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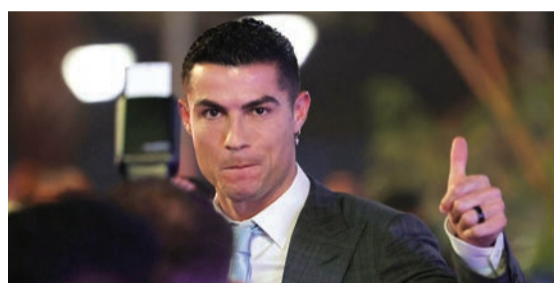
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KUWAIT REACHES THE STARS

KU and KFAS collaborate to launch Kuwait's first satellite into space



KUWAIT: Attendees watch a screen displaying live footage of the first Kuwaiti satellite (Kuwait Sat-1) launching from Florida at Kuwait University on Jan 3, 2023. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat (See Page 3)

By Khaled Al-Abdulhadi

KUWAIT: Kuwait's first satellite was successfully launched into space on Tuesday in what was hailed as a milestone effort in setting up the country's space industry. "Kuwait Sat-1" was launched onboard the SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket from Cape Canaveral in Florida, in an endeavor undertaken by Kuwait University and funded by the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences. The launch was the culmination of diligent work over the course of the past three years, aiming to bring Kuwait's space ambitions to fruition.

The launch was monitored through a ground reception station, which will receive information from imagery collected by the satellite. The station is located in Sabah Al-Salem Science City in the university's campus. A large number of officials and attendees watched the launch of the rocket that carried the satellite into space. "This is a national project within the framework of Kuwait's 2035 vision to establish national staff, as we aim to develop the scientific field in Kuwait," Acting Director of Kuwait University Dr Suad Al-Fadhli said.

"Our ambitions have reached the sky with the efforts of our youth, and I am honored to witness this achievement and all efforts spent in avoiding obstacles. Today is a historic day for Kuwait, fully accomplished by Kuwaiti efforts that will record a milestone for Kuwait's presence in the space field," Dean of Kuwait University's College of Science Mohammed bin Sabt said.

"We are the national team for the first satellite of Kuwait. It is a completely Kuwaiti project with the sponsorship of local institutions, with 45 of our young students. Our goal is to build national

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News in brief

MoI installs new traffic cameras

KUWAIT: The interior ministry's traffic department announced the installation of new traffic cameras with improved features to detect over speeding, running red lights, illegal U-turns and stopping in yellow box junctions, as well as using the phone while driving and failure to fasten seatbelts.



Ramadan from March 23, Eid April 21

KUWAIT: Astronomer Adel Al-Marzouq said the holy month of Ramadan is forecast to begin on March 23 and last for 29 days. "Fajr prayer will be at 4:30 am and Maghrib will be at 6:01 pm, or a fast of 13 hours and 31 minutes on the first day of Ramadan," he said. It is forecast Eid al-Fitr prayers will be on Friday, April 21 at 5:31 am.

No bank heists in Denmark

COPENHAGEN: Denmark has recorded its first year without bank robberies, as the use of cold hard cash has dwindled in recent years, the country's finance workers union said. The increasingly cashless society has led banks to dial down their cash services, the union said, leaving little potential loot for robbers. — AFP

Govt meets MPs, says buying loans will be expensive

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah, accompanied by some ministers on

Tuesday, held talks with lawmakers on expanding cooperation, but the government informed MPs that purchasing citizens' consumer and personal loans is expensive. The government said the meeting was positive and fruitful, but MPs were divided on the outcome of the first such meeting, with some praising its results and others saying it did not achieve much.

The meeting, called by the prime minister, discussed outstanding issues between the government and the National Assembly, including purchasing loans, amnesty for political prisoners and others with the aim to reduce differences between the two bodies. A majority of MPs say the prime minister is a

Zionist storms Aqsa compound; forces kill child

JERUSALEM: Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates were among nations to condemn a visit Tuesday by the Zionist entity's extreme-right new national security minister to Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque compound. The move by firebrand Itamar Ben-Gvir has enraged Palestinians, while the United States warned of

steps which may harm the status quo.

Kuwait's foreign ministry strongly denounced the Zionist minister's storming of the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound. In a statement Tuesday, the ministry stressed that this act provokes the feelings of Muslims, violates international legitimacy resolutions and comes within the framework of the Zionist occupation authorities' continuous attempts to change the historical and legal status quo in Jerusalem and its sanctities. The ministry also urged the international community to act immediately and put an end to such acts.

Meanwhile, Zionist forces killed a child in the West Bank city of Bethlehem on Tuesday, the

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Lunar orbiter sends pics of Earth, Moon

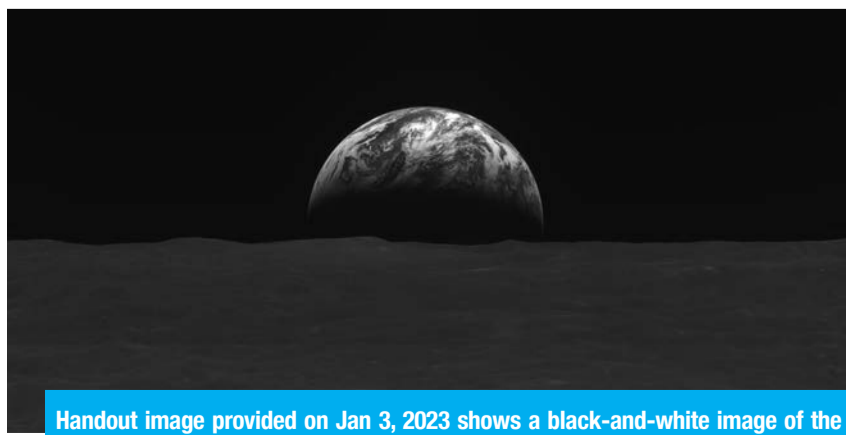
SEOUL: South Korea's first-ever lunar orbiter Danuri has sent black-and-white photos of the Moon's surface and Earth, the national space center said Tuesday. Danuri - a portmanteau of the Korean words for "Moon" and "enjoy" - was launched on a SpaceX rocket from the United States in August 2022 and entered lunar orbit last month.

Its images - taken between Dec 24 and Jan 1 - show the lunar surface and Earth, and were shot from less than 120 km over the Moon, the Korea Aerospace Research Institute (KARI) said in a statement. The images and videos will be "used to select potential sites for a Moon landing in 2032," it added. Danuri is circling the Moon every two hours, the center said.

The orbiter will begin its scientific mission next month, which includes mapping and analyzing lunar terrain, and measuring magnetic strength and gamma rays. It will also test experimental "space internet" technology by transmitting photos and videos to Earth. — AFP



JERUSALEM: Zionist minister and Jewish Power party chief Itamar Ben-Gvir walks through the courtyard of the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound on Jan 3, 2023. — AFP



Handout image provided on Jan 3, 2023 shows a black-and-white image of the Moon's surface and Earth taken by South Korean lunar orbiter Danuri. — AFP



Amiri Diwan conveys condolences over Pope Benedict's death



KUWAIT: Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah.



KUWAIT: Amiri Diwan minister conveys condolences over Pope Benedict XVI's death. — KUNA photos

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah visited the Vatican Embassy on Tuesday to convey the condolences of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince

Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah as well as the government and people of Kuwait over Pope Benedict XVI's death.

Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-

Jaber Al-Sabah offered his condolences on Tuesday over the demise of Pope Benedict XVI at the Vatican's embassy in Kuwait. Writing in the condolence book, Sheikh Salem expressed sincere condolences and solace recalling the deceased's good deeds and contributions to humanity across

the world as well as his efforts over decades to spread and promote tolerance, amity and peace.

He also condoled with Pope Francis, the current head of the Catholic Church, the bishop of Rome and sovereign of the Vatican City, the family of the deceased and the Catholic Church. —KUNA

KPTC's electric buses could take Kuwait closer to its climate goals

Kuwait's current road infrastructure 'limited and inefficient': Study

By Nebal Snan

KUWAIT: Electric buses could take Kuwait one step closer to achieving its climate goals, but some changes are needed to ensure they meet their intended objective, experts say.

The first batch of buses, produced by Chinese bus manufacturer King Long, joined the fleet of Kuwait Public Transport Company (KPTC) last December and is expected to hit the road in January. KPTC CEO Mansour Abdul Mohsen Al-Saad told media that the company plans to operate more electric buses in the future.

Speaking to the Kuwait Times, Secretary General of the Kuwaiti Environmental Protection Society Jenan Bahzad said the buses are Kuwait's hope for reducing air and noise pollution. According to a 2017 evaluation of carbon emissions in the country,

road transportation constituted the third biggest source of air pollution at 16.6 percent. The top source was power stations and water at 41.6 percent, followed by chemicals such as fertilizers and asphalt at 25.5 percent.

Bahzad highlighted the positive effects resulting from easing off fossil fuels, including drop in incidences of respiratory diseases. But she said it takes a lot more than purchasing new vehicles for us to reap the benefits. Bahzad singled out the need for infrastructure to support the technology and provide road users with a good commuting experience.

A paper examining transportation equity in Kuwait published by The London School of Economics and Political Science has found that the public transport system is "inaccessible" for both Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis. The study described the current infrastructure as "limited and inefficient"

with bus routes that do not serve people's needs.

Switching to electric vehicles might not seem like an attractive option for people in oil-producing Kuwait, says economist Mohammad Ramadan. Purchasing and running electric vehicles could be more expensive than conventional ones, given the relatively low cost of fossil fuels in the country. But there are other factors at play, such as the Kuwaiti government's commitment to decrease carbon emissions. The government's environment goals were affirmed most recently on the sidelines of COP27, where Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah pledged a carbon-neutral oil and gas sector by 2050 and promised to extend that to the rest of the country by the following decade.

As the country prioritizes reducing emissions, said Ramadan, electric buses are likely worth the cost. One obstacle jeopardizing the success of electric buses in Kuwait could be the electricity generation system which relies on burning fossil fuels to produce energy, thus exacerbating climate change. But Bahzad said the vehicles have a smaller carbon footprint compared to those running on diesel regardless of the source of electricity.



Jenan Bahzad



Mohammad Ramadan

A joint study carried out by universities in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Pakistan found that GCC countries hoping to utilize electric vehicles to lower carbon emissions, such as Saudi Arabia, must invest more into renewable energy sources.

More projects related to electric vehicles might be on the horizon for Kuwait. In 2021, Kuwait Ports Authority announced, with little detail, the approval of a proposal to build the Middle East's first city to serve electric vehicle manufacturers. However, no updates on the city have been provided since then.



KUWAIT: Kuwait Public Transport Company's electric bus. KPTC's electric buses are scheduled to hit the road this month.

AMU seeks to Arabize medicine in Arab world

KUWAIT: Arab Medical Union (AMU), which represents associations and societies active in the medical field, made a huge move in deciding to "Arabize" medicine in the Arab world. It is known that sciences including medical subjects are taught in native languages all over the world, with few exceptions due to having multiple languages, particularly in India. AMU said among the major reasons behind the drop in medicine in Arab countries, as studies and researches showed, is the inability of the Arab doctor to understand sciences correctly in his language.

All scientists around the world are in agreement on this, as the medical experience in Arab countries, since imperialism forced them to use a language other than theirs, faces a major regression in research and studies. It is regretful that the Zionist entity, which teaches medicine in Hebrew, has scientific and research papers that exceed what Arab scientists and doctors publish despite the huge difference in population numbers, as Jewish residents in the Zionist entity are 7 million, while the popula-

tion of the Arab world is nearly 437 million.

Dr Khalid Al-Saleh, who was asked to chair the Arabization committee, said the union reformed the committee's statutes and regulations and meetings of the higher council of the union. He said former head of the translation department at WHO Dr Qasim Sara from Syria was selected as committee rapporteur.

Dr Saleh said the committee has 17 members from Arab countries who are concerned with Arabization - Dr Mohammad Iyad Al-Shatti, Dr Youssef Barakat and Dr Mohammad Qaderi from Syria; Dr Mohammad Al-Hamlawi, Dr Mohammad Al-Batanouni, Dr Khalid Amarah and Dr Essam Al-Sayyed from Egypt; Dr Saleh Baleid and Dr Ismail Erwainah from Algeria; Dr Abdellatif Obaid and Dr Ahmad Thiyab from Tunisia; Dr Amin Kashmiri from Saudi Arabia; Dr Marzouq Youssef Al-Ghunaim from Kuwait; Dr Abdullah Al-Saedi from Yemen and Dr Idris Abu Al-Hassan from Morocco. Dr Saleh appreciated all Arab efforts that facilitated this matter and wished them success.



Dr Khalid Al-Saleh

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Local

Kuwait Sat-1: Tales behind 1,000 hours of ‘blood, sweat, and tears’

Kuwait marks first milestone in space technology



KUWAIT: Kuwaitis watch the launch of Kuwait's first satellite Kuwait Sat-1 on Tuesday. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



KUWAIT: Kuwait's first satellite Kuwait Sat-1's administrative team speaks during the launch on Tuesday. Kuwait Sat-1 was launched onboard the SpaceX Falcon 9 from the US State of Florida's Cape Canaveral, in an endeavor undertaken by Kuwait University and funded by the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences.

KUWAIT: The mere thought of sending anything to outer space might be cumbersome to some, but actualizing the step is far more difficult than it appears to be. In the case of Kuwait Sat-1, the process took some 1,000 hours of “blood, sweat, and tears” to bring what was once upon a time an idea into frustration, kick-starting Kuwait's journey to the stars.

Kuwait's first satellite was successfully launched into space on Tuesday in what was hailed as a milestone effort in setting up the country's space industry. Kuwait Sat-1 was launched onboard the SpaceX Falcon 9 from the US State of Florida's Cape Canaveral, in an endeavor undertaken by Kuwait University and funded by the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences.

One of the behind the scenes tales of the project was of Ali Al-Damkhi's, head of Kuwait Sat-1's administrative team. Al-Damkhi - Kuwait Sat-1's geology, earth science, and environment specialist - was strolling at Kuwait University's (KU) Khaldiya campus one day heading to the geology department, situated atop the physics section.

Instead of heading straight to his destination, Al-Damkhi was stopped by a purple-colored advertisement from Kuwait Foundation for Advancement of Sciences (KFAS). The advertisement was sort of a call to arms by the KFAS for those interested in “space”. Al-Damkhi could not erase that from his mind despite finishing his business at KU on that very day. Scrolling down on his Instagram feed, Al-Damkhi saw the advertisement again and felt that he was destined to join this mission. Applying to the project and being accepted after the interview was a dream for the young Al-Damkhi and the words of the project's director Dr Hala Al-Jassar kept ringing in his head. He and his fellow project's mates were, as Dr Al-Jassar puts it, are “fully responsible” for the project and they will succeed because the heads of Kuwait Sat-1 believed in “their capabilities.”

A tremendous amount of strenuous



work was involved in the initial phases of the project but Al-Damkhi - mainly involved in the environmental portion of the satellite mission - was venturing on bravely. In contrast to Al-Damkhi's journey into Kuwait Sat-1, Abdullah Al-Khatem was not guided by that almost magical encounter with the KFAS advertisement. A member of the project's team and childhood friend nominated him to join in the mission. Al-Khatem, a photography enthusiast and volunteer worker, was tasked with informing the masses of the project through social media as well as taking project-related photographs.

In the opening chapter of his college life, Al-Khatem moved away from science into studying media and with a twist of fate, he went back into science after graduation through a project which utilized his media talents. Initially, the task at hand seemed like huge as a mountain to conquer, but gradually with the helping hands and support of

Kuwait Sat-1 teammates, Al-Khatem found his groove, believing fully in the real potential of the project despite his doubts at first.

While surrounded by scientists and students of knowledge, Al-Khatem felt out of place, but gradually he began to feel the importance of documenting and providing support to his team. His task, no matter how minimal, is part of a team effort to get that piece of metal, wires, and computer chips to space. For Sarah Iskandar, a mechanical engineer, her entry point into the project was through a professor in college. In 2019, Iskandar did not register at first and preferred to focus on her graduation project. She, however, took a leap of faith after graduation and signing up to join the project in need of newly graduated students and becoming a member of the team. Iskandar's parents were enthusiastic about the project but began to worry over Sarah's full immersion into the task,

a matter, which might affect her quest for a job and her post-graduate studies. Nevertheless, Iskandar marched on despite the pressure and she never looked back. Closer to realizing the dream, Sarah Iskandar now is anxiously optimistic, but she has faith in the effort put in assembling and producing Kuwait Sat-1. Now, Anfal Al-Lenqawi's involvement in the project is not far different from aforementioned team member Al-Damkhi. One day, KU's Oceanology student, Al-Lenqawi was strolling around the college and she encountered the purple-colored space project advertisement. Through the induction process and hours upon hours of work, Al-Lenqawi was tasked with analyzing the environmental data soon to be sent by the satellite once in orbit. As soon as the launch is successful, Al-Lenqawi would be waiting for data to beam down into earth, a process of four hours and two minutes, which might as well be an eternity for

this specific team member.

The dynamic duo of mechanical engineers Dana Al-Otaibi and Maha Al-Kharji had varying stories on how they joined the team, Al-Otaibi applied and was accepted in the first batch, Al-Kharji, on the other hand, kept waiting for what it felt like eons to hear the good news. Al-Otaibi fought “tooth and nail” in the interviewing process, and after four years of work, the time nears for the launch of Kuwait Sat-1. Al-Kharji was a space enthusiast and pounced at the first opportunity to get involved in Kuwait Sat-1. While, she applied for work at the time, Al-Kharji's reaction to the letter of acceptance was met by emphatical cry of joy once she knew she was in. The tales behind Kuwait Sat-1 might become full volumes of books, but one thing is for sure, the members gave it all and now the team was waiting for Kuwait Sat-1 to fly high above the skies into outer space. — KUNA



A detailed study of illustrations of the satellite and its parts.



Accuracy and concentration during training.



Youthful members of the Kuwait Sat-1 team.

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News in brief



One killed and two injured in accident

KUWAIT: One person was killed and two others were injured in an accident involving three vehicles including two cars and a motorcycle on Tuesday, the Kuwait Fire Force announced on Tuesday. "The central command station of KFF has received a tip about the accident that occurred on Fahaheel Expressway and teams from Qurain fire station were dispatched to the scene of the accident," the KFF added.

Arab expat tries to torch police car

KUWAIT: An Iraqi expat attempted to torch a police patrol car near Jahra police station dousing it with gasoline. However, the expat himself caught fire in the process and he entered the police station seeking help. The fire was put out as well as the fire on the police car. The Iraqi was taken to hospital under a heavy guard. The police station had received a call earlier in the week threatening to burn it.

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Container vessel Portland Charleston is seen anchored off Kuwait. —Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

Kuwaitis with visual impairment make critical accomplishments

Counting on other senses, youths cope with their condition quite well

KUWAIT: Many Kuwaitis with visual impairment cope with their condition quite well, guided by their enlightened hearts, counting on other senses and various technical and computer systems. Great credit for aiding this segment of people goes to the French Luis Braille who had invented the Braille language that enabled the sightless people to be much more involved in various fields, productively interacting with others.

