlai scored his side's third in injury time, extending Wolfsburg's winless run to five games. Speaking after the match, Forsberg said the "beautiful and important win" would give his side "self-confidence" for the City clash. "We're looking forward to an awesome game. We want to go out and win." —AFP

"We know Porto's strengths, I played against them last season in a friendly with Roma. We need to be ready for them."

### Milan revival continues

Milan's season is creaking back into gear and Junior Messias lashed in a powerful strike from the edge of the area in the 31st minute to earn a third league win since the new year. "We had chances to add more... but given the situation we find ourselves in we need to keep building our belief getting results," coach Stefano Pioli told DAZN.

"We're in a battle for the Champions League, but if we keep clean sheets we have the quality to win games." Saturday's win against their Lombardy rivals was Milan's third single-goal victory in a row in all competitions and came after Tuesday's 1-0 Champions League win over Tottenham Hotspur. Monza, whose unbeaten record ends at eight matches, dropped down a place to 11th thanks also to Bologna's late 2-1 win at struggling Sampdoria. —AFP

### News in brief

#### Atsu's body flown home

**ACCRA:** The remains of former Ghana international footballer Christian Atsu who died in a devastating earthquake in Turkey were being flown home on Sunday, the country's foreign ministry said. Atsu, 31, was caught up in a 7.8-magnitude quake that rocked Turkey and Syria on February 6, killing more than 44,000 people in both countries. There were initial reports the former Chelsea and Newcastle player had been rescued a day after the quake, but these turned out to be false and his body was found on Saturday. "The remains will be accompanied by his family and Ghana's ambassador to Turkey on a Turkish airlines flight and arrived in Accra (Ghana's capital) at 7:40 pm Sunday," the foreign ministry said. On Saturday, the ministry said that Atsu's older brother and twin sister were present at the site of the rescue when his body was recovered. His widow Marie-Claire Rupio and their three children were in the stands at St James' Park on Saturday to join in a tribute to the player before Newcastle's Premier League match against Liverpool. —AFP

#### Kuwaiti crowned champion

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's Meshari Al-Thefiri led the second round of the 2023 Qatar International Rally, FIA Middle East Rally Championship (MERC 2) on Saturday. Al-Thefiri and his Qatari teammate Nasser Al-Kuwari, riding a Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X, finished the race in 2hr 6min 3.3sec, with a comfortable margin from the second position. Speaking to KUNA, he said his team had a lead of 5min 12sec over the closest rivals, thus leading the general rating with 60 points. This is Al-Thefiri's fourth regional MERC title. His compatriot Yousef Al-Dhafeeri and Carlos Hanna, of Lebanon, riding a Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X, came second after finishing the race in 2hr 11min 15.8sec. Al-Dhafeeri thanked Kuwait Motor Sports Club, 965 Motor Club, Kuwait Airways Corp. and the Public Authority for Sport for their support to the Kuwaiti mission to the rally. The results of this round qualified the Kuwaiti team to the third round of the championship (MERC 3), due in Jordan this May. —KUNA

#### Australia upset Spain

**SYDNEY:** A Sam Kerr-led Australia beat powerhouse Spain 3-2 on Sunday in a big confidence boost ahead of the women's World Cup on home soil this year, stretching their unbeaten streak to six games. The two sides are both seen as contenders at the showpiece tournament in Australia and New Zealand in July-August, with the ongoing four-team Cup of Nations in Sydney and its surrounds being used as a dress rehearsal. Cortnee Vine, Clare Polkinghorne and Arsenal star Caitlin Foord all scored in a blistering first half before Olga Carmona and Alba Redondo pulled goals back for Spain in the second stanza. The Czech Republic earlier beat Jamaica 3-2 at the same Sydney stadium, thanks to a last-gasp winner from substitute Alena Peckova. Australia came into the clash after thumping the Czechs 4-0 last week, while Spain enjoyed a 3-0 romp against Jamaica. —AFP

