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Amir congratulates citizens, residents on national days

Fireworks, celebrations held across Kuwait • Kuwait flag sets new world record



Kuwait sets a new Guinness World Record by unfurling the largest flag at the Seventh Hole Cave on Salmah Plateau in Oman. — KUNA



The Royal Saudi Air Force aerobatic display team 'Saudi Hawks' perform during an aerobatic show. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Revelers celebrate on Arabian Gulf Street. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Sunday congratulated Kuwaitis and residents on the country's 62nd National Day and 32nd Liberation Day. HH the Amir highly appreciated the overwhelming feelings displayed by citizens and residents during the festivities held to mark the dear national occasions, well-organized nationwide by various official and private bodies. They have formed a "national epic" reflecting loyalty to the nation and crystalizing a "cohesive Kuwaiti family".

HH the Amir highlighted the great efforts exerted by official bodies that arranged for marking the occasions, topped with the national committee on national celebrations and the ministries of information, health and education, together with the Kuwait Fire Force

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US agency says COVID likely from China lab leak

BEIJING: China on Monday rejected claims that the COVID-19 pandemic arose from a leak at one of its laboratories, following media reports that the US Department of Energy has determined that was the most likely cause of the outbreak. The conclusion - noted in a classified report by Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines' office, The Wall Street Journal reported - marks a shift by the Energy Department, which had previously said it was undecided on how the virus emerged.

People who read the classified report were quoted in the Journal and The New York Times as saying the department made its judgement with "low confidence", highlighting how different agencies remain divided over the origins of COVID-19 and the pandemic that swept the globe in early 2020. The conclusion, reportedly the result of new intelligence, is nevertheless significant because the department

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Palestinians count cost of Zionist arson

HUWARA: Palestinians in the occupied West Bank on Monday counted the cost of deadly violence and arson by Zionist settlers targeting a town where two Zionist brothers were killed. Dozens of Zionist settlers set homes and cars ablaze in the northern town of Huwara overnight, after a day of

Zionist-Palestinian talks in neighboring Jordan aimed at quelling a surge in violence in the Palestinian territory.

More than 350 Palestinians were injured, most suffering from tear gas inhalation, the Palestinian Red Crescent Society said. The Palestinian health ministry said Sameh Aqtash, 37, was shot dead during an attack by Zionist forces and settlers on the nearby village of Zaatara. The violence came hours after two Zionist settlers - brothers Yagel Yaniv, 20, and Hallel Yaniv, 22 — were shot dead Sunday as they drove through Huwara.

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HUWARA: A man stands amidst destroyed cars in this town near Nablus in the occupied West Bank on Feb 27, 2023 after they were torched by Zionists overnight. — AFP

Beaches combed for bodies after deadly shipwreck

CUTRO, Italy: Italy's coastguard on Monday searched the sea and beaches for bodies following a shipwreck off Calabria, as authorities tried to identify the dead and the government's migrant policy came under scrutiny. The overloaded wooden boat broke up and sank early Sunday in stormy seas off Italy's southern coast, with bodies, shoes and debris

washing up along a long stretch of shoreline.

The death toll rose Monday to 62 people, a coast guard official told AFP - and that number looked likely to increase. Sergio di Dato, head of the Doctors Without Borders (MSF) team offering psychological support to the survivors, said there were cases of children orphaned in the disaster. "One Afghan 12-year-old boy lost his entire family, all nine of them - four siblings, his parents and other very close relatives," he told journalists.

At Le Castella, where a 15th century fortress dominates the shoreline, an AFP journalist witnessed the coastguard recovering the body of a woman who looked to be in her early 20s. Local officials said the search was ongoing for around 20

people believed to be still missing, though survivors have given differing versions as to how many people were originally on the boat. Forensic police set about identifying the victims, issuing an email address to which relatives searching for loved ones could send distinguishing details, from eye and hair color to tattoos or piercings.

Save the Children charity said on Twitter it was supporting survivors from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia and Syria, including 10 minors who had been travelling with their families. "There are many missing minors," it wrote. The charity said survivors described how "during the night, near the coast, they heard a loud boom, the boat broke and they all

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Local

#National_Celebration hashtag sheds light on the festivities' negative side

Throwing water balloons or spraying water guns a controversial topic



KUWAIT: Kuwaitis celebrate their 62nd National Day and 32nd Liberation day.

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: On the 25th and 26th of February every year, Kuwait celebrates its National and Liberation Days, where children throw water balloons or spray water guns at each other. This kind of celebration has become a controversial topic on social media, as some supporters say it is just two days of fun, while others are angry about how the celebration took another turn.

Trending on Twitter, the hashtag #National_Celebration went viral, showcasing citizens' points of view on celebrations with water balloons. Citizen Ali Awadhi said he almost lost a family member because of a water balloon. "On the highway, someone threw a water balloon on my mother's

car and almost caused her death. The sound of a balloon filled with water bursting can cause an accident out of fear," he said.

Meanwhile, the ministry of interior said an expat was arrested for throwing a water balloon on a police patrol. But people on Twitter slammed some of the comments that blamed the Asian expatriate. "The expat is imitating the rest. The law must be applied correctly on everyone, from young to old, especially punishing parents for this kind of upbringing that does not have love and appreciation for their homeland. Then blame a stranger," Hind Hayat tweeted.

"Some of the comments are inhumane, as someone who was enjoying the celebration was deported and terminated from work for having fun like the

rest of Kuwaiti citizens!" a citizen said. The citizen denounced celebrations by several children and a young person, which indicates that their parents were not qualified to raise an aware generation.

Others blamed the reckless behavior of Kuwaiti youth. Mohammad Salem noted that throwing water balloons was not only limited on Gulf Road, but also in residential areas that are not meant for such celebrations. "I saw many young people throwing water balloons and spraying water on helpless workers going to work," he said, pointing out such scenes are not acceptable, as the humble, poor worker goes on foot to fulfill his needs, not to play. "Children must be respectful," he added.

Citizen Talal Al-Enzi denounced a video on social media showing youths intimidating a woman inside

her car by shaking her vehicle, stressing such scenes do not reflect celebrations of the National Day. "I do not think that these young men have morals; they are being insolent under the pretext of celebrations," he said.

For his part, Abdulaziz Al-Fadhli said: "It is sad to see some educated people taking the issue of throwing water balloons as a simple matter that does not need this fuss! This behavior is causing harm to people, exposing their lives to danger, and causing fights that may have consequences. And it is a waste of the wealth of water." Meanwhile, Hussein Obaidly affirmed that targeting people with water balloons and spraying them with foam, and gathering of children on the roadsides is a bad way to express joy on the occasion of the National and Liberation Days.

We love Kuwait and our eyes

By Dr Ahmad Abbadi, Ophthalmologist at Al-Bahar Eye Centre

February is considered to be a hallmark in every Kuwaiti's calendar. It is the month of celebration of our beloved country Kuwait. Every year on the 25th and 26th of February, all people in Kuwait celebrate the National and Liberation Days of Kuwait, either by enjoying the multiple events happening all over the country or by creating new ways to express their love to Kuwait.

Nevertheless, some people might take extra measures in expressing their love that might be considered dangerous to other individuals. For example, it has been estimated that over 95 cases of eye injuries were reported in Kuwait in 2022. These injuries have been inflicted by the use of water balloons and water sprays. Water under high pressure can cause trauma to the eyes, from superficial injuries to sudden blindness, where there is no return from it.

The eye is a soft tissue that is surrounded by a bony structure (bony orbit) that functions to protect the eyes from harm. In addition, each eye is covered by a thin layer of skin called eyelids to lubricate and guard the eyes from harmful substances such as dirt. The eye is a miraculous thing containing many small structures that all function together to allow us to see the world and enjoy the multiple activities happening during our month of celebration in Kuwait.

As an ophthalmologist (eye doctor) working in Kuwait, I have observed many cases of eye injuries related to water balloons and water



guns during the month of February. They can range from superficial wounds and cuts to ruptured globes; in other words, the eye globe is cut open and this can result in blindness.

In addition, the eye is a sensitive organ - it is responsible for our eyesight. The retina which is found at the back of the eyes is of extreme importance to eyesight. Even with the protections of the bony structures surrounding the eyes, any forceful trauma, for example water balloons, can cause disruption of the retina, thus causing sudden eyesight loss.

On the 24th of February while I was on duty, I was called to assess an emergency case secondary to a water balloon injury of a female in her 40s while she was in a car and had the windows open. She was on a wheelchair with her eyes completely shut due to swelling. Her vision was compromised significantly with multiple injuries to the cornea. The patient was bleeding from her eyes due to the trauma. Due to this significant case, the patient was sent for imaging and dilatation of the pupil to visualize any abnormalities that might have occurred to the retina.

My message to all individuals in Kuwait - have fun and enjoy the events and the numerous activities happening in Kuwait during the month of celebration. Nevertheless, do not forget to protect yourselves and others. Most importantly, protect your eyes to enjoy the National and Liberation Days in Kuwait.



Belongings of Kuwaiti POW at Bait Al-Othman Museum. —KUNA photos



A handwritten note and other belongings of a POW Fawzi Al-Mane are showcased at Bait Al-Othman Museum.

Government, private museums house variety of Iraqi invasion items

KUWAIT: Several government and private museums in Kuwait housed variety of items pertaining to the Iraqi invasion and the liberation of Kuwait. From resistance memorabilia to items showing the devastating impact of the invasion and the overflow of joy during liberation, these establishments keep the memory of the era alive and well for future generations.

Speaking to KUNA, head of the Abdullah Abdulatif Al-Othman cultural center Anwar Al-Refaei said that weapons, military uniforms, and more were on display in the Bait Al-Othman museums and accompanying exhibits. He affirmed that the museums curators made it their mission to introduce visitors to the heavy toll the Iraqi invasion had on Kuwait, which not only affected infrastructure of all kinds, it also destroyed lives and that was evident in the huge tally of martyrs slain by Iraqi troops during invasion and after imprisonment in Iraq.

He said that it was paramount for Kuwaitis to remember the lessons from the Iraqi invasion and then liberation of Kuwait, stressing that such lessons would help the country to handle ordeals and challenges of the future. In similar fashion, the Al-Qurain Martyrs Museum displayed the most heroic act during the Iraqi invasion when 12 members of the resistance stood against Iraqi troops, losing their lives for the sake of Kuwait and its people.

The Museum's curator Eman Nasser revealed that the facility put on display the weapons and belongings of the Al-Masila resistance group, which stood against the brutal Iraqi soldiers. She affirmed that the museum, which was the house where the 12 members of the resistance group met their fate, served as testament for the heroic act for country and people.

The mission to document the Iraqi invasion is not a government-driven mission only; Kuwaiti private collectors also contribute to the cause. Yousef Al-Amiri, owner of Kuwait House for National Works Museum, affirmed that his establishment heavily documented the Iraqi invasion of August 2, 1990. He pointed out that efforts of the resistance, protests, martyrdom of



Collector Mohammad Kamal and his Iraqi-invasion-era items.



Belongings of Kuwaiti Al-Masila resistance group at Al-Qurain Martyrs Museum.

A national message during the invasion

KUWAIT: Iraqi military forces may have succeeded in sabotaging and confiscating Kuwait News Agency's (KUNA) equipment and archive during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 but they failed to destroy KUNA's spirit and its national duty. In October 1990, shortly after the invasion had started, KUNA resumed its national role and started broadcasting its news bulletin from London.

The focus of this role was to highlight and emphasize the legitimacy and independence of the state of Kuwait as a sovereign country recognized by the United Nations and international organizations and its right to its land. During the period from

October 3, 1990 to November 1991, KUNA was able to broadcast about 16,110 news items until its return to its permanent headquarter in Kuwait where it was fully functional by 1992. — KUNA



Photo shows KUNA's offices after they were destroyed by Iraqi army forces during the 1990 invasion. — KUNA

Kuwaitis were put up and front for those eager to know about the ordeal of the country.

Al-Amiri also said that there was a section dedicated to the efforts to put down over 700 oil well burned by the Iraqi invaders during their withdrawal from Kuwait before liberation. Meanwhile, founder and general coordinator of the Expo 965 group for traditional exhibitions Mohammad Kamal revealed that he curated a museum filled with memorabilia from the Iraqi invasion and liberation of Kuwait. Documents and currency signed by the long-dead Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein were also on display in the museum in addition to hand written notes of martyred Kuwaitis. He pointed out that he was always eager to provide tours of the facility specially for students and young individuals to remind them of the ordeal and the sacrifices made to overcome the invasion. — KUNA

Local

Kuwaitis made history with faith in their unbreakable homeland



The late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah with late US President George Bush senior and Kuwaiti Ambassador to Washington Sheikh Saud Al-Nasser Al-Sabah address the press.—KUNA photos



The late Amir Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah.

KUWAIT: When nations pass through a historical juncture that puts their fate at stake, geopolitical factors may play a vital role in overcoming adversity. Kuwait and its people made their history recorded with faith in their unbreakable homeland considered victorious given the liberation of their country from the brutal Iraqi invasion on February 26, 1991.

With the occurrence of the brutal Iraqi invasion on the morning of August 2, 1990, the people of Kuwait called to uphold the voice of truth and legitimacy, and that aggression, no matter how forced, will end in accordance with the UN Charter. It is true that the Kuwaiti right was necessitated by Kuwait's unique visions, its exemplary relations and its excellent foreign policy. However the role of the national leadership of Kuwait and its men, women and children who played historical and pivotal roles in consolidating the Kuwaiti right in international forums and carrying Kuwait's message therein cannot be forgotten.

The efforts were led by the late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the late Amir Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah, and the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and others whose input were recorded, each according to his position, in the return of Kuwait to its people. With the first moments of the invasion, Kuwait raised its case in international and regional forums and mobilized global support for it in the UN Security Council (UNSC) and in the meeting of foreign ministers of non-aligned countries that was held on the sidelines of the meeting of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) on October 5, 1990.

Kuwait affirmed at the time that the Iraqi occupation represented a flagrant violation of the UN Charter and the principles of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). It urged members to condemn the aggression and continue their support for the principled positions taken by the international community, represented by commit-

ment and full compliance with UNSC resolutions towards the Iraqi aggression and support Kuwait's efforts to achieve the withdrawal of Iraqi forces from its territory, the return of the legitimate government to the country and the demand of the aggressor to pay all compensation for what they caused to the economic and social environment in Kuwait in terms of destruction, losses, and the money that was looted.

Indeed, the UNSC held an emergency session based on the wish of several countries on August 3, 1990, then at the end of it, resolution 660 was issued condemning the Iraqi invasion, calling for Iraq's immediate and unconditional withdrawal from Kuwaiti lands and the return of legitimacy to its people.

The US and the Soviet Union announced in a statement their condemnation of the invasion and demanded that Iraq withdraw its forces immediately from Kuwait, while the 19th session of foreign ministers of Islamic countries, during its meeting in Cairo, also issued a statement calling for the withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwaiti territory, as the ambassadors of NAM agreed during their meeting in New York, denouncing the invasion and demanding Iraq's immediate withdrawal.

The US also submitted a new draft resolution to the UNSC to impose comprehensive economic and military sanctions against Iraq to force it to withdraw from Kuwait without restrictions or conditions, in implementation of the UNSC resolution that it adopted hours after the invasion. The UNSC approved the draft resolution submitted by the US after amending it, the UNSC issued resolution 661 on August 6, which is the second after the invasion, and affirmed the Council's determination to end the occupation of Kuwait and restore its sovereignty and safety.

The developments necessitated opening the door for peace-loving countries to send troops to

the region, then immediately, contacts took place between various world capitals to mobilize an international coalition, especially after the UNSC issued a third resolution number 662, in which the UN confirmed its rejection of Iraq's decision to annex Kuwait and considered it invalid, therefore the decision was annulled and demanded that all countries, international organizations and specialized agencies not recognize this annexation.

The vanguards of Arab and international forces also began to arrive in Saudi lands to form the international coalition to liberate Kuwait, while the UNSC issued its fourth resolution on the Iraqi invasion bearing the number 664 and reaffirmed the invalidity of Kuwait's annexation to Iraq.

Soon after, the UNSC issued resolution 674 against Iraq, and the five major countries agreed on a draft resolution that would allow the use of military force against Iraq if it did not withdraw from Kuwait. At the end of November 1990, the UNSC issued several resolutions in connection to Iraq, the first of which was resolution 677, which warned Iraq of the consequences of its attempts to obliterate the identity of Kuwait and settle Iraqis in place of Kuwaiti citizens, and underlined the importance of keeping smuggled copies of the population register in Kuwait.

The UNSC also issued resolution 678, which authorized all necessary means to ensure compliance with previous resolutions and gave Iraq until January 15, 1991 to withdraw its forces from Kuwait, otherwise it would face the danger of war with the international coalition forces arrayed against it. Following the issuance of UNSC resolution 678, which stipulated the use of military force against Iraq, the pace of events accelerated, and at dawn on January 17, 1991, the coalition forces began their major attack on Iraqi military and strategic sites in Kuwait and Iraq, as a prelude to the liberation of Kuwait. — KUNA

In my view

Greetings to the homeland



By Dr Khalid Al-Saleh

Local@kuwaittimes.com

As we celebrated the National and Liberation Days, greetings to my homeland Kuwait. It is in my heart - a symbol of all noble values. It is a homeland, refuge and security. When the invasion of Kuwait was over, a few Kuwaitis sold their properties in Kuwait and headed abroad. Those few thought Kuwait will not withstand the shock after the invasion and occupation.

They sold the homeland at the first opportunity and bought property in the US, because it is more secure in their opinion. Years went by and America was shocked by the mortgage crisis and the value of their properties dropped. At the same time, prices of the real estate they sold in Kuwait went up manifold. It is Kuwait, gentlemen: it will remain, it is blessed.

The government sold its shares in private companies and reclaimed a palace for a huge amount of money, so souls became distressed and people exchanged expressions of frustration, as if Kuwait is being sold. The anxious concerns began to rise in the hearts of the youth, and invalidators spout out poisons of skepticism about the country's future. Material measurements were being made on the country's capabilities, a homeland that is loved by its people and they love its soil. It is a losing formula and invalid measurement.

Kuwait will remain as long as the sun rises from the east. It is our country whose soil we adore, and we are satisfied with the few from it. Kuwait carries the burdens of alienation and protects us from the sadness of loss, lack of resources and loss of dignity. Kuwait, my country, may you be safe and glorious! You, our youth - believe in our homeland, as it is everything for you. Do not let anyone, whoever they may be, make you lose your confidence in Kuwait. No matter how much the corruptors corrupt, or how loud are the disinterested, or the number of oppressors rise; they are just scum as far as Kuwait is concerned that floats on top of its sea, and will get rid of it on the first coast and bury it in it.

Kuwait will remain and go higher, and as the one who sold his property after the invasion lost the bet. Those who doubted it will lose, and those who believed in it and worked for it will win. My homeland will remain the jewel of countries, and most beautiful, and my heart will continue beating with its love, and my eyes tearful for seeing it each time as it hugs me on my return from a trip. It is Kuwait - my glorious homeland. It is above any dispute, above any fear and higher than any struggle.

Kuwait, my country, may you be safe and glorious!



'1990 bread bag' is packaged to commemorate the heroes who ran the Kuwait Flour Mills and Bakeries Company during the Iraqi invasion. — KUNA



Kuwait Flour Mills, Bakeries reproduces 'invasion bread'

KUWAIT: 32 years after the Iraqi invasion of 1990 and subsequent liberation the year after, the Kuwait Flour Mills and Bakeries Company marked the occasion via reproducing bread made during the country's darkest time. Kuwaiti and expatriate staff, which worked during the invasion, had to use whatever material available back then to produce bread by adding a combination of bran and



Mutlaq Al-Zayed

grinded wheat, and flour. Speaking to KUNA on the issue, the company's CEO Mutlaq Al-Zayed said that the product, the "1990 bread bag", came to commemorate Kuwait's stance against the brutal Iraqi aggression.

