



Established 1961

ISSUE NO: 18934
16 PAGES, 150 FILLS

The First English Daily in the Arabian Gulf

JAMADA ALTHANI 17, 1444 AH
TUESDAY, JANUARY 10, 2023



3 European cruise ship docks in Kuwait amid wider Arab tour



8 Gulf Exchanges Committee announces unified ESG metrics



11 Pandemic cooking boom sharpens Japan knife sales



16 Gareth Bale calls time on glittering football career



Populist laws first litmus test

Lawmakers and government face off over debt relief, reforms

'Deemah' drizzles drench Kuwait



KUWAIT: A man struggles with an umbrella amid persistent rainfall on Jan 9, 2023. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat (See Page 2)

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The National Assembly holds crucial regular sessions on Tuesday and Wednesday with populist demands on top of the agenda, the first litmus test between opposition MPs and the government, described as reformist by lawmakers. The Assembly is scheduled to debate several draft laws including a controversial bill supported by an overwhelming majority of MPs calling for debt relief for Kuwaiti citizens.

The government is strongly opposed to the draft law, saying it is too expensive for state coffers to bear, saying bank loans owed by over half a million Kuwaiti citizens exceed KD 14.7 billion. MPs however insist that the draft law is not too expensive because it deals with only personal and consumer loans taken from local banks, which amount to less than KD 2 billion.

Moreover, MPs add, under the law, the government is required to purchase the capital of the loans, scrap the interest and then deduct KD 120 per month from debtors, which is the amount paid by the government as cost-of-living allowance. Citizens who have not taken loans will continue to receive their allowance. A minority of lawmakers are also opposed to the law, saying it violates the rules of equality among people and can affect local banks.

MPs backing the draft law called on citizens to

attend the session and vowed they will support the law. MP Faisal Al-Kandari urged Kuwaiti people to attend in large numbers, adding he will support populist laws including the purchase of loans, repayment of illegal interest, raising the pensions of retired citizens and others.

MP Shuaib Shaaban also vowed to support draft legislation that help improve the standard of living of citizens, in addition to draft laws that stipulate key political reforms, especially amending the election law and establishing an independent election commission. MP Khaled Al-Otaibi said he is confident that a majority of lawmakers will vote for the laws, which will improve the standard of living of Kuwaiti citizens, and also for political reforms. He urged the government to accept the laws. The government had urged lawmakers to study such laws more carefully because they will overburden the state budget, which has been posting deficits for several years.

The government has in the past aborted several attempts by lawmakers to write off consumer loans of hundreds of thousands of Kuwaiti citizens to help them face difficult living conditions. The Central Bank of Kuwait said in a statement on Thursday that 97.5 percent of the 550,000 Kuwaiti debtors pay their installments regularly without any problem, and that only 2.5 percent of them face difficulties repaying.

News in brief

Kuwait Sat-1 initial signal received

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Sat-1 team announced receiving the initial signal from space following last week's successful launch of the satellite.

Saudi lifts hajj pilgrim curbs

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia will not impose limits on the number of pilgrims for this year's hajj, a Saudi minister said Monday, after three years of restrictions to curb the COVID-19 pandemic. "The number of pilgrims will return to what it was before the pandemic, without any age limit," Minister of Hajj and Umrah Tawfiq Al-Rabiah told reporters in Riyadh. — AFP

Iran hands death sentences

PARIS: Iran has handed down three more death sentences for offences related to the civil unrest triggered by Mahsa Amini's death, the judiciary said Monday, fueling international protests against the regime. The latest sentences bring to 17 the official total of detainees condemned to death in connection with the protests. Four executions have been carried out while six convicts have been granted retrials. — AFP

90% of Henan got COVID

BEIJING: Almost 90 percent of people in China's third most populous province have now been infected with COVID-19, a top official said Monday, as the country battles an unprecedented surge in cases. With a population of 99.4 million, the figures suggest about 88.5 million people in Henan may now have been infected. — AFP

Lula slams far-right 'terrorism'

BRASILIA: Brazilian security forces cleared protest camps Monday and President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva condemned "acts of terrorism" after a far-right mob stormed the seat of power in the capital, in chaotic scenes that triggered global shock. Hundreds of soldiers and police mobilized to dismantle an improvised camp outside the army's headquarters in Brasilia where some 3,000 supporters of ex-president Jair Bolsonaro had set up tents - used as a base for the sea of

protesters who ran riot inside the presidential palace, Congress and Supreme Court for around four hours Sunday.