#### Olesen cruises to victory

**BANGKOK:** Denmark's Thorbjorn Olesen fired six birdies on an unblemished scorecard to thunder to victory by four shots in the Thailand Classic on Sunday. Olesen ended Sunday with a bogey-free 66 and finished the tournament at 24 under par. The 33-year-old Dane went into the final round with a two-stroke lead after an impeccable 64 on Saturday. The win at Chon Buri was his seventh DP World Tour title and first victory since claiming the British Masters in May last year. He was all smiles after his final putt and was doused in champagne as he celebrated his first win in Asia. "It felt really good today, felt steady, I felt like I was in control, and I just enjoyed playing golf today, which was very nice," Olesen said. He described the Thailand Classic title as special, and the result of much hard work, while also acknowledging the sacrifices of his wife as they raise their young family. —AFP

#### Pogacar powers to 50th win

**MADRID:** Tadej Pogacar won yet another stage of the Vuelta a Andalucia on Saturday to maintain his overall lead in his season-opening Tour. At just 24-years-old this was Pogacar's 50th career win and the UAE Team Emirates rider had to survive the crash of key lieutenant Rafal Majka to do so. "Everybody tried to attack us from the start. It was hard to control," Pogacar said of the competitive field of World Tour riders on the roster. "We're getting tired because everybody tries to attack us. From the start, they tried to put us in a weak spot," he added. The two-time Tour de France champion from also won a one day classic in southern Spain ahead of the Tour of Andalucia on top of the three wins from four stages on this mini-tour. Pogacar now leads Spaniard Mikel Landa by 1min 14sec in the overall standings with one stage remaining. —AFP

#### Piastri in confident mood

**SYDNEY:** Rookie McLaren driver Oscar Piastri Sunday said he believed he could beat new teammate Lando Norris in his maiden Formula One season, but admitted a steep learning curve awaited him. The 21-year-old, seen as one of the sport's hottest young talents, will make his bow in Bahrain testing this month after replacing fellow Australian Daniel Ricciardo, who has returned to Red Bull as a reserve driver. Piastri said he had confidence in his ability to better Britain's Norris, but was also realistic about expectations. Asked if he could beat Norris, Piastri told Australian national broadcaster ABC: "Yeah, I think so. I think everyone has to have that self-belief that they can win, or if they're not in a position to win to do the best that they can with what they have." But the Australian said his main focus in 2023 was to set the foundations for a long F1 career. —AFP

## Inter squeeze past Udinese as Messias fires Milan to third

**MILAN:** Inter Milan made sure the gap separating them from runaway Serie A leaders Napoli stayed at 15 points with a 3-1 success over Udinese on Saturday. Romelu Lukaku, Henrikh Mkhitaryan and Lautaro Martinez all scored in a hard-fought win against ninth-placed Udinese, who have won only once in their last 15 league matches. Simone Inzaghi's side stay second and are three points ahead of local rivals AC Milan, who beat Monza 1-0 earlier on Saturday, but are at long way behind rampant Napoli after their 2-0 win at Sassuolo on Friday.

"Udinese are a very physical side with good technique who cause you a lot of problems, as we already

## Man United hammer Leicester

United sit third in the table, 5 points behind leaders Arsenal



MANCHESTER: Leicester City's English striker Jamie Vardy (center) vies with Manchester United's Argentine defender Lisandro Martinez (left) and Manchester United's Swedish defender Victor Lindelof during the English Premier League football match between Manchester United and Leicester City on February 19, 2023. — AFP

MANCHESTER: Marcus Rashford showed Manchester United won't be distracted by the race to buy the Old Trafford club as his double inspired a 3-0 win against Leicester on Sunday. United owners the Glazer family are considering rival offers from Sheikh Jassim bin Hamad Al Thani, chairman of one of Qatar's biggest banks, and British billionaire Jim Ratcliffe. Further bids could still be made amid reports United may be under new ownership within six weeks - but Erik ten Hag's side have kept their focus firmly on the pitch.

Rashford has been the key to United's impressive form in Ten Hag's first season and the England forward proved too hot for Leicester to handle at Old Trafford. Rashford has scored 24 times in all competitions for United this season, the highest goal tally he has ever managed in a single campaign. Remarkably, 16 of those goals have come in 17 appearances since he returned from the World Cup in December.