Abdullah Al-Othaina is a 19-year-old Kuwaiti who is challenging the impairment, aspiring to master computer sciences and cyber security despite some obstacles. In addition to his studies in English literature and linguistics, Al-Othaina had been enrolled in many courses in computer sciences and programs, revealing, "I am now in the last phase of posting additional programs to the global site, Access NVDA, for the blind. I am also designing a personal aid application identical to Siri system that had been designed for Apple and Amazon, which I will develop for written and vocal conversation," he said, adding that he has done successful initial tests.

Al-Othaina also said that he had contributed to working out an application for currency conversion and games for the blind. As to his condition, the 19-year-old national said he had lost sightedness at

birth due to the gene, IRPGRIP, adding that scientific researches indicate that a treatment to his condition might be found in the future. Describing his condition, Al-Othaina has said that he only sees glimpses of light. "The picture reaches the eye but not the brain however I have faith that someday I will be able to see," he said. His fellow citizen, Humoud Mohammad Al-Hojailan, says he is following steps of the late Kuwaiti astronomer, Saleh Al-Ojairi. Al-Hojailan started to develop interest in climatic issues since childhood when his father, a shepherd, used to talk a lot about weather forecast, creating special forms of thunders in his imagination. In 2021, he recalled, the meteorology authorities gave him some weather monitoring devices, thus he had successfully recorded win speed, direction, humidity levels and climatic pressure in Al-Sabbahiya where he had lived.

He had also co-established Salem Al-Jalawi Meteorological Center, documented information about snow falls in Kuwait in January 2016 and served as member in the Kuwait and the Gulf meteorological network. Al-Hojailan has added that he aspires to set up meteorological monitors throughout Kuwait to aid the state in observing the climate. A third special challenge case is that of Abdulaziz Al-Otaibi, who is particularly attracted to poetry and philosophy. Al-Otaibi who lost seeing ability accidentally, three months ago, during a surgery can visualize colors and shapes more than his two peers, evidently. His impairment has not left him slack or



Student Abdullah Al-Othaina

complacent for he has taken part in the volunteering "resalat mufahah" that promote causes of persons of special needs, pledging to convey their demands to state officials.

"I aspire to acquire a PhD and raise the name of my country Kuwait aloft for it has given me much and I will seek to work as a professor at Kuwait University by Allah's will," he said. Kuwait first adopted the Braille system in 1947, established a special section for the blind at the religious academy, founded the girls' school for the blind in 1956. In 1958, the ministry of education established a special publishing house for this segment, the Braille system is available at some educational centers, schools and societies throughout Kuwait. — KUNA



The three Kuwaiti students

Kuwait keeps tight control on drug trade and dealings

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti authorities maintain tight control over prescriptions and trade in drugs particularly stimulating medicines. Dr Mariam Al-Yassin, the director of medicines inspection at the Ministry of Health (MoH), said in a statement to KUNA that preserving safety and effectiveness of the medical products is ensured by the health system for patients' safety and holding offenders at health facilities and pharmacies.

She said up to 2,804 penalties were issued against private pharmacies between January and November 2022. Most of the cases involved insufficient data in medical prescription papers, unsafe storage and expiry of the pharmacist practice per-

mit. Dr. Al-Yassin indicated at the prime role of the supervision division for medicines and mental drugs' permits that keeps inventories and other detailed information about the stored medicines, namely the stimulating drugs. The division along with other relevant units follow up on the chain that begins with importation and ends with distribution to the local market; according to laws 48/1887 and 74/1983 that covers regulations for mental drugs trade and prescriptions. Assigned inspectors, once the products are taken out of depots, examine standard compatibility with reference to the MoH records.

An offense is reported to the undersecretary of the medicines supervision division, pending referral to the public prosecution. Dr Al-Yassin revealed that there were 4,043 offenses in the private medical sector between 2020 and November 2022, compared with 1,134 ones in 2020. She added that between 2020 and November 2022, penalties in the public sector reached 343. Last year, there were 80 irregularities, including 20 cases of mishandling of the stimulating drugs in the public sector. — KUNA

Kuwait, GCC dairy firms seek hike in prices of products

KUWAIT: The Commerce and Industry Ministry has received memos from local and GCC dairy companies seeking to raise the prices of their products due to the spike in costs in accordance with

neighboring countries.

"The first request was by a GCC country, but other regional companies soon followed, as the ministry is about to study these requests during this month. The ministry will review the requests to raise the prices of products as well as other requests including the ceiling put forth during the COVID pandemic in 2020," sources revealed to Kuwait Times. "The ministry is of the view that the requests are logical as global prices have increased after the COVID pandemic and the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine," the sources added.



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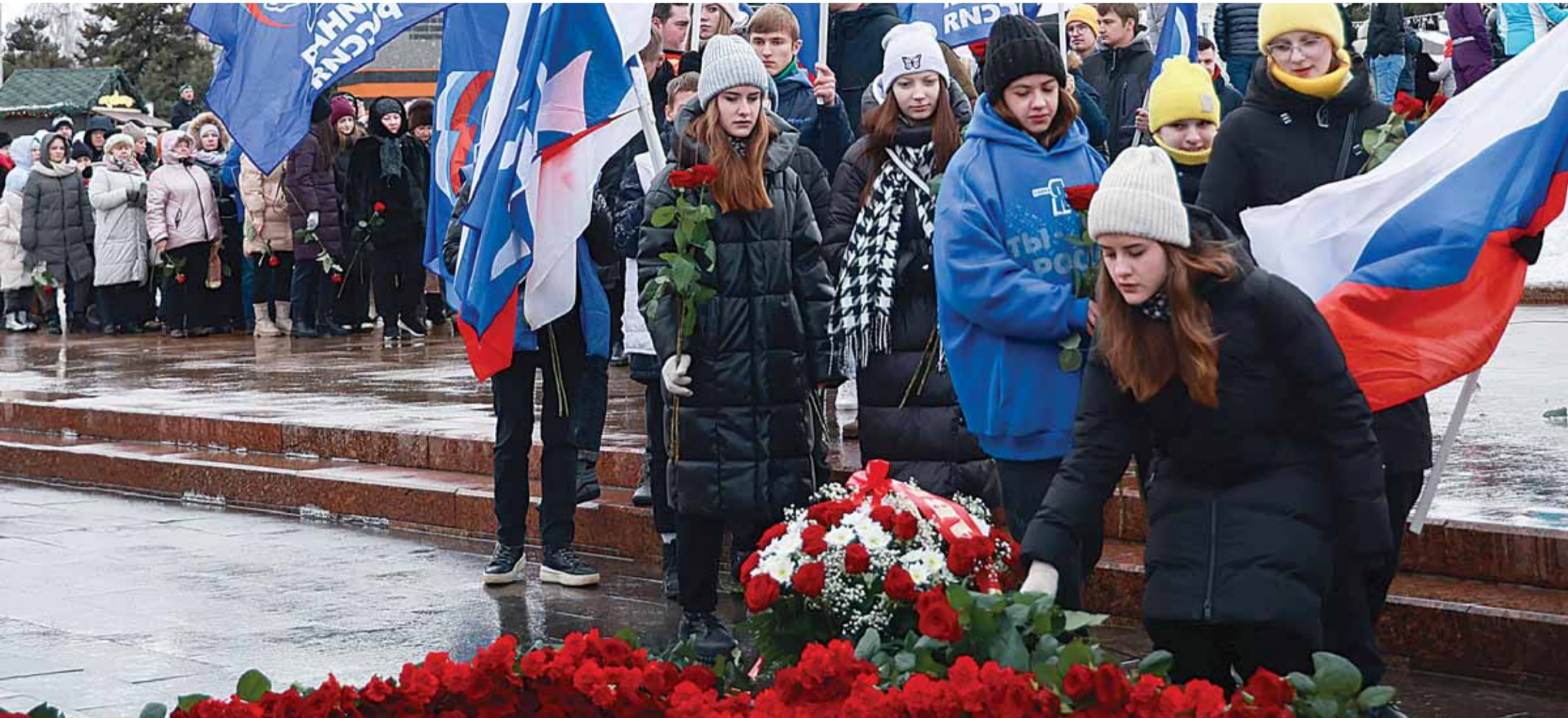


China slams
COVID curbs
on travellers

Gazans risk death at sea dreaming of life in Europe

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SAMARA: Mourners gather to lay flowers in memory of more than 60 Russian soldiers that Russia says were killed in a Ukrainian strike on Russian-controlled territory, in Samara. —AFP

Russian anger over deadly Ukraine strike

Deaths sparked heavy online criticism in Russia of the army's senior command

SAMARA: Mourners voiced grief and anger on Tuesday at a rare public commemoration in Russia for the scores of soldiers killed by a Ukrainian strike on New Year's Eve. In a rare admission, Russia on Monday said 63 servicemen were killed when a temporary deployment point was struck in Makiivka in a part of eastern Ukraine held by pro-Moscow separatists since 2014.

Ukraine has taken responsibility for the strike and says the toll is much higher. Some 200 people laid roses and wreaths in a central square in the city of Samara—where some of the servicemen came from—as an Orthodox priest recited a prayer.

Soldiers also fired a gun salute at the commemoration, where some of the mourners could be seen holding flags for President Vladimir Putin's United Russia party. "It's very tough, it's scary. But we cannot be broken. Grief unites," Ekaterina Kolotovkina, head of a group of army spouses, said at the ceremony. Local media reported similar gatherings in other

parts of the Samara region.

'Criminally naive'

The deaths immediately sparked heavy online criticism in Russia of the army's senior command, including from nationalist commentators favourable to Russia's military intervention. Russian military correspondents, who have gained influence in recent months, said hundreds could have been killed and accused Russia's top commanders of not learning from past mistakes.

The outrage has been amplified by reports that many of the victims were reservists who were recently mobilised into the army. There have also been reports that the servicemen were quartered next to a munitions depot which exploded in the strike and that some had been able to use their Russian mobile phones—giving away their location to Ukrainian forces.

"What conclusions will be drawn? Who will be punished?" Mikhail

Matveyev, a member of the Russian parliament representing Samara, wrote on social media. The Telegram account Rybar, which has around a million followers, said it was "criminally naive" for the army to store ammunition next to sleeping quarters.

Putin has yet to react to the Makiivka strike, which comes during a holiday season before Orthodox Christmas which many Russians spend with their families.

Call for revenge

At the gathering in Samara, Kolotovkina, the wife of a general, said she had asked her husband to "avenge" the victims. "We will crush the enemy together. We are left with no choice," she told mourners.

The defence ministry said the strike was carried out by HIMARS rocket systems supplied to Ukraine by the United States. These systems have allowed Ukrainian forces to strike much deeper into Russian-held territory and have been credited for a

series of battlefield reversals for Russia in recent months.

Ukraine meanwhile said it had faced waves of Russian drone and missile attacks since New Year's Eve, mainly targeting energy and other critical infrastructure. President Volodymyr Zelensky on Monday said the army had shot down 80 Iranian-made drones on Sunday and Monday.

But the hardest fighting is going on around the city of Bakhmut in eastern Ukraine—a location with little strategic importance that Russian forces led by the mercenary group Wagner have been trying to capture for months.

Wagner chief Yevgeny Prigozhin, a businessman close to Putin, admitted in an interview that the fighting was tough and claimed that Ukrainian forces had turned "each house into a fortress". Prigozhin told Russian news agency Ria-Novosti in the interview on Tuesday that his men were sometimes fighting "several weeks for a single house". —AFP

US lawmakers pick leader in high-wire political thriller

WASHINGTON: US Republican leader Kevin McCarthy was a simple up-or-down vote from realizing his dream of becoming one of the country's top statesmen on Tuesday—in a cliffhanger worthy of TV drama "House of Cards" that could as easily end with his career in tatters.

The California congressman is vying for the speakership of the House of Representatives and needs a simple majority — 218 votes if every lawmaker shows up—as the lower chamber of Congress opens for the new term.

Having failed in a previous bid, McCarthy has long coveted the role of Washington's top legislator, the parliamentary and political leader who presides over House business and is second in line to the presidency.

Yet in the best traditions of the political thriller, there will be intrigue until the credits roll, with the threadbare 222 Republican majority opening the path for a potential rearguard action from anti-McCarthy spoilers. Six House Republicans—enough to keep McCarthy from securing the gavel—have come out against him, with three saying they are a firm "no" and the rest "almost certainly" opposed.

McCarthy withdrew from the speaker race in 2015 amid a number of blunders and a right-wing revolt. In a sign of his continuing propensity to divide rather than unify, far right flamethrower Marjorie Taylor Greene and her normally close ally Matt Gaetz had dueling columns in the conservative Daily Caller before Christmas. "Every single Republican in Congress knows that Kevin does not actually believe anything. He has no ideology," Gaetz wrote. Greene, who is believed to have been offered considerable influence in return for her backing, retorted that McCarthy's opponents were lying "when they claim a consensus House Speaker candidate will emerge."

Cloak and dagger

If the 57-year-old former storekeeper falls short, the process continues to a second ballot, probably also on Tuesday, and McCarthy's critics get the chance to put forward different candidates. No credi-



WASHINGTON: Rep. Andy Biggs (R-AZ) walks with reporters while walking to a meeting with Republican House members at the US Capitol Building on January 03, 2023 in Washington, DC. —AFP

ble alternative has been floated publicly, although the most obvious would be House Whip Steve Scalise, a loyal McCarthy deputy who has nevertheless been clear that he has ambitions of his own.

One roadblock to McCarthy's anointment has been the perception among detractors on his party's far right that he is insufficiently loyal to Republican former president and 2024 election candidate Donald Trump. The California Republican has tried to ingratiate himself with the "Never Kevin" crowd, bowing to calls for intensive investigations of Democrats.

McCarthy, who defied a subpoena from the House panel probing the 2021 assault on the Capitol, has promised investigations of President Joe Biden's family and administration, as well as of the FBI and CIA.

But the more he is seen as giving away the store to critics on the right, the more likely he is to alienate moderates, sparking open war between Senate and House Republicans, where there is already little love lost.

Several of the lawmakers withholding support from

McCarthy said the House should block bills from Republican senators who voted for the \$1.7 trillion government funding bill that passed before Christmas. In a sign of the leverage they hold over him, McCarthy agreed, pledging that those bills would be "dead on arrival in the House" if he is speaker.

But he was largely ignored by the Senate leadership and much of the rank and file, as the bill passed by 68 votes to 29 — leaving his threat looking unsustainable. Strategists expect fraught cloak-and-dagger talks between the two sides in the event of a McCarthy defeat that could see the emergence of a consensus Republican who can lock in 218 votes with some Democratic support.

There has been behind-the-scenes speculation about how long McCarthy might stay in Congress if he were to lose out again. Allies point out that he would not be short of private-sector job offers. But some Congress watchers believe the career politician has the place in his blood and would want to remain as a backbencher. —AFP



VILLIERS-LE-BEL: Members of the Kurdish community carry the flag-draped coffin of the three Enghien Street shooting victims during a funeral service, in Paris' northern suburb of Villiers-le-Bel, on January 3, 2023. —AFP

Tears, anger at Paris funeral for shooting victims

VILLIERS-LE-BEL: Thousands of Kurds from across Europe travelled to the Paris suburbs Tuesday for the politically charged funeral of three of their own killed in a December attack in the French capital. Buses were chartered to bring people from across France and some neighbouring countries to the ceremony in Villiers-le-Bel, north of Paris, local sources said. Tears and cries of "Martyrs live forever!" greeted the coffins, wrapped in the flags of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and the Kurdish-controlled Rojava territory in northern Syria.

The huge crowd followed the funeral on giant screens erected in the car park, showing the coffins surrounded by wreaths beneath a portrait of imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan. Police and security volunteers were on duty outside the hall hired for Tuesday's proceedings. A xenophobic gunman, William Malet, killed two men and one woman in a December 23 attack on the Ahmet Kaya community centre in Paris's 10th district.

His victims were Abdurrahman Kizil, singer and political refugee Mir Perwer and Emine Kara, a leader of the Movement of Kurdish Women in France. Arrested after the shootings and formally charged on December 26, 69-year-old Malet told investigators he had a "pathological" hatred for foreigners and wanted to "murder migrants", prosecutors said.

Distrust of Turkey

Malet, a retired train driver, had a violent criminal history and had just left detention over a previous incident. But many Kurds in France's 150,000-strong community refuse to believe he acted alone, calling his actions a "terrorist" attack and pointing the finger at Turkey.

Tuesday's funeral recalled another held at the same spot almost exactly 10 years ago after three Kurdish activists linked to the PKK were shot dead, also in Paris' 10th district. The Turkish suspect in the killings, believed to have had ties to Ankara's secret services, died of cancer in pre-trial detention.

More recently, an April attack in which men were beaten with iron bars at a Kurdish cultural centre in eastern French city Lyon was blamed on members of the Turkish ultra-nationalist Grey Wolves group, which has since been banned. The PKK, which has waged an almost four decade armed struggle for greater rights for Turkey's Kurdish minority, is categorised as a terror group by Ankara, Europe and the United States. Its leader Ocalan is serving a life sentence on a prison island off Istanbul after being captured by Turkish agents in Kenya in 1999. —AFP

Gazans risk death at sea dreaming of life in Europe

Younis’ death hit his mother Samira al-Shaer like an ‘earthquake’

RAFAH: Younis al-Shaer left Gaza dreaming of a better life in Europe, only to return to the Palestinian enclave in a coffin. The 21-year-old was one of scores of Palestinians risking the perilous journey across the Mediterranean.

He drowned alongside seven other Gazans, whose bodies were returned home in December, adding to a toll of nearly 2,000 people recorded as dead or missing last year in the Mediterranean by the United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR).

The death hit his mother Samira al-Shaer like an “earthquake”, she told AFP at the family home in Rafah, southern Gaza. “I knew the dangers of emigrating, but at some point I gave up because of his insistence on leaving. Every day I waited for news of his death,” she said.

Kissing a photo of her late son, she said it was a “lack of work and the poverty that pushed Younis to leave”. As many as two-thirds of the Gaza Strip’s 2.3 million residents live in poverty, according to figures from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics.

Shaer studied accountancy for two years before deciding to leave the Palestinian enclave, along with a group of relatives. Gaza has been under an Zionist entity’s blockade since the militant group Hamas took power in 2007, meaning residents cannot leave by air or sea.

Shaer took the land crossing to Egypt last February, before travelling onwards to Libya which is a hub for unauthorised Mediterranean crossings. He ultimately hoped to reach Belgium, and along the arduous route would call his mother. “He said to me: ‘Don’t worry, God willing, we will arrive,’” she said, adding that other relatives had previously made the journey successfully.

‘Cruel and humiliating’

Yet the plan soon began to unravel, his brother Mohammed al-Shaer told AFP. Upon reaching Libya,

the group had their money and belongings stolen. They had to sleep in places “unfit even for animals”, said his brother, 34.

The group were detained by one of Libya’s many people trafficking gangs, which often kidnap migrants for ransom. His brother said the gang forced his family to pay \$1,500. Separately, the group initially paid to cross the Mediterranean but were tricked and there was “no boat, no shelter, no food,” Shaer said.