Lula, who took office on Jan 1 after a bitterly divisive election win over Bolsonaro, meanwhile returned to work in the pillaged presidential palace, where AFP reporters saw the wreckage that remained of the previous day's havoc: Trashed artwork and offices, shattered windows and doors, broken glass strewn across the floor, and puddles of water left by the sprinkler system after rioters set fire to a rug.

Lula, the 77-year-old veteran leftist who previously led Brazil from 2003 to 2010, joined the leaders of both houses of Congress and the chief

Continued on Page 6



BRASILIA: Supporters of Brazilian former President Jair Bolsonaro invade the National Congress on Jan 8, 2023. — AFP

Suez traffic 'normal' after ship refloated

ISMAILIA, Egypt: Suez Canal maritime traffic was "normal" Monday after a cargo vessel carrying Ukrainian grain ran aground but was then refloated and towed away, said the Egyptian authority running the vital waterway. The incident involving the 225-m-long Marshall Islands-reg-

istered M/V Glory had briefly sparked fears of a repeat of a major 2021 blockage when the giant container ship Ever Given became diagonally wedged in the canal.

That closure for nearly a week of the man-made waterway linking Asia and Europe cost billions of dollars through shipping delays. It also cost the life of a Suez Canal Authority employee in the operation to free the mega-ship. SCA chief Osama Rabie gave the all-clear Monday when he said "traffic is moving normally on the Suez Canal" after the authority had

Continued on Page 6



ISMAILIA, Egypt: A tugboat pulls the Marshall Islands-flagged bulk carrier M/V Glory in the Suez Canal on Jan 9, 2023. — AFP

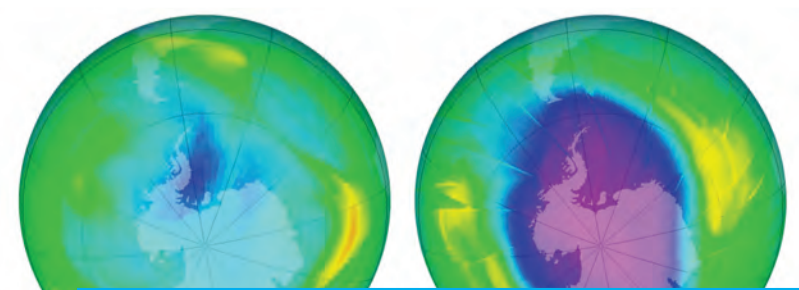
Ozone layer healing but imperiled

PARIS: The ozone layer that shields life on Earth from deadly solar radiation is on track to recover within decades, but controversial geoengineering schemes to blunt global warming could reverse that progress,

a major scientific assessment warned Monday. Since the mid-1970s, certain industrial aerosols have led to the depletion of ozone in the stratosphere, 11 to 40 km above Earth's surface.

In 1987, nearly 200 nations agreed on the Montreal Protocol to reverse damage to the ozone layer by banning chemicals that destroy this naturally occurring stratum of molecules in the atmosphere. That agreement is working as hoped, and is in line with previous projections, more than 200 scientists found.

Continued on Page 6



This file image shows a combination of two images released by the NASA Earth Observatory showing the size and shape of the ozone hole each year in 1979 (left) and in 2009. — AFP



Local

Crown Prince receives outstanding Kuwaiti student

KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace on Monday Saad Al-Tami, the first Arab student to deliver a graduation speech at the prestigious George Washington University.

His Highness the Crown Prince commended Al-Tami for his outstanding performance at the university, saying that he was an example for his fellow Kuwaiti students abroad. His Highness affirmed that the leadership would continue to support and push Kuwaiti youth to achieve greatness for their country and wished Al-Tami more success in the future. —KUNA



KUWAIT: HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives Saad Al-Tami.

Parliament to vote on city building firms

KUWAIT: The Kuwait's National Assembly will hold ordinary sessions on Tuesday and Wednesday to examine tabled items, most notable of which is second deliberation vote on draft law establishing town-construction companies on state-owned land plots.