He affirmed that the company was operated back then by staff from citizens and loyal residents, revealing that in the initial weeks of the invasion, bakeries worked at full capacity 24 hours and seven days a week.

The ordeal was tough due to the lack of technical staff that made sure that production lines went smoothly without a hitch and also the materials involved in bread production were limited, he added. He indicated that people back then had to wait in long lines before getting the much coveted bag of bread.

Al-Zayed stressed that the company decided to commemorate the memory of the heroes who got involved in the mission to cover the needs of the people during invasion, hence, the idea of the 1990 bread bag came to fruition. The Kuwait flour mills company was established in 1961 and was joined with the Kuwait Bakeries company in 1988, becoming one of the biggest food companies in the Gulf region. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Municipal workers clean garbage and water balloons from the streets after the two-day national holidays. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

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News in brief



Google celebrates Kuwait

KUWAIT: Google celebrated the 62nd anniversary of Kuwait's National Day by changing its doodle to depict the Gulf country's white, red, black and green flag flying proudly in the sky. Under the headline: "Kuwait National Day 2023", Google said: "Today's Doodle celebrates Kuwait National Day! On this day each year, Kuwaitis reflect on their nation's independence and progress with pride." Popular sawt music comprising of drums, violins, and lutes fills the air as the white, red, black, and green Kuwaiti flag, depicted in today's artwork, flies proudly in the sky. Kuwait marked its first National Day on June 19, 1952, but an Amiri decree was issued on May 18, 1964, changing the National Day to February 25 as of 1965. — KUNA

Winter aid campaign in Gaza

GAZA: Al-Nama Kuwaiti charity society contributed to the winter aid campaign to cover the needs of 1,000 families in the Gaza Strip, said a Palestinian official on Monday. Deputy Head of the Zakat Al-Daraj Committee Mohammad Khalaf told KUNA that the campaign would provide necessary assistance to families suffering from the cold weather conditions. Each family received clothing and blankets to fend off the harsh winter, he added. Khalaf thanked the Kuwaiti leadership and people for their continuous support to the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip. — KUNA

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Several streets and buildings in Bahrain hoisted Kuwaiti flags on Saturday to mark the Kuwait national days. The gesture came as Kuwait celebrates the 62nd anniversary of the National Day and the 32nd anniversary of the Liberation Day. The Bahrain International Airport was decorated with the Kuwaiti flag and airport staff welcomed arrivals from Kuwait with gifts and greetings on this dear occasion. — KUNA

Kuwait to strengthen energy ties with Arabs



CAIRO: Kuwaiti Electricity and Water Acting Undersecretary Mutlaq Al-Otaibi and Kuwait's delegation to pan-Arab attend a meeting on energy cooperation in the Egyptian capital. —KUNA photos



CAIRO: Kuwait is eager to improve its energy relations with Arab countries given the market expansion around the wider region, an official said on Monday, citing the exponential growth in global renewable energy capacity. Forging closer ties would enable countries with a "surplus" of power

generation capacity to share some of it with others more in need, according to Kuwaiti Electricity and Water Acting Undersecretary Mutlaq Al-Otaibi.

Heading Kuwait's delegation to pan-Arab talks on energy cooperation in the Egyptian capital, the official underlined the need to develop a "joint"

energy market in the wider Arab region, which will be instrumental in promoting exchange. Plans to develop power interconnection systems linking Arab states are making progress, added the official, saying it was necessary to ensure adequate supply in light of "soaring" global prices. — KUNA



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MMC launches 4th branch in Kuwait

KUWAIT: Metro Medical Center (MMC), one of the largest and fastest growing hospital chains in Kuwait, launched its specialized medical center, "Super Metro Specialized Medical Center", in Fahaheel on 24 February. The new Center was inaugurated by top management of MMC, in the presence of ambassadors from several countries, as well as ministers and socio-cultural leaders.

The inaugural event, themed 'Metro Day', featured various cultural performances representing different states of India, as well as those from other countries. The new center is located in Building No 93, Block-10, Makka Street, near Mangaf Signal. It marks MMC's fourth branch in Kuwait, and heralds its entry into Fahaheel, after having cemented its presence in Farwaniya and Salmiya with three medical centers earlier.

As part of the launch of the new specialized medical center, a slew of special offers and discounts on various medical services are being extended by MMC for three months from the inauguration date. These include: Free consultation by doctors; Discount of 40 percent on medical procedures; Discount of 10 percent on pharmacy invoices; Full body checkup for KD 10, which comprises testing for fasting blood sugar, lipid profile, creatinine, SGPT, Uric acid, Vitamin D, Complete blood count, ECG, Blood pressure, and doctor consultations.

The full-fledged Super Metro Specialized Medical Center, which will be providing 24/7 services, offers the following medical services and facili-

ties to patients: Cardiology, Neurology, Urology, Endocrinology, Internal Medicine, Orthopedics, In-Vitro-Fertilization, Obstetrics & Gynecology, Pediatrics, Family Medicine, General Medicine, Occupational Health, and Day-Care Surgeries.

The Center also offers Specialized Dental, Pediatric Dental, ENT, Eye Specialist, Opticals, Hearing Center, Derma & Cosmetology, Laser Procedures, MRI, CT & Dexa Scans, Digital X-rays, Endoscopy, Colonoscopy, Radiology, 2D, 3D, and 4D Ultrasound, MoH-approved PCR tests, Laboratory, Pharmacy, Ambulance and Home Care services. In addition, the center accepts all insurance cards, and provides other conveniences such as a cafeteria, auditorium, and ample car parking facilities for visitors, besides being located in an area with easy access from all parts of Kuwait.

MMC is a healthcare chain managed by professionals with a mission and a passion for providing high-quality healthcare to patients, which has led to it becoming the top healthcare provider in Kuwait in a very short time. The Center also has a reputation for its humanitarian and selfless service, and for providing compassionate healthcare to the less privileged in society. More than 75,000 needy patients have availed free medical services at MMC over the past eight years as a part of the Center's social commitments.

"Armed with the best of the facilities in areas of patient care, and with a highly qualified and dedicated team of physicians, nurses, technicians and other medical professionals, Metro Medical Center endeavors to match quality benchmarks for the benefit of all patients, now and in the future," said MMC Group Chairman and CEO Mustafa Hamza, while thanking citizens and residents in Kuwait for their continued support and patronage of MMC.



Indian opposition official arrested in graft probe

Serbia, Kosovo leaders hold talks as pressure mounts for deal

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GENEVA: UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres delivers a speech during the 52nd UN Human Rights Council session in Geneva on February 27, 2023. — AFP

Progress on human rights has 'gone reverse': UN

'Russian invasion of Ukraine has triggered the most massive violations of human rights'

GENEVA: Respect for human rights has gone into reverse, the United Nations chief warned Monday, calling for a renewal of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 75 years after its signing. Pointing to the war raging in Ukraine, and threats to rights from soaring poverty, hunger and climate disasters, Antonio Guterres said the declaration was "under assault from all sides." "Some governments chip away at it. Others use a wrecking ball," he told the opening of the UN Human Rights Council's main annual session, describing the disregard and disdain seen for human rights around the world as "a wake-up call".

He said the "Russian invasion of Ukraine has triggered the most massive violations of human rights" being witnessed in the world today. "It has unleashed widespread death, destruction and displacement," he

said. While the past century has seen astounding progress in human rights and human development, Guterres warned that now, "instead of continuing this progress, we have gone into reverse."

Russia's war in Ukraine loomed large over the meeting, due to last a record six weeks, with calls for unity in condemning Moscow and extending a probe into war crimes in the conflict. The session comes just days after the one-year anniversary of Moscow's full-scale invasion—which UN rights chief Volker Turk warned show that 75 years after the world agreed on the universality of rights, "the oppression of the past can return in various disguises."

Turk cited "the old destructive wars of aggression from a bygone era with worldwide consequences, as we have witnessed again in Europe with the senseless

Russian invasion of Ukraine". Following the speeches by the UN top brass, nearly 150 ministers and heads of state and government are due to speak, virtually or in person, during the first four days of the session. Among them will be the foreign ministers of the United States, China, Ukraine and Iran.

Walkout?

Moscow will send Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov to address the council in person on Thursday. Despite calls from NGOs, observers said it was unlikely there would be a walkout like the one many diplomats took part in when Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's video played in the council last year.

Several diplomats suggested that other measures might be taken to convey their disapproval. "We

believe that Russia does not deserve to sit in the room," Ukrainian ambassador Yevheniia Filipenko told reporters. "We will act accordingly." There is no shortage of other pressing human rights issues for the council to address, with the situations in Iran, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Syria and Zionist entity on the agenda. A long line of resolutions will be voted on during the last few days of the session, which is due to wrap up on April 4.

One key resolution will be on extending a high-level investigation into crimes committed in Ukraine since Russia's invasion. The so-called Commission of Inquiry, which has already determined that Russia is committing war crimes on a "massive scale" in Ukraine, is due to present a comprehensive report to the council in late March.—AFP

Spanish jailed for hitting wife live on TikTok

MADRID: A Spanish man who slapped his wife during a TikTok livestream was sentenced on Monday to a year in jail although the victim declined to file a police complaint. A court in the northern city of Soria found the man guilty of violence against women, banned him from coming within 300 metres (1,000 feet) of his wife or communicating with her for three years, and of acquiring a weapon during that time.

The sentence stems from an incident during a TikTok "battle"—a real-time competition between streamers where the winner is decided by viewers—held between the woman and three men during the early hours of January 28. In images that went viral in Spain, the man is seen slapping his wife in the face so hard that her head turns and she bursts out crying.

"The defendant assaulted his wife publicly and openly, in front of thousands of people, with the aim of undermining her physical integrity and humiliating her in public," the court ruled. "There is no need for a complaint from the victim in gender violence crimes. These should be punished once it becomes clear they have been committed," the court added.

"Broadcasting the slap live is sufficient for the authorities to step in and protect the victim, regardless of whether she recognises herself as such." The woman had declined to press charges against her husband and refused to take the stand against him during the trial.

But the court said police had been called to the couple's home in the past because of "disputes between the accused and his wife" which proved there was "continued mistreatment". Successive Spanish governments on both the right and left have made the fight against domestic violence a priority.

Parliament in 2004 overwhelmingly approved Europe's first law to specifically crack down on gender-based violence. It established special courts and offered free legal aid for victims, and set up a hotline that would not appear on victims' phone bills.—AFP



ANKARA: Turkish father Mesut Hancer (center), his wife Gulseren (2nd right), and their children Beste (left), Ezgi (2nd left) and Berkay (right) pose in their apartment in Ankara as the family tries to rebuild, after losing a daughter Irmak, 15 years old, in the earthquake.— AFP

Support for Turkish father who lost daughter in quake

ANKARA: A photo of a father holding his daughter's hand killed in the February 6 earthquake that struck Turkey has provoked an outpouring of sympathy and support from around the world, he told AFP. Around three weeks after the disaster that killed more than 44,000 people in Turkey and thousands more in neighbouring Syria, AFP photographer Adem Altan tracked down Mesut Hancer in the capital Ankara.


He had moved there from Kahramanmaraş, near the epicentre of the quake. As well as his daughter, lost under the ruins of an eight-storey block of flats, "I lost my mother, my brothers, my nephews in the quake," Hancer said. "But nothing compares to burying a child. The pain is indescribable." The image of Hancer wearing an orange jacket against the cold and rain while holding his daughter's hand emerging from the rubble, was published on many newspaper front pages and seen millions of times online.

It became a symbol of a disaster that devastated tens of thousands of lives, drawing special attention to his family. Now, Turkish businessman Necat Gulseven, own-

er of the television channel TV100, and his wife, Ebru Yasar, a well-known singer, have offered the former baker an administrative job at the TV channel and given the family an apartment in Ankara. Meanwhile a painting of Hancer's daughter Irmak as an angel alongside her father, donated by an artist, hangs in their living room. "I couldn't let go of her hand. My daughter was sleeping like an angel in her bed," he recalled.


Waiting for help

Hancer was working in his bakery when the quake hit at 4:17 am (0117 GMT). Calling home, he found his wife and three adult children were safe at home in their one-storey house, although it was damaged as the earth shook. But no one could reach Irmak, the youngest, who had stayed the night at her grandmother's house. She had planned to spend time with cousins visiting from Istanbul and Hatay. Rushing to his mother's building, Hancer found the eight-storey block collapsed into a mound of rubble. In the middle, amid the debris of everyday life, was his daughter. Waiting more than a day before any rescue team arrived, Hancer and other local people tried to find their loved ones under the ruins themselves, even trying—and failing—to shift concrete blocks by hand. Unable to recover Irmak's body, he remained sat by her side. "I held her hand, I stroked her hair, I kissed her cheeks," he recalls. Later, he saw Adem Altan taking photos of the scene. "Take pictures of my child," he said in a quiet, broken voice. — AFP




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International

Serbia, Kosovo leaders hold talks as pressure mounts for deal

Russia actively trying to derail negotiations between the two sides: EU

BRUSSELS: Brussels hosts the rival leaders of Kosovo and Serbia on Monday as the European Union turns up the pressure to reach a breakthrough deal it hopes will lead to a normalisation of ties between the foes.

Serbia has refused to recognise Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence made in 2008, with periodic bouts of unrest erupting between Belgrade and its former breakaway province. The two sides have admitted being increasingly squeezed by Western governments to hammer out an agreement after more than two decades of acrimony.

Kosovo's Prime Minister Albin Kurti and Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic were set to meet chief EU diplomat Josep Borrell at the bloc's headquarters Monday afternoon, where they will likely go over the details of a deal that could lay out the framework for a potential understanding. The latest round of talks follow months of shuttle diplomacy in the renewed thrust to resolve long-simmering tensions, nearly 25 years after the war between ethnic Albanian insurgents and Serb forces triggered a NATO bombing campaign that ended the fighting.

Last week, Kurti told Kosovo's parliament that the deal currently in the works would pave the way for the territory's entry into a number of international institutions—a long-sought goal for the government in Pristina. "I think the next meeting will show how hopeful we can be for this year," Kurti told lawmakers, saying he was "very optimistic that there can be an agreement this year."

On the other side, Serbia's President Vucic has said his government was under the gun to come to an understanding. In a televised address last month, Vucic said he had been handed an ultimatum from Western countries to normalise ties with Kosovo or face measures that would do "great damage" to his country.

"(They) said you must accept this plan, or you will face the interruption of the process of European integration, the halting and withdrawal of investments and comprehensive economic and political measures that will cause great damage to the Republic of Serbia," Vucic told viewers.

The mounting pressure comes as Western governments have reserved much of their diplomatic muscle for addressing the war in Ukraine, spurring fears that the Kremlin may use the Kosovo issue as a wedge to further divide Europe.

"Russian aggression in Ukraine has changed the dynamic. The West can't allow Russia to potentially open up a new front, and this region is volatile enough," said Aleksandar Popov, a political analyst with the Centre for Regionalism based in Serbia's Novi Sad.

On Friday, a senior EU official told journalists that Russia was actively trying to derail negotiations between the two sides. Questions remain over how both leaders would be able to sell any potential agreement to their respective populations. Kosovo remains an obsession among large swaths of the Serbian population, who regard the



PRISTINA: Kosovans walk past the newborn monument changed to "No New Broken Republic" in Pristina. Brussels hosts leaders of Kosovo and Serbia as the European Union turns up the pressure to reach a breakthrough deal it hopes will lead to a normalisation of ties between the foes. — AFP

territory as their rightful homeland that witnessed pivotal battles over the centuries and is steeped in nationalist mythology.

Kosovo is home to an estimated 120,000 Serbs,

many of whom remain largely loyal to Belgrade—especially in northern areas near the border with Serbia where there are frequent bouts of unrest, demonstrations and occasional violence. — AFP

IS fighter accused of links to 'Beatles' cell in UK court

LONDON: A convicted Islamic State member allegedly linked to the group's notorious "Beatles" kidnap-and-murder cell appeared in a UK court ahead of the planned start Monday of his terror trial. Aine Davis sat in the dock at London's Old Bailey criminal court, wearing a black skull cap and blue sweatshirt, speaking only to confirm his name.

He was named as a co-conspirator in the US trials of El Shafee Elsheikh and Alexandra Amon Kotey, two members of the infamous group of hostage takers who grew up and were radicalised in London. The group members were nicknamed the "Beatles" by their captives because of their distinctive British accents.

Active in Syria from 2012 to 2015, the group was allegedly involved in abducting more than two dozen journalists and relief workers hailing from the United States and other countries. The hostages—some of whom were released after their governments paid ransoms—were from at least 15 countries, including Denmark, France, Japan, Norway,

Spain and the United States. Davis, who is in his late 30s, denies being a member of the group. He faces two charges related to providing money for terrorist purposes and one of possessing a firearm for a purpose connected to terrorism. The proceedings in his case opened on Monday, but hours of legal arguments were expected before the trial could formally start.

Davis was arrested in Turkey in 2015 and sentenced in 2017 to seven and a half years for membership in IS. The group tortured and killed its victims, including by beheading, and released videos of the murders.

Davis was released in July last year and deported from Turkey the next month. He was re-arrested when he arrived at Britain's Luton airport. In 2014, his wife Amal El-Wahabi became the first person in Britain to be convicted of funding IS jihadists after trying to send 20,000 euros—worth \$25,000 at the time—to him in Syria.

She was jailed for over 28 months following a trial in which Davis was described as a drug dealer before he went to Syria to fight with IS. Two of the "Beatles", El Shafee Elsheikh and Alexandra Amon Kotey, have received life sentences in the United States. — AFP

Pope to visit Hungary, meet Orban in April

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis will visit Hungary in April and meet far-right Prime Minister Viktor Orban, the Vatican said Monday, with the Ukraine war and migrants expected to dominate talks. Francis, who regularly champions the rights of refugees, will sit down in Budapest with Orban, who portrays himself as the defender of a Christian Europe against migrants.

During his April 28 to 30 trip, the pope will also meet with poor people as well as youths and refugees, according to a programme released by the Vatican. It will be the 86-year-old pope's second visit to the predominantly Catholic country in two years. Francis made a one-day visit to the country in September 2021, spending just seven hours in the country to preside over a mass and meet privately with Orban. The pope then received Orban for the first time at the Vatican a few months later, in April 2022.

During the private audience, he thanked the Hungarian leader for the protection his country had offered to refugees fleeing the war in neighbouring Ukraine, the Vatican later said. Some 34,248 Ukrainians have so far been granted refugee status in Hungary. The two men have conflicting views on a range of issues. Francis is a defender of European



BUDAPEST: File photo shows Pope Francis taking a tour in an open vehicle to greet faithful before a Holy Mass at the end of an International Eucharistic Congress in Budapest, during his papal visit to Hungary. — AFP

integration and the protection of minorities, while Orban champions nationalism and a deeply conservative Catholicism. Orban has also come under fire in the past for his policies against non-European refugees, while pro-Orban media outlets in Hungary have slammed the pope's views on immigration as "cretinous" and "senile".

But Vatican watchers say Francis may be hoping that Orban, who nurtured close ties to Russian President Vladimir Putin before the war in Ukraine, could help the pope in his quest to play peace broker in the year-long conflict. Hungary has trod an ambiguous path on the war, with Orban condemning Russian aggression while refusing to criticise Russian President Vladimir Putin by

name. Francis has vowed to do "everything possible" to try to end the war, but his attempts to position the Vatican as a possible mediator appear so far to have fallen flat.