“The trip was cruel and humiliating... all this was only torture and humiliation,” he added. They eventually boarded a rubber dinghy in October, but it encountered trouble and the boat never reached the Italian shore.

Younis al-Shaer’s body and those of seven other Gazans were later recovered from the Tunisian coast, west of Libya.

‘They lied to me’

From Gaza, migrants now tread a dangerous path through Egypt and Libya before trying their luck at sea, along with fellow migrants fleeing poverty and violence in North Africa, Syria, sub-Saharan Africa and even further afield.

The number of people reaching Europe by the Mediterranean Sea has been on the rise over the past three years, UNHCR data show, reaching more than 146,000 in 2022. For Samir Zaqout, deputy director of the Al-Mezan Center for Human Rights, a Gaza-based NGO, “unemployment, poverty and frustration are the most important drivers of youth migration from Gaza”.

There are no official statistics on the number of people who have fled in recent years from the territory ruled by Hamas, which has been designated a “terrorist” entity by the United States, the European Union and Israel.

According to Masarat, a research institute based in



GAZA CITY: Monira (R), the 58-year-old aunt of Palestinian Yunis al-Shaer, one of eight young Palestinian men who drowned two months prior off the coast of Tunisia in a clandestine migration attempt to Europe, speaks during an interview at their house in Rafah the southern Gaza Strip on December 20, 2022. —AFP

Gaza, around 36,000 people have left the Strip in the past five years attempting to emigrate. The journey can cost vast sums. Shaer estimated his brother’s trip cost around \$9,000 of which two-thirds went to smugglers.

The family went 20 days without hearing from him, before his brother contacted the smugglers on Facebook. “They told me that everything was fine... but they lied to me,” he said.

A desperate Shaer then reached out to some

Tunisian activists, and partnered with them in trying to find Younis and the other Gazans. “They found his passport wrapped in nylon among corpses washed up by the sea on the coast,” sighed Shaer.

Younis’s dreams cost him his life, said his family. “Younis only wanted to ensure his future. He dreamed of being himself, of owning a house and a motorbike, and of opening a business from which he could live,” said Shaer. —AFP

Seven killed as Mexican police seek prisoners

MEXICO CITY: Seven people were killed Monday in northern Mexico’s Ciudad Juarez during a police operation to recapture prisoners who escaped after an attack at their facility, state authorities announced. Gunmen attacked the border city’s state prison on Sunday at dawn, leaving nearly 20 people dead and allowing the prisoners, which include a gang leader, to flee.

Monday’s deaths—two agents from the state prosecutor’s office and five alleged criminals—took the total fatalities related to the attack to 26, according to a statement from the Chihuahua Public Security Department.

Defense Minister Luis Cresencio Sandoval had earlier told reporters that ten guards, seven prisoners and two attackers had died in Sunday’s assault on the prison, which has been attributed to drug traffickers. Fourteen inmates and a guard were injured and five attackers were captured, Sandoval said.

The 25 escapees included Ernesto Alfredo Pinon, known as “El Neto,” the leader of a gang allied with the Juarez drug cartel, Security Minister Rosa Icela Rodriguez said. Pinon was sentenced to more than 200 years in prison in 2010 for kidnapping and



CIUDAD JUAREZ: Members of the Mexican Army and security personnel secure an area outside the prison of Ciudad Juarez number 3 in Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua state, Mexico. —AFP

murder, according to the Chihuahua state prosecutor’s office.

The attackers, traveling in armored vehicles, launched the assault when relatives of the inmates were lined up for New Year’s visits. Ciudad Juarez, which sits across the border from El Paso, Texas, has seen years of violent clashes between security forces and rival drug cartels.

The prison itself has seen multiple breakouts of fighting and riots, notably in March 2009 when 20 people died. Mexican detention centers suffer from chronic overcrowding and violence, which has worsened in recent years due to conflict between criminal groups. —AFP

Migrants in peril rescued by Italy coastguard: Charity

ROME: A charity monitoring migrant boats in the Central Mediterranean said Monday the Italian coastguard had pulled around 50 people to safety after repeated appeals for help. Alarm Phone, a hotline used by migrants in distress, tweeted that it was “relieved to confirm that the Italian coastguard has eventually rescued” the people, who had first called for help on Sunday.

There were no further details about those saved. Doctors Without Borders (MSF) had said earlier Monday that it had been alerted by Alarm Phone to a boat with some 45 people in distress. It said its Geo Barents charity rescue ship would assist them if it came across the boat while it was en route to the port of Taranto.

“We immediately requested permission from the Italian authorities to intervene, but received no reply,” MSF press officer Maurizio Debanne said. “Under international law and maritime conventions, we are obliged to assist those in danger,” he said.

Intervening could potentially have pitted the charity against the far-right government and its strict new decree law on rescues at sea. The char-

ity later said it was no longer looking for the boat.

Orders from Rome

MSF published a series of tweets earlier Monday making it clear it was only aiding boats after being requested to by Italian authorities. It also said Rome had asked the Geo Barents in one case not to assist, because the situation was “being managed by Libya”. It obeyed.

The new decree law was signed by the president on Monday, and now moves to parliament to be converted into law within 60 days, during which time it can undergo changes. Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni’s hard-right government took office in October, vowing to stop migrant landings in Italy, which reached more than 105,000 in 2022, according to the interior ministry.

She claims migrants and people traffickers are encouraged by the charities which rescue people attempting the perilous crossing from North Africa. However, the charities say they always follow international and national laws regarding saving lives at sea, and slam the new rules as putting lives at risk.

Most of the migrants who arrived in 2022 were rescued and brought to shore by Italian navy or coast guard vessels, not charity ships. At least 20,218 people have died or gone missing on the crossing—the world’s deadliest—since 2014, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM). —AFP

KUWAIT REACHES THE...

Continued from Page 1

abilities in building and operating space projects, with the slogan ‘build, succeed, explore.’” Dr Hala Al-Jassar, manager of the project and head of the physics department, said. “The rocket has two stages - one that can carry up to 114 satellites, which will carry Kuwait Sat-1 into space, and the second stage will be 30 minutes after the launch for the final setup of the satellite in space,” she explained.

“This is an exceptional project which we started four years ago with the efforts and skills of youth whom we trained. We have benefited from the work of a technical team, which will benefit in photo analysis. The ground station will receive all information from space, the first of its kind in Kuwait. The project saw a participation of 71 percent from female staff made up of graduates and undergraduates, and 29 percent from our male graduates and undergraduates,” Dr Ahmad Al-Kandari, deputy project manager and operations manager, said during the event.

“The camera includes vision of over 30 kilometers, which will cover Kuwait. Images will be sent to the ground station on our campus, which we will analyze. The application of the project includes everything ranging from marine to urban infrastructure to traffic and environmental issues,” academic manager of the

project Dr Yasser Abdullaheem said.

“This is just the beginning, as we have entered space and we hope for further progress in order to raise the global standings of our beloved country. Kuwait has great capabilities, as well as great infrastructure that will further progress our development. It will also expand the coverage of communications in Kuwait and lower costs of many things related to the space economy,” Dr Kandari told Kuwait Times. “The space sector will provide many future opportunities for young Kuwaitis, as it is rich in giving and providing for the development of their capabilities,” he added.

US Chargé d’Affaires James Holtsnider told Kuwait Times: “It’s a fantastic way to start 2023. To have Kuwait have its first satellite launched in partnership with one of the best in American space industry. I look forward to seeing what is coming in the future. Inshallah, we’ll have many Kuwaiti satellites in the future. It is a great opportunity for young people on both sides and this scientific collaboration is great to see.”

Engineer Dina Al-Naqeeb, program manager at KFAS, told Kuwait Times: “We are very proud to witness the launch, which is fully operated by Kuwaiti staff. The project was funded by KFAS, and what we do is advance work on catalyzing science and technology in Kuwait. The satellite has cameras that will project images of Kuwait and the environment, which will lead to more research ideas. In the next phase, we are awaiting the launch of Kuwait Sat-2, which will study contents of solar cells and their performance. We are also working with KU to establish the first research center in Kuwait. So hopefully, this project will be the nucleus of future research projects.”

on the issue of purchasing loans of citizens.

Some parliamentary sources quoted the finance minister as telling MPs that purchasing loans will cost over KD 14 billion, and the funds are not available with the government. The sources added that the government submitted financial options for the purchase of loans with the aim to improve the living conditions of citizens.

Opposition MP Saud Al-Asfour however said the meeting achieved no real result. He said the government did not present any practical alternatives for parliamentary demands, and “I personally heard only more promises from the government”, adding he expected the government to be more prepared. MP Jenan Bushehri charged that most Cabinet members are unaware of their responsibilities toward the country and citizens. She called on the prime minister to reform this problem.

Zionist storms Aqsa compound...

Continued from Page 1

Palestinian health ministry reported. The health ministry announced “the death of the child Adam Essam Shaker Ayyad, 15, with a bullet in the chest fired by the occupation soldiers during the aggression on Bethlehem at dawn today”. The official Palestinian news agency, Wafa, reported clashes erupted when Zionist forces entered Dheishah, in the southern occupied West Bank, to search houses. Ayyad is the third Palestinian killed by Zionist forces in the West Bank since the start of the year.

Ben-Gvir’s visit comes days after he took office as national security minister, with powers over the police, giving his decision to enter the highly sensitive site considerable weight. Al-Aqsa Mosque is the third-holiest place in Islam and the most sacred site to Jews. Under a longstanding status quo, non-Muslims can visit the site at specific times but are not allowed to pray there. In recent years, a growing number of Jews, most of them Zionist nationalists, have covertly prayed at the compound, a development decry by Palestinians.

The UAE, which established diplomatic ties with the Zionist entity in 2020, “strongly condemned the storming of Al-Aqsa Mosque courtyard by a (Zionist) minister”. The US ambassador to the Zionist entity, Tom Nides, said Washington “has made it clear to the (Zionist) government it opposes any steps that could harm the status quo in the holy sites”.

Lying in the walled Old City of Zionist-annexed east Jerusalem, the compound is administered by Jordan’s Waqf Islamic affairs council, with Zionist forces operating there and controlling access. After his visit, Ben-Gvir vowed to “maintain the freedom of movement for Muslims and Christians, but Jews will also go up to the mount, and those who make threats must be dealt with - with an iron hand”.

The politician has lobbied to allow Jewish prayer in the compound, a move opposed by mainstream rabbinical authorities. The Zionist entity’s Sephardi chief rabbi, Yitzhak Yosef, wrote to Ben-Gvir on Tuesday. “What will people say when they see a minister, an observant Jew, who flouts the position of the rabbinat,” he said in a letter.

Ben-Gvir was accompanied by units of the Zionist security forces, Waqf guards told AFP. Jordan’s foreign ministry spokesman Sinan Majali said Amman summoned the Zionist ambassador, to “convey a protest message about the recklessness of the (Zionist) national security minister in storming the blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque”.

Saudi Arabia, home to the holiest sites in Islam, condemned the “provocative practices” of Ben-Gvir. The visit was also criticized by the Arab League and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. And the Zionist entity’s arch-foe Iran called the visit a “violation of international regulations and an insult to the values and sanctities of the Muslims,” with a foreign ministry spokesman warning of a response from “Muslim nations”.

While Ben-Gvir has visited the compound numerous times since entering parliament in April 2021, his presence as a top minister is highly significant. A controversial visit in 2000 by then opposition leader Ariel Sharon was one of the main triggers for the second Palestinian intifada, or uprising, which lasted until 2005. The Palestinian foreign ministry called Ben-Gvir’s visit a “serious threat”.

Bassem Naim, a senior Hamas official, last week warned such a step would be “a big red line and it will lead to an explosion”. On Tuesday, Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem deemed it a “crime” and vowed the mosque compound “will remain Palestinian, Arab, Islamic”. Hamas rules the Gaza Strip and in May 2021 an 11-day war broke out between Palestinian militants based in the territory and the Zionist entity, after violence at Al-Aqsa Mosque.

Hundreds of Palestinians and dozens of Zionist police were wounded in the preceding clashes across east Jerusalem, initially sparked by restrictions on Palestinians gathering and eviction threats against residents. During this period, Ben-Gvir rallied his supporters in Zionist settler homes in east Jerusalem, which has been occupied by the Zionist entity since the Six-Day War of 1967.

The foreign ministry of Egypt - which serves as a key mediator in Gaza - warned “of the negative consequences of such actions on security and stability” in the Palestinian territories and the wider region. For years seen as a fringe figure, Jewish Power leader Ben-Gvir entered mainstream politics with the backing of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The premier’s office on Tuesday said Netanyahu is “committed to strictly maintaining the status quo, without changes” at the holy site. —AFP

Govt meets MPs, says buying loans...

Continued from Page 1

The minister said cooperation between the two bodies will benefit the nation.

Speaker Ahmad Al-Saadoun and around 20 MPs attended the meeting. MP Mohammad Hayef said the meeting was positive and issues like purchasing loans, amnesty for political prisoners and citizenship were discussed. MP Hamad Al-Obaid said that the government and MPs agreed on key issues, but differences remained

International

China slams ‘unacceptable’ COVID curbs on travellers from its territory

70 percent of megacity’s population may have been infected with COVID-19

BEIJING: China called the mounting international restrictions on travellers from its territory “unacceptable” on Tuesday after over a dozen countries placed fresh COVID curbs on visitors from the world’s most populous nation. The United States, Canada, Japan and France are among the countries insisting all travellers from China provide negative COVID tests before arrival, as concerns grow over a surge in cases.

China’s steep rise in infections comes after Beijing abruptly lifted years of hardline restrictions last month, with hospitals and crematoriums quickly overwhelmed. But Beijing has pushed ahead with a long-awaited reopening, last week announcing an end to mandatory quarantines on arrival in a move that prompted Chinese people to plan trips abroad.

“Some countries have taken entry restrictions targeting only Chinese travellers,” foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning told a regular briefing. “This lacks scientific basis and some practices are unacceptable,” she added, warning China could “take counter-measures based on the principle of reciprocity”.

Asked about China’s reaction, France’s Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne defended the new rules. “I think we’re performing our duty in asking for tests,” Borne told franceinfo radio. “We will continue to do it.” The rules imposed affect all travellers coming from China—not just Chinese nationals—while Beijing continues to restrict inbound visitors and not issue visas for tourists or international students.

Countries including the United States have also cited Beijing’s lack of transparency around infection data and the risk of new variants as a reason to restrict travellers. China has only recorded 22 COVID deaths since December and has dramatically narrowed the criteria for classifying such deaths—meaning that Beijing’s own statistics about the unprecedented wave are now widely seen as not reflecting reality.



BEIJING: Picture shows patients on wheelchairs and people in the emergency department of a hospital in Beijing on January 3, 2023. Cities across China have struggled with surging infections, a resulting shortage of pharmaceuticals and overflowing hospital wards. — AFP

Shanghai overwhelmed

As health workers nationwide battle a surge in cases, a senior doctor at one of Shanghai’s top hospitals said 70 percent of the megacity’s population may now have been infected with COVID-19, state media reported Tuesday.

Chen Erzhen, vice president at Ruijin Hospital and a member of Shanghai’s COVID expert advisory panel, estimated that the majority of the city’s 25 million people may have been infected. “Now the spread of the

epidemic in Shanghai is very wide, and it may have reached 70 percent of the population, which is 20 to 30 times more than (in April and May),” he told Dajiangdong Studio, owned by the Communist Party mouthpiece People’s Daily.

Shanghai suffered a gruelling two-month lockdown from April, during which over 600,000 residents were infected and many were hauled to mass quarantine centres. But now the Omicron variant is spreading rampantly across the city.

rence” were no longer enough to reassure South Koreans. “The nuclear weapons belong to the United States, but the planning, information sharing, exercises and training must be done jointly by South Korea and the United States,” Yoon said, adding that the US was “quite positive” about the idea.

However, a senior US administration official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said that there was no confusion over the extent of allied coordination. Because North Korea’s “actions and statements have caused increasing concern,” the United States and South Korea “are working together to strengthen extended deterrence, including eventually through table-top exercises that will explore our joint response to a range of scenarios, including nuclear use,” the official said. “This is consistent with President Yoon’s comment that the United States and the ROK (South Korea) will expand planning, information sharing, exercises, and training,” the official said.

Kim regime wouldn’t ‘survive’

Tensions are high after the North’s leader Kim Jong Un called for an “exponential” increase in his country’s nuclear arsenal and new intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) to counter what it termed US and South Korean hostility.

In 2022, the North conducted sanctions-defying weapons tests nearly every month, including firing its most advanced ICBM ever. Under the hawkish Yoon, South Korea has beefed up joint military drills with the United States, which had been scaled back during the pandemic or paused for a bout of ill-fated diplomacy with the North under his predecessor.

The official Pentagon position on response to a North Korean nuclear attack is emphatic. “Any nuclear attack by North Korea against the United States or its Allies and partners is unacceptable and will result in the end of that regime. There is no scenario in which the Kim regime could employ nuclear weapons and survive,” the US defense department says. — AFP

US, S Korea planning response to any North’s ‘nuclear use’

WASHINGTON: Washington and Seoul are planning an “effective coordinated” response if North Korea uses nuclear weapons, the White House warned on Tuesday. South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol and US President Joe Biden have “tasked their teams to plan for an effective coordinated response to a range of scenarios, including nuclear use by North Korea,” a spokesman for the National Security Council at the White House said.

The NSC spoke out after confusion emerged in media reports about the allies’ response to nuclear sabre rattling from Pyongyang. On Monday, Biden had said “no” when asked if joint nuclear exercises were a possibility, seemingly contradicting earlier comments from Yoon. The NSC spokesman clarified that joint exercises were not an option because South Korea does not have its own nuclear weapons. However, “the United States is fully committed to our alliance... and providing extended deterrence through the full range of US defense capabilities,” the spokesman said.

In Seoul, Yoon’s office said in a statement that the allies are “in talks over information-sharing, joint planning and the joint implementation plans that follow with regard to the operation of US nuclear assets to respond to North Korea’s nuclear weapons.”

‘Tabletop’ planning

Some interpreted earlier Yoon comments in a newspaper interview as indicating more elaborate joint nuclear exercises. In an interview with the Chosun Ilbo newspaper published Monday, Yoon said the United States’ existing “nuclear umbrella” and “extended deter-



PYONGYANG: Picture taken and released from North Korea’s official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) on January 2, 2023 shows North Korea’s leader Kim Jong Un (2nd L) meeting with representatives who participated in the 9th meeting of the Korean Boy Scouts during a commemorative photo session in Pyongyang. — AFP

Volunteer militia blamed in new Burkina bloodshed

OUAGADOUGOU: Twenty-eight bodies were found in northwest Burkina Faso at the weekend, the government said, as rights campaigners blamed a volunteer militia created to support the army’s battle against jihadists. Attacks targeting the security forces and civilians have increased in recent months, especially in northern and eastern regions bordering jihadist-torn Mali and Niger. “The government was informed of an incident at Nouna... during the night of December 30-31,” a government statement said late Monday.