The session commences with a vote on MP recommendations submitted during 21 December special session, followed by a discussion of Audit Bureau report reviewing government budgets and final accounts. The session will then move on to a succession of votes on parliamentary committee draft laws including establishing town development

companies, forming a share-holding agricultural company, amendments on Amiri order relating to social security law, and law regarding illegal acquisition of interest revenues by banks subject to Central Bank of Kuwait.

Further on the session's agenda are two draft laws regarding funding citizen's loans or eliminating interests on these loans, amending law relating to turning Kuwait Airways into a share-holding company, and discussions on electoral process laws.

Reports on approving Kuwait joining Nairobi Treaty on removing wreckage, substituting the word "domestic worker" with the word servant in related laws, and amendments on the penal code, are also slated to be discussed. More on the schedule are requests of forming interim committees, public funds protection committee reports, and a host of government-submitted documents. — KUNA

Cabinet briefed on Google Cloud deal for digital transformation

KUWAIT: The Kuwait's Cabinet Monday was briefed on the strategic partnership deal signed with Google Cloud to support comprehensive digital transformation in all government and state-run bodies. This came during the Cabinet's weekly session headed by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah at Sief Palace, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Barrak Al-Sheetan said after the session.

The deal will help the Kuwaiti government benefit from Google Cloud technology and its experience in data analysis, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence and others in order to achieve digital transformation, which is a main part of Kuwait Vision 2035, Al-Sheetan noted. This shows the Cabinet's keenness to implement what was included in the government's action program of the 17th legislative term (2022-2026), mainly in digitizing government services. The Cabinet was informed that Google, in cooperation with the Direct Investment Promotion

Authority, the Central Agency for Information Technology (CAIT), and the Communications and Information Technology Regulatory Authority, intend to open an office in Kuwait and invest in establishing its own cloud area that will support government agencies in terms of digital infrastructure and management of digital business tasks.

Google Cloud will also work, in cooperation with the CAIT, to launch training programs to develop digital skills for government sector's employees and others inside the State of Kuwait. The Cabinet lauded efforts made by the government concerned bodies in this regard. The Cabinet was then briefed with topics listed on the agenda of the regular National Assembly session set for Tuesday, and the complementary one Wednesday.

The Cabinet expressed sincere congratulations to Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Al-Sudani on the successful inauguration of the 25th Arabian Gulf Cup, running from January 6-19, wishing success to all teams. On Arab and international



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah chairs the Cabinet's meeting. — KUNA

affairs, the Cabinet expressed strong condemnation and denunciation of the extremist Zionist minister's storming of Al-Aqsa Mosque, under the protection of occupation forces.

The Cabinet stressed the storming act

constitutes provocation of Muslims' feelings and violates relevant resolutions of international legitimacy. The act comes in light of the Zionist occupation forces' attempts aiming to change the current legal and historical status in Jerusalem and

its sanctities, Al-Sheetan elaborated. It called on the international community to take a rapid action to halt such Zionist violations and provide full protection to the brotherly Palestinian people and their properties, mainly in Jerusalem. — KUNA

Kuwait's Google partnership: What's behind the headlines?

By Mohammed Al-Roomi

KUWAIT: The government of Kuwait announced a strategic alliance with Google to set up a local office, open multiple data centers which provides organizations the ability to host data/resources within the Google Cloud in Kuwait, and support the government migrating its systems onto the cloud.

Public Cloud Services (like the Google Cloud) are now mature and proven to deliver superior performance and stability compared to the government running and operating their own infrastructure. Therefore, accelerating Kuwait's technology transformation, by adopting public cloud services can be a step in the right direction, for the Kuwaiti public and private sector, if implemented and managed correctly.

Whilst this announcement can be a cause for optimism: it is a massive undertaking, requires multiple years to implement, and needs top talent in the Kuwaiti government experienced within this space who can ensure the government is selecting the best Google resources (ie computing, storage and networking services) that meets its needs for the lowest cost and highest rate of productivity.

Limited information so far

Several local news outlets reported that the deal could cost Kuwait in excess of a billion dollars. Limited information was released regarding how the government evaluated cloud vendors, if proper due diligence was performed, the basis on which Google was selected, if the cost of the deal is justifiable, and if the interests of the government were adequately protected (ie Service Level Agreements, Protection against fines, etc). The starting point for cloud contracts is primarily the suppliers' (ie Google's) standard terms, which tend to be supplier-centric. Thorough pre-contract due diligence is vital before entering into any cloud agreements.