April's visit "has a strategic purpose in relation to Russia's war in Ukraine, given Hungarian PM Victor Orban's long standing relationship with the Kremlin," British religion reporter Christopher Lamb tweeted.

During his visit—the pope's 41st trip abroad since his election in 2013—he will visit children and address diplomatic corps. He will also meet with bishops, priests and pastoral works. More than half of Hungarians are Christian, and at least 37 percent of the population identifies as Catholic. — AFP

Amir congratulates citizens, residents...

Continued from Page 1

and Kuwait Municipality. Moreover, HH the Amir recalled the roles of the late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the late Amir Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah and the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in the liberation of Kuwait.

HH Sheikh Nawaf recalled Kuwait's martyrs who sacrificed their lives to defend the nation over the years. HH the Amir greeted leaders of GCC member states for their countries' participation in Kuwait's national days, both on the official and popular levels. He stressed the deep-rooted bond binding the bloc's peoples together. HH Sheikh Nawaf also thanked leaders of Arab and friendly countries for sharing Kuwait's national celebrations. HH the Amir prayed to Almighty Allah to protect Kuwait and bless it with perpetual security, safety and prosperity.

The Royal Saudi Air Force aerobatic display team "Saudi Hawks" performed aerobatic shows, while fireworks shows were held at Kuwait Towers, Winter Wonderland, The Avenues and other venues. People celebrated National and Liberation Days on Arabian Gulf Street, with the Kuwait army, interior ministry and other state departments participating in the celebrations.

Meanwhile, Kuwait has set a new Guinness World Record by unfolding the biggest flag at the Seventh Hole Cave on Salmah Plateau in Oman on Saturday. The KFlag, a voluntary work, coincided with the celebrations marking Kuwait's national days, and won a certificate from Guinness World Record arbiter Alwaleed Osman.

Head of KFlag team Fuad Qabazard said the new world record signals the team's resolve to "immortalize the name of our dear homeland and our national days". "The flag, with dimensions of 2,773 sq m, was unfolded inside the cave as a show of solidarity and brotherly relationship between the peoples of the State of Kuwait and the Sultanate of Oman," Qabazard told KUNA. "This voluntary initiative by the 16-member team took six months to complete," he added. — Agencies

continuing to examine "all available scientific evidence," spokesperson Tarik Jasarevic told AFP on Monday. "We call on China and the scientific community to undertake necessary studies" for determining the virus' origin, he added. "Until we have more evidence, all hypothesis are still on the table."

The White House maintained Sunday that American intelligence remained divided on the issue. Four US intelligence agencies believe COVID occurred through natural transmission, while two others remain undecided, the Journal reported. White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan emphasized a "variety of views" on the matter remain. "Right now, there is not a definitive answer that has emerged from the intelligence community on this question," he told CNN Sunday.

In mid-February, the WHO pledged to do everything possible "until we get the answer" on COVID's origins, denying a report suggesting the agency had abandoned its investigation. The scientific community sees it as crucial to determine the origins of the pandemic in order to better fight or even prevent the next one. — AFP

Palestinians count cost of...

Continued from Page 1

On Monday, an AFP photographer saw damaged homes blackened by fire, long lines of charred cars, burned trees and smashed windows in the town. "They burned the cars and the houses and destroyed everything," Huwara resident Diaa Odeh said. "Whenever we started to push the settlers back, the army was firing tear gas at us," added the 25-year-old.

Wajeh Odeh, a member of the town's municipality, said 30 houses were burned and damaged while more than 100 cars were torched. A Zionist military official said 300 to 400 people went to the area for "revenge" and described the violence as "actions of terror", without elaborating. "(We are) trying to de-escalate and keep the two sides apart in this very, very hard situation that we are in," the official told journalists.

Abdel Moneim Aqtash said he and his brother were standing outside a blacksmith's workshop when they were attacked by Zionist settlers. "They left the area

and then came back with the occupation (Zionist) army... The army shot my brother, not the settlers," he told AFP. The military told AFP that Aqtash "was not shot by a (Zionist) soldier".

Yoav Gallant, defense minister in Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's new right-wing coalition government, said he expected "difficult days ahead" and had ordered troops to be reinforced. "With this being said, I call on everyone to restore calm... We cannot allow a situation in which citizens take the law into their (own) hands," he said.

The Zionist military told AFP that 10 people were arrested over the violence, but a spokesperson was unable to detail how many had since been released. The search for the gunmen who fired on the two brothers was ongoing, the military official said. The West Bank is home to about 2.9 million Palestinians as well as an estimated 475,000 Zionist settlers, who live in state-approved settlements considered illegal under international law.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas' office accused the Zionist entity of "protecting terrorist acts perpetrated by settlers" in the West Bank. Hamas, the militant group which rules Gaza, called on Palestinians "to defend the city of Nablus and repel the settlers' terrorism". — AFP

US agency says COVID likely from...

Continued from Page 1

works using a network of national laboratories, including some that do advanced biological research.

The department now joins the Federal Bureau of Investigation in believing that the pandemic, which has left nearly seven million people dead, was the result of a mishap in a Chinese laboratory. Beijing again denied the claim, with a foreign ministry spokesperson telling people to "stop stirring up claims about laboratory leaks, stop smearing China, and stop politicizing the origin-tracing issue."

"A laboratory leak wasn't found to be possible by authoritative scientific conclusions drawn by joint experts from China and the (World Health Organization)," Mao Ning said at a press conference. The WHO said it had not received any information about the Energy Department's findings and was

Beaches combed for bodies after...

Continued from Page 1

fell into the water." The survivors were "in shock... some say they saw relatives fall into the water and disappear, or die".

The boat was reported to have set sail from Izmir in Turkey last week. Three suspected human traffickers were arrested and police were searching for a fourth, media reports said Monday. David Morabito, a rescue diver in Calabria, told Rai state broadcaster he had recovered the bodies of young twins from the water. "When you see the little, lifeless bodies of children, those images pierce your heart," Morabito said. "So many children dead. A tragedy," he added.

The disaster has further fueled the debate in Italy over search and rescue measures for saving migrants who run into trouble on the Central Mediterranean route, which is the world's dead-

liest. Far-right Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, elected in September, has pledged to curb migrant arrivals. She said Sunday the government was "committed to preventing (migrant boat) departures and, with them, this type of tragedy", while her interior minister Matteo Paintedosi simply said "they must not set sail".

Their reactions were "a sad buck-passing, yet another slap in the face of the victims and survivors of this tragedy", MSF Italy's programs director Marco Bertotto said Monday. "Sea rescue must not be confused with illegal immigration. We need patrolling on the high seas and coordination," he told journalists. Meloni's government pushed through a controversial law last week that forces migrant aid charities to perform only one life-saving rescue mission at a time before heading directly to ports, which are often far away.

Critics say the measure violates international law and will result in more people drowning. According to the interior ministry, nearly 14,000 migrants have arrived in Italy by sea so far this year, up from 5,200 over the same period last year. — AFP

International

Tense wait as Nigeria slowly counts election results

Nigerians hope for a new leader to tackle insecurity, economic malaise, widening poverty

LAGOS: Nigeria slowly counted more results on Monday after a tight election for the presidency of Africa's most populous nation as delays and accusations of manipulation fuelled tensions. Nearly 90 million were eligible to vote on Saturday for a successor to President Muhammadu Buhari, with many hoping for a new leader to tackle insecurity, economic malaise and widening poverty. Voting on Saturday was mostly peaceful, but thugs ransacked some polling stations and many others opened very late in Lagos and other cities. Many voters stayed overnight to watch over the initial count at polling stations.

The election pits former Lagos governor Bola Tinubu, 70, of the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) against former vice president 76-year-old Atiku Abubakar, of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). But for the first time since the end of military rule in 1999, a surprise third-party candidate, Labour Party's Peter Obi, has challenged APC and PDP dominance with an appeal to younger voters.

Announcing first results state by state, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) on Sunday said APC's Tinubu won small, southwestern Ekiti state with PDP coming second. INEC was due to announce more state by state results on Monday at 1000 GMT, but final tallies for the presidential race could take days.

Votes are tallied by hand at local polling stations and results are uploaded online to INEC's central database IReV, which is meant to improve transparency. But slow uploading of results to INEC's website has fueled worries of malpractice in a country with a history of ballot rigging and vote buying.

By Monday morning, results from around 52,000 centres had been submitted to the platform from around 176,000 polling centres nationwide—around 30 percent. PDP on Monday accused the ruling APC governors of pressuring INEC over results in southeast and in parts



ABUJA: Head of The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Observation Mission and former Sierra Leone president Ernest Bai Koroma addresses a press conference in Abuja, Nigeria. — AFP

of Lagos, a highly contested state with the most registered voters at more than seven million. "APC is doing all in its means to cheat in Lagos," PDP spokesman Dele Momodu told reporters.

Malpractice fears

The early result in one state for APC's Tinubu was very preliminary in a country almost equally divided between a mostly Muslim north and a predominantly Christian south and with three main ethnic groups in different regions. Voting is usually determined by large key states such as Lagos and northwestern Kano and Kaduna. To win the presidency, a candidate must get the most votes, but also win at least 25 percent of votes cast in two-thirds of Nigeria's 36

states to reflect broad representation. Nigeria's police force on Monday urged presidential candidates to "caution their party stalwarts and supporters to avoid making inciting comments."

When he was defeated by Buhari in the 2019 election, PDP's Abubakar claimed massive fraud, but the Supreme Court eventually rejected his challenge. Labour Party chairman Julius Abure also accused election officials of failing to upload results from parts of Lagos and southern Delta State to benefit APC's candidate. APC has said rival parties are just trying to undermine confidence in INEC. But INEC said problems with uploading results on its IReV data page were due to "technical hitches" and there was no risk of tampering. "The commission wishes to assure Nigerians that the challenges are not due to any intrusion or sabotage of our systems," it said.

Competitive race

The vote in Africa's biggest democracy is being closely watched elsewhere in a region battered by coups in Guinea, Burkina Faso and Mali and growing Islamist militancy. Tinubu and Abubakar are old guard figures who have fought off past corruption accusations, but the emergence of Obi—a Christian ethnic Igbo from the southeast—threw the race open. The race has some analysts forecasting a runoff between the two frontrunners if no candidate meets election requirements—a first in Nigeria's history. It would have to be organised within 21 days. Buhari, a former army general first elected in 2015, will step down after two terms in office. His critics say he failed in his key promises to make Nigeria safer.

Whoever wins the election must quickly get to grips with Africa's largest economy and top oil producer, beset by problems from a grinding jihadist war in the northeast to double-digit inflation. — AFP

SpaceX crew launch to ISS postponed

CAPE CANAVERAL: A rocket launch to the International Space Station was postponed minutes before take-off on Monday, with officials citing a problem with ground systems. The SpaceX Dragon Crew-6 mission was scheduled to depart the Kennedy Space Center in Florida at 1:45 am (0645 GMT), carrying two NASA astronauts, a Russian cosmonaut and the second Emirati to voyage to space. But just two minutes before lift-off, the launch was called off, or "scrubbed".

"Today's #Crew6 launch has been scrubbed due to an issue with ground systems," NASA posted on Twitter. SpaceX unloaded fuel from its Falcon 9 rocket and the crew disembarked, NASA added in a statement. "The next available launch attempt is at 12:34 a.m. EST Thursday, March 2, pending resolution of the technical issue preventing Monday's launch," it said. "I'm proud of the NASA and SpaceX teams' focus and dedication to keeping Crew-6 safe," NASA Administrator Bill Nelson said in the statement. "Human spaceflight is an inherently risky endeavor and, as always, we will fly when we are ready."

Once they are successfully sent into space, NASA's Stephen Bowen and Warren Hoburg, Russia's Andrey Fedyayev and Sultan Al-Neyadi of the United Arab Emirates are to spend six months on the orbiting station. Neyadi, 41, will be the fourth astronaut from an Arab country and the second from the oil-rich UAE to journey to space; his compatriot Hazzaa Al-Mansoori flew an eight-day mission in 2019. Neyadi described the upcoming mission as a "great honor".

Hoburg, the Endeavour pilot, and Fedyayev, the Russian mission specialist, will also be making their first space flights. Fedyayev is the second Russian cosmonaut to fly to the ISS aboard a SpaceX rocket. NASA astronauts fly regularly to the station on Russian Soyuz craft. Space has remained a rare venue of cooperation between Moscow and Washington since the Russian offensive in Ukraine placed the two in sharp opposition.

Bowen, a veteran of three space shuttle missions, said politics rarely come up while in space. "We're all professionals. We keep focused on the mission itself," the commander said. "It's always been a great relationship we've had with cosmonauts once we get to space." While aboard the ISS, the Crew-6 members will conduct dozens of experiments including studying how materials burn in microgravity and researching heart, brain and cartilage functions.

The current crew is the sixth to be transported by a SpaceX rocket to the ISS. The Endeavour capsule has flown into space three times. NASA pays SpaceX to ferry astronauts to the ISS roughly every six months. The space agency expects Crew-6 to have a handover of several days with the four members of Crew-5, who have been on the ISS since October. Crew-5 will then return to Earth.

Rescue capsule

Also aboard the ISS are cosmonauts Dmitry Petelin and Sergei Prokopyev, as well as NASA astronaut Frank Rubio. They had been scheduled to return home on March 28 but the cooling system of their Soyuz MS-22 capsule was damaged by a tiny meteoroid in December while docked with the ISS. An uncrewed Russian Soyuz capsule, MS-23, took off on Friday from Kazakhstan to bring the three astronauts home. They are now scheduled to return to Earth in September.

Construction of the ISS began in 1998 at a time of increased US-Russia cooperation following the Cold War space race. Russia has been using the aging but reliable Soyuz capsules to ferry astronauts into space since the 1960s. But in recent years, Russia's space program has been beset by a litany of problems that have led to the loss of satellites and vehicles. — AFP



NEW DELHI: Members of Aam Aadmi Party stage a protest against the arrest of Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia (not pictured) in New Delhi on February 27, 2023. — AFP

Indian opposition official arrested in graft probe

NEW DELHI: Indian federal investigators on Sunday arrested the Delhi capital territory's second highest-ranking official over corruption allegations, prompting claims of political interference from his up-and-coming opposition party. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) is seeking to establish itself as the main opposition to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and has already won control of Punjab state and the capital region Delhi.

Manish Sisodia, Delhi's deputy chief minister and seen as party leader Arvind Kejriwal's right hand man, was arrested by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) after almost eight hours of questioning.

In a statement, the CBI said Sisodia was arrested in connection with an investigation into Delhi's liquor

regulations. "He gave evasive replies and did not cooperate (with the investigation despite being confronted with evidence to the contrary)," they said. "Therefore, he has been arrested."

The arrest comes months after the Enforcement Directorate, India's federal financial crime agency, raided several liquor agencies over alleged irregularities in the Delhi government's now-withdrawn excise policy. The AAP, which has been anticipating Sisodia's arrest, said the move was due to "political rivalry" and that it was a "fake case".

"Black day for democracy," the party's Delhi office tweeted after the arrest. The Aam Aadmi Party, formed around a decade ago, is looking to displace the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty's Congress-whose electoral support has been declining for decades—as the main opposition to the dominant BJP. Kejriwal, also Delhi's chief minister, said his deputy was innocent and the arrest was "dirty politics." "There is a lot of anger among people because of Manish's arrest. People are watching everything. People will respond to this," Kejriwal tweeted. "This will boost our spirit. Our struggle will get stronger." — AFP



HONG KONG: People watch a screen on a train showing news about Hong Kong model and influencer Abby Choi on February 27, 2023 in Hong Kong. Choi's partial remains were found by the police at a house on February 24. — AFP

Ex-husband, in-laws charged with murder of Hong Kong model

HONG KONG: The ex-husband and two former in-laws of a Hong Kong model were charged on Monday with her murder, after police revealed they had found more body parts during a weekend search. Abby Choi, who had appeared in fashion magazines and attracted more than 100,000 followers on Instagram, was reported missing on Tuesday, the prosecutor told the court.

On Saturday, police said that partial remains had been discovered in the fridge and soup pots of a seaside house. After a later examination of materials seized at the property, police uncovered what they believe to be Choi's skull, hair and several ribs.

The 28-year-old's ex-husband Alex Kwong, as well as his father Kwong Kau and brother Anthony Kwong, were charged with murder on Monday and face up to life in prison. Choi's former mother-in-law, Jenny Li, was charged with perverting the

News in brief

Japan to buy Tomahawk missiles

TOKYO: Japan will purchase 400 Tomahawk missiles from the United States, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said Monday, as his government beefs up the country's defences with eyes on threats including China. "Our country's plan is (to acquire) 400 units" of the cruise missile, Kishida told the lower house budget committee without elaborating, citing the military sensitivity of the purchase. Earlier this month, the defence minister said Japan has set aside 211.3 billion yen (\$1.5 billion) to buy the missiles in the coming fiscal year, rather than dividing the procurement over several years. Kishida's government wants to dramatically expand Japan's defence capacity in the face of China's growing military clout and nuclear-armed North Korea's unpredictable missile tests. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has also stoked fears that China may move to take over Taiwan, a self-governed democracy claimed by Beijing. — AFP

Turkish drone kills 3 PKK

ARBIL: A Turkish drone attack Monday in northern Iraq killed at least three fighters from the minority Yazidi community affiliated with the rebel Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), Iraqi Kurdish officials said. "A drone from the Turkish army targeted a vehicle" in the region, killing an officer and two combatants from the Yazidi Sinjar Resistance Units, a statement from the Kurdistan region's anti-terrorist squad said. The three fighters were heading towards Sinjar, a stronghold of the Yazidis, at the time of the attack. Turkey has dozens of military facilities in northern Iraq for use in its war against the PKK, and it has repeatedly carried out strikes targeting the group in northern Iraq, where it has bases, and its allies. — AFP

Two dead in drone attack

KYIV: A Russian attack with Iran-made drones early Monday left two people dead and three more wounded in the western Ukraine city of Khmelnytskyi, the mayor said. Mayor Oleksandr Symchyshyn said in separate messages on social media that two rescue workers had died in hospital following the attack with more than a dozen unmanned aerial vehicles. "Unfortunately, we have another hospital death. Doctors failed to save the life of another hero — a rescuer," he said in the second statement after earlier reporting the first death. The victims were 21-year-old Vladyslav Dvorak and 31-year-old Sergiy Sevruck, Ukrainian Interior Minister Igor Klymenko said on Facebook. — AFP

Reporter marks year in jail

MADRID: A Spanish journalist is set to mark a year behind bars in Poland Tuesday after being arrested and charged with spying for Russia, although Polish prosecutors have provided no evidence for the claim, according to his lawyers. Freelance journalist Pablo Gonzalez, who was working for Spanish online news site Publico and La Sexta television, was arrested by the Polish intelligence services near the border with Ukraine on February 28, 2022. His arrest came just four days after Russia sent troops into Ukraine. Despite a year behind bars, no trial date has been set and his lawyers remain in the dark about the charges against this 40-year-old journalist who was born in Moscow but moved to Spain when he was nine. "The charges against the suspect concern spying for the benefit of the Russian Federation's secret services," Lukasz Lapczynski, spokesman for the prosecutor's office, told AFP. If convicted, Gonzalez faces a maximum 10-year jail sentence. His Spanish lawyer Gonzalo Boye said prosecutors had not provided evidence to corroborate their allegations. "If they had something concrete, they would have sent us the whole lawsuit so we could put up a defence," he told AFP. "When they keep asserting things that we don't have access to and keep extending his detention, we can deduce they're going round in circles." — AFP

course of justice by destroying evidence. The property where police found bodily remains was equipped with an electric saw and a meat grinder that had been used to mince human flesh, according to superintendent Alan Chung. A forensic examination found a hole at the back of the skull that could be evidence of a fatal attack.