In other major cities, including Beijing, Tianjin, Chongqing and Guangzhou, Chinese health officials have suggested that the wave has already peaked. In neighbouring Zhejiang province, disease control authorities said Tuesday that there had been one million new COVID infections in recent days and that the province was entering a peak plateau.

Chen added that his Shanghai hospital was seeing 1,600 emergency admissions daily—double the number prior to restrictions being lifted—with 80 percent of them COVID patients. “More than 100 ambulances arrive at the hospital every day,” he was quoted as saying, adding that around half of emergency admissions were vulnerable people aged over 65.

At Tongren Hospital in downtown Shanghai, AFP reporters saw patients receiving emergency medical attention outside the entrance of the overcrowded emergency ward on Tuesday. The corridors overflowed with dozens of elderly patients lying on beds crammed together, hooked up to IV drips.

‘Enormous challenge’

Chinese officials are now readying for a virus wave to hit the country’s underresourced rural interior, as millions of people prepare to travel to their hometowns for the week-long Lunar New Year public holiday beginning January 21.

National Health Commission (NHC) official Jiao Yahui admitted that dealing with the expected surge in rural areas would be an “enormous challenge”. “What we are most worried about is in the past three years nobody has returned home for Lunar New Year but they finally can this year,” Jiao told state broadcaster CCTV on Monday. “As a result, there may be a retaliatory surge of urban residents into the countryside to visit their relatives, so we are even more worried about the rural epidemic.” — AFP



Tanzania’s new President Samia Suluhu Hassan

Tanzania lifts ban on opposition political rallies

DAR ES SALAAM: Tanzania’s President Samia Suluhu Hassan on Tuesday lifted a ban on opposition rallies imposed in 2016 by her strongman predecessor, in an overt move to political rivals seeking the restoration of democratic traditions. Hassan has been under pressure to break with the hardline policies of John Magufuli, who died in 2021 after six years of heavy-handed rule in a country once seen as a democratic beacon in East Africa. Magufuli came to power in 2015 as a no-nonsense man of the people but presided over a sustained crackdown on political freedoms, earning the nickname “Bulldozer” for his refusal to brook any dissent. Early in his tenure, he banned political rallies, saying it was time for work, not politics.

But critics said the ban applied only to opposition groups, with the ruling party free to assemble, while rival gatherings were violently broken up by police and their officials thrown in jail. In 2018, police fired live rounds to disperse a rally by the Chadema opposition party, and its leader Freeman Mbowe was later charged with unlawful assembly and inciting violence.

Addressing party leaders invited to State House on Tuesday, Hassan announced that the “ban on political rallies is now lifted”. “The government will be responsible for ensuring security during rallies, but I urge all politicians to also practise civilised politics,” she said.

“You are all free to criticise the government wherever you see challenges, so that we address them for the benefit of our people.”

‘Cleaned up the mess’

Mbowe, who spent seven months in prison under Hassan on terrorism charges, was cautious. “It is good that the president has allowed political meetings, but we are now waiting to see the implementation by other government officials,” he said. Zitto Kabwe, another opposition leader, said the decision was a first step towards greater political reforms. “I am exhilarated! This is the right that was snatched by the state through an illegal presidential decree. President Samia has cleaned up the mess. It is a normal thing but Huge,” he told AFP in a WhatsApp message.

The opposition hoped that Hassan, a ruling party stalwart herself, and deputy president at the time of Magufuli’s sudden death, would turn the page on the autocratic-style rule of her predecessor. There was early optimism when Hassan, the country’s first female president, reached out to rivals, reopened banned media outlets, and reversed some of Magufuli’s most controversial policies. Those hopes were dimmed with Mbowe’s arrest in July 2021, and observers say more needs to be done to reform the country’s battered reputation.

“President Suluhu should definitely go beyond this announcement. There has to be concrete action to restore a fair democratic playing field in Tanzania,” said Oryem Nyeko, a researcher on Tanzania for Human Rights Watch. Hassan said Tuesday she was committed to “reconciliation and reforms” including a long-awaited rewriting of the constitution, a key opposition demand. “More legal reforms are coming soon to ensure that the rights of all parties are accommodated,” she said.—AFP

Al-Qaeda silent over Zawahiri successor

PARIS: Five months after the United States announced the killing of Al-Qaeda’s leader Ayman al-Zawahiri in Afghanistan, the global jihadist group has still not confirmed his death or announced a new boss. In early August, US President Joe Biden said US armed forces fired two missiles from a drone flying above the Afghan capital, striking al-Zawahiri’s safe house and killing him.

But the group’s propaganda arms have continued to broadcast undated audio or video messages of the bearded Egyptian ideologue who led the group after US special forces in 2011 killed its charismatic founder Osama bin Laden in Pakistan.

“This is really bizarre,” said Hans-Jakob Schindler, director of the Counter-Extremism Project think tank. “A network only works with a leader. You need a person around which everything coalesces.” Almost all options remain open.

“It could of course be the case that the United States is wrong about his death,” researchers Raffaello Pantucci and Kabir Taneja wrote in early December on the Lawfare website. But “this would seem unlikely given the confidence with which President Biden publicly spoke about the strike.”

Successor in hiding?

Another possibility is that the group has so far failed to make contact with Zawahiri’s most likely successor, his former number two, who goes by the nom de guerre Saif al-Adl or “sword of justice”. A former Egyptian special forces lieutenant-colonel who turned to jihadism in the 1980s, he is believed by observers to be in Iran.

The Islamic republic’s Shiite rulers officially oppose Sunni Al-Qaeda, but opponents have repeatedly accused Iran of cooperating with the network and giving sanctuary to its leaders. For Schindler, Saif al-Adl “is a liability but also an asset for the Iranian regime”.

According to its interests, Tehran could decide to hand him over to the United States, or allow him to attack the West. Al-Qaeda may also be keeping quiet about Zawahiri’s demise under pressure from the Taliban, Pantucci and Taneja suggested.

The group issued a carefully worded statement in August, neither confirming Zawahiri’s presence in Afghanistan nor acknowledging his death. “Their decision not to comment could be part of their efforts to manage their fragile but deep relationship with Al-Qaeda, while also avoiding drawing attention to the foreign terror group presence in direct contravention of their agreement with the United States,” they said.—AFP

led by jihadists affiliated with Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State group that has killed tens of thousands and displaced around two million people.

The VDP, set up in December 2019, comprises civilian volunteers who are given two weeks’ military training and then work alongside the army, typically carrying out surveillance, information-gathering or escort duties. Commentators have long worried that the poorly-trained volunteers are easy targets for the jihadists—and may also dangerously inflame ethnic friction without proper controls.

The CISC said the weekend events in Nouna had begun with a reported “terrorist attack” on a local VDP headquarters. Armed men then carried out “deadly attacks in reprisal,” it said. Victims said the assailants were VDP who were members of a traditional hunting community called the Dozo, according to the CISC.—AFP

Preliminary reports “indicate 28 people killed,” it said, adding that an investigation had been opened in order to shed “full light” on what had happened, and urging calm. But a rights group called the Collective of Communities against Impunity and Stigmatisation (CISC) pointed the finger at the Volunteers for the Defence of the Fatherland (VDP) — a civilian auxiliary force that supports the military in its seven-year-old fight against jihadists.

“Armed civilians claiming to be” VDP have been “freely carrying out organised looting and abuses targeting civilian populations on the basis of appearance and stigmatisation,” the CISC said. The public prosecutor in Nouna, Armel Sama, said in a statement that “most of the victims, all of them males, were shot dead.” The landlocked West African country is one of the poorest and most volatile nations in the world. Since 2015, it has been grappling with an insurgency

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 4, 2023

Business



ANKARA: Shoppers buy vegetables and fruits at a public market in the historical district of Ulus in Ankara. —AFP

Turkey's inflation rate slows to 64.3%

Bulgaria inks deal for gas deliveries via Turkey

ISTANBUL: Turkey's annual inflation pulled back further in December from a two-decade high, official data showed Tuesday, helping President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's chances in elections due by June. Consumer prices rose by 64.3 percent in December from the same time last year, the state statistics agency said, compared to an 84.4-percent increase in November.

Analysts attribute the sharp slowdown to the so-called base effect, which makes price increases look smaller when compared to extremely high rates 12 months earlier.

The latest reading is still higher than in any other emerging market except for Argentina. But it fulfils Erdogan's campaign promise that inflation will start falling at the start of the year after reaching the highest levels since 1998 last year. Erdogan hailed the data as a sign of a "rapid recovery". "We will see that the downward trend in inflation will continue," he said in a televised address.

"Our goal this year is to completely burst the

bubble of inflation and remove the issue from our country's agenda as of next year." Turkey's economy has been going through convulsions since Erdogan launched an unusual experiment in September 2021 that tried to fight inflation by bringing down borrowing costs.

The lira began to lose value almost immediately, as consumers rushed to buy up gold and dollars to protect their savings. The price of imports such as oil and gas soared, creating an inflationary spiral that the nominally independent central bank fed further by continuing to lower interest rates.

The annual inflation rate peaked at 85.5 percent in October 2021. But polls show that most Turks lost trust in the official data when Erdogan replaced the head of the state statistics agency in the wake of a particularly dire inflation report last year. A separate study released by Turkey's ENAG research institute showed the rate slowing to 137.6 percent in December from 170.7 a month earlier.

The crisis forced Erdogan to alter his foreign policy, resuming economic alliances with

petrodollar-rich rivals in the Arab world and ramping up trade with Russia, despite its war on Ukraine.

These deals have helped to prop up Turkey's hard currency reserves, allowing it to stabilise the lira. The government has additionally forced exporters to convert 40 percent of their dollar revenues into liras, further supporting the Turkish currency. The lira's stabilisation has helped temper the pace of price increases.

But analysts warn that a wave of populist social support measures that Erdogan announced heading into the election make the current economic policies unsustainable. He has tripled the minimum wage in the past year, raised state salaries and hiked pensions for millions of Turks. He announced a new 25-percent hike in pensions and civil servant salaries on Tuesday.

Analysts believe these policies will cost the state billions of dollars, draining the budget and fuelling inflation. "Turkey faces a very difficult economic outlook after elections, because of the

current disastrous policy mix," Timothy Ash of BlueBay Asset Management tweeted.

Erdogan has vowed not to raise the benchmark interest rate, which at nine percent is just a fraction of the annual inflation rate. Meanwhile, Bulgaria on Tuesday signed a long-term deal for access to Turkey's liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminals and transit network, in a move to secure alternatives after Russia cut off deliveries in April.

The agreement between Bulgaria's state-owned gas operator Bulgargaz and Turkish state gas firm Botas will allow the EU nation to unload LNG at its neighbour's gas terminals and use the Botas network to transport gas.

"Thanks to this agreement we secure the possibility to buy gas from all international producers and unload it in Turkey, where it's most convenient for us logistically," Bulgaria's interim Energy Minister Rosen Hristov said after the deal was signed. "The agreement is important for increasing the security of deliveries in the Balkan region," Turkish Energy Minister Fatih Donmez said. —AFP

Strike-hit UK faces first rail stoppage of 2023

LONDON: UK rail staff disrupted the New Year return to work on Tuesday in the latest strike action by workers in a range of sectors over the worst cost-of-living crisis in a generation. Workers across the economy are at loggerheads with the government as they demand big pay rises to cope with decades-high inflation, currently running at nearly 11 percent.

Normally bustling London train stations were quiet on Tuesday, the first normal working day of 2023 after the New Year break. Network Rail, which operates the UK's rail services, warned travellers of "significantly reduced" train services or no services at all in some areas until Sunday.

Five days of strike action beginning on Tuesday were to include two 48-hour strikes by around 40,000 members of the RMT union. The Aslef union will also strike on Thursday. Transport Secretary Mark Harper urged the rail unions to return to the negotiating table.

"The trade unions decided they wanted to go on strike this week, which is deeply unhelpful, damages the rail industry, damages the interests of the peo-



LONDON: An information sheet displayed at Kings Cross station in London, on January 2, 2023, advises the public on strike action on National Railways. —AFP

ple that work in it," he told Sky News. "I want to see them back around the table and we can try and hammer out a deal between the employers and the trade unions."

The RMT union, however, accused the government of intervening in negotiations in December to stop a deal. Harper denies the claim. RMT general secretary Mick Lynch said the minister had scuppered a potential settlement by insisting on the removal of guards from trains, in favour of driver-

only operated trains.

The issue is a key one for unions. "So that prevented any move forward on the issue and so that is the direct responsibility of the Secretary of State (Harper)," Lynch said from a picket line at London's Euston Station. Despite escalating pay demands, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has pledged to fight calls for inflation-busting rises, insisting the government must stick to more modest increases for public sector workers. —AFP

European gas prices fall to lowest level

PARIS: Europe's wholesale natural gas prices fell Monday to their lowest level since Russia invaded Ukraine, which had driven them to a record high last year. A mild winter has enabled countries to tap less gas from stocks that were built up in anticipation of cuts in supplies from Russia, which was Europe's main supplier before the war.

The benchmark European contract-Dutch TTF gas future for the coming month-soared to a record 345 euros per megawatt hours in March. It still reached as high as 342 euros in August. But prices have been falling since then, hitting 73 euros on Monday — 50 percent down from a month ago and the lowest level since before the war on February 21.

Gas exports by Russian energy giant Gazprom to the European Union and Switzerland fell by 55 percent last year, the company said Monday. Europe was previously Gazprom's main export market but supplies have been drastically reduced because of sanctions following Russia's offensive in Ukraine in 2022. European nations filled up their gas storage facilities and launched campaigns to encourage consumers to save on energy during the winter. European storage levels were at 83 percent on Monday, reducing the need to buy more gas for now.

The EU has scrambled to find new sources of natural gas in efforts to cut its heavy reliance on Russian supplies. EU nations have also adopted a mechanism to cap natural gas prices, but analysts say it will likely have only a limited impact on reducing what businesses and households pay.

Experts have warned that a cold snap could still send gas prices rising again. Russian President Vladimir Putin could also cause more commotion in the markets. "He could send less (gas) but he could also send more to certain destinations in the hope of dividing European countries," said Thierry Bros, an energy market analyst who teaches at the Sciences Po school in Paris.

Europe would struggle to fill up stocks this summer if it does not receive 30 billion cubic metres of Russian gas, Bros said. "Prices risk rising again," he said. Europe is better prepared than in January 2022 when storage was only at 54 percent capacity, Bros added. Competition between Europe and Asia for imports of liquefied natural gas could also send prices higher, said Nicolas de Warren, president of the French association of industries that consume the most energy. —AFP

China Evergrande pledges to repay debts in 2023

BEIJING: China Evergrande has pledged to repay its debt this year, as the property giant faces a restructuring following Beijing's crackdown on excessive borrowing and rampant speculation in the real estate sector. In an email seen by AFP, chairman Hui Ka Yan told staff that "2023 is a key year for Evergrande to fulfill its corporate responsibility and do everything in its power to ensure the delivery of construction projects".

"As long as everyone at Evergrande pulls together, never gives up, (and) works hard... we will certainly be able to complete the tasks of guaranteeing deliveries, repaying all kinds of debts, and resolving risks," Hui wrote. The company last year resumed work on 732 construction sites and delivered

301,000 residential units to homebuyers, the message said.

Employees "endured huge physical and mental stress, and overcame countless difficulties to realise the impossible", Hui wrote. Evergrande has rushed to offload assets in recent months and has been involved in restructuring talks after racking up some \$300 billion in liabilities.

The company has come to embody a broader crisis in China's property sector, which accounts for around a quarter of the country's gross domestic product. Major developers including Evergrande have failed to complete housing projects, triggering protests and mortgage boycotts from homebuyers.

And smaller firms have defaulted on loans or had problems raising cash since the government brought in stricter lending curbs in 2020. In November, an official document showed Evergrande had sold land earmarked for its headquarters in the southern tech hub of Shenzhen for \$1 billion. That same month, China's banking regulator and central bank issued new measures to promote the "stable and healthy development" of the real



Head office of China Evergrande.

estate industry. They include credit support for indebted developers, financial support to ensure projects are completed and assistance for deferred-payment loans for homebuyers. —AFP

Business

France signals flexibility in face of pension reform resistance

This year will be the year of pension reform: Macron

PARIS: The French government said Tuesday it could be flexible on its plan to raise the retirement age to 65, part of a hugely controversial pension reform project pushed by President Emmanuel Macron. Speaking ahead of crunch talks with unions that have fiercely resisted any change, Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne told FranceInfo radio that the age of 65 is “not set in stone”.

She added that “other solutions” could help the government reach its target of balancing the pensions system by 2030. She said the plan, a flagship domestic policy of Macron’s second term, would be presented to the cabinet on January 23 before being debated in parliament at the beginning of February.

The full details of the plan-whose banner policy of raising the retirement age from the current level of 62 has been rejected out of hand by the unions—are to be unveiled on January 10. Macron’s overhaul would be one of the most extensive in a series of pension reforms enacted by successive governments on both the left and right in recent decades aiming to end budget shortfalls.

‘Our pensions problem’

Edouard Philippe, a former prime minister, summed up politicians’ frustration at failing to manage a pensions breakthrough despite long-standing attempts. “The English have their Ireland problem, the Americans their weapons problem, and we have our pensions problem,” he told AFP recently.

A majority of French oppose the reform, according to opinion polls, with a Harris-Interactive poll published Monday putting the level of opposition at 54 percent. “The only group in favour are retired people of 65 and over,” said Frederic Dabi, head of the Ifop polling institute.

The revamp was supposed to have been announced in mid-December but Macron, whose ruling party lost its overall parliament majority in polls last year, delayed the announcement to allow further talks. But he said he would not be sidetracked. “This year will be the year of pension reform,” he said in his traditional New Year’s address.

A new system would be implemented “by the end of the summer”, he promised. Later Tuesday, Borne is due to hold new discussions with unions, which have already signalled that even a less ambitious pension age increase to 64 years would not be acceptable.

Any change in the pension age would be “a red line”, said Laurent Berger, head of the moderate CFDT union. As an apparent olive branch to unions, Borne on Tuesday withdrew a plan to cap the duration of unemployment benefits if the national jobless rate falls below six percent, an idea that had caused much anger among union leaders.

‘A spark could be enough’

Borne is hoping for parliamentary support from the conservative Les Republicains party, which is broadly in favour of pension reform and could vote with the government. Their backing would save her having to make use of a constitutional measure, article 49/3, giving a minority government the right to push through legisla-



PARIS: French Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne (C) walks along the Boulevard Haussman with French Secretary of State for Citizenship Sonia Backes (2nd L), Mayor of Paris Anne Hidalgo (L) and soldiers of the Sentinel operation deployed in the 9th district of Paris. — AFP

tion without a vote. Such a move would, however, undermine the legitimacy in public opinion of the entire reform, analysts say. Left-wing politicians have announced a tough fight against Macron’s reform plans, including with calls to mass demonstrations. “It’s going to get hot in the streets,” threatened the leader of the far-left LFI party, Jean-Luc Melenchon.