What can go wrong

Key risk areas to consider related to cloud transformations include: Cloud Strategy & Reputation risks

- Delays in the cloud journey because of dependencies, unpredictability, legacy systems etc. may result in a risk that the initial business case doesn't pay off.

Operational & process risks

- Organizations do not adopt their current risk management approach to the new cloud environment.

Corporate governance risks (compliance, regulatory requirements and data privacy)

- Insufficient transparency on data holding aspects leading to non-compliance with legal and regulatory duties.

Availability and resiliency risks

- Lack of business continuity planning addressing cloud provider failure, acquisition with negative impact, or change in their service strategy.



Mohammed Al-Roomi

Infrastructure risks

- Considering the complexity of the existing IT landscape. No clear target architecture defined. Addressing aspects such as: directory services, network micro segmentation, authentication, encryption, logging and monitoring and use of virtual machines, containers and/or serverless computing.

People risks

- Knowledge management, skills and change. Legacy systems knowledge is lost because of team changes and larger focus on new topics. Lack of communication and focus on the people dimension in general.

Data management risks

- Lack of data management ownership due to missing governance structure lead to insufficient protected data.

Vendor lock-in risks

- Dependency on the cloud provider (ie Google) and lack of portability and interoperability in case of missing IT architecture concepts.

Cloud security risks

- Risk of data leakage, eg due to configuration errors during the cloud transformation. Confidentiality breach due to identity & access management issues.

Why migrations fail

Many IT leaders and entities experienced failed cloud migration projects because they move systems into the cloud only to find that they were costlier and don't work as well there as they did prior to the move. Reasons previous Google Cloud Migrations did not succeed include:

- Unclear shared responsibility model/overdelegation
- Cloud platform and services selected were not fit for purpose
- Operating cost on the cloud exceeded the cost of purchasing and managing infrastructure independently
- Vendor lock-in

Unclear shared responsibility model/overdelegation

There is a general misconception that by moving to the cloud, the provider (ie Google) will take care of everything and that organizations don't need to do any administration. The government of Kuwait and/or companies are still responsible for managing and securing their systems. Understanding the shared responsibility model is vital when determining how to best protect data and systems on Google Cloud. Over delegation can lead to security breaches and risks not being handled/managed appropriately.

Cloud platform and services selected were not fit for purpose

Application evaluation is crucial. Evaluating each application supporting the various government agencies is of paramount importance to determine which can move as they are into the cloud and run successfully, which should be modernized and which should be

decommissioned and replaced. Organizations that just migrate systems as is (ie lift and shift) run the risk of system failure. Code changes or optimizations should be considered for each system to take advantage of native cloud services. The government of Kuwait and/or companies need to ensure they understand the Google service offerings available (ie Compute Engine, App Engine, Kubernetes Engine, Cloud Functions, etc) and select the ones that best suit their needs. Choosing the wrong offering can lead to lack of control, increased operating costs, slow system performance or failure, and the inability to take advantage of what Google can offer, particularly around agility, resiliency, efficiency, and innovation.

Operating costs

Cloud computing is popular as organizations seek to save money on IT costs. However, the cost of running systems on Google Cloud can be more expensive if not implemented properly. If systems are simply "lifted and shifted" into the cloud without being modernized to use the Google environment efficiently, the government can end up paying more than the cost to manage and operate systems within their existing infrastructure.

For each system, the government plans on migrating, they should have a technical understanding of the system and the proposed architecture they plan on implementing that makes best use of the Google cloud (and any associated cost savings).

Vendor lock-in

When organizations move systems to the cloud, the core motivation is often to break free from the demands of maintaining the infrastructure themselves. However, if the government of Kuwait is not careful, they might end up in a cloud lockup with Google. This is called cloud vendor lock-in - a scenario where you become tied to a cloud service provider without an easy or cost-efficient way to break free.

If for some reason, Google's quality of services declines with time; or it never meets the promised thresholds, being locked into one vendor can be dangerous. When re-architecting and migrating systems into the cloud, the government of Kuwait should ensure the backend infrastructure that supports the systems is interoperable with different cloud providers.

Next steps?