"We believe the victim had been attacked when she was in the vehicle (that took her to the house) and that she was already unconscious when she arrived," Chung told reporters on Sunday night. According to police, Choi had financial disputes with her ex-husband and his family involving a luxury property.

The mother of two had divorced Kwong and remarried Chris Tam, the scion of a wealthy Hong Kong family. Kwong, 28, was arrested on Saturday at a Hong Kong pier after what police described as a failed attempt to flee by speedboat. A fifth suspect connected to Choi's former father-in-law was arrested on Sunday on suspicion of "assisting criminals". Chung said all suspects in the case had been arrested and the force would continue to search for missing body parts. Judge Peony Wong denied bail for the accused on Monday and adjourned the case until May, pending further investigations. — AFP

Business

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2023

Phone firms promise 'tsunami of innovation' at Barcelona meeting

Some 80,000 delegates expected at four-day Mobile World Congress

BARCELONA: The big beasts of the telecom industry kicked off their most important annual get-together in Barcelona on Monday, promising to lead a "tsunami of innovation", as they try to shrug off a major slump across the technology sector. Some 80,000 delegates are expected at the four-day Mobile World Congress (MWC), which is back to near full strength following years of pandemic-related disruption.

Industrial titans like Huawei, Nokia and Samsung are set to showcase their latest innovations, flanked by smartphone makers like Oppo and Xiaomi and network operators like Orange, Verizon and China Mobile. "We are at the doors of a new change of era driven by the intersection of Telco, Computing, Artificial Intelligence and Web3," said Jose Maria Alvarez-Pallete, boss of Spanish operator Telefonica and current chairman of industry body GSMA, which organises the Barcelona event.

He promised the telecoms industry would be at the forefront of the "tsunami of innovation", adding: "Without telcos there is no digital future."

But many of the firms are more concerned with finding a path back to profit as the global economy stutters and the wider tech sector slashes thousands of jobs. In the first clear sign that the ills of the wider tech sector are reaching telecoms, equipment maker Ericsson announced 8,500 layoffs last week. Overall sales of smartphones last year slumped by 11.3 percent compared with 2021, according to the IDC consultancy.

Research firm Gartner reckons sales of smart-

phones, tablets and computers will fall again by four percent this year. And network operators are still struggling to make 5G pay, years after they spent billions in government auctions for the right to use the bandwidth.

'Unsustainable situation'

A hugely popular idea for many at the show is to get the owners of bandwidth-hungry platforms like YouTube, Netflix and Facebook to pay network operators a "fair share". Christel Heydemann, boss of French operator Orange, said the five largest users—which she did not name—account for 55 percent of daily traffic on European networks, costing telecoms firms 15 billion euros (\$16 billion) a year.

She said it was an "unsustainable situation" and welcomed a public consultation launched by EU commissioner Thierry Breton last week. But Breton told the MWC on Monday that it was not a "binary choice" or a battle between telecoms and big tech.

He said the idea was for everyone to make sure Europe had the best possible network by 2030 and warned that telecoms firms "will have to adapt to survive". Critics of the "fair share" narrative point out that customers already pay the operators for use of their networks.

Netflix boss Greg Peters, who is unlikely to be enthusiastic about the fair share proposal, is expected at the MWC on Tuesday.

Huawei centre-stage

The organizers are trumpeting the return of

crude and the UAE's key revenue-earner.

According to Bloomberg, only \$1.67 billion has been raised in IPOs in Europe, the Middle East and Africa so far this year. The state energy company raised the size of offering from the previous 4 percent and will now sell more than 3.8 billion shares, up from about 3 billion earlier, Adnoc said on Monday.

The first tranche of the share offering has been raised to 12 percent, representing more than 460.5 million common shares, while the third tranche has been increased to more than 153.5 million shares, about 4 percent of the total offering. Qualified investors have access to more than 3.2 billion shares, which make up 84 percent of the offering.

"We are delighted to announce that we will be increasing the offer size for the IPO of Adnoc Gas, which is set to be the largest-ever market debut on the ADX to date, and also marks the next remarkable milestone for Adnoc and our ongoing value-creation journey," said Khaled Al-Zaabi, Adnoc's chief financial officer.

"We have witnessed substantial investor demand across all tranches, reflecting Adnoc Gas' status as a key component of Abu Dhabi and the UAE's energy ecosystem." The listing of the gas processing and marketing unit is the UAE's biggest IPO this year and the company expects to start trading on the ADX on March 13. Adnoc Gas has access to 95 percent of the UAE's natural gas reserves, estimated to be the seventh largest globally. The company also supplies more than 60 percent of the UAE's gas needs.

It will operate eight gas processing sites and a pipeline network of more than 3,250km. Adnoc Gas plans to pay \$3.25 billion in dividends in 2023, split in two payments. It intends to increase the annual divi-



BARCELONA: King Felipe VI of Spain (center) poses with attendees at the opening of the Mobile World Congress (MWC), the telecom industry's biggest annual gathering, in Barcelona on February 27, 2023. —AFP

Chinese delegates as a vital boon to the event. Chinese firms heavily sponsor the MWC and Huawei is once again getting pride of place, this time hosting the biggest dedicated pavilion in the event's decades-long history. The Chinese tech giant was the second biggest smartphone maker in the world in 2020 but retreated after US regulators accused it of being controlled by Beijing. The firm is now under pressure in Europe, where Breton and

other commissioners are pushing for its equipment to be removed from 5G network infrastructure.

Huawei boss Eric Xu said before the event he would use the MWC to display products that would "help carriers meet evolving demand and unleash more opportunities for new growth". In total, GSMA said the four-day show would host almost 750 operators and manufacturers and 2,000 exhibitors. —AFP

Adnoc Gas expands IPO, seeking up to \$2.5bn windfall

ABU DHABI: The UAE's Adnoc Gas raised the number of shares in its initial public offering by 25 percent on Monday as it seeks to raise \$2.5 billion in what is expected to be the biggest flotation so far this year. Adnoc Gas, an offshoot of the United Arab Emirates' Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC), a major crude producer, expanded the offering from 4.0 to 5.0 percent or 3.84 billion shares.

A price range of 2.25-2.43 dirhams (\$0.61-0.66) was announced last week, valuing the newly formed company at \$47-50.8 billion. The final offer price is due to be announced on Friday, before the shares launch on the Abu Dhabi stock exchange on March 13. The offering was increased "based on significant investor demand across all tranches", said a statement carried by the official WAM News Agency.

The initial three billion shares were sold within an hour when they were made available last Thursday, a source close to the company told AFP. Adnoc Gas, formed from Adnoc's former gas processing, LNG and industrial gas units, only became operational on January 1.

Its rapid flotation follows increased activity in the gas market following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which sent European countries scrambling to find alternative suppliers. Adnoc Gas's parent company, Adnoc, is one of the world's biggest producers of



Adnoc's headquarters in Abu Dhabi

dend amount by 5 percent from 2024 to 2027.

The deal is the latest in a string of IPOs from the Gulf region, where economies have benefitted from higher oil and gas prices. Brent crude, the benchmark for two thirds of the world's oil, surged to a 20-year high of \$140 a barrel after Russia's invasion of Ukraine last year. Middle East IPOs raised more than \$23 billion in 2022 from 48 listings, compared with \$7.52 billion raised from 20 offerings in the previous year. That was the highest share for the Gulf region after 2019, when Saudi Aramco went public in a \$29 billion offering, the world's largest. The UAE had 12 listings that raised \$11 billion last year, apart from the joint Abu Dhabi-Riyadh listing of Mena food franchisee Americana, which reaped \$1.8 billion in late 2022. — Agencies

UK, EU eye deal over post-Brexit trade in N Ireland

LONDON: Britain and the European Union were on Monday poised to agree a crucial overhaul of trade rules in Northern Ireland, in a breakthrough aimed at resetting strained relations since Brexit.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen were set to hold "final talks" at lunchtime in the UK, in a bid to end more than a year of negotiations over the so-called Northern Ireland protocol. Agreed in 2020 as part of Britain's divorce from the EU, the contentious pact kept the province in the European single market and subject to different trade rules than the rest of the UK.

However, staunch opposition to the protocol from the pro-British unionist community in Northern Ireland, who argue it threatens the province's place within the UK, has led to the collapse of devolved power-sharing there. That prompted the UK government to threaten a unilateral overhaul of the protocol unless the EU agreed to wholesale changes, souring diplomatic relations and risking a wider trade war. Talks between London and Brussels aimed at resolving the problems with the protocol dragged on through last year—and two changes of prime minister in the UK.

Now, after months of what Downing Street called "intensive negotiations" since Sunak took power in October, a deal appears within sight. "Positive, constructive progress has been made," his office said in a statement late Sunday. "The prime minister wants to ensure that any deal fixes the practical problems on the ground, ensures trade flows freely within the whole of the UK, safeguards Northern Ireland's place in our Union and returns sovereignty to the people of Northern Ireland."

DUP 'influential'

After Monday's talks, a British cabinet meeting will take place in the afternoon, when ministers will get an update. If a final deal is agreed as expected, Sunak and von der Leyen will hold a short joint press conference in Windsor, west of London, famous for its royal palace.

Sunak is then due to deliver a statement to parliament on the agreement. The UK leader must convince eurosceptic Conservatives, including his potentially rebellious predecessor Boris Johnson, that the deal secures enough concessions from Brussels. He will also hope to win the backing of Northern Ireland's Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), the largest pro-UK unionist party, which has said it will keep blocking the functioning of the assembly there until the protocol is scrapped.

Former cabinet minister and Johnson loyalist Jacob Rees-Mogg hinted at the peril Sunak faces over the deal when asked about it Monday, noting the DUP's verdict would be "very influential" among Tory lawmakers. "I'm not sure he has achieved the objective of getting the DUP back into power-sharing, which is the fundamental point of it," he told broadcaster ITV. Disagreements about the protocol have dogged relations between Britain and the EU since Brexit rules came into effect in 2021 and are seen as hindering broader post-Brexit cooperation. —AFP

War-weary Yemenis fell trees for fuel, cash

TAEZ, Yemen: The sound of an electric saw rips through a lush mountain landscape in southern Yemen, where years of conflict and soaring prices have left people desperate for fuel and income. "We started cutting trees and selling them because we have no other way of making a living," said Hussein Abdulqawi from a thinning forest on the outskirts of Taz.

He and other workers lugged freshly cut wood into the back of a van near the city, which is besieged by rebels but still under government control. A more than eight-year-long war between Saudi-backed government forces and pro-Iran Houthi rebels has devastated Yemen, the poorest country on the Arabian Peninsula. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine a year ago, rises in global food and fuel prices have piled on further suffering.

Abdulqawi acknowledged he was contributing to an environmental "catastrophe" but said he lacked options in a nation where many cannot afford fuel for heating and cooking. "We have no choice" but to sell the wood, just as people "have no choice but to buy" it, he said.

Houthi rebels seized the capital Sanaa in 2014, prompting a Saudi-led coalition to intervene the following year to prop up the internationally recognized government. Since then, the war has caused hundreds of thousands of deaths both directly and indirectly, and pushed the nation to the brink of famine. An estimated 21.6 million people—two-thirds of Yemen's population—will require humanitarian assistance and protection services in 2023, according to the United Nations.



TAEZ, Yemen: A man cuts tree branches with a chainsaw to make firewood, on the outskirts of Taz. —AFP

'Anarchic'

At a Taz bakery, tree trunks and branches are cut into pieces and piled into bread ovens. The wood crackles as it catches fire while employees shovel out loaves at a frantic pace. Standing in front of the oven, bakery owner Abdelsalam Dabwan complained of an "incredible increase" in gas costs.

He said he used wood as a cheaper alternative and to avoid compounding his people's "suffering" by putting up bread prices. "We use wood to give people what they need," the baker told AFP, urging authorities to intervene to stem inflation. Fuel costs in government-held parts of Yemen peaked early last year in the immediate aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

They then spiked again mid-year before steadily declining, but still remain high.

Environmental expert Anwar Al-Shazli said more than six million trees had been felled since the start of Yemen's war, including around the capital Sanaa, where the wood is often used in restaurants and bakeries. Especially in Taz, trees are cut "at ground level, which affects groundwater, agricultural systems and biodiversity while contributing to soil erosion", he added. Shazli called on authorities to prevent "anarchic" felling and to train amateur loggers on how to avoid serious damage to the environment. "A natural disaster will befall the country" if no steps are taken, he warned. —AFP

Business

India's PM calls for World Bank reform at G20 finance meet

US nominates Indian-American Ajay Banga as World Bank chief

BENGALURU: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi added his voice Friday to calls for reform of global lenders such as the World Bank, as G20 finance ministers and central bank heads met. The talks in Bengaluru focused on the continuing damaging effects of the COVID pandemic and the Ukraine war, as well as debt relief for poorer nations reeling from high food and fuel prices. "Trust in international financial institutions has eroded. This is partly because they have been slow to reform themselves," Modi said by video link as the two-day gathering began.



Ajay Banga

"We need to collectively work to strengthen multi-lateral development banks for meeting global challenges like climate change and high debt levels." The remarks echoed calls by others for the World Bank to boost lending and widen its remit beyond tackling poverty, although this has raised concerns that it could lose its top-notch credit rating.

US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said on Thursday in Bengaluru it was "critical that they inte-

grate work on global challenges into their core mission to sustain progress on these priorities". World Bank chief David Malpass this month said he was stepping down in June, a year early. He had drawn fire for refusing multiple times to say if he believed man-made emissions contributed to global warming.

On Thursday, Washington nominated Indian-American former Mastercard CEO Ajay Banga as his successor, drawing criticism over his corporate background and gender. "We don't need another World Bank president who will further corporate interests like fossil fuel and industrial agriculture," Friends of the Earth said. German Finance Minister Christian Lindner, however, welcomed the proposal, saying Banga's background "suggests he can help cooperation between developed industrial nations and developing nations". His French counterpart Bruno Le Maire called Banga "a very good candidate".

Discord

It was unclear if delegates in Bengaluru would manage to agree on a joint statement, in particular because of differences over the Ukraine war, as has happened at similar gatherings in the past. Lindner and Le Maire said Germany and France wanted no weakening of the language used in a leaders' declaration in Indonesia in November that said "most members strongly condemned the war".

"For a year we have been witnesses of this awful war in Ukraine started by Russia. And especially on a day like this, and at an occasion such as a G20 event, we need absolute clarity," Lindner said. Hosting a raft of Group of 20 meetings during its presidency this year puts India in an awkward position, as it has refused to condemn the invasion of Ukraine by its biggest arms supplier Russia.

The International Monetary Fund said ahead of the



BENGALURU, India: India's Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman (center) addressing a press conference along with the Governor of Reserve Bank of India, Shaktikanta Das (right) and Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance Ajay Seth (left) after the G20 Finance meetings in Bengaluru on February 25, 2023.— AFP

meeting that around 15 percent of low-income countries were in debt distress and an additional 45 percent were at high risk. Lindner echoed calls by Yellen that China needed to "take responsibility" in restructuring poor nations' debts, and that development banks should not have to take a "haircut" on their loans as demanded by Beijing.

The IMF said it was convening in Bengaluru a new Global Sovereign Debt Roundtable to "pave the way for creditors, both public and private, and debtor countries to work together".

The G20's Common Framework for Debt Treatments has so far had limited success, largely on account of disagreements between China and other large creditor countries. Discussions around green industry financing will be in focus after the European Commission laid out its Green Deal Industrial Plan this month—a move seen as countering the US Inflation Reduction Act. Global tax reform could emerge as another point of conflict as plans for a global digital tax remain stalled in the absence of consensus between European nations and the United States.— AFP



BEIJING: A man walks past the entrance to the headquarters of China Renaissance, in Beijing on February 27, 2023.— AFP

China tycoon Bao Fan 'cooperating with investigation'

CHINA: Chinese billionaire Bao Fan is "cooperating in an investigation" by authorities, his company said, almost two weeks after his disappearance sparked fears of a renewed crackdown on the nation's financial services industry. The China Renaissance chairman rose to fame as a key player in the emergence of some of the country's biggest tech giants, supervising blockbuster IPOs and the landmark 2015 merger between ride-hailing giant Didi and its top competitor at the time, Kuaidi Dache.

His Hong Kong-listed firm said in a filing dated Sunday that it was now "aware that Mr Bao is currently cooperating in an investigation being carried out by certain authorities" in mainland China.

"The Company will duly cooperate and assist with any lawful request from the relevant PRC authorities, if and when made," it added, referring to the country by its official name, the People's Republic of China. The firm did not provide details about the nature of the investigation, and told AFP on Monday it had no additional comment. Shares in the company slumped as much as 50 percent at one point following the February 16 announcement that he was missing, before clawing back to sit at around 30 percent down.

While yet to recover from that drop, the firm was up 2.1 percent in afternoon trading on Monday. Chinese authorities have not given any details on Bao's detention or the reasons for the investigation.

According to financial news outlet Caixin, China Renaissance president Cong Lin was taken into custody last September as authorities launched a probe into his work at the financial leasing unit of state-

owned bank ICBC. No further details have been shared about his case.

Powerhouse

China Renaissance has become a global financial institution since its founding in 2005, with more than 700 employees and offices in Beijing, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Singapore and New York. The group has supervised the IPOs of several domestic tech giants, including leading e-commerce firm JD.com.

In 2015, Bao appeared on the Bloomberg Markets 50 Most Influential list, described as a "fast-talking" banker who had the ability to "arrange practically anything in China's vibrant tech scene".

The Shanghai-born son of government workers, Bao, 52, has enjoyed a globetrotting career that has seen him work for financial giants such as Morgan Stanley and Credit Suisse, including stints in the United States and Britain. A 2014 profile in The New York Times described him as a congenial man with a penchant for open-necked shirts and an interest in mixed martial arts.

Bao is not the first high-profile Chinese financier to fall foul of the authorities in recent years, with President Xi Jinping leading an aggressive crackdown on alleged corruption. In 2017, Chinese-Canadian businessman Xiao Jianhua was arrested by mainland authorities, receiving a 13-year jail sentence for corruption last August. Known to have close ties to top Chinese Communist Party leaders, the billionaire was reportedly abducted from his Hong Kong hotel room by plainclothes police officers from Beijing.

Alibaba founder Jack Ma has also seen his fortune fall by around half to an estimated \$25 billion after regulators pulled the plug on what would have been the world's biggest-ever IPO—that of fintech giant Ant Group. A reshuffle of Ant's shareholding structure announced in January saw Ma, who has since receded from public view, cede control of the megafirm he founded in 2014.—AFP

demand, supply chain and logistics disruptions due to impact of changes in COVID-19 measures," chairman and CEO Daniel Zhang said.

"Looking ahead, we expect continued recovery in consumer sentiment and economic activity," he added. China maintained a strict zero-COVID policy until late last year, sticking fast to a strategy of snap lockdowns and lengthy quarantines even as they roiled global supply chains and smothered demand. Beijing abruptly changed tack in December, lifting years-long curbs in a matter of days.

"During the past quarter, we continued to improve operating efficiency and cost optimization that resulted in robust profit growth," said Alibaba's chief financial officer, Toby Xu.