The 25-year-old is also the first United player to score in seven consecutive home league games

since Wayne Rooney in 2010. Rashford endured a difficult period prior to Ten Hag's appointment last season, sparking suggestions the forward might look to leave Old Trafford. But Rashford is now United's most influential player as he rediscovers the form that made him a teen sensation.

### Silverware drought

United sit third in the table, just five points behind leaders Arsenal, after a third win in their last four league matches. Ten Hag has played down his side's hopes of catching Arsenal, who have a game in hand on United. But if United do fall short in the title race, there are other opportunities to make it a memorable season in what could be the final campaign of the unpopular Glazers' 18-year reign. United are without a major trophy since 2017, when they won the League Cup and the Europa League, while their last Premier League crown came 10 years ago. The silverware drought could end this term, with United hosting Barcelona in the second leg of their Europa

League play-off on Thursday before playing Newcastle in the League Cup final three days later. United are also through to the FA Cup fifth round, where they face West Ham in March.

### Rampant Rashford

After drawing 2-2 at Barcelona on Thursday, Ten Hag made five changes to freshen up his team ahead of their pivotal week. David De Gea made a superb save to deny Harvey Barnes in the early stages after the Leicester winger surged onto Kelechi Iheanacho's pass. Harry Souttar headed just over from the resulting corner before Iheanacho's deflected effort rolled narrowly wide. Only De Gea was keeping United afloat and the Spaniard plunged to his right to make a brilliant stop from Iheanacho's stooping header.

Fittingly, De Gea finished with his 180th United clean-sheet, moving him level with Peter Schmeichel's all time record for the club. After Leicester's barrage, they were hit with a Rashford

sucker punch in the 25th minute. Bruno Fernandes's deft pass with the outside of his boot exposed Leicester's creaky offside trap, and Rashford sprinted clear to fire a clinical finish into the far corner from 12 yards. Rashford's goal came against the run of play, but it was reward for Ten Hag's decision to deploy his star as United's central striker rather than on the flanks.

United had seized the momentum and they should have been two up when Diogo Dalot somehow shanked Fernandes's cross wide from close-range. Rashford's speed and movement made him unplayable at times and he doubled United's lead in the 56th minute. Accelerating onto Fred's pass, Rashford guided a composed finish past Ward, with his celebrations briefly halted by an offside flag that was overturned by VAR. Leicester were in disarray and Jadon Sancho put the result beyond doubt in the 61st minute when the substitute slotted home from Fernandes's pass.— AFP

## Race to take control of United intensifies

LONDON: The race to take control of Manchester United has intensified as British billionaire Jim Ratcliffe formally challenged a Qatari banker for the ownership of the English football giants. Ratcliffe had already expressed interest in United several weeks ago and his INEOS company followed the Qatari offer by officially submitting their own bid. But the contest for control of the record 20-times English champions may be more than a two-horse race.

On Saturday, The Times reported that American hedge fund giant Elliott had made a bid-but not a full takeover of the kind proposed by both Ratcliffe and Qatari rival Sheikh Jassim Bin Hamad Al Thani. United is currently owned by the US-based Glazer family-with the cost of purchasing one of the world's most iconic sports teams expected to reach around \$6 billion. The 70-year-old Ratcliffe is keen to expand a sporting portfolio that already includes French football club Nice and Swiss team FC Lausanne-Sport, as well as the cycling team Ineos Grenadiers, formerly Team Sky.

"We can confirm that Sir Jim Ratcliffe and INEOS have submitted a bid for majority ownership of Manchester United Football Club," Ineos said in a statement to AFP. Ratcliffe, born in Failsworth, Greater Manchester, is one of Britain's wealthiest people, with an estimated net worth of £12.5 billion (\$15 billion) following the success of INEOS, his global chemical company.