The cloud is a must-have to compete in the digital age. The need to develop products/electronic services more nimbly, and operate more efficiently, drives the businesses and governments to pursue transformative technology solutions on the Google cloud.

However, if the right due diligence isn't performed, the appropriate Google products aren't selected, the complete governance structure isn't in place, and the right talent and skills aren't involved; the consequences over the cloud implementation to the government can be significant.

Note: The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of Ernst & Young Global or its member companies. Mohammed Al-Roomi is a senior manager in Ernst & Young's Information technology advisory practice with over 12 years of experience managing information technology (IT) matters for international companies. These organizations include high profile Big Tech corporations, Globally Systemically Important Banks (G-SIBs), and Media conglomerates.

Heavy rains disrupt life as cold wave continues in Kuwait

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: The country witnessed heavy rain and strong winds on Monday with speeds exceeding 50 km per hour, according to Kuwait Meteorological Center. Dirar Al-Ali, a meteorological department observer, told Kuwait Times that rainfall will start to ease gradually from Tuesday noon, and chances of rain will gradually decrease during the day.

Sporadic rains disrupted life in Kuwait on Monday even as motorists negotiated a tough day driving through wet roads across the country. Ali expected unstable weather marked with intermittent rainfall will continue throughout Kuwait, noting the country will also witness sporadic light rain during the weekend.

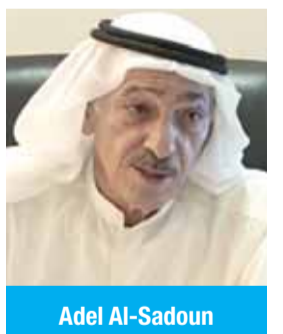
"The weather will improve by Tuesday noon. However, it will be cold during the day and severely cold at night," astronomer Adel Al-Sadoun said, pointing out that this type of rain is called "Deemah", which means light but continuous. "The wind is northerly, so I expect rain to remain light during the week. I don't think it will be heavy, but it will be moderate and continuous. Kuwait recorded today (Monday) 11-12 mm of rain in some areas, but this will not cause floods in the country," he explained to Kuwait Times.



KUWAIT: Motorists drive through wet roads as sporadic rains continued in Kuwait on Monday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Dirar Al-Ali



Adel Al-Sadoun

Local

Workplace harassment: Most women prefer to remain silent

Kuwaiti law supports women, but sexual assaults may be hard to prove

By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: Women in Kuwait are exposed to sexual harassment at their workplaces, but many prefer not to complain to the administration or file a case due to several reasons, such as the fear of losing their jobs or being blamed by their colleagues, who may not believe them. They also fear a scandal among their community that does not accept such cases. Meanwhile, these women continue to face great pressure due to the harassment that they are exposed to, especially from a serial harasser who could be a colleague or even the boss.

Kuwait Times spoke to consultant and lawyer Jaber Al-Hababi and discussed with him the legal aspects of this issue. Hababi affirmed the presence of sexual harassment cases in Kuwaiti courts by women against men, but said this issue cannot be considered a phenomenon due to a dearth of cases filed. He explained the main problem facing women during the process of filing the cases is to prove that the incident happened, whether it is verbal or physical harassment or abuse in some cases.

Several reports have been published previously warning women they could face accountability if they record a video or take a picture of the harasser (without his permission) to prove the incident they are exposed to. But Hababi said Kuwaiti law supports women in this matter, as such videos or pictures can be considered in court as evidence, adding some cases were built by relying on these.

Hababi said from a legal point of view, there are several types of cases that fall under sexual harassment, such as seducing a female employee with position or money, or preventing her from getting a raise if she doesn't heed the harasser's requests, which is considered extortion for personal benefit.

Regarding punishment for the harasser, he said according to Kuwaiti law, the penalty for sexual harassment without indecent assault is up to 10 years in jail, while in the event of indecent assault or rape, it reaches up to 15 years in jail. But Hababi noted that women in Kuwait enjoy an independent lifestyle and have a strong personality that help them to not rely on men or the law to protect themselves from sexual harassers, and have the ability to end harassment without filing a case or complaint.

Feelings of discomfort

Sexual harassment can be subjective and might be measured in feelings of discomfort. Some inappropriate workplace conduct can be subtle and include things like unwanted touching that the harasser tries to disguise as an accident or innuendos.