Hunger blights the lives of Sudan's children

KALMA, Sudan: In Sudan's sprawling Kalma camp for the displaced, Ansaf Omar lives with the gut-wrenching guilt of losing her toddler to a food crisis that has hit millions of people nationwide. "I am severely malnourished so I couldn't breastfeed him," said Omar, 34, a month after her one-and-a-half-year-old child died in Kalma camp just outside Nyala, the provincial capital of South Darfur state.

"I took him everywhere—hospitals, treatment centres, but he died in the end," she said. Desperate mothers like Omar battle daily around Kalma to feed their frail and hungry children, many of whom are severely malnourished. Sudan is one of the world's poorest countries, with one-third of the population—at least 15 million people—facing a growing hunger crisis, according to United Nations figures. Nearly three million of Sudan's children under the age of five are acutely malnourished, the UN says.

"Over 100,000 children in Sudan are at risk of dying of malnutrition if left untreated," said Leni Kinzli, head of communications in the country for the World Food Programme (WFP). Nationwide, one-third of children under five are "too short for their age", and nearly half of Sudan's 189 localities have a "stunting prevalence more significant than 40 percent", according to the Alight aid group.

It said that at least 63 children were reported to have died from causes related to malnutrition at Alight facilities in and around Kalma in 2022. Sudan grappled with chronic hardships under the regime of Omar Al-Bashir, who was ousted in 2019. His three-decade rule was marked by internal conflicts, government mismanagement and punishing international sanctions.



KALMA, Sudan: Women and children sit waiting at a nutrition centre at the Kalma camp for the displaced just outside Nyala, the provincial capital of South Darfur state.— AFP

"Our net cash position remains strong and we continue to generate healthy cash flow," he said.

Tech troubles

China's technology industry has been hit in recent years by a sweeping crackdown, with authorities pulling Alibaba finance affiliate Ant Group's planned 2020 IPO in Hong Kong at the last minute. The government also later fined Alibaba a record \$2.75 billion for alleged unfair practices. Alibaba's billionaire founder Jack Ma retreated from public view after a public speech in 2020 accusing financial regulators of stifling growth. He said in January he would cede control of Ant, which operates Alipay, the world's largest digital payments platform. Alibaba's earnings data

showed a three percent increase in revenue year-on-year for the quarter ending September 2022.

The company did not release full sales figures for its annual Singles Day shopping bonanza, for the first time ever. The company in December said its business had tackled a "deteriorating macroeconomic backdrop, wild swings in financial markets and fluctuating geopolitical tensions" over the past year. Combined revenue at China's internet companies shrank by just over one percent to 1.46 trillion yuan in 2022, the first contraction in almost a decade, according to data from the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology. But the crackdown appears to be easing as the country scrambles to boost economic growth battered by three years of zero-COVID restrictions.—AFP

Bouts of violence

The restive Darfur region was the scene of a bitter civil war that broke out in 2003, pitting ethnic African minority rebels against Bashir's Arab-dominated government in Khartoum. Economic troubles deepened following the COVID-19 pandemic and a 2021 military coup which derailed a post-Bashir transition and triggered cuts to crucial international aid. Some 65 percent of Sudan's people live under the poverty line, according to a 2020 UN report. Food insecurity is not new to the residents of Kalma, Darfur's largest camp and home to some 120,000 people displaced since the 2003 conflict erupted in the country's arid western region. But residents say conditions have worsened as economic hardships kept rising and sporadic bouts of deadly violence continued.

Alight's nutrition centers in Kalma saw a "dramatic increase on admissions to and demand on its emergency nutrition services" in 2022, according to the group's country director, Heidi Diedrich.

"Kalma stabilization centre newly admitted 863 children in 2022, an increase of 71 percent from 2021," according to Alight. "The number of deaths at the stabilization centre increased by 231 percent in 2022, all children aged six months and above." Outside one nutrition centre in Kalma, 38-year-old Hawa Suleiman cradled her sleeping infant, hoping to find food for the child. "We have nothing at home. We sometimes go to sleep hungry," she said.

In recent years the WFP has halved food rations for internally displaced people in Kalma "due to funding constraints", said Kinzli. The lack of funding—in part due to global economic decline following COVID-19 and the Ukraine crisis—coupled with rising humanitarian needs puts the WFP in "an impossible situation where we have to choose who receives support and who does not—it's heartbreaking". The UN has reported a 35 percent deficiency in the production of sorghum—a staple food in Sudan—during the 2021-2022 harvest season. Nouralsham Ibrahim, 30, says she could no longer rely on aid to feed her five children.—AFP

Alibaba quarterly revenue rises 2%

BEIJING: China's Alibaba Group said Thursday its revenue rose two percent year-on-year in the quarter ending December 2022, as the internet giant shook off the impact of strict COVID containment measures and a slump in consumer demand. The company recorded revenue of 248 billion yuan (\$36 billion) for the three months through December, according to a quarterly earnings report.

"We delivered a solid quarter despite softer

Business

Fed's preferred inflation gauge, home sales rise, fueling concern

History says Fed can't tame inflation without recession

WASHINGTON: A key indicator of US inflation rose in January as new home sales jumped more than expected, said government data released Friday, feeding fears that interest rates could stay high for longer. The numbers, indicating that the world's biggest economy is running hotter than policymakers hope, came despite aggressive efforts by the Federal Reserve to raise the benchmark lending rate and rein in inflation.

While sectors like housing slumped recently, some areas of inflation remain sticky, potentially pointing to more rate hikes in the pipeline. The Fed's preferred gauge of inflation, the personal consumption expenditures (PCE) price index, rose 5.4 percent last month from January 2022, while consumption surged more than one percent from a month prior, said the Commerce Department.

From December to January, the PCE price index jumped 0.6 percent, the biggest rise since mid-2022 as prices for goods and services both picked up. Excluding the volatile food and energy segments, the PCE price index still bounced 0.6 percent from the preceding month.

"Today's report shows we have made progress on inflation, but we have more work to do," said President Joe Biden in a statement. But he added that while there may be setbacks, the US faces "global economic challenges from a position of strength." The central bank focuses on the PCE price index as it reflects actual spending, including shifts to less expensive items, unlike the more well-known consumer price index.

While inflation has come off last year's decades-high levels, it remains well above policymakers' two percent target. Personal income rose as well from December to January, said the Commerce Department.

Meanwhile, sales of new US homes surged more

than expected in January by 7.2 percent to an annual rate of 670,000, seasonally adjusted, the Commerce Department added. This was the highest in nearly a year and up from December's revised rate of 625,000. The median sales price last month cooled to \$427,500. New properties make up a small portion of overall home sales-and transactions of existing homes remains weak despite Friday's data. "Higher mortgage rates are impacting affordability and are weighing heavily on home sales, a trend that is not yet showing any sign of stabilizing or reversing," said Rubeela Farooqi of High Frequency Economics. She added that there has been a "reversal in progress last month," in the inflation gauge.

"Reaccelerating price pressures coupled with a still-strong labor market that is restoring incomes and is supporting demand will keep the Fed on track to hike rates further," she added. But Ian Shepherdson of Pantheon Macroeconomics said the latest overshoot in inflation "is concentrated in financial services, professional services, and healthcare, none of which are likely to persist." In the bigger picture, drivers of the inflation surge, including global food and energy prices as well as a supply chain crisis, are "now reversing, at varying rates," he said in an earlier report. This suggests downward pressure on inflation for the foreseeable future, Shepherdson added.

On Friday, a survey of consumers by the University of Michigan indicated consumer sentiment has picked up, helped by improvements in the short-term economic outlook. There is no recent precedent for a central bank successfully defeating inflation without "substantial economic sacrifice or recession," said a report presented Friday to Federal Reserve policymakers.

The report, prepared in connection with a semi-



WASHINGTON: A key indicator of US inflation rose in January as new home sales jumped more than expected, said government data released Friday.

nar organized by the University of Chicago's Booth School of Business, came after fresh US pricing data suggested the Fed's aggressive moves thus far have been only partially successful. The Booth analysis suggested a potentially rocky future for the US economy, which has thus far shown resilience despite aggressive Fed actions to counter inflation.

Citing historical "disinflation" cases dating back to 1950 in major economies, the report concluded that central banks "are likely to be hard pressed to achieve their disinflationary goals without significant sacrifice in economic activity."

The analysis, prepared by a team of academic and corporate economists, identified parallels between the current climate and that of the late 1970s when former Fed Chair Paul Volcker radically increased interest rates to counter soaring inflation. As with the earlier period, the Fed in the recent episode also "fell behind the curve," the report said.

The Volcker case "shows how costly disinflation can be once a central bank has lost credibility for controlling inflation," said the report, which also recounted the bruising consequences, including more than 10 percent unemployment in the 1980s. — AFP



KUWAIT: Mohamed Naser Al-Sayer & Sons Est Co and Lexus officials during the launch of all-new RX 2023. — Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh

Mohamed Naser Al-Sayer & Sons Est Co unveils all-new RX 2023

KUWAIT: The all-new RX 2023 was unveiled during one of its kind signature events organized by Lexus team exclusively for its elite customers at the flagship Lexus Center Shuwaikh. The exceptional unveil elevated the enthusiasm among the audience marking the end for a long-anticipated RX full model change.

Fifth-generation Lexus RX comes with a choice of two electrified powertrains to accelerate the realization of a carbon-neutral society.

Mohamed Naser Al-Sayer & Sons Est Co and Lexus are bringing unparalleled levels of elegance and refinement to the high-end crossover market with the launch of the all-new RX 2023.

The fifth-generation RX has been completely reimagined to deliver greater style, comfort, and performance than ever before and comes with a choice of three powertrains, two of which are electrified to contribute to the realization of a carbon-neutral society. The launch press conference was attended by Kei Fujita Chief Representative from Lexus Middle East & Central Asia Representative Office who was the Chief Guest at the event along with Faisal Bader Al-Sayer Chairman, Mubarak Naser Al-Sayer CEO, Mohamed Naser Al-Sayer Board Member, Bengt Shultz COO, Mahmoud Abou-Zahr Senior Business Director Lexus Kuwait, Bedour Faisal Al-Sayer Lexus Marketing Manager, Top Management Team, members from Lexus Sales and Service Division and representatives from the press and media.

According to Mubarak Naser Al-Sayer "The frequently asked question is "why Lexus is special?". Lexus is considered a respected luxurious brand for several reasons: it is known for making high-quality sophisticated cars that tend to retain its value for a long time, not to mention its talented and sophisticated design. Moreover, in accordance to most experts in the

industry: if you wish to own a reliable vehicle with full features; then Lexus is your answer".

Bengt Shultz said "I take this opportunity to thank our valued customers for their loyalty and patiently waiting for their Lexus. We had severe shortages of supply especially LX, and NX. We are working diligently with the manufacturer to ease the pressure. We offer the best service but we intend to become even better." First launched in 1998, the Lexus RX has created the blueprint for luxury crossover utility vehicles and set the tone in the segment ever since. The 1998 Lexus RX 300 was the world's first luxury crossover, while the 2006 Lexus RX 400h was the world's first hybrid electric luxury crossover. The choice of two electrified powertrains comes as part of the 'Lexus Electrified' vision announced in 2019, which aims to achieve significant performance improvements through electrification technologies. The company is on track to achieve a full lineup of electrified vehicles in all categories by 2030 and aims to sell 100 percent BEVs globally by 2035.

Speaking during the event Bedour Faisal Al-Sayer said "Lexus RX has become admired globally, and its design is famous for its exceptional boldness that combines luxury and sporty performance in keeping with a rapidly changing world. I can confidently tell you that Lexus RX is elegant, appealing, smooth, sporty, and embodies the values and attributes adored by ambitious youth who are into luxury."

Commenting on the launch of the all-new Lexus RX, Koji Sato, President of Lexus International, said: "For the all-new RX, we were determined to keep the Lexus DNA of supreme quality, ride comfort, and refinement and elevate the driving experience to the next level, delivering a unique Lexus driving signature."

Kei Fujita, Chief Representative of Middle East & Central Asia Representative Office, Toyota Motor Corporation, said: "We are pleased to launch the 2023 Lexus RX as the latest step in our drive to create innovative and amazing experiences for owners and passengers in the Middle East by developing vehicles that offer a highly engaging driving experience.

Kalaam Group announces advisory board

KUWAIT: Kalaam Telecom Group, one of the top three data service providers in the MENA region, is delighted to announce the introduction of its advisory board following the acquisition and expansion strategy of the company. As Kalaam Telecom Group is witnessing robust growth in the region, the investment in formation of an advisory board is an important step towards its long-term growth strategy that creates additional value for the Group as the new board brings proven track records, industry expertise and will be pivotal in shaping the sustainable growth path that Kalaam Telecom Group is treading on.

The new advisory board supports the growth of acquired company, Zajil Telecom in Kuwait along with its associate company KEMS Telecom. KEMS Telecom is the first internet service provider in Kuwait, established in 1992, which is officially licensed by the Communications & IT Regulatory Authority (CITRA) to provide connectivity services to its customers across the state offering Internet and Data Transfer services, high quality cloud and managed services at local data centers, wherein customers, of all sizes and from various industry segments, rely on its expertise to manage their ICT infrastructure. Zajil Telecom

has recently been awarded the global ISO certifications 9001, 27001, 22301, 14001 & 45001 for quality management system, information security system, business continuity management system, environmental management system and occupational health & safety standards that showcase its adherence to top notch policies and procedures under international and worldwide management systems.

The advisory board comprises Javier Alvarez - founding partner of Delta Partners, Rabih Khoury - managing partner & chief exit officer of Middle East Venture Partners, John Lincoln - chief commercial officer at Ennoventure and Yousif Ahmed, a telecom veteran and previously COO of Gulf Net & Quality Net, Kuwait. They are independent advisory board members, crucial to Kalaam Telecom Group's growth as they strengthen the board by bringing in their independent perspectives to support the group's region-wide digital transformation drive for enterprises and M&A strategy.

"With the new Executive Team on board, Kalaam Telecom Group is excited to embark on a new journey in its growth trajectory and expansion into new markets like KSA, UAE and Kuwait, besides Bahrain with cutting-edge digital solutions, while investing in human capital to further solidify its position in the MENA ecosystem. The advisory board will continue to enhance the company's focus on digital transformation and help Kalaam Telecom Group strengthen its regional footprint in being amongst the top three digital solutions provider and further expand its global reach," said Nezar Al-Saie, Kalaam Telecom Group chairman.

Ericsson to cut 8,500 jobs worldwide

STOCKHOLM: Telecom equipment maker Ericsson said Friday it would slash 8,500 jobs worldwide, part of a cost-cutting program as financial headwinds push operators to rein in spending. Ericsson, which had a total of 105,000 employees at the end of 2022, last month posted disappointing full-year 2022 earnings, as operators slow spending on rolling out the latest 5G networks due to the global economic slowdown and rising inflation.

The Swedish company said most of the layoffs would be implemented in the first half of 2023 and the

rest in 2024, as it accelerated its \$860 million cost saving plan announced late last year. "We see potential to simplify and become more efficient across the company, especially in structural costs. But we are also working on our service delivery, supply, real estate and IT," spokeswoman Jenny Hedelin told AFP.

"It will, however, unfortunately also result in a need to address headcount. We believe a total of 8,500 positions will be affected", she said. Ericsson said 1,400 of the job cuts were in Sweden, which had already been announced earlier this week.

For 2022, the group posted a 17 percent drop in net profit to 19.1 billion kronor (\$1.8 billion).

Announcing those earnings in January, chief executive Borje Ekholm said the near-term outlook was "uncertain". He said Ericsson had already begun to sense at the end of last year that network operators wanted to reduce assets and that it expects this to continue at least through the first half of 2023. — AFP

Hot US inflation leaves investors cold on equities

NEW YORK: Global stocks mostly fell Friday after the latest US inflation data added to worries that the Federal Reserve will enact more aggressive interest rate hikes. Meanwhile, the dollar pushed higher against major currencies including the yen, which tumbled as the incoming head of Japan's central bank showed no intention of altering the policy of avoiding interest rate rises.

The Federal Reserve's preferred gauge of inflation, the personal consumption expenditures price index, rose 5.4 percent last month from January 2022. The report is the latest indicator to suggest the US central

bank still faces significant challenges in addressing sticky pricing pressure.

"It's hard to suggest that this data is not concerning," said Tom Cahill of Ventura Wealth Management, who questioned whether the Fed's actions will "drive the economy into recession."

The broad-based S&P 500 shed just over one percent, bringing its losses for the week to nearly three percent. The dollar was broadly higher as markets bet on more Fed rate hikes.

"Inflation accelerated more than expected," said Joseph Manimbo, senior analyst at Convera.

A strong consumer, coupled with "inflation's jump in the wrong direction, adds credence to the view of the Fed having to raise rates beyond the first half of the year," he added. European stock indices were also pulled lower by the US inflation data, while Tokyo equities rose solidly as the Bank of Japan's incoming governor Kazuo Ueda said its longstanding monetary easing policies were "appropriate." — FP



QATARI BUSINESSWOMAN SPARKLES AT DOHA SHOW

A Qatari businesswoman has turned heads at the Doha Jewellery and Watches Exhibition, pitting herself against giants of the industry while also bucking trends in the conservative country. Noora al-Ansari - a Qatari woman running her own company and dealing with customers herself - is a rarity in the



wealthy Gulf state, where a growing number of women work but few have made their name in business. Since opening her first Papillon store in the capital Doha, she said customers have been curious about her nationality.

"When women saw me standing in Papillon, they were wondering whether I

was Qatari or not," she said, her exhibition stand flanked by household names of the jewelry world. "They were not used to seeing a Qatari woman standing in her shop" and dealing with the business and customers, she said. "When they found out they said, 'we are so proud of you. You have beautiful pieces.' And that encourages me."

The week-long exhibition, which ended on Saturday, reflected the opulence of Qatar, whose massive gas reserves have made it one of the world's wealthiest countries but where women's rights have caused controversy. Ansari said she calls the annual show, which has drawn more than 30,000 visitors, "the big Qatari wedding" because it is highly anticipated among Doha society. A steady flow of luxury cars could be seen pulling up outside the exhibition, where Louis Vuitton, Bulgari and other global names were showcasing their designs. One Cartier necklace was on sale for \$21 million.

'All owned by men'

A former education and oil industry executive, Ansari designed her first solitaire ring in 2008 and launched her business three years later. In 2022, she moved her store into one of Doha's most expensive malls alongside the



Women check gold sets and pendants at the Doha Jewellery and Watches Exhibition in Doha. —AFP photos

international names she is competing with at the show.

"I am very proud as a woman to be a jeweler because all the names that you hear about in Doha, all the jewelry stores here, are owned by men," she said. She added that her customers appreciated her efforts to explain the "four Cs" of diamonds - cut, clarity, color and carat.

"When I visited jewelry stores, no one was telling us what is a diamond, why it is valuable, why we should have it and enjoy it. We just keep hearing

that a diamond is a girl's best friend," she said. When she started out, there were only one or two Qatari designers while this year there were at least 10 at the Doha show, according to Ansari. "As a local brand, to be among the big names in the world is an honor, of course. It means that our jewelry is presenting our local tastes and high standards," she said. — AFP

Paris Fashion Week colored by scandal and grief

Paris Fashion Week launched Monday with touches of scandal and grief, as Balenciaga tries to move past recent controversies while Vivienne Westwood and Paco Rabanne hold their first shows since their founders' deaths. The womenswear week in the French capital caps a hectic February for the fashion world, following New York, London and Milan. All eyes are on Balenciaga - which was on a hot streak until late last year, with innovative catwalk shows and celebrity superfans driving up sales.