Dabi, meanwhile, drew parallels with the Yellow Vest movement of social unrest that shook France in 2018. “The ingredients of a social explosion are in place,” he said. Resentment at low salaries and a feeling of economic decline combined with “inflation that we didn’t have in 2018” meant that “a spark could be enough to make everything go up in flames”, said Dabi. — AFP

EVs make up 80% of new car sales in Norway

OSLO: Electric vehicles accounted for almost four out of every five new car registrations in Norway last year, setting a new record, according to figures released Monday. Led by US car-maker Tesla, which topped the list with a 12.2 percent market share, 138,265 new electric cars were sold in the Scandinavian country last year, representing 79.3 percent of total passenger car sales, the Norwegian Road Federation (OFV) said in a statement.

In doing so, Norway, which is both a major producer of oil and gas, as well as a pioneer for zero-emission cars, comfortably beat the previous record of 64.5 percent set in 2021. Comparatively, electric cars made up just 8.6 percent of new car registrations in the European Union over the first nine months of 2022.

In December alone, electric cars hogged 82.8 percent of sales as Norwegian households rushed to buy them before a tax change came into force in 2023. Norway aims for all new cars to be “zero emission” — in other words, electric and hydrogen — by 2025.

“Eight out of 10 people choosing fully electric instead of combustion engines is a considerable step towards Norway reaching its climate goal of 100 percent BEV sales in 2025,” said Christina Bu, Secretary General of the Norwegian Electric Vehicle Association.

“Our message to the rest of the world is crystal clear: Now there is no excuse for the internal combustion engines’ unnecessary pollution when the climate crisis is so urgent to solve,” she said in a statement. To promote sales, such cars have benefitted from being tax-free, as well as being charged lower fares for road tolls and public parking.

But with their popularity growing, and subsequent loss of income for the state, Norwegian authorities have started to roll back some of the benefits. As of January 1, the 25 percent VAT exemption on the purchase of new electric vehicles applies only to the first 500,000 Norwegian kroner (about \$50,500) of the price. About one in five cars on Norwegian roads are currently electric. — AFP



Electric cars take off in Norway.



FREMONT: File photo shows, Tesla Motors Chairman and CEO, Elon Musk, speaks at the Model X launch event in Fremont, California. — AFP

Tesla posts disappointing deliveries

NEW YORK: Tesla said Monday it had delivered 1.31 million electric vehicles in 2022 — a record for the US automaker and a 40 percent jump from a year before, but still short of its own and Wall Street’s expectations.

The Elon Musk-led company has set a long-term goal of increasing its deliveries by 50 percent a year on average. Tesla regularly says the objective may fluctuate based on operations and in a statement Monday, it noted “significant COVID and supply chain-related challenges” had affected its 2022 output.

Production was suspended at its Shanghai plant for several weeks during the course of last year due to COVID restrictions. In October, the company’s chief

financial officer Zach Kirkhorn said that Tesla might fall short of its goal.

Analysts had hoped for better results—they predicted delivery of 427,000 vehicles in the fourth quarter, according to estimates compiled by FactSet, but the company only managed to deliver 405,000.

To boost sluggish sales, Tesla had offered rare promotions to customers willing to take delivery of a new vehicle before the end of 2022. In a company-wide email sent to employees last week and seen by CNBC, Musk had asked them to “volunteer to help deliver” as many cars to customers as possible before midnight on December 31.

Industry watchers are concerned that demand for Tesla’s relatively pricey electric vehicles could bottom out amid global economic uncertainty and stiffer competition in the sector. They are also concerned about Musk’s current focus on operations at social media site Twitter, which he acquired last year. After soaring on Wall Street in 2020 and 2021, Tesla shares plummeted 65 percent in 2022. — AFP

Santiago’s poorest district plants recycling seed

SANTIAGO: Every morning, trucks collect potato and avocado skins, orange peels and other food scraps that residents of Santiago’s poorest neighborhood leave hanging in bags on their front doors or in tree branches or place in special bins. For nearly two decades, the residents of La Pintana have been pioneers of recycling in Chile-South America’s largest garbage generator. Under a project started in 2005, the commune of 190,000 people enthusiastically gather their plant-based food waste, which is then turned into compost to help green their community.

In La Pintana, where 15 percent of people live in poverty, 50 percent of the community’s organic waste is collected for recycling—a figure that puts to shame the 0.8 percent achieved by Chile as a whole, according to environment ministry data. “They do a lot with it (the waste): they produce compost and it is used for the community itself, for the squares and gardens,” La Pintana resident Jose Vera told AFP as he left two large cardboard boxes filled with scraps on the sidewalk, proud of his contribution.

“It is also a saving (for the municipality) because they no longer have to buy” fertilizer or pay landfill fees, he said. Chile generates some 1.13 kilograms (about 2.5 pounds) of waste per person per day—the highest output in South America, according to World Bank data. And in terms of recycling, it is far from achieving even Latin America’s low average of four percent of solid municipal waste processed. But La Pintana, one of the first neighborhoods of Chile’s deeply socially unequal capital to adopt such a project, now collects some 20 tons of organic waste every day. It is delivered to a local plant that turns the scraps into natural fertilizer for the town’s own municipal nursery, and others.



SANTIAGO: Municipal staff collects organic material which will be sent for a vermiculture recycling process, in the commune of La Pintana in Santiago, Chile. — AFP

‘A change in people’

The municipality estimates to be saving some \$100,000 per year—money that can go to other community projects. “There has been a change in people,” since the project started, resident Vera said. “They are now concerned about recycling and no longer put the vegetables with the garbage.”

La Pintana’s nursery, built on what used to be an unsightly landfill, yields some 100,000 plants of 400 different species every year. These are planted back in La Pintana, one of the areas of Santiago with the fewest green spaces per inhabitant. The nursery uses about a ton of humus—a dark organic matter created when plant material decomposes—every year, according to project member Cintia Ortiz. All of it is obtained from La Pintana’s plant waste.

“This humus, the benefit it gives us, is that it is organic... thanks to the community and the workers,”

Ortiz told AFP. In addition, “as we can keep the plants well-nourished, we do not have to use chemicals.”

Planting flowers outside a municipal sports center, municipal worker Jeanette Gonzalez told AFP the project “brings us... joy. The town is improving.” “When we took over... it was a town where every 200 meters there was a landfill,” Claudia Pizarro, mayor of La Pintana since 2016, said of the trailblazing project, which has received several international awards.

“It is a virtuous circle: people see that where there used to be a landfill there is now greenery and everything is flourishing, and they stop throwing garbage there,” she added. There have been spillover benefits too: more than half of the municipal nursery’s 15 staff are former inmates doing community work in lieu of serving prison time. Chile’s Environment Minister Maisa Rojas recently proposed a bill to reproduce the project in the rest of Chile. — AFP

Business

Markets mostly rise at start of new year, but worries persist

China's growth and Ukraine war continue to dampen the mood

HONG KONG: Most markets bounced from early losses and the yen hit a seven-month high Tuesday to start the year on a positive note, but ongoing worries about interest rates, China's growth and the Ukraine war continue to dampen the mood.

While 2022 was painful for investors, there is a fear that the next 12 months could be worse, with the head of the International Monetary Fund warning a third of the global economy could slip into recession. Eyes are on China, where the swift removal of most zero-Covid measures has sparked a massive surge in infections that has filled up hospitals and left crematoriums overloaded. The widespread outbreak has fanned fresh concerns for the economic outlook as businesses are being forced to shut down, after having already been battered by the strict containment measures put in place for almost three years.

Analysts said infections may have already peaked in major cities including Beijing, where activity is picking back up. But there are fears that travel over the Lunar New Year holiday at the end of the month could see cases spread to the countryside and further impact the economy.

"With the ongoing COVID tidal wave, investment sliding to a 10-quarter low, and new orders continuing to get battered, a meaningful first-quarter recovery is increasingly unrealistic," Derek Scissors, of CBBI, said. IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva said with China's economy looking shaky just as the United States and European Union edge towards contraction, the outlook for the world was downbeat for 2023.

She told CBS's "Face the Nation" that this year will be "tougher than the year we leave behind". While the United States may avoid it, she warned

half the 27-nation European Union will be in recession, as the bloc is "very severely hit" by the Ukraine conflict.

China's economy will likely be at or below global growth for the first time in 40 years, she added. However, after a negative start to the day, Asia's markets turned brighter as it progressed. Hong Kong was lifted 1.8 percent by hopes for the city's economy ahead of an expected reopening of the border with China next week. Macau-based casino shares led the rally as investors bet on a recovery in revenues, with MGM China up more than 13 percent and Wynn Macau soaring more than six percent.

The Hang Seng Index's rise came after it suffered its worst year since 2011. There were also gains in Shanghai, Taipei, Manila and Jakarta, though Sydney, Mumbai, Seoul and Singapore remained in the red. London, Paris and Frankfurt all rose at the open.

Investors are now bracing for another series of central bank rate hikes in the early months of the year as monetary policymakers battle to rein in decades-high inflation. The sharp increase in borrowing costs last year was a key reason for the major pain suffered by equity markets as traders contemplated the end of years of cheap cash.

The Fed and others have suggested they will slow their pace of increases, but they are tipped to take rates higher than previously expected and not start to cut until later in the year or even 2024. Friday's release of US jobs data will be closely followed for an idea of how the Fed will move next, with a strong reading likely to put pressure on the bank to keep lifting for some time.

Still, the yen extended its gains to briefly hit 129.52 per dollar — its highest level since June —



NEW YORK: A trader reacts on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange at the closing bell. —AFP

after the Bank of Japan shifted away from its long-standing ultra-loose monetary policy. The BoJ said last month it would loosen its grip on yields and allow those on certain government bonds to move in a wider band.

Observers see the unit pushing much higher, after it hit a three-decade low close to 152 per dol-

lar as recently as October. "The yen's current level is significantly undervalued, even after the recent rally," Rajeev De Mello, at GAMA Asset Management, said. "I would expect an end to (the Bank of Japan's) negative rates by April. This further removes obstacles for the yen to strengthen more." —AFP

GCC markets buoyant, oil prices climb

By Farah Mourad

DUBAI: GCC stock markets were mostly seeing positive performances while oil prices improved. Energy markets remain relatively uncertain as geopolitical tensions in Europe remain and China reopens. Oil prices extended more gains as most global markets reopened. Energy prices could find support thanks to the reopening of the Chinese economy. However, demand levels could be limited by the surge in COVID cases in the country. In this regard, Chinese manufacturing activity has declined but less than expected.

The Dubai stock market witnessed some volatility and saw limited changes as uncertainty continues to affect traders' expectations. The market could remain exposed to the global slowdown fears and could see some new declines. The Abu Dhabi stock market was heading to the upside as stronger oil prices could help push the main index higher. Sustained high energy prices could support the market to recover from its latest price corrections.

The Qatari stock market recovered this week after significant declines during the last few months. However, the main index remains exposed to new price corrections as natural gas prices could maintain their negative performance.

The Saudi stock market continued to recover thanks to stronger oil prices and a more resilient local economy. The job market in particular continued to grow helping improve sentiment among traders.

The stock market in Oman continued to benefit from a positive sentiment among local investors and could extend more gains. Higher oil prices could strengthen the main index further which could help approach its latest peak. The Egyptian stock market extended its gains this week as local investors return to the market with high trading volumes. However, international investors continued to shy away, putting pressure on the market.



Farah Mourad

Singapore economy grows more than expected in 2022

SINGAPORE: Singapore's economy grew more than expected last year but much slower than in 2021, official data showed Tuesday, as analysts warned of weaker growth ahead owing to an expected recession in key markets. While the 3.8 percent on-year expansion was welcome, it was weighed by a 3.0 percent contraction in the key manufacturing sector in the final three months.

Growth in the fourth quarter came in at 2.2 percent, sharply down from 4.2 percent in July-September, according to advance estimates by the trade ministry. Exports for computer chips and other products have been hit by softer global demand caused by surging inflation and sharp increases in interest rates.

The city-state's economic performance is often seen as a useful barometer of the global environment because of its reliance on trade with the rest of the world. Last year's growth beat the 3.5 percent expected by the government but was half the 7.6 percent rise enjoyed in 2021.

"While the slight outperformance suggests some resilience in economic activities for now, the overall trend remains on the downside," Yeap Jun Rong, market analyst at online trading firm IG, said in a note.

Research house Capital Economics said it expects exports to fall further on expectations the global economy would enter a recession this year. "Elevated interest rates, declining household savings and high inflation are likely to drag on domestic demand," it added.

Song Seng Wun, a regional economist with CIMB Private Banking, told AFP: "The Singapore economy, though faced headwinds, did well enough. But the outlook is cautious given that we are such a trade-dependent economy."

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong warned in his New Year's message that growth this year is



SINGAPORE: A crane lifts containers onto a vessel at Pasir Panjang port terminal in Singapore on January 3, 2023. —AFP

that the "big fish" encouraging a culture of impunity be called out. Following those rallies, justice minister Khishgeeign Nyambaatar told AFP that greater steps must be taken to battle corruption that many Mongolians feel has robbed their country of the vast profits from a mining boom.

Coal is one of Mongolia's biggest earners, with state media reporting in October that the country exports an average of 1,304 trucks of the fossil fuel a day. Privatisation of state-owned assets after the country's transition to democracy in the 1990s was a mistake, Nyambaatar admitted, as was not preventing massive disparities in the distribution of wealth.

"The majority believe that the reason behind the economic downturn and crisis is the corruption," he told AFP. "We have to improve and increase the measures that we're taking to combat corruption, which is the issue that raises frustration among the people of Mongolia."

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expected to ease to 0.5-2.5 percent. "The international outlook remains troubled. The Russia-Ukraine conflict continues, with no good outcome in sight," he said.

"US-China tensions are likely to persist. How quickly China recovers from COVID-19 remains to be seen, while the US and EU may well enter recession. Our economy will be affected." —AFP

Ex-leader in spotlight

Nyambaatar is leading a wide-ranging government investigation into the coal theft claims, with a former president under scrutiny over his alleged role. Ex-leader Khaltmaagiin Battulga, currently in South Korea receiving medical treatment, is one of a number of officials under "criminal investigation related to the coal theft", the justice minister said.

"If Mr Battulga makes some obstacles and hindrances to the ongoing criminal investigations, then he will be subject to arrest," Nyambaatar told AFP. "There are a number of criminal investigations that he is currently being subjected to." The former president has given a "personal guarantee" that he will return to Mongolia, Nyambaatar said. A populist businessman and former champion in the Russian martial art of sambo, Battulga has not publicly commented on the allegations. He is far from the only senior Mongolian politician linked to corruption. NGO Transparency International said in a report this year that graft had failed to improve under this government. —AFP

Yen breaks 130 per dollar to sit at 7-month high

TOKYO: The yen rose to a seven-month high against the dollar on Tuesday, breaking the 130 mark and building on a rally sparked by the Bank of Japan's decision to move away from its long-standing ultra-loose monetary policy. The unit strengthened to 129.52 per dollar at one point before easing slightly, and analysts tipped it to continue advancing as the BoJ changes tack with a shift out of

negative interest rates tipped to be in the pipeline.

That comes as the US Federal Reserve and other central banks look to slow down the pace of interest rate hikes implemented over the past year to fight decades-high inflation. The BoJ said last month it would loosen its grip on yields and allow those on certain government bonds to move in a wider band.

The announcement saw the yen surge by the most in three decades. It is now at its strongest level since June, having hit a 32-year low close to 152 per dollar as recently as October. Now, it is seen pushing even higher.

"The yen's current level is significantly undervalued, even after the recent

rally," said Rajeev De Mello, at GAMA Asset Management. "I would expect an end to (the BoJ's) negative rates by April. This further removes obstacles for the yen to strengthen more."

The yen's sharp rise was also spurred by fewer participants in the market at the beginning of the new year, brokers said. SPI Asset Management's Stephen Innes told AFP: "Into the holiday forex traders bought yen as a hedge in case there were some hints of BoJ policy announcement. This has picked up steam."

"The latest move is getting generated because the market is raising the odds of a material shift in BoJ policy." —AFP



Yen pushes ahead against greenback.



A tourist buys a bottle of argan oil at a shop near Morocco's western Atlantic coastal city of Essaouira. — AFP photos



SHUNNED BY YOUTH, MOROCCO COSMETIC OIL CRAFT FACES UNCERTAIN FUTURE

Morocco's argan oil is highly prized by the cosmetics industry, yet it is now mostly produced by elderly workers, raising questions about how long the artisanal practice can continue. A dozen women, sitting on the floor of a workshop inland from Essaouira, a port town on Morocco's Atlantic coast, work to deftly shell argan nuts, crush them and extract the oil. It is a time-honored and labor-intensive craft, but one increasingly shunned by young people in the North African kingdom. The women, mostly aged over 60, manually pulp the small yellow fruits at Cooperative Marjana, while others use hammers to crush the robust shells and remove the nuts.

The fruits are then sorted, roasted, ground and pressed for their oil, which is used in cooking but has also long been famed for its moisturizing and anti-ageing properties for skin and hair. "It's difficult work and it requires experience and, most of all, patience," said Samira Chari, who at 42 is Marjana's youngest artisanal worker. Cooperative founder Amel El Hantatti says the job's physical nature is one reason "young people aren't taking up this craft anymore", despite a lack of local employment.

The area's otherwise arid landscape is home to vast argan orchards. Tourists stopping to see the production process and buy argan products are warmly welcomed by Marjana's all-female staff. Argan is so important to the region between the towns of Essaouira and Agadir that in 1998 UNESCO declared a biosphere reserve in the area and later added the tree's cultivation to its Intangible Cultural Heritage list. Argan oil

is the main source of revenue in this part of southern Morocco, where few other crops survive the low rainfall and searing summer heat.

It is also widely used in Moroccan cuisine and has been certified with an Appellation of Origin since 2010. Hantatti founded the cooperative in 2005 and says it now employs 80 women, some working in production and others in sales. But today, she says, "I really

having contact with people and practicing other languages with tourists who come into the shop every day, instead of spending the whole day crushing and pulping argan nuts. "Anyway, one day the job will be done by machines," she added.

But Hantatti said the process is hard to mechanize, insisting that "oil extracted by machines will never have the same flavor as what the women produce. "It

figures, around 40 percent of it for export. The sector's turnover tripled between 2012 and 2019 to reach around \$115 million, according to the agriculture ministry.

Inherited skills

But producers in Essaouira say the next generation has little interest in learning their craft. "All I've known all my life is argan oil," said Samira as she

she understands. Yet, with a growing body of scientific research backing up its health claims, argan oil remains an important part of the local economy and a sought-after commodity worldwide. Morocco's government has also been paying more attention to the sector, notably by building 13 reservoirs to collect scant rainfall and help mitigate the region's ever-worsening droughts.

Rabat aims to double argan oil pro-



Women shell Argan nuts to make oil near Morocco's western Atlantic coastal city of Essaouira.



fear that the artisanal production of argan oil might disappear".

'A spiritual quality'

The cooperative's younger workers prefer to work in the gift shop, selling argan soap, shampoo and moisturizer. One of them, Assia Chaker, 25, said: "I tried to work a few days with the craftswomen but I couldn't carry on, it's a hard process and really tiring. "I like

contains all the positive vibes of these artisans, their laughter, the stories they share as they're working. There's a spiritual quality that makes it special and unique." The cooperative produces up to 1,000 liters (about 265 gallons) of oil a year and works with tour companies bringing groups of visitors as they pass through the popular coastal region.