Unwelcome physical contact

Some harassers use unwelcome touching as a way to target victims in the workplace. A co-



Jaber Al-Hababi



worker might brush against you and claim that it was an accident, but does this sort of thing repeatedly.

Differential treatment

Sexual harassment is a type of sex discrimination and is illegal when it occurs in the workplace. One sign that sexual harassment might be occurring is if you receive different treatment than others based on your sex.

'No' not accepted

If someone makes unwanted advances to you at work when you have already declined, it can become illegal sexual harassment. If your co-worker has let you know that he is interested in pursuing a romantic relationship and persists even though you have declined, that could indicate sexual harassment.

Sexual jokes or displays of sexual images

In some cases, a person will tell sexual jokes or display pornographic images at work. If someone behaves in this way at your job, you could be the victim of sexual harassment even if the person is not pursuing you for a sexual relationship. This type of conduct has no place at work and should not be tolerated.

Retaliation

If you have declined a supervisor's sexual advances at your job, you might feel as if your job might be in danger. Just like sexual harassment, retaliation for turning down unwelcome sexual advances is also illegal.

Feeling unsafe

If the environment at your workplace makes you feel unsafe because of its sexual nature, that indicates that you might be the victim of sexual harassment. If you feel that you are exposed to any type of these sexual harassment signs, here are some defensive behaviors that would help preventing their unethical actions.

Talk to him directly

Tell those who harass you directly and clearly to stop such actions, or else you will file a complaint with the administration. Some people stop directly if they are threatened.

Find other victims

Talk to some of your other co-workers who have been harassed by the same person. The presence of another victim may strengthen your position and support the complaint request that you want to submit to the administration.

Use a calm yet firm tone

When you talk about harassment in the workplace and when you bring up the law, don't get emotional and carried away by screams and threats. Just be calm and confident enough, and use a firm and confident tone of voice.

Try to keep some evidence of harassment

Such as pictures, messages, inappropriate comments, or those that contain sexual hints, but do not try to register your harasser without his knowledge. Because this clause is against the law. For more details, you should ask a legal specialist in labor issues in the country in which you work.

Do not wait for things to escalate

Try to stop harassment in the work environment from its inception, by talking legally. Do not pretend to be completely silent and afraid: so that the harasser does not think that you are afraid or satisfied with what is happening.

Don't quit your job

It is not recommended to withdraw from the workplace where the harassment occurred, but rather to stand firm and act confidently in front of the harassing manager or colleague, because you are the victim, not the harasser. In this situation, remember, the one who has to leave is the harasser and the bully, not you.

In my view

Corruption and reform



By Dr Khalid Al-Saleh

Local@kuwaittimes.com

Public frustration is not a new phenomenon and not limited to Kuwait people, as in every country of the world, there exists a group of people suffering from frustration and depression, as well as inability to achieve their ambitions. But in Kuwait, the frustration phenomenon took a public turn in the past year. The reason of frustration in Kuwait is corruption reports that revealed that Kuwait is rich, but despite this, development growth is weak due to corruption.

Kuwait should realistically be among the countries where depression is minimal, as Kuwaitis enjoy comprehensive government care from cradle to grave. The Kuwaiti is wrapped at birth with the government blanket and buried in the government shroud. The Kuwaiti is educated and medicated free of charge, and if housing is delayed, he is given rent allowance. If not employed, he is given unemployment benefits. Most citizens work in the government that keeps a closed eye on them and does not hold them to account and does not fire anyone from their job although productivity of most of them is no more than half an hour, as reported by the World Bank.

Also, the government does not collect income or service tax. Yet, all what the government did to satisfy the Kuwaiti people did not succeed; rather, with the spread of financial corruption in the past, the people started to see the government luxuries as a bribe given to them in order to ignore the financial corruption most people see in front of them. This financial corruption placed Kuwait in the worst rank among GCC countries and 73rd in 2021 among 180 countries, ie in the lower group of evaluation of Transparency International, and this is the secret behind the frustration of the Kuwaiti citizen.

The budget surplus last year was KD 4.24 billion, that is nearly \$13.8 billion, a huge number with which the feelings of fear and frustration increase among Kuwaiti people instead of joy and happiness. Why? Fear of victory by the corrupt in the battle that began months ago and still rages, a battle between reformists and a deep state that made oil funds disappear in favor of the corrupt.