It came to an abrupt halt after a spectacularly ill-considered ad campaign that appeared to reference child abuse, featuring children with teddy bear bags that had studs and harnesses, and surrounded by adult items including wine glasses. Balenciaga also had to cut ties with Kanye West - who modelled for its last show in Paris in September - after the rapper's controversial comments about Jews.

The scandals hit the bottom line. Coupled with a slump at Gucci, parent company Kering saw fourth-quarter revenues slump by seven percent. Profusely apologizing in the pages of Vogue, Balenciaga's creative director Demna has vowed to abandon his provocative approach and get back to basics at this week's show on Sunday. "I have decided to go back to my roots in fashion as well as to the roots of Balenciaga, which is making quality clothes-not making image or buzz," he said.

Posthumous shows

There is also interest in how Schiaparelli, led by US designer Daniel Roseberry, follows its eye-catching haute couture show in January when the use of fake animal heads sharply divided audiences. Before then, the opening day focuses on young designers before the big-hitters such as Christian Dior and Saint Laurent return to the catwalk on Tuesday.

Wednesday will see the first show from the house of Paco Rabanne since his death at the age of 88 earlier this month. And the first Vivienne Westwood show since the dame's death in December will be held on Saturday. Her label's designs have been overseen by her widower, Andreas Kronthaler, for several years.

Pierre Cardin is also returning to the official calendar for the first time in 25 years, following the death of its founder in late 2020. The new collection has been put together by the label's in-house team rather than collaborating with an outside designer, so as not to "distort Pierre Cardin," its director Rodrigo Basilicati-Cardin told AFP. Fashionistas are also excited to see the first collection from hot young French designer Ludovic de Saint Sernin in his new role at Belgian house Ann Demeulemeester, previously known for its minimalist and monochrome aesthetic. — AFP



Outdoor livestreamers singing and chatting with the audiences through their mobile phones.

Chinese livestreamers flock outdoors for late-night tips

In the dead of night on a bridge in southern China, around two dozen livestreamers sat crooning and chatting into microphones, their identical ring lights spaced a few meters apart in glowing rows. The broadcasters gather in spots like this in the city of Guilin most nights in hope of standing out to users scrolling through reams of livestreams on Douyin, China's version



An outdoor livestreamer checks her mobile phones on an overpass bridge at night in Guilin, in southern China. — AFP photos

of TikTok, where viewers can donate to their favorite streamers.

"There are too many indoor livestreamers," said 27-year-old Qiao Ya, who sings and talks about daily life to anyone who happens across her channel from 9:00 pm to 3:00 am every night. "Since I'm relatively average and don't have any skills, I stream outside to use the views to attract online 'passers-by'." Conditions can be harsh - at the time of this interview, the temperature

had dropped to almost zero degrees Celsius (32 degrees Fahrenheit). Streamers bundled in thick blankets and some bringing small heaters.

"Viewers might feel if we're outdoors or just by ourselves late at night that it's very tough, so they might be nicer to us," said Qiao, who like most Douyin performers, is signed with a livestreamer talent agency. Livestreaming on apps like Douyin, which said it had 600 million users in 2020, is a popular way to make money in China. Activities range from selling merchandise, demonstrating life hacks, singing and dancing to chatting with viewers.

Some livestreamers - like "Lipstick King" Li Jiaqi - have become e-commerce celebrities, making millions of dollars in endorsements and advertising fees through the platform. But for those on the bridge, the earnings are much slimmer. Viewers can buy virtual gifts for

a range of prices-represented by emojis such as race cars, rockets and carrots - and give them to the streamers, who can convert them into money. Qiao's only income comes from donations to her stream. On a good day, she makes up to 600 yuan (\$87) over eight hours of streaming. On a bad day, her takings can be as low as 10 yuan (\$1.50). Qiao's agency takes a 10 percent cut of her revenue in exchange for equipment rental and

management of her social media presence. Douyin takes another 50 percent, leaving her with just 40 percent of what she makes. Douyin's parent company ByteDance, which also owns TikTok, reported \$18.3 billion in revenue in the first quarter of 2022.

'Side job'

Most of the streamers on the bridge on Monday were young women, with one of the few men wearing a furry frog suit. For eyebrow tattooist Zhang Xiaoxiao, the broadcasts are an extra source of income. She said the Covid pandemic had hit her profession hard, with beauty salons crippled by health restrictions.

"Pressure was very high and business was bleak... If not for this, I don't think I would be livestreaming," explained Zhang, 36, as she set up to work until 3:00 am. "I really enjoy singing and dancing, so I thought I would make it a side job, to be able to do something I liked." Last October, Douyin issued a warning against public disturbances caused by outdoor livestreaming, though that has largely gone unheeded after an initial crackdown.

Zhang said sometimes people walking past react angrily to her. "Some look at us with some discrimination. They ask 'Why don't you find a normal job?'" she said. "So we choose a place far away from the residents, to try to not disturb people, and where it's very safe." The streamers' agencies send men who act as assistants and bodyguards - with some saying they occasionally had to move drunk people on or block inappropriate online viewers.

Despite the risks, big donations keep livestreamers like Qiao coming back. "One guy scrolled past my roadside livestream one night at 2:20 am and felt very touched," Qiao said. The anonymous man gave her a 3,000-yuan (\$435) donation. "I was so happy that I went home early that night," Qiao said. "Livestreaming is actually very simple, it's like making friends." — AFP

Fashion courts K-culture fans at Milan catwalk shows

Milan's catwalks may have been the epicenter of global fashion over the past week, but Seoul and K-Pop fans are front and center in the battle for new luxury customers. Outside Prada's fashion show, the biggest squeals of excitement came from fans of Jeon Somi, South Korea's blonde singer with 16.6 million Instagram followers.

The hordes of pushing, screaming fans straining for a view of their favorite K-pop or Korean film and television stars underscore the strategic importance of the South Korean market to Italian fashion. "I've been here since 11 o'clock in the morning to see Somi," 20-year-old Italian fan Serena Danimarco said. "I love her, her music, her look." She held up a sign reading "Somi I'm so Dumb Dumb for you," a reference to the singer's 2021 single.

Such enthusiasm also greeted the arrival of Korean actress Song Hye-kyo at the Fendi show Wednesday, which kicked off fashion week. Fan Giulia, 20, was crushed behind a barrier outside the show, holding up her handmade sign with photos of her idol and an "I love you" written underneath. "I knew she was coming through the networks of Neverland, one of the Korean Idol fan groups. I am also a Blink, a Blackpink fan!" she said, referring to the chart-dominating girl group named by Time Magazine as 2022's "Entertainer of the year".



South Korean actor Song Kang arrives to attend Prada's show.

Ambassadors of luxury

Luxury brands, whether based in Milan, Paris, London or New York, have been snapping up South Korean stars as brand ambassadors, including at Bulgari, Chanel, Celine and Giorgio Armani. Jimin, a member of the best-selling K-pop boy band BTS, became Dior's latest global brand ambassador in January, while Valentino announced its collaboration with Suga - another member of the band that is on a temporary hiatus - who plans a solo tour this spring.



Korean and Canadian singer Jeon Somi arrives to attend Prada's fashion show in Milan. — AFP photos

Gucci, meanwhile, has seized on Hanni, the lead singer of NewJeans, another South Korean girl group who released their debut single last summer. Hanni is expected in the front row of Gucci's show on Friday. Like Dior, which held its first runway show in Seoul last year, Gucci also plans to hit the South Korean capital for its upcoming cruise collection in May. A show planned for last November - which would have been the South Korean debut for Gucci's former creative director Alessandro Michele - was cancelled following the Itaewon Halloween crowd crush that killed more than 150 people.

Sales of Italian fashion to South Korea rose 31 percent in 2022, according to Italy's fashion chamber (CNMI). Seven out of the top 10 Italian exports to South Korea relate to fashion, the Italian Trade Agency said. The biggest chunk comes from leather goods, comprising 21 percent of total Italian exports to South Korea, up 5.8 percent over 2021, followed by footwear. — AFP

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Participants and their pet cats pose for photos during a cat show in Dhaka. — AFP photos

Puss in boots: Fancy felines on the catwalk

Cats in velvet, cats in skirts, cats in sunglasses, cats in football kits: hundreds of felines were dressed to the nines Friday for Bangladesh's largest-ever cat show. Owners sashayed down the catwalk carrying their furry friends, while others feasted in eating competitions or simply took cat-naps. Sunglasses were a popular item, as were matching

hats and jackets, along with Brazil and Argentina football shirts - the two South American giants have avid followings in the South Asian country. Tabassum Akter adopted Z six months ago, and dressed him in a special collar for the event, at Dhaka's biggest shopping mall.

She regularly takes him out with her, but receives odd looks when she does so.

"It's important to realize that these animals also want love, sympathy, and care," she said. Domestic cats are common in Bangladesh, especially in rural areas, where they are used for vermin control.

Companion pets are largely the preserve of urban upper and middle classes, and felines dominate for religious reasons in the Muslim-majority country. The

Prophet Mohammed is said to have kept cats himself, and the name he gave one of his companions, the chronicler Abu Huraira, means "father of the kitten".

Practicing Muslim families do not keep dogs as pets as they are seen as impure. Organizer Rabi Hasan purred with satisfaction at the turnout for the event, saying at least 900 cats took part, drawing more

than 15,000 admirers. Nasif Ullah adorned his cat Poko with the features of a honey-bee, and hoped the event would raise awareness among Bangladeshis of animal rights. "There is a tendency to cause harm to cats everywhere," he said. "We often don't realize that these creatures also have some rights." — AFP



This combination of images shows men holding their roosters.



Men watch a cockfight at a popular cafe in Iraq's southern city of Basra. — AFP photos

Cockfighting popular in Iraq despite cruelty

Two vicious roosters circle a filthy carpet in southern Iraq, facing off for a cockfight that has drawn dozens to a dimly lit cafe in the port city of Basra. "This practice has been around since I was born in 1949," said referee Riad Ali, whose father introduced him to cockfighting when he was around 10.

The popular blood sport "dates back to the 1920s or earlier" in Basra and is thought to have arrived with boats at the

port, he added. Banned in many parts of the world due to concerns over animal cruelty, cockfighting has remained common from the Philippines to India, and is tolerated in areas including parts of northern France. An AFP photographer witnessed several nights of fights in Basra, where red-crested roosters were locked in a violent dance, leaving smears of blood on their feet and neck as they leapt and pecked at each other.

Spectators on narrow seats near the red and yellow ring littered with feathers sipped tea as they watched, the smell of cigarettes and water pipes filling the air. The avian bouts can last for an hour or two, and end when the birds are exhausted or when one of the owners withdraws his animal, said Ali, who has been an amateur cockfighting referee for around two decades. Retiree Najji Hamza said he had been attend-

ing cockfights since the 1970s even though they were banned for some time. "We were in secluded homes, not at a cafe or in public" like now, said the 70-year-old. Islam prohibits gambling, and in conservative, Muslim-majority Iraq it is usually the animals' owners who make wagers, putting down between 25,000 and 100,000 dinars (\$17-\$68) per fight - though spectators sometimes have a flutter too.

Mohammed, a 51-year-old mechanic who declined to provide his surname, said he had had birds in the ring since the early 1990s, and bought his three roosters in Turkey for between \$900 and \$1,100 each. "We come to the cafe in the evening and spend an hour or two. We see our friends," he said. "It's a pastime, a leisure activity during winter," he added. — AFP

Tigris, Euphrates levels plunge

Iraq's Tigris and Euphrates rivers have witnessed a sharp decrease in their levels in the south of the country, officials said Sunday, pledging to take urgent measures to ease water shortages. In Nasiriyah, capital of the southern province of Dhi Qar, an AFP photographer saw the river bed of the mighty Euphrates dry in patches.

The water ministry blamed the situation in some southern provinces on "the low quantity of water reaching Iraq from neighboring Turkey". "This has triggered a sharp drop in the country's water reserves," it said in a statement. The Tigris and the Euphrates both have their source in Turkey, and authorities in Iraq have long accused the Ankara government of withholding water in dams that choke the rivers, dramatically reducing flows into Iraq.

Iraqi authorities also accuse farmers of abusing water supplies and flouting restrictions to irrigate their lands. Water scarcity hitting farming and food security are already among the "main drivers of

rural-to-urban migration" in Iraq, the UN and several non-government groups said in June 2022.

According to official Iraqi statistics from last year, the level of the Tigris entering Iraq has dropped to just 35 percent of its average over the past century. Water ministry spokesman Khaled Chamal said Sunday that Iraq was getting only 30 percent of the water it expected from the Tigris and the Euphrates. Iraq regularly

asks Turkey to release more water, and has imposed measures to ration water for agriculture and domestic use. Water is also often held back in dams in Iraq's north, triggering anger among residents in the south. Chamal told AFP the latest drop in water levels in both the Tigris and Euphrates in the country's south was "temporary". — AFP



An aerial view shows the Hadarat bridge across the Euphrates River which is witnessing a sharp decrease in water levels. — AFP

Warm weather keeps famous ice rink closed

The Rideau Canal Skateway, the world's largest open-air ice rink and a UNESCO World Heritage Site, will not open this year for the first time in its history because of a mild winter, managers confirmed Friday. "Despite our best efforts, the weather got the best of us for the first time in our history," the Ottawa facility said on its Twitter account. "We share everyone's disappointment," it added in a statement.

The free Skateway, which goes by the major monuments of the Canadian capital-Parliament Hill, the Senate, and Carleton University - is normally an icy 7.9-kilometer (5 mile) thoroughfare in winter and the pride of Ottawa. But for the ice rink to open safely, it needs the mercury to remain between -10 and -20 degrees C (14 degrees F to -4 F) for nearly two weeks.

Although the capital has recorded colder temperatures during the last 24

hours, it was not enough to reverse a scenario that many people feared. The Skateway management said it "remains unsafe for skating." In mid-February, tourists and residents of Ottawa - who sometimes skate to work - voiced their disappointment to AFP reporters. "I would have liked to be able to skate on it, but the best I can do now is to simply observe it," said Lani Simmons, 46, who is from Bermuda.

With abnormally high temperatures in December and January - sometimes barely below freezing - Ottawa is expected to record its third warmest winter on record, officials say. For several years, site officials have been studying the effects of climate change on the canal and say they are "preparing for it," including trying to better understand how ice forms.

Usually accessible from the end of December for 30 to 60 days, the opening of the canal has been pushed back on the calendar in recent years. In 2020, it was not possible to skate on the canal until January 28. The Rideau Canal, a symbol of Canadian history in the heart of Ottawa, attracts an average of 22,000 visitors per day. — AFP

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Some of the cast of "Everything Everywhere All at Once" pose with the SAG award for Outstanding Performance by a Cast in a Motion Picture. — AFP photos



Malaysian actress Michelle Yeoh poses with her awards for outstanding lead actress and cast for "Everything Everywhere".



US actress Jennifer Coolidge poses with the awards for outstanding actress and ensemble for "The White Lotus".

'Everything Everywhere' wins (nearly) all at SAG Awards

Absurdist sci-fi comedy "Everything Everywhere All at Once" continued its dominance of this year's Hollywood award shows by earning top honors from the Screen Actors Guild on Sunday. The film about a Chinese-American family undergoing a tax audit who end up fighting a universe-hopping supervillain also won best actress for Michelle Yeoh, best supporting actor for Ke Huy Quan, and best supporting actress for Jamie Lee Curtis.



US-Canadian actor Brendan Fraser poses with the SAG award for outstanding Male Actor in a Leading Role.

The movie's 94-year-old patriarch James Hong stole the show at Sunday's gala, collecting the night's final prize of best cast in a motion picture - the star-studded ceremony's equivalent of best film. Hong reflected on how Hollywood once cast white actors with "their eyes taped up" to play leading Asian roles because producers thought "the Asians are not good enough and they are not box office." "But look at us now, huh?" he said, to a huge ovation.

The SAG prizes from the actors' union round out a month in which "Everything Everywhere" has won best film from directors' and producers' groups too,



Some of the cast of "The White Lotus" pose with the award for Outstanding Performance by an Ensemble in a Drama Series.

making it firm favorite for the Oscars next month. Voted on by more than 120,000 members of Hollywood's acting union, the SAG awards are an important precursor for the Academy Awards, whose largest voting bloc is also actors. The Oscars will take place this year on March 12.

Other winners from the mainly Asian cast of "Everything Everywhere" also referred to Hollywood's long struggle with diversity. "This isn't just for me, this is for every little girl who looks like me," said Yeoh. Quan, who after appearing as a child in 1984's "Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom" took a long hiatus from acting because there "were so few opportunities," noted he was the first Asian actor to win his category. "When I heard this, I quickly realized that this moment no longer belongs to just me. It also belongs to everyone who has asked for change," he said.

Curtis addressed the recent "nepo baby" controversy, which has called out

China to outmatch Japan in animation

Anime director Makoto Shinkai said China could eventually leapfrog Japan on the global animation stage as Chinese animated drama "Art College 1994" had its world premiere in Berlin. Shinkai's "Suzume", among the contenders for the Golden Bear at this year's Berlinale film festival, has made a splash amid a global boom in Japanese anime. But "Art College 1994", Chinese director Liu Jian's animated portrait of a

group of art students in the 1990s, has also got the critics talking.

Screen Daily said it "evokes a specific time and a place so vividly that you can almost taste the stale cigarette smoke and cheap beer". "The quality of (Chinese) movies is improving rapidly, and they're also able to build those unique characters that we have in Japan," Shinkai said. "So, I think that sooner or later they're going to overtake us."

Until 10 years ago, Japanese anime creators were "very confident that they were creating the best and most unique animation movies in the world", Shinkai said. "But I think that this has changed

in recent years, and most of my peers think that way as well." The global market for Japanese anime grew 13 percent to an all-time high of 2.74 trillion yen (\$20 billion) in 2021, according to the Association of Japanese Animations.

But Chinese films are catching up. "In recent years there are more and more Chinese animation films coming out and they are becoming more and more diverse, not only commercial but also arthouse," Liu told AFP. "Many commercial Chinese animations are influenced by Japanese animation but they are starting to find their own style," he said.

"Art College 1994", based on Liu's own experiences as an art student in

Indian film-maker shoots for Oscar fame

Indian director S.S. Rajamouli's films are all-singing, all-dancing spectacles - and he is now a favorite to secure the first ever Oscar for an all-Indian film. His three-hour extravaganza "RRR" is a fictionalized story of two colonial-era revolutionaries, filled with large-scale, visual effects-laden action sequences and musical numbers.

It has smashed box offices in India, wowed audiences from the United States to Japan, and is a front runner for the Best Original Song award at next month's Oscars, having already beaten out Taylor Swift and Rihanna for the same prize at the Golden Globes. "When I'm going to a movie, I would like to see larger-than-life characters, larger-than-life situations, larger-than-life drama," Rajamouli said.

"And that's what I like to make," he said at his office in the southern city of Hyderabad. "Nothing holds the heroes back in delivering their action sequences." A word-of-mouth hit that has seen moviegoers dancing in cinema aisles, Telugu-language "RRR" has become one of the highest-grossing Indian movies ever. It has also introduced the country's lesser-known but prolific southern cinema industry to a worldwide audience.

India's Hindi-language Bollywood cinema industry has long been known as the world's most productive, but international film awards beyond the festival circuit have largely remained the preserve of English-language movies. That changed when Bong Joon-ho's "Parasite" swept four Oscars in 2020, including Best Film and Best Director, after decades when the plaudits for Korean cinema were confined to the critics.