Morocco produces around 5,640 tons of argan oil annually, according to official

roasted nuts in a large clay oven. "For me, it's as essential as oxygen and water." The divorcee did not have the opportunity of an education and works 10 hours a day to provide for her children.

Samira learned every stage of argan oil production from her parents, skills traditionally passed from generation to generation. But she says her children have no desire to go into the industry-a choice

duction by 2030, hoping to support the emergence of a "new generation of the rural middle class". But with fewer and fewer young people taking up the craft, time will tell whether another generation will learn the traditions associated with the tree. — AFP



A woman shells Argan nuts to make oil near Morocco's western Atlantic coastal city of Essaouira.



A woman empties roasted Argan nuts into a basket as she makes oil, at a house near Morocco's western Atlantic coastal city of Essaouira.



Women squeeze oil out of a paste made from crushed Argan nuts, near Morocco's western Atlantic coastal city of Essaouira.

Can the French embrace cuisine sans booze?

It remains an uncomfortably foreign idea for some, but even the wine-loving French are experimenting with non-alcoholic drinks these days. Being pregnant or the designated-driver in France—or attempting a "Dry January" after a booze-soaked festive season—has tended to leave few exciting drinks options when dining out.

"When I was pregnant, it was annoying to go to a restaurant and be stuck with water for the whole night," said Argentinean sommelier Paz Levinson. She works with Anne-Sophie Pic, the chef with the most Michelin stars in the world, and they have pioneered new approaches to drinks-pairing, such as a Brazilian coffee infusion served with the venison at their triple-starred Valence restaurant. "It's starting to catch on," said Pic. "Everyone is trying it." Paris-based mixologist Yann Daniel admits he was "fairly dubious" about the idea at first, but quickly realized how many people were thirsty for low- and non-alcoholic concoctions. "It's a trend that is growing in France, following the Anglo-Saxons who are always a bit ahead of us in these things," he told AFP.

He was commissioned to put together

a menu of light cocktails based around spices, herbs, roots and teas for a hotel chain this autumn, while his colleague Matthias Giroud published a book of cocktail recipes called "No Low" (no alcohol and low alcohol). Not everyone is convinced. Guy Savoy, the best chef in the world according to The List, says the trend is better reserved for countries without a world-beating wine industry.

"In the number one country for great wine—I'm not judging, but it doesn't fit," he told AFP. But the data seems clear: French alcohol consumption has fallen steeply, with the average intake per adult down from 17.7 liters a year in 1960 to 9.2 liters in 2014, according to Our World in Data. And many restaura-

teurs are also excited about the opportunities for new inventions.

At his eponymous restaurant near the Eiffel Tower, two-Michelin-star chef David Toutain pairs his lobster with an infusion of fir-tree buds, the eel with an apple juice mixed with fennel vinegar and the pigeon with a beet-carrot nectar. These options now sit alongside wine selections on the menu. "It's taken me years to put all this in place," Toutain told AFP. He prefers it to pairing with wines, which are never made specifically with the dish in mind. "It takes you deeper into the experience," he said. — AFP



Chef Guy Savoy



Chef David Toutain

Earth, Wind & Fire drummer Fred White dies at 67

Drummer Fred White, an early member of US band Earth, Wind & Fire, has died at age 67, his brother and former group announced Monday. Born in 1955 in Chicago, White began drumming at an early age and went on to win six Grammy awards with the funk band, founded in 1969 by his brother, the late Maurice White. "Our family is saddened today with the loss of an amazing and talented family member," wrote another of White's brothers, Verdine, in an Instagram post.

"Child protege, member of the EWF ORIGINAL 9, with gold records at the young age of 16 years old!" wrote White's older brother, also a former member of the group. Earth, Wind & Fire quickly rose to fame in the 1970s, becoming one of the early acts to break the color barrier in pop music, winning a white fanbase while remaining favorites within the African American community.

In 1979, the band became the first Black act to sell out New York's Madison Square Garden, then-as now-one of the most prestigious concert venues. The band's official Instagram page posted a video of White performing a drum solo at a 1979 concert in Germany. "Rest in

love," the group wrote. He went on to work with other performers, including soul singer Deniece Williams. White-as a member of Earth, Wind & Fire—was inducted in 2000 into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame.

The group won acclaim not only for songwriting but for its energetic live shows, led by a forceful horn section and featuring a kalimba, an African percussion instrument played by plucking metal tines. While never disappearing completely, Earth, Wind & Fire enjoyed a career resurgence after the election of former president Barack Obama, who invited the band as one of the first entertainers when he entered the White House in 2009. — AFP



Ticket to busk: Musicians vie for Paris metro spot



Eli Jadelot performs in a wedding dress at the subway station "Arts et Metiers" in Paris.



Eli Jadelot, in a wedding dress, walks inside the subway station "Arts et Metiers" in Paris.

In the morning, Eli Jadelot sells chocolate eclairs in a bakery. In the afternoons, she swaps her apron for a wedding dress and sweet pastries for sweet melodies. Jadelot is a busker in the Paris metro, one of 300 musicians authorized by the French capital's transit network to perform in its vast network of corridors. "I don't see it a career springboard, but as another way to make music, in a different environment," said the 39-year-old Jadelot, who usually works as a street artist near the touristy Sacre Coeur area of Montmartre after countless odd jobs since she moved to Paris from Lorraine 16 years ago, driven by dreams of an acting career in the capital.

"I want to see how I manage in a place where people only pass through. Will they react, or won't they?" she said as she got ready to perform at the Saint-Lazare station, one of Europe's busiest commuter hubs. Faced with overwhelming numbers of would-be buskers-without a permit and, often, without talent-Paris metro operator RATP decided 25 years ago to licence the best 300 to perform legally, and ban everybody else. Every six months, a jury made up of RATP staff listens to around 1,000 applicants and selects its favorites who get to play in the corridors of metro stations, although not on platforms or aboard trains. This does not stop, of course, unofficial musicians seeking to serenade commuters on the trains themselves.

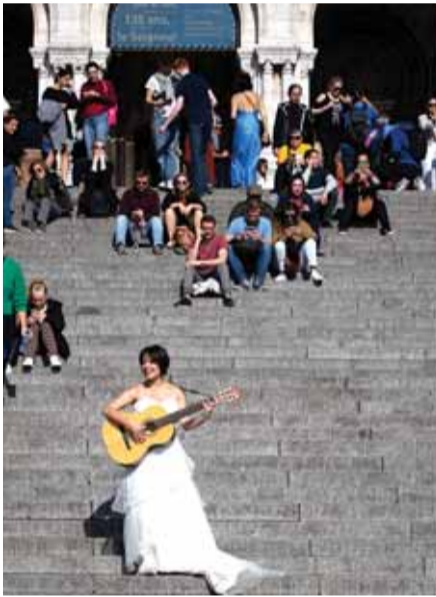
'She's astonishing'

Jadelot applied for the first time last year, and her selection of songs about love, work and everyday life got her in straightaway. Her stage outfit, a stunning wedding dress borrowed from a friend, may have helped. "She's astonishing, with her wedding dress, plus her charming smile," said Cherif Medouni, an educator who often stops to listen to buskers on his commute. "Her songs are beautiful, poetic, with a rebellious edge," he said.

For its selection, the RATP jury doesn't rule out any instrument, said Stella Sainson, in charge of the "Metro Musician" label, "although some are hard to manage, like the Djembe which is very loud". Arnaud Moyencourt, who has been playing his barrel organ in the metro since 1992, made the cut again this time. "He repre-



Eli Jadelot performs in a wedding dress in front of the Sacre Coeur in Paris.—AFP photos



Eli Jadelot performs in a wedding dress in front of the Sacre Coeur in Paris.

sents the Paris of old," said a juror, Sofia Tondinelli. "I would definitely stop for him."

Camille Millian, who sang a Whitney Houston cover to renew her licence, also got selected. "The metro is one of my best venues," she said. Riana Rabe, applying for the second time, also got through with suave interpretations of a song from Disney's "Mulan" film, and one by Radiohead, accompanying herself on a pink electro-acoustic ukulele. "I've always been a little scared of people, but now I've discovered that they are really extremely friendly," she said.

Licences were also won by Dominique, who followed in his uncle's footsteps as a musical saw virtuoso, by Ukrainian Anna Leonid Byulakh, who accompanies her violin performance with artistic jumps, by Abram Lacoste, who gave up his analyst day job for music eight months ago, and by Hugo Vaxelaire with his nyckelharpa, a harp-like contraption that is Sweden's national instrument.

'Need to attract attention'

Unlucky applicants include another ukulele player—"poor thing, she's not ready," said Sainson—and a 28-year-old Chinese violinist with wide glasses who was judged to be too shy for the challenge. "They need to be able to attract attention, otherwise people just pass them by, lost in their thoughts," said Tondinelli.

Some buskers move on to above-ground careers, even France-wide fame, including singer-songwriter Zaz, singer-accordeonist Claudio Capeo and pop group Arcadian who made it onto talent show "The Voice" and released two albums. But for most of the metro performers, it's not about fame or money, and that's probably just as well. "On a good day, you make 25 euros (\$27)," said Jadelot. — AFP

What is the link between winter storms and global warming?

The world is getting warmer, winters included. The United States, however, has experienced severe winter storms in recent years, and experts are taking a closer look at the link between these extreme cold events and climate change. While the link between global warming and heat waves is very direct, the behavior of winter storms is governed by complex atmospheric dynamics that are more difficult to study.

Even so, "there are certain aspects of winter storms (...) where the climate change linkages are fairly strong and robust," Michael Mann, a climatologist at the University of Pennsylvania, told AFP. For example, the warming of bodies of water-lakes or oceans-influences the



A gigantic snow pile is seen in front of Central Terminal in Buffalo, New York.

amount of snowfall. In the United States, a mechanism called "lake-effect snow" occurs around the Great Lakes region on the Canadian border. The city of Buffalo, which sits on the shores of one of the Great Lakes, was hit hard by a lethal snowstorm over Christmas weekend.

The collision between cold air from the north with the warmer water of these

lakes causes convection, which leads to snowfall. "The warmer those lake temperatures, the more moisture (is) in the air, and the greater potential for lake-effect snows," Michael Mann wrote in a 2018 paper. "Not surprisingly, we see a long-term increase in lake effect snowfalls as temperatures have warmed during the last century."



Residents take in the view from atop a gigantic snow pile in front of Central Terminal in Buffalo, New York. — AFP photos

Polar vortex

There is, however, no consensus on other mechanisms, such as the effect of climate change on the polar vortex and jet stream air currents. The polar vortex is an air mass above the North Pole, located high in the stratosphere. Humans dwell in the troposphere, and the stratosphere is located just above it. It is surrounded by a band of rotating air, which acts as a barrier between the cold air in the north, and the warmer air in the south. As the polar vortex weakens, this band of air begins to undulate and take on a more oval shape, bringing more cold air southward.

According to a 2021 study, this type of disturbance is occurring more often, and is reflected in the following two weeks lower in the atmosphere, where the jet stream is located. This air current, which blows from west to east, again following the border between cold and warm air, then meanders in such a way that it allows cold air from the north to intrude at lower latitudes, particularly over the eastern United States.

"Everybody agrees that when the polar vortex becomes perturbed or disrupted, there is an increase in the probability of severe winter weather," Judah Cohen, lead author of the study and climatologist for Atmospheric and Environmental Research (AER), told AFP. And this "stretched" polar vortex is exactly what was observed just before the storm that hit the United States this December, he pointed out. The same phenomenon was seen in February 2021, when a bitter cold snap hit Texas, causing massive power outages.

'Active debate'

But the heart of the debate lies elsewhere: What is causing these increased disturbances in the polar vortex? According to Cohen, they are linked to changes in the Arctic, accelerated by climate change. On the one hand, the rapid melting of sea ice, and on the other, an increase in snow cover in Siberia.

"This is a topic that I have been studying for over 15 years, and I am more confident today in the link than I have ever been in the past," he told AFP. This last point, however, remains "an active debate within the scientific community," said Mann.

"Climate models are not yet capturing all of the underlying physics that may be relevant to how climate change is impacting the behavior of the jet stream." Future studies will still be needed in the coming years to unravel the mystery of these complex chain reactions. — AFP



Polish director Roman Polanski and President of the jury gives a speech during the Closing Ceremony of the 44th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France on May 20, 1991. — AFP

'French Oscars' bars those investigated for sex crimes

The Cesar Awards, France's version of the Oscars, said Monday that anyone being investigated for allegations of sexual misconduct would be barred from its ceremony next month. There were fears of protests at the event on February 25 over the latest #MeToo furore involving newcomer Sofiane Bennacer, who is being investigated by police on two allegations of rape and one of violence against a partner. Bennacer, 25, who denies any wrongdoing, had been seen as an awards frontrunner for his part in "Les Amandiers" (titled "Forever Young" abroad) about a sexually promiscuous group of drama students in the 1980s.

It also follows protests at the 2020 ceremony when Roman Polanski, convicted of raping a child in the 1970s, won best director—which triggered a major reorganization of the Cesar Academy. In a statement, the Academy said anyone facing a potential prison sentence for "violence, notably of (a) sexual or sexist nature" would be excluded from the coming ceremony. "It has been decided not to highlight people who may have been put in question by the judiciary for acts of violence," it said, adding that the step was being taken "out of respect for the victims", even if they were only "presumed" victims.

Bennacer was dropped from the longlist of possible nominees in November after fresh allegations surfaced in the media. The director of "Les Amandiers", Valeria Bruni-Tedeschi (also said to be Bennacer's girlfriend), denounced "a media lynching".—AFP

Lifestyle | Features



This file handout picture provided by the Sharqiyah International Baja Toyota shows Saudi rider Dania Akeel, the first ever Saudi female to tackle an international rally, waves next to her vehicle in Saudi Arabia. — AFP photos



In this file photo Mini's Spanish diver Laia Sanz speaks with Saudi driver Dania Akeel in the coastal city of Jeddah.



This file handout picture provided by the Sharqiyah International Baja Toyota shows FIA's Jutta Kleinschmidt (right) and Saudi rider Dania Akeel, the first ever Saudi female to tackle an international rally, posing for a picture in Saudi Arabia.

AS A SAUDI WOMAN AT THE WHEEL IN THE DAKAR RALLY, AKEEL CARRIES EXTRA BAGGAGE

As Dania Akeel drives her lightweight vehicle through the Saudi desert in the Dakar Rally she is aware she has to steer a careful course across her home sands. Akeel is one of two Saudi women competing in the 2023 race and one of only 31 women among 790 competitors.

She represents a visible change in the ultra-conservative kingdom where women have only been allowed to drive since 2018, but, sponsored by the Saudi Ministry of Sport, the country's motor sports federation and a leading Saudi car dealership, she is vulnerable to accusations she is part of a 'sportswashing' campaign. "I'll go and do my best and at the end of the day your drive is between you and yourself," Akeel told AFP. "One wants to do well of course, but to do so you just have to focus on the drive. 'Motorsport is not segregated by gender, so I think that the best way to empower women is to drive your best and to be competitive,'" she added.

Cristiano Ronaldo last week became the latest high-priced sporting jewel adding lustre to the country's image when he joined the Al Nassr club. Other sporting ventures include the rebel LIV Golf series, which offers huge contracts and purses to attract stars, heavyweight boxing title bouts and a Formula One grand prix. The country's Public Investment Fund bought



This file handout picture provided by the Sharqiyah International Baja Toyota shows Saudi rider Dania Akeel, the first ever Saudi female to tackle an international rally, standing next to her vehicle in Saudi Arabia.

Premier League club Newcastle in 2021 and is being linked with Manchester United. Human Rights Watch said that despite the "progressive image conveyed" by sporting events, the lack of opportunities for women and girls to participate in sports remains.

'What sponsors are paying for'

Akeel turned professional last season and finished eighth overall in the T3 light-weight prototype category in her first Dakar. After Monday's second stage,

Akeel, and co-driver Sergio Lafuente, were 14th out of 46 remaining drivers in the class. She started driving in the desert in buggies owned by cousins and acquired a driving license after moving to England as a student at 17.

Akeel avoids criticizing either the restrictions on Saudi women or the recent easing. Before the ban on women drivers was lifted, "I didn't really have any problem" because her family "took me to places and so I didn't feel limited." "Then when they opened the tap and we were



This file handout picture provided by the Sharqiyah International Baja Toyota shows Saudi rider Dania Akeel, the first ever Saudi female to tackle an international rally, talking to event staff in Saudi Arabia.

able to drive, I saw it's actually a wonderful feeling and it does have an impact for sure."

Akeel, who studied modern history and politics at Royal Holloway College outside London and then gained a masters in business studies in the United States, is acutely aware that visibility pays. "I don't imagine a situation where I will enter a race like this and nobody will have an opinion, that will never be the case. "And, actually, it's what the sponsors are paying for," she said. "For me it's useful to be in

the public eye, otherwise I wouldn't be able to finance my season. "For sponsors, it can be an asset being a woman and speaking to a bigger audience and that's why they chose me." While Akeel was careful to stay on track when discussing Saudi politics she said she was happy to compete and to draw attention to her country's "topography". "To be able to see the country from the off road perspective is really a privilege. "I'm there because I love to drive." — AFP



In this file photo taken on October 31, 1990 Pele opens his arms as he acknowledges cheers from a crowd of spectators during a ceremony in Milan to celebrate his fiftieth birthday. — AFP

Pele lives on in 738 Peruvian children named for football star

The world lost Pele, the "king" of football in 2022, but his name will live on in more than 700 Peruvian children born last year, according to a list published by Peru's National Registry of Identification and Civil Status. As per the list, 738 babies were registered with the names Pele, King Pele, Edson Arantes or Edson Arantes do Nascimento, the full name of the three-time football world champion, by the close of 2022. The Brazilian star died on December 29 at the age of 82 and was mourned on Monday at the stadium of his long-time club Santos, where thousands of people arrived to bid him farewell.

New President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva will lead the tributes as Brazil says its final farewell to its most famous son at a 24-hour wake on Tuesday. Among Peruvian girls, 551 were baptized as either Queen Elizabeth, Elizabeth the Second or Elizabeth II, after the British monarch who died in September after 70 years on the throne.

Despite Pele's passing, the most popular famous name used by Peruvian parents was that of Portuguese star Cristiano Ronaldo, with Ronaldo or his full name chosen 31,583 times. Football was an enduring theme, with 371 babies named either Leo Messi or Messi, for the Argentine World Cup champion, and 229 Mbappe or Kylian Mbappe for the French star. here were also 733 Mavericks, after Tom Cruise's character from the Top Gun movie sequel released last year. Among female names, Rubi was at the top of the list with 24,980, followed by 1,787 baby girls named for Colombian singer Shakira. — AFP

US rally driver, YouTube star Ken Block dies in snowmobile mishap

US rally driver and YouTube star Ken Block was killed when the snowmobile he was riding overturned on a steep slope in Utah, his racing team and US media reported Monday. "It's with our deepest regrets that we can confirm that Ken Block passed away in a snowmobile accident today," Hoonigan Racing Division said on its web page. "He will be incredibly missed." TMZ Sports reported that Block, 55, was riding a snowmobile on Monday afternoon when it "suddenly upended" and landed on top of him.