Tens of examples, major and minor, still linger in the minds of citizens, which reflect the fear of the Kuwaiti public from any surplus, because it is made into harmful projects that end with new wars against reformists. Corruption was biting at our values until people started to fear that we may become a nation without values, so why does frustration not spread?

Financial corruption does not only mean violating public funds and the struggle between major merchants to gain the biggest spoils, sometimes with the least production. Financial corruption means direct effects on the citizen: it means shaken confidence in the administrative and supervisory system; it means increase in the spread of material values, end of the ethics era and trade in everything, even in the values of democracy that became a tool in the hands of some people to buy votes at the expense of the developing the country and preserving its gains and its finances from waste - those are the inevitable results.

Kuwaiti people were optimistic about the campaigns against major personalities that were able to restore some confidence in the people, but they are still waiting for deciding the battle in favor of reformists. It is a worrisome wait as the war of interests has no mercy, so the people must interact with the reform process. We must all stand against corruption and support the government in its moves, and support reformist members of parliament and not let the corruption machine succeed in spreading lies against them, or take advantage of some of their mistakes in order to discredit their credibility.

The war on corruption war will not bear fruit as long as the people remain as spectators, as in the end, the people will pay the price. It is a true war, maybe bigger than the invasion of Kuwait, so as we supported Kuwait against the invaders, we must support it today against corruption and the corrupt.



KUWAIT: Officials pose for a group picture in front of the cruise ship MS Artania.

European cruise ship with tourists docks in Kuwait

KUWAIT: The cruise ship MS Artania, carrying around a thousand tourists from across Europe, docked in Kuwait on Monday as part of a tour of the wider Arab region, the country's ports authority said.

MS Artania's pit stop in Kuwait is part of efforts to boost local 'maritime tourism,' said a Kuwait Ports Authority in a statement. It is in line with the national 'Development Vision 2035.' The German-owned MS Artania, en route to a number of Gulf Arab countries, is the first tourist ship to dock in Kuwait since 2012. — KUNA



KUWAIT: The cruise ship MS Artania is anchored at Kuwait Port on Monday. —KUNA photos

THE LEADING INDEPENDENT
DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF
ESTABLISHED 1961

Founder and Publisher
YOUSUF S. AL-ALYAN

Editor-in-Chief
ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-ALYAN

EDITORIAL : 24833199-24833358-24833432
ADVERTISING : 24835616/7
FAX : 24835620/1
CIRCULATION : 24833199 Extn. 353/3561
ACCOUNTS : 24833199 Extn. 125
COMMERCIAL : 24835618
P.O. Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait.
Email: info@kuwaittimes.com
Website: www.kuwaittimes.com

News in brief

Warrant against store for selling immoral products

KUWAIT: The Commerce and Industry Ministry has issued a warrant for violation against a store in Aswaq Al-Qurain area for displaying products that contravene the general public regulations. The warrant was issued after receiving a complaint from a citizen. The phrase contained "Warning: Contains freedom and alcohol" with an eagle on a t-shirt. The emergency team has continued legal procedures against the store after investigations.