### 'Number 1 in world again'

The boyhood United fan vowed to restore the Old Trafford side as the "number one club in the world again" after 10 years without a Premier League title triumph. The group also pledged to be "the long-term custodians of Manchester



MANCHESTER: Fans arrive outside of Old Trafford stadium in Manchester, north west England on February 19, 2023. —AFP

United on behalf of the fans and the wider community". "We want a Manchester United anchored in its proud history and roots in the North-West of England, putting the Manchester back into Manchester United and clearly focusing on winning the Champions League."

US merchant bank the Raine Group are conducting the sale on behalf of the Glazers. A price tag of around \$6 billion would smash the record fee for a football club set when a consortium led by LA Dodgers co-owner Todd Boehly and private equity firm Clearlake Capital purchased Chelsea last year. There could be yet more US involvement in the Premier League, with The Times saying Elliott, the former owners of Italian football giants AC Milan had made an "eleventh-hour swoop" for United.

The Times, citing unnamed sources, added Elliott, which manages \$56 billion (£46 billion) in assets, had ruled itself out of a full takeover of United, but has offered to provide the financing for a bid-which could include debt funding. But that would provoke a bitter reaction from United fans, many of whom were angered by the Glazers saddling the club with huge debts in their £790 million 2005 takeover. — AFP

## Blind Saudi rider gains recognition

RIYADH: Badr Al-Sharari refused to let his disability curb his passion, and despite being blind, the Saudi rider has now trailblazed his way to official recognition in horse-mad Saudi Arabia. The 35-year-old had to train at least three times a week for nearly two years before finally being admitted this month into the Saudi Arabian Equestrian Federation as its first blind member. But the data sector worker told AFP that just as important as his journey into the official ranks was the parallel one to self-empowerment. Clutching the reins and speaking from the saddle of his horse Star, after completing an obstacle course of wooden fences, he described his life before being bitten by the horse riding bug.

"I was an introvert, and didn't leave the house much," Al-Sharari said from a sandy track flanked by palm trees. "My relationship with horses broke the barrier of introversion. If I can tame a horse, then I can do anything." Like his mother and younger brother, Al-Sharari was born blind. He travels 140 kilometers every day from his home in western Riyadh to the Medhal equestrian centre east of the city, where he is helped in his training by his Afghan assistant, Nasim.

### Sensory skills

He is coached by Abu Mahmoud, an Egyptian, who looked on during an early-morning session as Al-Sharari flawlessly navigated a showjumping course, barely brushing against any of the fences. "You see how he jumps without touching it? It's as if he can see," Abu Mahmoud nodded approvingly. Equestrianism is popular in Saudi Arabia, the world's leading producer of purebred Arabian horses and home to several clubs. Official data shows that disabled people make up seven percent of the kingdom's population of 34 million, and of these some 811,000 have visual impairments. Until recently, such people were often unable to join their sighted counterparts in the joys of horse riding.

However, some riding schools now offer programs



RIYADH: Saudi blind jockey Badr Al-Sharari leads a horse during a training session at Medhal equestrian centre in eastern Riyadh. — AFP

tailored specifically to blind and autistic students, as a way of helping to improve their motor and sensory skills. Abdul Rahman Al-Otaibi joined the Medhal equestrian school three months ago. "I have come to regard horses as my brothers," said the 31-year-old, who suffers from severe visual impairment. Just like Al-Sharari, Al-Otaibi said horseback riding made him "more social" and allowed him to "integrate" with society.

### Saudi Cup

"I have made more friends and developed new relationships," he said. Al-Otaibi is not completely blind, but does struggle to see the fences on the course. Initially this made him fear he might take a tumble. "I was afraid of the jumps... but with time I broke this fear," he said. Medhal director Mashari Al-Dhiyabi said that those who suffer from visual impairments "have the ability, determination and insistence to learn, but society makes them feel as though they are incapable" of doing so.

Horseback riding is a great way to "enhance mental and physical capabilities of all riders, regardless of their condition", Al-Dhiyabi said. At the end of the month, Saudi Arabia will stage this year's Saudi Cup, an annual competition held at the King Abdulaziz Racetrack in the capital. —AFP