The only previous Indian Oscars won were for English-language films - the 1982 British-Indian co-production "Gandhi" and 2008's Mumbai-set drama "Slumdog Millionaire". Now Rajamouli hopes a statuette for the dance number "Naatu Naatu" will pave the way for Indian auteurs to do the same.

Shot in front of Ukraine's turquoise presidential palace - before the war - it features high-energy performances from the two leads as they confront their antagonist. "We are breaking ground, but I think we are in very, very initial, initial steps," said the 49-year-old. "If you see (South) Korea, for example, the kind of inroads that they have made ... we should aspire to do that, all Indian film-makers."

'Unprecedented'

Rajamouli was born in the southern state of Karnataka. His father was a scriptwriter who exposed him to the industry. His early influences included prominent Telugu directors but he found himself drawn to epic Hollywood films such as "Ben Hur" and "Braveheart", and is a fan of Steven Spielberg and James Cameron.

Rajamouli's 2015 historical action-drama "Baahubali" - then the most expensive film made in India - made him a household name domestically, leading a wave of southern films to the top of the multilingual country's box office. The 2017 sequel was well-received, with

both movies among the highest-grossing of all time in the nation of 1.4 billion people, cementing Rajamouli's reputation as a blockbuster director.

He was "pleasantly surprised" by the buzz around "RRR" in the West, he said, pointing to what he called a "lack of maximalist entertainment". "There's a section of audiences who wanted that, a celebratory kind of engagement with the cinema."

Despite appearing on Netflix only two months after it debuted across 1,200 US theatres in March last year, "RRR" has become among North America's highest-grossing Indian films. It was "unprecedented" and "a total outlier", said analyst David A. Gross of Franchise Entertainment Research.



Indian director S.S. Rajamouli (pictured) is a favorite to secure the first ever Oscar for an all-Indian film. — AFP photos

Audiences continue to flock to packed screenings for repeat viewings - a January showing at Hollywood's historic TCL Chinese Theatre sold out in 98 seconds.

Rajamouli's films have been compared to Marvel superhero movies and he said it would "be an honor" to be asked to do one - but he worries that a major studio would want to involve itself in the production process.

Troubling undertones

The accolades for "RRR" have also been accompanied by criticism of perceived troubling undertones in the film, including the promotion of Hindu nationalism and hyper-masculinity. "RRR" contains Hindu mythology and nationalist fervor at a time when film-makers, mostly in Bollywood, have been repeatedly targeted by Hindu right-wingers on social media.

Rights campaigners say that under Hindu nationalist Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Bollywood stars are facing increased pressure - particularly minority Muslim actors like Shah Rukh Khan and Aamir Khan. Rajamouli grew up in a "deeply religious" Hindu family but is now an atheist and believes that "religion essentially is exploitation".

He blames criticism of the film on the polarization of debate in India that does not allow for a middle ground. "Any extreme point of view, I oppose," he said. "I don't have any kind of hidden agenda ... I make films for people who are willing to pay their hard-earned money on the film ticket. I like to get them entertained, make them feel dramatic about the characters, about the situations, have a good time, go back and live their lives." — AFP



(L-R) S. S. Rajamouli, M. M. Keeravani, and Ram Charan accept the Spotlight award for 'RRR' at the 2023 HCA Film Awards.

the 1990s, tracks half a dozen young people as they pursue their studies, caught between Chinese traditions and Western influences. Deep discussions about French literature and German philosophy are held as the students contemplate the meaning of art and their place in the world. Not-so-subtle signs of Western influence are everywhere, with McDonald's and Michael Jackson both putting in a cameo appearance.

The early 1990s was "a very special period ... where art and literature were prospering not only in China but also worldwide", said Liu, 53. "At that time not only students but also

people outside the campus were talking about these kinds of topics. It was a very energetic period." Liu himself studied painting at Nanjing University of the Arts and began making animations in 1995.

He now also works as a college teacher and said some of his students who were born in the 1990s or later had watched the film. "They are very curious about that period because it's very different, they don't have cellphones or the internet at that moment," he said. Liu's dark comedy "Have a Nice Day" was the first Chinese animated film to compete at the Berlinale in 2017. — AFP

Sports

Fury topples YouTuber Paul in Saudi boxing showdown

Kingdom's growing clout in the boxing world

AD DIRIYAH: British reality TV star Tommy Fury beat American YouTuber Jake Paul on points Sunday in a boxing spectacle intended to boost Saudi Arabia's reputation as a top-flight fight destination. Despite suffering a knockdown in the eighth and final round of the cruiserweight contest, Fury won a split decision to the delight of Saudi fans, who shouted "Let's go Tommy" in the closing stages.

Addressing the crowd through tears afterwards, Fury—who is the half-brother of heavyweight champion Tyson Fury, but better known for his turn on the dating show *Love Island*—declared he had "made my own legacy" with the win. Paul, who calls himself "The Problem Child", drew loud boos with his post-fight claim that he "got sick really bad twice in this camp" and "injured my arm", though he added he was "not making excuses".

He told reporters that Fury had "impressive combinations" but that the loss was "a reflection of my own performance". "I couldn't get my momentum going like I wanted to and I just felt kind of flat," he said. A triumphant Fury, for his part, boasted that he "showed everybody that I ain't scared of no one and I can cut it in the big dance." Paul first gained fame and millions of followers on the now-defunct social media platform Vine and also YouTube before pivoting to boxing about five years ago.

His 6-0 record heading into Sunday's fight, including four knockouts, had come against a ragtag group of opponents that included another YouTuber and three mixed martial arts fighters. He was out to bolster his credibility against Fury, who was likewise undefeated, though his past opponents were also hardly household names. The two men's unusual backgrounds have led many observers to question whether either should be taken seriously. Saudi officials nevertheless pitched Sunday's event as a sign of the kingdom's growing clout in the boxing world.



RIYADH: British reality TV star Tommy Fury fights against US YouTuber Jake Paul during a boxing match held at Diriyah in Riyadh on February 27, 2023. — AFP

It built on a 2019 fight billed as the "Clash on the Dunes", in which Anthony Joshua reclaimed his world heavyweight crown from Andy Ruiz, the first time a world heavyweight title fight had been staged in Saudi Arabia. Last year Joshua lost in a split decision to Ukraine's Oleksandr Usyk in the "Rage on the Red Sea" in Jeddah.

The crowd Sunday included former heavyweight champion Mike Tyson, comedian Kevin Hart and Cristiano Ronaldo, who is now playing club football in Saudi Arabia. Saudi officials say there has been a surge of domestic interest in boxing in recent years, with the number of boxing gyms rising from seven to 59. Their goal is to have 500,000 boxers in the king-

dom by 2030. They have gloated about being able to stage the Paul-Fury clash after previous attempts to hold it in the United States fell through.

"Paul versus Fury has taken a long time and it has finally been made, which is significant for the landscape of boxing in Saudi Arabia," Prince Khalid bin Abdulaziz told a pre-match press conference. "We knew we wanted to stage this fight. We knew its potential and knew we could overcome challenges to make it happen." Saudi fighters Ziyad Almaayouf, who made his professional debut at "Rage on the Red Sea", and Ragad Al Naimi, the kingdom's first female professional boxer, were both victorious in undercard matches on Sunday.— AFP

Lakers rally to top Mavericks; Bucks win 14th straight

LOS ANGELES: The Los Angeles Lakers erased a 27-point deficit to grab a much-needed 111-108 victory over the Dallas Mavericks on Sunday, as the Milwaukee Bucks pushed their NBA winning streak to 14 games. Anthony Davis scored 30 points and pulled down 15 rebounds for the Lakers, who have won three straight as they try to claw their way into a playoff position.

LeBron James added 26 points and unheralded Jarred Vanderbilt scored 15 points with 17 rebounds and four steals in an impressive performance that included strong defense on Mavs star Luka Doncic. The Lakers were in full flight in the third quarter when James went down hard, clutching his right ankle and heel in pain and saying he heard something "pop."

He stayed in the game, draining a three-pointer to tie it up early in the fourth and making the basket to give them their first lead since early in the first quarter. Davis grabbed the rebound of a Vanderbilt miss and made a put-back dunk to stretch the lead with two minutes to play and the Lakers held on for the win. Doncic scored 26 points, but 14 of those came in the first quarter. Kyrie Irving scored 21 points and grabbed 11 rebounds for the Mavs, but couldn't assert himself in the final period.

Lakers coach Darvin Ham called his team's biggest comeback win of the season "a huge shot in the arm." "The way we were able to continue to scratch, claw, fight, compete," he said. "There were some tough, depressing moments in that first half as they were building their lead. The guys never got discouraged. They had that look of frustration but it wasn't a look of defeat." James said he'd monitor his ankle, but he never considered leaving the game with the Lakers on the upswing. "I thought we could steal one," he said.

Bucks, Nuggets win

In Milwaukee, Jrue Holiday scored 33 points to help the Bucks shake off the absence of superstar Giannis Antetokounmpo in a 104-101 victory over the Phoenix Suns. The Sunday matinee was minus some star power as Antetokounmpo sat out with a quadriceps contusion and Kevin Durant's drama debut remained on hold as he continues his recovery from a knee injury.

Bucks coach Mike Budenholzer singled out Holiday's defensive effort, which included a crucial late steal to rob the Suns' Devin Booker. "His hands are phenomenal, his competitiveness is at a high high level, and he's got a knack for getting deflections and steals at meaningful moments—and that's what winners do," Budenholzer told reporters. The clash between the 2021 NBA finalists offered plenty of drama as the Bucks erased a seven-point deficit with 5:47 left in the fourth quarter to extend their league-best streak.

Brook Lopez scored 22 points for Milwaukee, his cutting layup putting the Bucks up for good 102-100 with 28.4 seconds remaining—just seconds after Booker's turnaround basket under heavy pressure had pulled the Suns level. Booker missed his first six shots but warmed up to lead the Suns with 24 points. In the late game in Denver, Nikola Jokic dropped a 40-point triple-double as the Nuggets downed the Los Angeles Clippers 134-124 in overtime. The Clippers clawed back an 18-point deficit to lead by two points late in the fourth quarter before Denver regrouped to pull clear again in overtime.

Jokic finished with 40 points, 17 rebounds and 10 assists to lead the Denver scoring, with Michael Porter Jr adding 29. Kawhi Leonard led the Clippers scorers with 33 points. Denver improved to 43-19 to remain in charge at the top of the Western Conference while the Clippers fell to 33-30. Trae Young was the hero in Atlanta, his floater as time expired lifting the Hawks to a 129-127 victory over the Brooklyn Nets. The Nets had trailed by as many as 18, but tied it up at 127-127 on Cam Johnson's three-pointer with 7.8 seconds left.— AFP



Shooting Grand Prix competition

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah International Annual Shooting Grand Prix continued with the trap competition. The first day of the preliminaries saw very strong competitors and the scores were very close for all the three categories - Men, Women and Juniors in both HH the Amir Grand Prix and the Asia Shotgun 2023 Cup.

President of the International Shooting Federation (ISSF) Luciano Rossi, in a press statement following a coordination meeting with the Asian Shooting Confederation said Kuwait Shooting has made great development in the past 33 years and has become a powerhouse in the sport with Kuwait shooters as world champions.

He said they are looking forward to organize more championships in Kuwait along with many other championships in Asia. Rossi lauded the role the Asian Shooting Confederation and its President Sheikh Salman Sabah Al-Salem Al-Humoud Al-Sabah as well as Kuwait and Arab Shooting Federations and President Eng Duaij Khalaf Al-Otaibi. Meanwhile, ISSF



Bowling Championship

KUWAIT: The Bowling Club organized the 'National Day' Bowling Championship under the patronage of club President Sheikh Talal Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah. 80 players from various age categories participated. In the open category, Mustafa Al-Mousawi won first place; Abdelsalam Mohammad grabbed the second position while Mohammad Habbab and Ali Ashkanani shared third place. In the youth category, Adel Abul took first; Nasser Al-Kandary (second); Abdelrahman Abul (third). The under-18 girls category was won by Rasha Ahmad. Tournament director Khalid Habbab lauded the support of the Bowling Club Board of Directors.

secretary General Willy Grill thanked ASC and its president Sheikh Salman Al-Humoud for the invitation.

The results of the skeet competition are as follows: Gold medal of the singles competition was claimed by Pakistan's Usman Chand, while the team gold went to Kuwait (with shooters Mansour Al-Rasheedi, Abdallah Al-Rashidi and Abdelaziz Al-Saad). In the women singles, the gold medal went to Kazakh Zoya Yevchenko.



The women team skeet completion was won by Kazakhstan. The skeet juniors gold medal went to Danil Streltsov (from Kazakhstan) while, the skeet mixed team gold went to Assem Oraynbay and Eduard Yechshenko.

News in brief

Evenepoel wins UAE Tour

PARIS: World and Vuelta a Espana champion Remco Evenepoel began his season on a high with success in the UAE Tour after following home stage winner Adam Yates in Sunday's finish. As leader of the home side British rider Yates went all out, attacking the 10-kilometre climb up Jebel Hafeet with its demanding 6.6 percent gradient and later saying he had nothing to lose. Quick-Step's 23-year-old star rider Evenepoel was initially caught out by the UAE Team leader's tactic of all out assault, but ended by holding out for a clear overall win. The Belgian managed to limit the damage having started the day with a slender nine-second cushion in the general classification, and ended with a wide 59sec win. "The pace was insane from the bottom to the top," Evenepoel said. "I thought he (Yates) would stay on my wheel until the final kilometers, but then he attacked I had to go over my limit," explained the man tipped to win the Giro this season.— AFP

Norrie wins Rio crown

RIO DE JANEIRO: Britain's Cameron Norrie took advantage of an ailing Carlos Alcaraz to win the ATP Tour Rio Open on Sunday. Second seed Norrie came from behind to claim the fifth tournament win of his career, winning 5-7, 6-4, 7-5 in 2hrs 40mins. Norrie's victory came exactly seven days after the British world number 13 had lost to Spain's second-ranked Alcaraz in the final of the Argentina Open in Buenos Aires. "It's so special to win this one, especially after losing a couple of finals this year," said Norrie, who was also beaten in the final in Auckland in January. But while Norrie celebrated, Alcaraz was left with fresh fitness concerns after an energy-sapping duel that saw him require repeated visits from the physio. The 19-year-old, who only returned to tennis at last week's tournament in Argentina after a four-month injury layoff, was clearly struggling with a sore hamstring during the latter stages of Sunday's final.— AFP

Kirk edges Cole in playoff

MIAMI: Chris Kirk birdied the first playoff hole to beat Eric Cole at the Honda Classic on Sunday, ending a near eight-year title drought with his fifth US PGA Tour triumph. It was an emotional win for the 37-year-old American, whose last victory at Colonial in 2015 was followed by time away from the game in 2019 to deal with depression and alcohol misuse. He took a two-shot lead into the final round and carded a one-under-par 69, shaking off a bogey at the 72nd hole with a birdie when they returned again to 18 for the first hole of the playoff. There Kirk spun his approach within a foot of the pin while Cole was in a greenside bunker and missed a 10-foot birdie attempt to extend the playoff. "I just have so much to be thankful for," Kirk said. "I'm so grateful. I'm so grateful for my sobriety. I'm so grateful for my family. I'm so grateful for everyone that's supported me throughout the past three or four years especially."— AFP

Howell wins LIV opener

MEXICO CITY: Charles Howell III fired an eight-under-par 63 to win the opening event of the LIV Golf season at Mayakoba in Playa del Carmen in Mexico on Sunday. Howell, whose most recent professional victory before Sunday came five years ago at the PGA Tour's RSM Classic, reeled off eight birdies to finish with a three-round 16-under-par aggregate of 197. The 43-year-old journeyman, who started the day one shot off the pace, erupted over the front nine with six birdies before adding a seventh at the 10th hole. He grabbed the eighth birdie of a bogey-free round on the 17th to seal a comfortable four-shot victory. Peter Uihlein finished in second after carding a closing 68 for an aggregate 201. Uihlein's challenge effectively went up in smoke on the 12th hole when he triple-bogeyed to leave Howell with a relatively comfortable route to victory. South Africa's Branden Grace took third place with a four-under-par 67 while England's Paul Casey was three shots back with a closing 70.— AFP

Krejčíková climbs to Top 20

PARIS: Barbora Krejčíková was rewarded for her victory in Dubai, where she beat the top three players in the world, with a return to the Top 20 after climbing 14 places in the new WTA rankings released on Monday. The 27-year-old Czech, who won the French Open in 2021, is up to No. 16 following her remarkable performance in Dubai. In successive matches, she came back from losing the first set 6-0 to defeat world No. 2 Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus in the quarterfinals, the American world No 3 Jessica Pegula in the semis and then, in straight sets, Iga Swiatek in the final. It is a welcome return to the higher echelons of the game for Krejčíková who a year ago was ranked No 2. In spite of the defeat Swiatek remains the No 1 by a clear margin. Liudmila Samsonova (12th) and Beatriz Haddad (13th) swap places while Ekaterina Alexandrova (18th) and the Romanian Simona Halep, the former world No. 1, now 19th, slip two spots.— AFP

Sports

La Liga leaders Barca tumble to embarrassing defeat 1-0

'Worst game of season' as lowly Almeria stun Barcelona

ALMERIA: La Liga leaders Barcelona tumbled to an embarrassing 1-0 defeat at Almeria on Sunday, failing to capitalize on Real Madrid's derby draw with Atletico to extend their advantage. El Bilal Toure's fine first half strike split the teams and earned Almeria their first ever victory over Barca, inflicting only the second defeat of the league campaign on the Catalans. Xavi Hernandez's side still have a seven-point lead over champions Madrid, but their morale took a further blow following their midweek Europa League exit against Manchester United.

Barca face Madrid in a Clasico Copa del Rey semi-final first leg on Thursday at the Santiago Bernabeu, with their vulnerabilities starting to show. Victory would have stretched their advantage in the title race to double figures, as they bid to win La Liga for the first time since 2019. Madrid beat Barcelona in the league in October in their first defeat and Almeria ended Barca's subsequent 13-game unbeaten league run.

"I'm very angry because I think we played our worst game of the season," Xavi told Movistar. "Above all in the first half, we couldn't move the ball around, we lacked intensity, speed, on a day where we couldn't mess up. We did not show the passion (we needed) to win the game. In the second half, yes, but they defended well." Xavi, already without injured trio Pedri, Ousmane Dembele and Ansu Fati, took a risk and rotated heavily and his team paid the price.

The lowly hosts, starting the game 19th with just one victory in their prior eight league games, were on top and went ahead through Toure's emphatic finish. The Mali international cushioned a long ball into striker Luis Suarez's path, before spinning and breaking forward at pace. Suarez lofted a pass over Andreas Christensen and Toure

ran on to it, lashing an effort past Marc-Andre ter Stegen and in off the crossbar. It was only the eighth league goal Barcelona have conceded this season, stopping Ter Stegen adding to his impressive tally of 17 clean sheets.

'We'll calm ourselves'

The hosts kept La Liga top scorer Robert Lewandowski quiet at the other end, unable to trouble Almeria goalkeeper Fernando Martinez. Defender Araujo, thrown into attack by Xavi in desperation, directed a header inches wide of the far post but that was as close as Barcelona came. Ter Stegen made a brilliant save to deny Adrian Embarba on the counter and Almeria defended bravely to see out an historic victory. The goalkeeper said Barcelona would recover ahead of the cup clash against Madrid.