He was pronounced dead at the scene, it quoted the Wasatch County Sheriff's Office as saying. The sheriff's office said Block was alone when the accident occurred. He had posted pictures on his Instagram page earlier on Monday. Block was an action sports star who co-founded the skateboard brand DC Shoes in 1994 and began his rally-driving career when the company was sold 10 years later.

He became more widely known after posting his 10-part Gymkhana video series on YouTube, which featured him stunt driving on dangerous tracks and obstacle courses. According to ESPN, his videos were viewed more than a billion times and his Hoonigan YouTube channel became the most popular in motor-sports history. Block also competed in snowboarding and motocross. — AFP



In this file photo US driver Ken Block of Hoonigan Racing Division Team, formerly known as the Monster World Rally Team, poses for a photo in a Ford Fiesta ST type car on ice of Budapest City Park Ice Rink as he is a star of the advertising film of the new type car.



In this file photo US driver Ken Block of Hoonigan Racing Division Team during the first day of the FIA World Rally Championship's in Silao, Guanajuato State, Mexico.



(From left to right) Britain's Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex (left) and Britain's Prince William, Prince of Wales (right) arrive to hold a vigil around the coffin of Queen Elizabeth II, in Westminster Hall, at the Palace of Westminster in London. — AFP

Harry sees 'no willingness to reconcile' in royal rift

Prince Harry sees "no willingness to reconcile" in a palace rift where leaks portray him and his wife Meghan as villains, according to interview extracts released Monday. Harry, 38, said he would nonetheless like to get back his father King Charles III and brother William, heir to the British throne, according to extracts from a television interview to be aired Sunday, days before the prince's memoirs are published. Harry and Meghan, 41, lifted the lid on their experiences in the British royal family in a Netflix docuseries last month about the reasons behind their stunning 2020 departure for North America.

"It never needed to be this way, the leaking and the planting," Harry said, referring to news stories about the palace rift. "I want a family not an institution," he added. "If they feel as though it's better to keep us somehow as the villains they've shown absolutely no willingness to reconcile," he said, without specifying who "they" were. "I would like to get my father back. I would like to get my brother back," Harry said.

Ahead of the January 10 publication of his memoirs, the prince gave an interview to the British network ITV and another to CBS of the United States, which are due to air on Sunday. The criticism comes in the run-up to the May 6 coronation of King Charles following the death of his mother, Queen Elizabeth II, on September 8 last year at the age of 96.

The Netflix docuseries broadcast in six episodes in December gave the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, their formal

titles, a chance to give their reasons for leaving for California. The move has made them very unpopular in Britain, where they are often portrayed by the media as selfish and spoiled children. The docuseries contained no startling revelations, but the couple settled scores with the media, which have been accused of harassment and triggering a miscarriage.

'Laid bare'

The pair accused the royal family of lies and not knowing how to protect them. Harry also said "it was terrifying to have my brother scream at me" during a 2020 family summit in the presence of Queen Elizabeth II. The Sussexes also accuse William and his wife Kate of being behind the negative media coverage because they allegedly wanted to retain the lime-light.

According to the Sunday Times newspaper, Harry's book takes greater aim at William than Charles. "Everything is laid bare," according to a source with knowledge of the memoirs. "Charles comes out of it better than I had expected, but it's tough on William, in particular, and even Kate gets a bit of a broadside," the source said. "There are these minute details, and a description of the fight between the brothers. I personally can't see how Harry and William will be able to reconcile after this," the source told the Sunday Times. — AFP

Sports

Player critical after suffering cardiac arrest during NFL game

WASHINGTON: Buffalo Bills safety Damar Hamlin suffered a cardiac arrest during Monday's game against the Cincinnati Bengals, which was later postponed, and is in critical condition in hospital, his team said. American football is one of the most violent team sports and has been dealing with growing concerns over player safety, particularly over concussion injuries for players from hits to the head.

Monday's medical emergency stunned players, fans and viewers. The seriousness of Hamlin's condition was immediately obvious as his teammates gathered around him while he was treated on the field, many of them kneeling to pray and some openly weeping. "His heartbeat was restored on the field ... He is currently sedated and listed in critical condition," the Buffalo Bills said on their Twitter page.

Hamlin, 24, took a hard hit to the chest as he tackled the Bengals' Tee Higgins during the first quarter of the match, stood up and then collapsed to the ground. Medical staff rushed onto the field to treat him. He received medical attention for more than 30 minutes before being taken from the field in an ambulance. The crowd in Cincinnati remained silent while Hamlin was being treated and television coverage broke away from the scene on the field.

ESPN commentator Joe Buck said medical staff had been "pounding" on Hamlin's chest. The network also said he was given oxygen and that his family joined him in the ambulance. Hamlin was taken to the University of Cincinnati Medical Center a few miles away for further testing and treatment. Early reports suggesting the game would restart after a five-minute warm-up drew angry responses on social media.

But the two teams' coaches conferred with referees and players were told to head to the locker

rooms with the game "temporarily suspended". NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell announced the game's postponement. "Our thoughts are with Damar and the Buffalo Bills. We will provide more information as it becomes available," the NFL said. "The NFL has been in constant communication with the NFL Players Association which is in agreement with postponing the game," it said.

The medical emergency sparked an immediate outpouring of well-wishes from fans, commentators and other players, and brought attention back to the particularly dangerous nature of America's most popular sport. Bengals wide-receiver Higgins said he was praying for Hamlin and his family: "I'm praying that you pull through bro," he said on Twitter.

'Terrible thing to see'

While injuries are common in American football, multiple observers said it was the first time they had seen an ambulance enter the field to treat a player. "I've never seen anything like that before," former quarterback Kurt Warner said on NFL Radio. The NFL Players Association said "the only thing that matters at this moment is Damar's health and well being". "The NFLPA and everyone in our community is praying for Damar Hamlin," the union said on Twitter.

Bills quarterback Josh Allen tweeted: "Please pray for our brother." Players from across the league took to social media with similar messages. Some fans traveled to the University of Cincinnati hospital, as did teammate Stefon Diggs. Fans also flooded Hamlin's fundraising website, set up for a community toy drive, sending donations on his GoFundMe page, which had a target goal of \$2,500, over \$2 million after the injury.

The incident, broadcast during the weekly



CINCINNATI: Damar Hamlin #3 of the Buffalo Bills tackles Tee Higgins #85 of the Cincinnati Bengals during the first quarter at Paycor Stadium on Jan 2, 2023. —AFP

nationally televised Monday night game, drew reaction from athletes in other sports. "The safety of players in all sports is always the most important," said NBA star LeBron James. "It was a terrible thing to see and I wish nothing but the best for that kid. I am a huge fan of the NFL and football and you never want to see anything like that happen," he said.

The NFL did not give any indication of when the

game might be continued or replayed. Both the Bills and Bengals have already secured places in the NFL's playoffs but the game was important for both teams as they sought to get the number-one seed in the AFC. That would bring a bye and home-field advantage throughout the post-season. The NFL regular season is scheduled to end on Sunday, with the playoffs starting the following weekend. —AFP

Mitchell's stunning 71 pts leads Cavs as Lakers, Sixers win

LOS ANGELES: Cleveland's Donovan Mitchell scored a stunning 71 points - matching the eighth-most ever in an NBA game - as the Cavaliers erased a 21-point deficit to beat the Chicago Bulls 145-134 in overtime on Monday. Mitchell's performance was the highest single-game points total since Lakers great Kobe Bryant scored 81 against Toronto in 2006.

Wilt Chamberlain holds the single-game scoring record with 100 for Philadelphia against the New York Knicks on March 2, 1962. Mitchell became just the seventh player to score 70 or more points in a game. He's the first Cavs player to have a 60-point regular-season game - and he handed out 11 assists and grabbed eight rebounds to boot. "First and foremost, my teammates," Mitchell said in an on-court interview after the game, during which he was cheered rapturously by Cavs fans. "I know I scored 70 and all, but I wouldn't be here without them. We wouldn't be in this position without guys making crucial plays and that's the honest truth."

The Bulls led by as many as 21 in the second quarter and by as many as 18 in the third. The Cavs clawed back, however, and Mitchell forced overtime when he grabbed the rebound of his own intentionally missed free throw and drained an unlikely layup with three

seconds remaining. "We were treated tonight to one of the greatest performances in the history of the NBA," Cavaliers coach JB Bickerstaff said.

Mitchell connected on 22 of 34 shots from the field, drilling seven three-pointers as he carried a Cavs team that was without star guard Darius Garland and forward Evan Mobley. DeMar DeRozan scored 44 points for the Bulls - who never trailed in regulation. Mitchell scored 13 points in overtime - including the step-back three-pointer to open the extra session that put the Cavaliers up for the first time - and for good. "It's humbling," Mitchell said of putting himself among some of the game's greats. "Not only did I do that, I did it in an effort where we came back and won."

There was drama in San Francisco where Klay Thompson scored a season-high 54 points as the league's defending champions, the improving Golden State Warriors, beat the Atlanta Hawks 143-141 after double overtime. The Warriors, still without injured star Stephen Curry, have now won five straight home games but they had to work for victory against struggling Atlanta. After the Hawks' Trae Young tied the game with eight seconds remaining in the second period of overtime, Thompson's effort came out of the rim and Kevon Looney tipped in at the second attempt.

Los Angeles Lakers star LeBron James opened the new year in style, scoring 43 points in a 121-115 victory over the Charlotte Hornets. Philadelphia 76ers center Joel Embiid delivered 42 points and 11 rebounds in a 120-111 victory over the New Orleans Pelicans - who lost star forward Zion Williamson to a hamstring strain. —AFP



CLEVELAND: Donovan Mitchell #45 of the Cleveland Cavaliers drives to the basket during a game against the Chicago Bulls on Jan 2, 2022 at Rocket Mortgage FieldHouse. —AFP



KARACHI: Pakistan's Imam-ul-Haq plays a shot during the second day of the second cricket Test match between Pakistan and New Zealand at the National Stadium on Jan 3, 2023. —AFP

Haq anchors Pak after NZ pile on 449 in 2nd Test

KARACHI: Opener Imam-ul-Haq anchored Pakistan with a pugnacious half-century as the home team reached 154-3 at the close Tuesday after New Zealand piled up a handy 449 in their first innings of the second Test in Karachi. At the close of day two, Haq was unbeaten on 74 and Saud Shakeel 13 as the home team need another 96 runs to avoid the follow-on. Pakistan started chaotically, losing opener Abdullah Shafique (19), Shan Masood (20) and skipper Babar Azam (24) before the Haq-Shakeel stand added 55 runs for the unbroken fourth wicket.

In contrast, New Zealand's tail wagged furiously, with Matt Henry (68 not out) and Ajaz Patel (35) both scoring Test-bests as they added an invaluable 104 runs for the last wicket. The two-match series is tied after the first Test, also in Karachi, ended in a draw. The National Stadium pitch offered little to the bowlers, but Pakistan did themselves no favors by having skipper Azam, the team's best batsman, run out.

Haq drove Bracewell towards mid-wicket and saw Azam stranded at his end attempting a third run. But Haq took charge with his seventh half-century - even as Shakeel needed 42 balls to get off the mark at the other end. Earlier, Shafique was the first Pakistan wicket to fall when he pulled pacer Henry's short delivery straight to the hands of Ajaz Patel and Masood gave a catch off Patel. Henry and Patel had combined earlier to lift New Zealand from 345-9.

Henry smashed eight boundaries and two sixes in his knock, improving his previous high against Australia at Christchurch in 2016 by six runs. Patel also bettered his previous Test-best of 20 - against England last year - before he was the last wicket to fall, caught off spinner Abrar Ahmed. Naseem took the day's first wicket when he bowled Ish Sodhi for 11 with a ball that cut through sharply.

Blundell, who was 30 overnight, reached his fifty with a boundary and a single off Ahmed. He hit six boundaries in his 51 before being bowled by Ahmed. The spinner then had Tim Southee stumped for ten, before Henry and Patel prolonged the innings, helping New Zealand cross the 400-mark. Ahmed was the pick of the bowlers with 4-149, while Naseem Shah (3-71) and Agha Salman (3-75) were the other successful bowlers. —AFP

World Cup-winning skipper Kolisi signs for Racing 92

PARIS: South Africa's 2019 Rugby World Cup-winning captain Siya Kolisi signed for Top 14 side Racing 92 on Tuesday and will join them after the Springbok defense of their title later this year. The 31-year-old Sharks flanker - the first black player to captain South Africa - will be the three-time European Champions Cup finalists' marquee player, replacing Scottish fly-half Finn Russell, who is leaving for English Premiership side Bath.

"I am really enthusiastic at the idea of joining Racing 92 after the World Cup," said Kolisi in a club statement. "It is a club with a vision which I have always admired. Racing 92 has big ambitions on the pitch and equally very encouraging social affair projects which correspond to my values and personal goals."

He will join Racing after the completion of the Sept 8-Oct 28 Rugby World Cup in France and team up with several other Springboks at the

Parisian club. Two fellow 2019 World Cup winners, utility back Warrick Gelant and prop Trevor Nyakane, play for Racing. Jacky Lorenzetti, the Racing owner, said Kolisi's inspiring leadership would bring added value to the team. "Siya Kolisi's signing confirms Racing's ambition," he said. "His record of winning and his natural leadership makes him a superb player as well as an outstanding human being."

Kolisi has been granted an early release from his Sharks contract. "His move to France is a new and exciting opportunity, and we could not be happier for him," said Sharks' chief executive Eduard Coetzee. "We are blessed to have him don the black and white jersey, and we know that over the next few months, he will continue to give back to the team and our fans. Siya has been an instrumental and much-loved member of the Sharks family since his arrival two years ago. His well-documented and commendable leadership qualities extend far beyond the playing field... as well as his commitment in the expansion of the Sharks brand to a global market."

Kolisi, who joined the Sharks from the Stormers in Cape Town, said he was "immensely appreciative that the Sharks have given me their blessing to make this move".

'Tireless toil'

Kolisi become the first black Test skipper of the Springboks - a team reserved for whites during apartheid - when he led them against England in a 2018 Test. A match that began disastrously for the home team, as they fell 24-3 behind, ended joyously as they triumphed 42-39 at Ellis Park in Johannesburg. South Africa faced England again one year later in the World Cup final and Kolisi led the men in green and gold to a 32-12 victory in Yokohama.

He had an outstanding 2022 season for the reigning world champions, playing in 12 of 13 Tests, raising his international appearances to 75. Reviewing 2022 for South African sportsmen, the Johannesburg Sunday Times listed the loose forward among the top 20 for his "tireless toil". "Kolisi has delivered a rugged edge at the breakdown. He creates chaos in the collisions, which has helped make the Springboks a more potent force," noted the weekly. —AFP



Siya Kolisi

Rodgers pushes Packers to one win from playoffs

MIAMI: After losing eight of their opening 12 games of the regular season, few would have backed Aaron Rodgers and the Green Bay Packers to make the NFL playoffs. But on Sunday, the historic franchise know a victory against the Detroit Lions will earn them a place in the post-season with the seventh seed in the NFC. Six of the seven berths from the NFC have been booked, leaving the Packers with a simple scenario - win and they are in as a wildcard.

A win against division rivals the Minnesota Vikings on Sunday capped a roll of four straight victories that has transformed a season that looked to be a write-off into one

where anything is still possible. The run has recalled their campaign in 2016, when the Packers were 4-6, but, after losing four straight contests, they won the last six and went on to win two playoff games to reach the NFC Championship game.

Rodgers, a Super Bowl winner with the Packers in 2010, said the turnaround has shown the power of belief. "I do believe in the power of manifestation and I do believe in momentum and I believe very strongly in the force of the mind. When you start to believe something strongly, some miraculous things can happen," he told reporters after Sunday's game.

"I had faith, much like at 4-6 in 2016. Sometimes you've got to fool yourself a little bit into believing a little bit more. But I definitely had faith I was going to go down scraping," added the quarterback. The Packers began their campaign with a 23-7 loss to the Vikings in week one, but showed how far they have come on Sunday when they crushed the rival team 41-17.

Boosted by improved defense, the Packers' surge has also been helped by some of their NFC competitors fading in the run-in. The Washington Commanders were in a strong position at 7-5 after week 12, but after a tie with the New York Giants they have lost their last three games and are out of the running. The Seattle Seahawks lost five out of six before their win against the New York Jets on Sunday and at 8-8, their playoff hopes are no longer in their hands.

With all but one NFC spot taken, Seattle's only route to the playoffs is if they beat the Los Angeles Rams and the Packers lose to the Lions. Should Seattle lose, then the evening game at Lambeau Field becomes a de facto playoff game for both teams. For Lions head coach Dan Campbell, who has won admirers for his upbeat approach in the fly-on-the-wall documentary series "Hard Knocks" and the no-nonsense way he has led the Lions, the Packers game is a "must win," regardless of whether his team stays in the race. —AFP



Aaron Rodgers

Sports

Liverpool stunned by Brentford as Reds pay for defensive woes

LONDON: Jurgen Klopp said Liverpool were unable to cope with Brentford's "chaos" theory in a shock 3-1 defeat on Monday that damaged their bid for a top four finish in the Premier League. Klopp's side endured a nightmare start to 2023 and they had only themselves to blame for the horror show in west London. Ibrahima Konate's first half own goal set the tone for an evening scarred by mistakes at the back from Liverpool.

Yoane Wissa doubled Brentford's lead and although Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain got one back, Bryan Mbeumo wrapped up Brentford's first victory against Liverpool since 1938. In his first appearance since playing in France's World Cup final defeat against Argentina in December, Konate took a large share of the blame for Liverpool's woeful defensive performance. But the center-back was far from alone in deserving criticism for a Liverpool display that left them in sixth place, four points behind fourth placed Manchester United who play their game in hand against Bournemouth on Tuesday.

Rocked by Liverpool's first defeat in five league games, Reds boss Klopp conceded Brentford's clever set-piece tactics were too much for his players to handle. "Brentford create chaos with set-pieces. When I say they stretch the rules, they do, in offensive set-pieces," Klopp said. "Don't get me wrong, it's smart, but they do. If you could single out all the situations you would find five fouls but because it's so chaotic no one sees it in the end."

Although seventh placed Brentford are on a six-game unbeaten run in the league, including an impressive win at champions Manchester City just before the World Cup, it was still surprising to see Liverpool torn apart so easily. "You know before the game how strong they are from corners. The game got decided by the second goal which was our fault," Klopp said. "We are

not awake, they cross the ball and score the second that decided the game. The third goal should not have been allowed but we should have played better."

Darwin Nunez, signed from Benfica for £64 million (\$77 million) last year, was another poster-boy for Liverpool's struggles. The 23-year-old had 13 shots without scoring in his previous two league games and misfired again in the early stages. Mohamed Salah's superb pass unhinged the Brentford defence and Nunez looked certain to end his barren run when he rounded David Raya. But Ben Mee scampered back to clear his shot off the line as Nunez held his head in disbelief.