"It's a defeat, it always hurts, it never arrives at a good moment, but we will calm ourselves," said Ter Stegen. "It's important to charge our batteries for Thursday. We're looking forward and we will achieve what we want to." Almeria rose to 15th, two points clear of the relegation zone. "The best team in the league came to us, they're first, and we were capable of blocking them, of taking advantage of the chance we had," Rubi told Movistar. Elsewhere Jorge Sampaoli's Sevilla twice came from behind but fell to a 3-2 home defeat by Osasuna, leaving them 14th and two points above the relegation zone.

David Garcia headed the visitors in front in the first half as they dominated, but Nemanja Gudelj smashed Sevilla back level with a stunning long range effort. Fernando's unfortunate own goal put Osasuna back ahead, but Morocco striker Youssef En Nesry leveled with a fine finish. A thrilling clash was settled when on loan Barcelona winger Ez Abde produced a fine solo goal with five minutes



ALMERIA: Barcelona's Polish forward Robert Lewandowski (left) and Almeria's Spanish defender Chumi jump for the ball during the Spanish League football match between UD Almeria and FC Barcelona on February 26, 2023. — AFP

remaining, whipping his finish across Yassine Bounou and into the far corner.

Osasuna rose to seventh and have a Copa del Rey semi-final against Athletic Bilbao to look forward to on Wednesday. Girona earned an exciting 3-2 win at Athletic Bilbao to climb into mid-table, inspired by the electric Aleix Garcia, who opened

the scoring. Oscar de Marcos and Mikel Vesga own goals extended Girona's lead, while Athletic hit back through Yuri Berchiche and Raul Garcia grabbed another late on, but could not find an equalizer. Young Celta Vigo star Gabri Veiga struck twice and set up another for Haris Seferovic in a 3-0 win over Real Valladolid. — AFP

Bayern reclaim Bundesliga lead

MUNICH: Birthday boy Jamal Musiala scored his 11th of the season as Bayern Munich returned to the Bundesliga summit with a dominant 3-0 home win over Union Berlin on Sunday. Bayern and Borussia Dortmund now lead the Bundesliga by three points from Union. First-half goals from Eric Maxim Choupo-Moting, Kingsley Coman and Musiala, on his 20th birthday, put Bayern into a comfortable position against the overachieving Berliners.

A pre-match blizzard failed to cool Bayern's fluency, with the home side forcing Union into several last-ditch saves in the opening moments. Bayern striker Eric Maxim Choupo-Moting got the home side on the scoreboard after 31 minutes, heading in a lofted pass from Kingsley Coman. Union almost hit back five minutes later when Tunisia international Aissa Laidouni blasted just past the upright after a nice pass from Seraldo Becker.

Bayern doubled up immediately afterwards, Thomas Mueller chipping the Union defense with his back to goal to send Coman one-on-one with Union goalie Frederik Ronnow. The France forward rounded Ronnow and slid the ball into the net. Mueller was the provider again in first-half injury time, setting up Musiala to give Bayern a 3-0 halftime lead. Bayern took the sting out of the match after halftime in pursuit of just their third league win from seven matches in 2023, giving away few chances to the outclassed visitors.

Senegal forward Sadio Mane came off the bench in the 65th minute for Coman, his first appearance since sustaining a leg injury which saw him miss the Qatar World Cup. Mane put Mueller through on goal just five minutes later, but goalkeeper Ronnow headed the veteran forward's shot over the bar. The victory means Bayern overtake Borussia Dortmund who went three points clear with a 1-0 win at Hoffenheim on Saturday. The Bavarians now sit ahead of the Westfalians on goal difference. Union finish the round in third, one point ahead of fourth-placed RB Leipzig.

Azmoun snatches draw

A second-half goal from Iran striker Sardar



MUNICH: Bayern Munich's German midfielder Jamal Musiala (left) and Union Berlin's Norwegian midfielder Morten Thorsby both go to head the ball during the German first division Bundesliga football match on February 26, 2023. — AFP

Azmoun helped Bayer Leverkusen grab a 1-1 draw at Freiburg on Sunday. A goal from free-kick specialist Vincenzo Grifo had put Freiburg into a first-half lead and on course for a valuable three points in their top-four bid, but Azmoun's first goal in Leverkusen colors meant the honors were shared.

Grifo opened the scoring with his 12th league goal of the season, curling an inch-perfect free kick over the wall and onto the inside of the crossbar. The ball bounced down but hit the back of Leverkusen goalkeeper Lukas Hradecky and went in. The visitors had two chances to equalize just before the break through Jeremie Frimpong and Moussa Diaby, but Freiburg held firm. Bayer manager Xabi Alonso brought on midfielder Florian Wirtz at half-time and the change had the desired impact, with the visitors benefiting from the teenager's creativity and vision.

With 67 minutes gone, Wirtz moved the ball to Mitchell Bakker, who chipped a superb looping cross to Azmoun. The Iranian cut the ball across the face of goal and into the net. Grifo credited the "incredible quality" of the guests and said "you can't always win, so we are reasonably happy with the point." His coach Christian Streich echoed the sentiments, saying "handy and lively Leverkusen were really good." "I'm happy with the draw. It's a good point for us," Alonso told broadcaster DAZN he was "satisfied with the performance" but admitted "we wanted a little more." — AFP

Milan move to third; Inter slip

MILAN: AC Milan moved up to third in Serie A after Sunday's 2-0 win over Atalanta, drawing level on points with Inter Milan, who fell further behind runaway leaders Napoli with a 1-0 defeat at Bologna. Stefano Pioli's side are five points ahead of fifth-placed Lazio in the race for the Champions League thanks in part to Theo Hernandez's volley crashing off the post and into the goal via Juan Musso's back in the 26th minute. A late dinked finish from Junior Messias at a soaking San Siro ensured Milan had their third league victory in a row. "I'm counting the goal as mine. Oli (Giroud) did well to knock it down for me, I think it was a good goal," said Hernandez to DAZN.

Milan could have had more in the second half of a underwhelming encounter, Rafael Leo and

Messias both wasting golden chances from close range before the latter sealed the points from Leao's pass with four minutes remaining. The hosts were also cheered by the return of France goalkeeper Mike Maignan after five months out and Zlatan Ibrahimovic, who came on as a second-half substitute. Veteran forward Ibrahimovic had been sidelined since May last year after having the anterior cruciate ligament in his left knee reconstructed.

"Mike and Zlatan aren't only great players, they're leaders with so much experience and having them available makes a big difference," said Pioli. Atalanta stay sixth, three points behind Roma in fourth who can join Milan and Inter on 47 points with a win at bottom side Cremonese on Tuesday. Gian Piero Gasperini's side cannot complain about the result as they didn't trouble Maignan once and have now lost three of their last four league matches. The Milan giants are a whopping 18 points behind Napoli after Bologna beat Inter 1-0 in Sunday's early match. — AFP

France end Scotland's Six Nations dream

PARIS: France full-back Thomas Ramos scored 17 points to end Scotland's hopes of a Six Nations Grand Slam with a 32-21 win at the Stade de France on Sunday. Scotland lost for the first time in the Championship this season after victories over England and Wales, ending their hopes of a first Grand Slam since 1990.

Both sides played more than an hour with 14 men after Grant Gilchrist was shown a red card for the visitors and Mohamed Haouas suffered the same fate for the hosts. "I was proud of how the players reacted to the situation," Scotland coach Gregor Townsend said. "I'm disappointed we didn't take the two or three opportunities. We'll be highly motivated to play for a trophy at home against Ireland," he added of the game in Edinburgh on March 12.

Tight-head prop Haouas started instead of the banned Uini Atonio as Fabien Galthie's home side played their first home game of the year six months out from hosting the Rugby World Cup. France needed an improved performance after losing to Ireland two weeks ago, a first defeat since July 2021 - and they got it. "The theme was that we'd fallen and to get back on our feet," Galthie said. "It was that. We managed to get out of difficult times to then be on top and then go and get the bonus point at the end." Flanker Hamish Watson returned for Townsend's side after suffering concussion in November.

Townsend's visitors, seeking just a second win in Paris in 24 years, decided to play with the strong wind in the first half but failed to make the most of the advantage early on. After just five minutes, France fly-half Romain Ntamack crossed and with Ramos' conversion they led 7-0 to the joy of the majority of the sold-out crowd. Scotland's hopes of victory took a further blow two minutes later in the Parisian sunshine as lock and vice-captain Grant Gilchrist was shown a red card for a high tackle on Anthony Jelonec. — AFP

Classifieds

Change of Name

I, Ajith, holder of Indian Passport number Z3828192 having permanent address Vazhappilly House, behind Holy Cross Church, Arthath P.O, Thrissur - Dist, Kerala, India - 680521, residing in Kuwait at present hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as Ajith (Given name) and Vazhappilly Ittoop (Surname). **(C#3173) 24-02-2023**

I, Syed Mahaboob Basha holder of Indian Passport number T2417304 S/o Shaik Khasimsab resident of Dno. 2-361, Sastrinagar Akkayapalli, Kadapa City YSR. District. Have changed my name as Given Name MAHABOUB BASHA surname Shaik. **(C#3169)**

I, Rayamarakkal Salma Muhamed Hashim father of Abdul Razak rayamarakkal Muhamed hashim Passport no. T4486251 Rayamarakkal house Elavalay, Kakkassery po, Thrissur, pin:680511, Kerala have changed my son's name to Salmaan hashim Abdul Razak for all purposes. **(C#3170)**

I, AMATULLAH holder of Passport No. M5451208 do hereby change my name to AMATULLAH (as Given name) BURHAN VOHRA (as Surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name AMATULLAH BURHAN VOHRA and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. **(C#3171)**

I, BABUDIN, holder of Indian Passport No. P3551947 having permanent address Uttar Pradesh, India, pin code -

245206 residing in Kuwait at present hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as under Given name BABUDIN and Surname SHABUDIN. **(C#3172) - 23-02-2023**

I HAVE CHANGE MY NAME FROM QUTBUDDIN PASSPORT NO. Z2690395 IN FUTURE I AM KNOW FROM THIS NAME QUTBUDDIN HAKANI V/P NAJAMPURA SAGWARA. (C#3166)

I, ABDUL KHADER holder of Indian Passport No. Z3284430 having permanent address Telangana India 500005, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as under: Given name: Abdul Khader Omer and Surname: Bawazeer **(C#3167) - 22-02-2023.**

Hospitals & Clinics

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

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144

Man United grab League Cup

United end six-year trophy drought



LONDON: Manchester United's Portuguese midfielder Bruno Fernandes (3rd right) and Manchester United's English defender Harry Maguire (center) celebrate with the trophy after their victory in the English League Cup final football match between Manchester United and Newcastle United on February 26, 2023. — AFP

LONDON: Manchester United clinched their first major trophy for six years with a ruthless 2-0 win against Newcastle in the League Cup final at Wembley on Sunday. Erik ten Hag's side took control by half-time thanks to Casemiro's header and a Sven Botman own goal and held firm despite Newcastle's second-half pressure.

United's first silverware since 2017, when they won the League Cup and the Europa League in the Jose Mourinho era, was just reward for a mature display that underlined the impressive work done by Dutchman Ten Hag since he arrived from Ajax last year. The celebrations that accompanied United's sixth League Cup triumph could be the first of many trophy parades on the evidence of Ten Hag's transformative first season.

"You have to win the first one and that is what we did today," Ten Hag said. "We can get a lot of inspiration from this and more confidence that we can do it. We are still at the start of restoring Manchester United to where we belong-winning trophies." United remain challengers on three other fronts, sitting third in the Premier League and

with an FA Cup fifth round tie against West Ham on Wednesday followed by a Europa League last 16 tie against Real Betis in March.

After 10 years in the wilderness since Alex Ferguson retired having led them to their last Premier League title in 2013, United are finally emerging from one of the darkest periods in the club's illustrious history. United finished a dismal sixth in the Premier League last season, but Ten Hag has swiftly masterminded their return to relevance. It was fitting that Ten Hag's maiden trophy success with United came after he met Ferguson for dinner recently and with the Scot watching from the Wembley stands.

Ending United's longest trophy drought for 40 years is no guarantee of future success, but the steely Ten Hag appears capable of thriving in the unrelenting Old Trafford spotlight. United co-chairman Avram Glazer, attending his first game since the November announcement that his family are considering offers for the club, might reconsider selling up after viewing what could be the start of a golden era. Despite failing to win their first

major trophy since the 1969 Inter-Cities Fairs Cup, Newcastle can also expect to feature in more showpiece occasions soon.

United renaissance

Newcastle have been revitalized since their takeover by a Saudi-funded consortium in 2021 and they competed gamely in their first cup final for 24 years. "We played really well between both boxes. I can't fault the players' efforts, but we didn't defend the free-kick well enough for the first goal. That's what we will regret," Howe said.

Newcastle's fanatical 'Toon Army' turned one half of Wembley into a roiling sea of black and white as they belted out songs of praise for their heroes well over an hour before kick-off. But that show of Geordie passion proved the highpoint of the day for Newcastle as United spoiled the party in composed style. Newcastle had feared stand-in keeper Loris Karius might be exposed in his first major occasion since his howlers led to Liverpool's 2018 Champions League final defeat against Real Madrid.

Playing instead of the suspended Nick Pope, Karius might feel he could have done better with United's second goal, but he was not to blame for Newcastle's defeat. United went ahead in the 33rd minute when Luke Shaw's free-kick arrowed towards the Newcastle six-yard box and Casemiro timed his run perfectly to glance a clinical header past Karius. It was just reward for the latest commanding performance from the United midfielder following his move from Real Madrid last year.

Ten Hag's team had the momentum and doubled their lead in the 39th minute. Wout Weghorst's pass found Marcus Rashford inside the area and, with Newcastle's defenders slow to react, he hit a mistimed shot that deflected off Botman and looped over the wrong-footed Karius. Newcastle laid siege to David De Gea's goal in the second half but, showing the desire and organization demanded by their manager, Ten Hag's men refused to buckle. If United's last League Cup triumph ended up as fool's gold, this success suggests the Ten Hag era is built on far stronger foundations. — AFP

Mbappe becomes PSG's joint all-time top scorer

PARIS: Kylian Mbappe reached 200 goals for Paris Saint-Germain to become the club's joint all-time top scorer as the France superstar netted twice in his side's 3-0 win over Ligue 1 title rivals Marseille on Sunday. Mbappe scored both his goals at the Velodrome from Lionel Messi assists and in between he set up the Argentine for PSG's other goal as they moved eight points clear at the top of the table.

It was a result and a performance that will erase many of the doubts about a team that had been in stuttering form in recent weeks as they outclassed their most credible domestic challengers. Mbappe's brace took him to a double century of goals for PSG in just short of 250 appearances since signing from Monaco in 2017.

The 24-year-old therefore equals his former teammate Edinson Cavani as the club's record marksman. "He is obviously fast but it's not just about his legs - the speed at which he does things is out of the ordinary," PSG coach Christophe Galtier told broadcaster Amazon Prime. "Players like him are clearly motivated by stats and records. Tonight he has equaled Edinson Cavani's magnificent record and he will obviously go on to beat it."

Mbappe is now out on his own as Ligue 1's leading scorer with 17 goals and has 29 in 29 games in all competitions since the campaign began. Messi, meanwhile, now has 12 league goals this season and has set up 12 more, and PSG did not miss the absent Neymar. The Brazilian was sidelined after being stretched off with an ankle injury in last week's 4-3 defeat of Lille.

The Qatar-owned club saw their injury problems continue as centre-back Presnel Kimpembe -



MARSEILLE: Paris Saint-Germain's French forward Kylian Mbappe celebrates after scoring his team's third goal during the French L1 football match between Olympique Marseille (OM) and Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) on February 26, 2023. —AFP

whose season has been plagued by fitness issues - was carried off early on after crumpling to the turf in agony. "Unfortunately he seriously injured himself and will obviously be out until the end of the season," said Galtier, who added that it looked like an Achilles tendon injury. PSG overcame that setback to take the lead in the 25th minute. Mbappe darted infield from the left and broke away from the unaware Eric Bailly to latch onto a Messi pass before running through to score.

Four minutes later it was 2-0 as Mbappe combined with Nuno Mendes down the left before playing a glorious ball through the legs of Bailly for Messi to finish from close in. Messi should have scored again from a Mendes assist soon after while both Mbappe and Marquinhos came close to making it 3-0 before the interval. — AFP

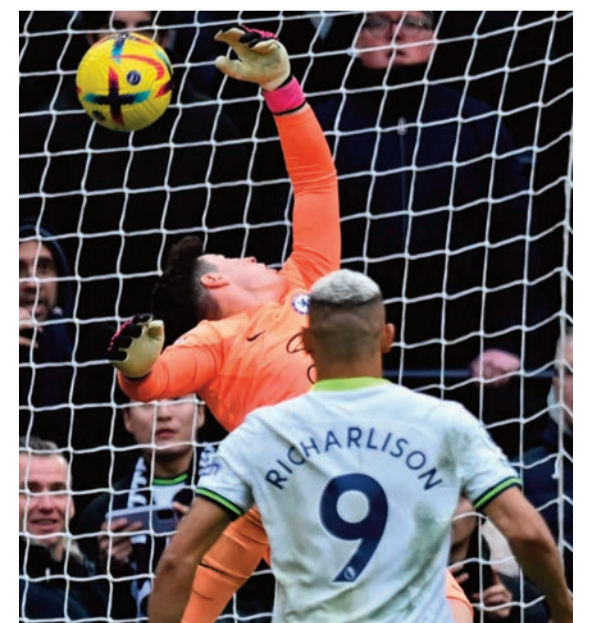
Spurs deepen Chelsea crisis

LONDON: Tottenham heaped more pressure on under-fire Chelsea manager Graham Potter as goals from Oliver Skipp and Harry Kane earned Spurs a 2-0 win on Sunday. Victory consolidates Tottenham's place in the Premier League top four as they opened up a four-point lead over fifth-placed Newcastle, although the Magpies have two games in hand.

Chelsea remain 10th with their chances of Champions League football next season now seemingly dependent on an unlikely run to win the European Cup for a third time. Despite splashing over £500 million (\$600 million) on new players this season, Potter's men have now won just twice in 15 games in all competitions. The former Brighton boss spoke this week of the mental toll that run has taken as he has had to deal with abuse from supporters aimed at his family.

Chelsea's new owners have remained steadfast in their support of Potter. But patience must be wearing thin and the Blues chairman and co-owner Todd Boehly was in attendance to watch another toothless display from his club at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium. Chelsea have scored only one goal in their last six games and never showed any fight for their beleaguered boss after falling behind just seconds into the second half.

Neither side hit their stride in a bad-tempered first period, which the visitors were lucky to finish with 11 men. After consultation with his assistant, referee Stuart Attwell showed Hakim Ziyech a straight red card for a push into the face of Emerson Royal. However, Attwell then reversed the decision after viewing the incident on the pitchside monitor. Chelsea did not take advantage of that let-off as they fell behind just 19 seconds after the break.



LONDON: Chelsea's Spanish goalkeeper Kepa Arrizabalaga cannot prevent a shot from Tottenham Hotspur's English midfielder Oliver Skipp (not pictured) - beating him for the opening goal of the English Premier League football match between Tottenham Hotspur and Chelsea on February 26, 2023. — AFP

Kepa Arrizabalaga saved Emerson's initial effort, but the Spanish goalkeeper should have done better than turning Skipp's shot in off the underside of the bar for his first Spurs goal. Tottenham were again without their manager Antonio Conte as the former Chelsea boss recovers from emergency surgery to remove his gallbladder, but Spurs have a 100 per cent record with his assistant Cristian Stellini in charge. Kane made sure of his side's first league win over Chelsea in nine attempts when the England captain swept home Eric Dier's flick on from Son Heung-min's corner eight minutes from time. — AFP