Fragile Liverpool

Foreshadowing the damage to come, Thomas Frank's team went in front from a corner in the 19th minute. Mee tried to flick on but it was Konate who got the final touch as the ball ricocheted off his knee and squirmed past the wrong-footed Alisson. Liverpool were fortunate to avoid more set-piece misery when Wissa struck from close-range after the Reds made a hash of clearing a corner, only for an offside call to deny Brentford.

Moments later, Wissa was left unmarked to drill home from yet another dangerous corner before an off-side flag against Mee once again spared Liverpool's blushes. In disarray at the back, Liverpool were unable to deal with Brentford's aerial threat and Wissa finally got on the scoresheet in the 42nd minute. Mathias Jensen's cross picked out Wissa and the Congo forward got in front of Trent Alexander-Arnold for a header that just crossed the line before Alisson could claw it out.

Klopp was fuming on the touchline as he raged at his shell-shocked players. The German responded by sending on Joel Matip, Andrew Robertson and Naby



LONDON: Liverpool's Egyptian striker Mohamed Salah vies with Brentford's Danish defender Zanka during their English Premier League match at Gtech Community Stadium on Jan 2, 2023. —AFP

Keita at half-time, with Virgil van Dijk replaced after suffering a leg injury. Klopp's changes briefly sparked Liverpool, who reduced the deficit in the 50th minute when Alexander-Arnold's pin-point delivery was head-

ed home by Oxlade-Chamberlain. But Brentford's knockout blow was a self-inflicted wound by Liverpool as Konate fell over while failing to deal with a long ball to Mbeumo, who ran clear to slot past Alisson. —AFP



RENNES: Nice's French defender Jean-Clair Todibo fights for the ball with Rennes' Belgian forward Jeremy Doku during their French L1 match at Roazhon Park stadium on Jan 2, 2023. —AFP

Marseille, Rennes win with eye on Champions League

PARIS: Marseille and Rennes kept up their chase for Champions League football on Monday with both coming through after hard-fought 2-1 wins over Montpellier and Nice respectively. Marseille won at Montpellier to notch up a fourth successive victory that keeps them third in Ligue 1 with Rennes two-points behind in fourth after a success at home against Nice. Second half goals from Nuno Tavares and Maxime Esteve's own goal gave Marseille a 2-0 cushion but they had to hold firm in a fiery finish which saw on-loan Arsenal left-back Tavares sent off four minutes from time before Teji Savanier pulled one back from the penalty spot.

The win, which follows a 6-1 thrashing of Toulouse last week, takes Marseille three points clear of fifth-placed Monaco and leaves them four points behind second-placed Lens who beat Paris Saint-Germain on Sunday. "We suffered a little, but it's a good victory," said Marseille coach Igor Tudor. "At the start, we lacked a bit of speed or something. The break allowed us to

acquire a bit of freshness."

Goalless at half-time, the match sprang into life early in the second half when Tavares claimed his fifth goal of the season, following up quickly to bury the chance after Jonas Omrin had pushed away Jordan Veretout's header. Just after the hour they were two up, central defender Esteve under pressure at the back post at a corner putting through his own goal. The exit of Tavares and Savanier's penalty made for a torrid ending but Marseille clung on to take the points.

Terrier injury worry

Benjamin Bourigeaud's 89th-minute winner gave Rennes the three points at home but the Brittany side lost star striker Martin Terrier to injury. Terrier had opened from close range after just five minutes but was stretchered off in agony after half an hour with a right knee injury. Coach Bruno Genesio admitted the prognosis was "so far not very reassuring" for the 25-year-old.

Ross Barkley pulled a goal back after 20 minutes to set up a tense finale before Bourigeaud struck following good work from Flavien Tait to leave Nice goalkeeper Kasper Schmeichel on the wrong foot. Lille missed the opportunity to go sixth when they were held to a 1-1 draw at home to Reims. Jonathan David put the home side ahead just after the half hour when he was first to pounce on a loose ball after Yehvann Diouf had parried away a shot by Jonathan Bamba. —AFP

Napoli charge towards history with Inter test

MILAN: Napoli recommence their bid for a first Italian title in over three decades when they face rivals Inter Milan on Wednesday as Serie A gets back underway with one of the league's most hotly-anticipated fixtures. Luciano Spalletti's side have already won once this season at the San Siro, claiming the points in a tight contest with reigning champions AC Milan, over whom they defend an eight-point lead at the top of the division.

Napoli are hoping to extend an 11-match winning streak and maintain their unbeaten record in Italy's top flight after having dropped just four points in their 15 matches. They also have the league's best attack after scoring 37 times before the World Cup, nine of those coming from Victor Osimhen who tops the scoring charts and is one of a host of well-rested players who didn't travel to Qatar.

Another of those is wing wizard Khvicha Kvaratskhelia, the Georgian heir to icon Diego Maradona, ready to start after not featuring since Napoli's Champions League defeat at Liverpool at the start of November which is their only defeat of the season so far. Champions in 2021 and challengers until the final day of last season, fifth-placed Inter will provide a stern test of Napoli's Scudetto credentials after Milan open 2023's fixtures at Salernitana.

Simone Inzaghi's side are 11 points off the pace in fifth but have won six of their last seven and will have

Burnley sink Swansea to boost promotion push

LONDON: Burnley cemented their grip on first place in the Championship with a 2-1 win against Swansea on Monday. The Clarets side made it six successive league victories as they stepped up their chase for promotion back to the Premier League after last season's relegation. Ian Maatsen fired Vincent Kompany's side into a two-goal lead with a pair of fine goals in the space of 10 first-half minutes at the Liberty Stadium.

Ollie Cooper got one back for Swansea in the 27th minute, but Burnley were able to hold for another three points. Burnley are five points clear at the top after second-placed Sheffield United needed a stoppage-time goal from John Egan to salvage a 1-1 draw at QPR. The hosts led through a deflected strike from Ilias Chair in the 11th minute.

star striker Romelu Lukaku back after injury troubles and humiliation at the World Cup. On Monday Inter revealed midfield lynchpin Marcelo Brozovic would be out with a calf injury. "Until the moment in which a team lifts the trophy anything is possible. That's why we play football, you have to believe in the impossible," said Lukaku in an interview with Sky at the weekend.

Ready to take advantage of a Napoli slip-up are Juventus, who are at struggling Cremonese and embroiled in one of Italian football's biggest scandals in years. Juve are set to name an entire new board later this month after the previous one collectively stepped down as prosecutors in Turin accuse the club of a variety of financial crimes. Those include lying to the stock market when announcing at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic that players would help the club save 90 million euros by giving up four month's pay, instead allegedly making a private agreement for the team to forgo just one payment.

However they are sitting third after recovering from a dismal start to the season with six straight league wins leading up to the World Cup break. Juve will be missing Dusan Vlahovic as coach Massimiliano Allegri deals with a series of injuries which still includes Paul Pogba, who missed the World Cup for finalists France and is yet to play a single game for the club since returning last summer.

Made into a figure of fun after his display of poor finishing in Belgium's World Cup group-stage elimination, Lukaku is now fit and ready to rebuild his reputation as one of Europe's most feared strikers. The 29-year-old missed a handful of chances in a goalless draw with Croatia which ended the Red Devils' chances in Qatar but hadn't even played a half of football since August before coming on as a second-half substitute. —AFP

Egan's shot through a crowded area deflected home in the final seconds to spare the Blades from a damaging defeat. Watford moved up to fourth place as Vakoun Bayo grabbed a late goal to defeat managerless Norwich 1-0 at Carrow Road. The Hornets recovered from successive defeats as Bayo finished off a swift counter-attack with three minutes left.

Middlesbrough are only a point behind Watford in fifth place after securing a sixth win in seven games, beating Birmingham 3-1 at St Andrew's. Matt Crooks was unmarked to head in Jonny Howson's cross in the 57th minute and seconds later he netted again after a mistake from George Friend. Although Tahith Chong pulled one back, Crooks then played in Chuba Akpom to make sure of the points for Michael Carrick's side.

West Bromwich Albion moved to within one point of the play-off places as Daryl Dike's 60th-minute goal earned a 1-0 win against Reading. Bottom of the table Wigan suffered a third 4-1 defeat in the space of seven days as Hull moved away from danger with an emphatic victory at the DW Stadium. Ched Evans headed the stoppage-time winner as Preston snatched a 1-0 victory at Stoke. —AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

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

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khalidiya	24848075

Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

CHANGE OF NAME

I, FAKHRUDDIN, holder of Passport No. L4538405 do hereby change my name to DAWOOD MYDEEN Fakhruddin Hussaini Obri for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name DAWOOD Fakhruddin Hussaini Obri and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. (C#0879) - 04-01-2023

I, DAWOOD MYDEEN JAKIR HUSSAIN holder of Passport No. L1169867 do hereby change my name to DAWOOD MYDEEN JAHIR HUSSAIN for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name DAWOOD MYDEEN JAHIR HUSSAIN and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. (C#0878) 3-1-2023

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Al Nassr give Ronaldo hero's welcome

'Unique' superstar says he wants to break records in Saudi stint

RIYADH: Cristiano Ronaldo described himself as a "unique player" and insisted his career was not over as he received a thunderous welcome at his new club in Saudi Arabia on Tuesday. The Portuguese superstar, 37, said he had done all he could in Europe and was hungry for a new challenge as he was greeted by fireworks and deafening roars at Al Nassr's Mrsool Park stadium.

The five-time Ballon d'Or winner, with five Champions League titles to his name, signed for an estimated 200 million euros to June 2025 not long after his acrimonious split with Manchester United. "It's not the end of my career to come to Saudi Arabia. This is why I change and, to be honest, I'm really not worried about what people say," Ronaldo said.

"In Europe my work is done... I had many offers in Europe, many in Brazil, Australia, the US, even in Portugal," he added. "Many clubs tried to sign me but I gave my word to this club." The packed, 25,000-capacity stadium erupted when Ronaldo, dressed in Al Nassr's yellow and blue kit, walked on the pitch, saluting the crowd as fireworks and floodlights flashed around him.

His girlfriend Georgina Rodriguez, wearing the traditional black abaya or all-covering robe worn by most Saudi women, followed at a distance along with Ronaldo's children. "I'm a unique player. It's good to come here, I broke all the records there (in Europe) and I want to break a few records here," Ronaldo said earlier. "I'm coming here to win, to play, to enjoy, to be part of the success of the country and culture of the country," he added.

Ronaldo joins the nine-time Saudi champions just weeks after his departure from United following a TV interview where he slammed the club and coach Erik ten Hag. Al Nassr, the nine-time Saudi league champions, represent a significant drop in standard for the Portuguese forward who spearheaded title-laden campaigns with United, Real Madrid and Juventus.

Ronaldo arrives just weeks after the World Cup in neighboring Qatar, and as Saudi Arabia considers a joint Asia-Africa-Europe bid to host football's

biggest tournament with Egypt and Greece. Well before his arrival, supporters carrying yellow "Ronaldo 7" flags and blue-and-yellow Al Nassr scarves turned up at the stadium, some of them looking for tickets.

Adam Seddik, an Al Ittihad fan from Jeddah, said he drove 900 km to Riyadh to witness the spectacle. "His presence will elevate the Saudi league value and its viewership," said Seddik. "He is the greatest player in the world."

Excitement is at fever-pitch over the arrival of Ronaldo, the highest-profile player to come to Saudi Arabia, the Gulf or any

country in the Asian confederation. Fans queued down the street to buy Ronaldo's Al Nassr shirt with his trademark number seven, and Al Nassr's Instagram page gained millions of new followers after his signing was made public.

Ronaldo's signing comes against the backdrop of a Saudi push into sports including golf, boxing, tennis and F1 as well as football, following the takeover of English Premier League club Newcastle United last year. Saudi Arabia will host upcoming editions of the Asian Games and Asian Winter Games, as well as football's men's and women's Asian Cups. — AFP



RIYADH: Portuguese forward Cristiano Ronaldo, accompanied by his partner Georgina Rodriguez and son Cristiano Ronaldo Jr, greets the crowd at the Mrsool Park Stadium upon his presentation as an Al Nassr player. —AFP photos

Djokovic romps in first singles clash since deportation

ADELAIDE: Novak Djokovic swept to victory in his first singles match on Australian soil since being deported a year ago, crushing Constant Lestienne at the Adelaide International Tuesday to kick-start his bid for another Grand Slam title. The Serbian superstar was given a warm welcome when he played a losing doubles clash on Monday and received similar treatment on a packed centre court.

He beat the Frenchman comfortably 6-3, 6-2 in 74 minutes, breaking once in the first set and twice in the second. "For the first match I can't complain, I played very well," Djokovic said. "Thank you all for coming out today. Thank you for giving me the welcome that I could only wish for. "Even the circumstances last year, it wasn't easy for anybody. But I'm just happy to be here focusing on tennis, and enjoying my time with you guys."

It was his first singles clash in the country after being kicked out before the 2022 Australian Open for not being vaccinated for COVID-19. Djokovic was subsequently barred from re-entering for three years. The ban was lifted in November, allowing him a chance to win an unprecedented 10th Australian Open crown at Melbourne Park later this month.

Daniil Medvedev, who lost to Djokovic in the 2021 Australian Open final, also tasted victory, saving an incredible nine set points on his way to a 7-6 (8/6), 2-1 win over Italian Lorenzo Sonego who retired hurt. Jannik Sinner, Denis Shapovalov and Victoria Azarenka were among other winners. Fourth seed Andrey Rublev was cruising, up a set and 3-1 against Roberto Bautista Agut when the Spaniard began to turn the tables, emerging with a 4-6, 6-3, 6-4 victory.

Rublev's game fell apart as his opponent earned his 19th career win over a Top 10 player. "I'm really happy with how I played," the winner said. "Andrey is a very tough opponent, it's tough to beat him on this kind of court. "I played aggressive and didn't give up, and was able to turn it around." There was disappointment for Andy Murray 17 years after his only previous Adelaide appearance. The three-time Grand Slam winner failed to fire in a 7-6 (7/3), 6-3 defeat by American Sebastian, who earned a second victory over the veteran.

Top seed Djokovic served to love to open his account and it went with serve until he pounced in game six, working two break points with Lestienne netting a forehand to go 4-2 behind. He calmly closed out the set in 38 minutes and took full control in the second, quickly breaking twice to move 3-0 clear before cruising home. Djokovic will play another Frenchman Quentin Halys next for a place in the quarterfinals of a tournament he won in 2007.



ADELAIDE: Serbian tennis player Novak Djokovic celebrates after winning against France's Constant Lestienne at the ATP Adelaide International tournament on Jan 3, 2023. —AFP

Before his haul of 21 major trophies, the then 19-year-old Serb beat Chris Guccione in the final ahead of his breakthrough triumph over Jo-Wilfried Tsonga at the Australian Open a year later.

'What a match'

Former world number one Medvedev, seeded two, also progressed but was given a tough workout by Sonego, a champion in Metz last year. They played a cracking 80-minute first set in their maiden meeting. Sonego fended off three break points, but the tables were turned in game nine with the Russian forced to save six set points after a series of uncharacteristic unforced errors. He saved another three set points in the next game before prevailing in the tiebreak.

They exchanged breaks in the second set before Sonego retired after treatment on his right arm. "I didn't know it was nine set points, that's crazy and probably the first time in my life I've saved nine set points," said Medvedev, who suffered a demoralizing five-set loss from two sets up against Rafael Nadal in the Australian Open final last year when Djokovic was absent. "What a match to start the year and definitely unfortunate for everybody that it finished early even though we played for 1hr 40mins. I'm happy to be through and to win the first set." He will next meet Serbian Miomir Kecmanovic.

Sixth seeded Italian Sinner beat Britain's Kyle Edmund in straight sets while Canadian seventh seed Shapovalov ground out a three set win over Australian qualifier Rinky Hijikata. In an upset on the women's side, Estonian former world number two Anett Kontaveit was stunned by Chinese qualifier Zheng Qinwen 6-1, 4-6, 7-6 (9/7). But former two-time Australian Open champion Azarenka survived a tough battle with Ukraine's Anhelina Kalinina 7-6 (11/9), 7-6 (7/5). — AFP

Sweet success for Chicherit in Dakar Rally

HAIL, Saudi Arabia: French driver Guerlain Chicherit bounced back from five punctures on Monday to win Tuesday's third stage of the Dakar Rally which was shortened from 447km to 378km due to torrential rain. The 44-year-old Prodrive driver timed 10 hours 56 minutes with South African Henk Lategan finishing second, 3min 26sec off the pace. Argentinian Orlando Terranova posted the third fastest time, 5min 4sec adrift.

"It is wonderful," said Chicherit. "Of course we are disappointed with what happened yesterday but we have proved what we can achieve if we stay focused." Chicherit's delight was in stark contrast to that of overnight leader and three-time champion Carlos Sainz, who came to a juddering halt 213km with a left wheel problem.

The stoppage cost the 60-year-old Spaniard nearly an hour - the most immediate beneficiary was Qatar's defending champion Nasser Al-Attiyah. The 52-year-old tops the overall standings ahead of Saudi driver Yazeed Al-Rajhi, who is second 13min 20sec off the pace, with Dakar legend Frenchman Stephane Peterhansel in third, 20min 45sec adrift.

Peterhansel's compatriot nine-time Rally World Champion Sebastien Loeb had a second successive bad day, last year's runner-up losing another 35

minutes. The drivers were brought to an early halt shortly after the motorcyclists were as the rain bucketed down. The motorcycling standings also features a new name as Australian rider Daniel Sanders has moved into the lead. Sanders' win was ample consolation for the 28-year-old as his time penalty on Sunday for speeding had seen the GasGas rider stripped of the stage victory. Sanders's ploy of deliberately not topping the stage on Monday so he could avoid being first out on to the course on Tuesday paid off handsomely.

He timed 5min 23sec faster than Argentinian rival Kevin Benavides with American Skyler Howes third, for a second successive stage, 6min 19sec adrift of the winner. "I thought, ok, if I go for the win, I'll try and push the whole day and win by a lot, and now I'll focus on tomorrow," said Sanders, who was winning his fourth career Dakar stage. "Of course, the Aussies have the strongest spirit. We've got some good natural desert skills."

Sanders's chances of overall victory were also boosted as one of the main contenders Ricky Brabec, the 2020 champion, was taken to hospital after crashing in the stage. The 31-year-old American came to grief on his Honda on the 274th kilometer of the stage and was taken to hospital by helicopter for further investigation after complaining of pain in his cervical vertebrae.

Brabec, who also finished second in 2021, had been awarded Sunday's first stage after Sanders and others had been penalized for speeding. He is the second of the main motorcycling contenders to bow out early in this year's edition: Britain's 2022 champion Sam Sunderland crashed out on Sunday. — AFP



HAIL, Saudi Arabia: France's driver Matieur Serradori and co-driver Loic Minaudier compete during the Stage 3 of the Dakar 2023 rally between Al-Ula and Hail on Jan 3, 2023. — AFP