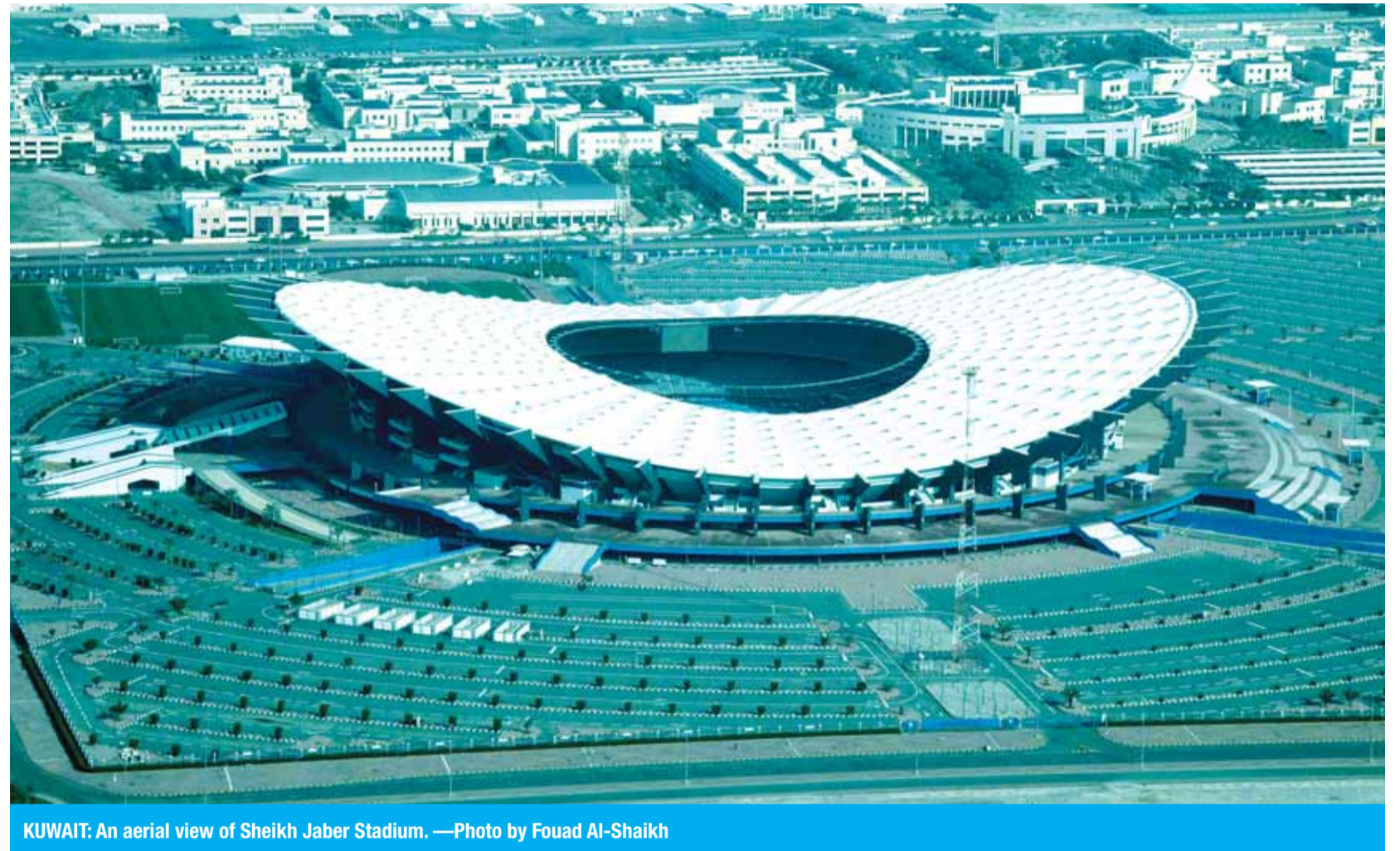
MoH initiates 17 legal actions over public funds' squandering

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Health (MoH) announced Sunday that 17 legal actions were taken in terms of some files on public funds' squandering suspicion and other violations in construction contracts. In line with the fact-finding committees' results, these files were referred to the concerned bodies - the Public Prosecution, the Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha) and the disciplinary trials authority at the State Audit Bureau - to protect public funds, implement law and boost transparency, the ministry noted in a statement. These procedures were taken upon urgent directions from Health Minister Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi, it made clear. — KUNA

Kuwait sympathizes with Senegal over bus accident

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed sympathy and solidarity with the friendly Republic of Senegal, following the painful accident of two buses colliding in the town of Kafrin in central Senegal, which resulted in the death and injury of tens of victims. In a statement Monday, the ministry expressed deepest condolences to the leadership and government of Senegal as well as the victims' families, wishing the injured speedy recovery. Earlier on Sunday, at least 40 people were killed and dozens injured in a bus crash in central Senegal. — KUNA

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: An aerial view of Sheikh Jaber Stadium. —Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

Kuwait is fighting resolutely the scourge of drugs, says Al-Baghli

Kuwait addiction treatment center welcomes voluntary admission

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Ministry of Social Affairs is exerting all possible efforts to encounter and fight the scourge of drugs due to destructive impacts on the families and society, Minister of Social Affairs and Community Development May Al-Baghli said Monday.

Speaking to KUNA, Al-Baghli, who doubles as Minister of State for Women and Children's Affairs, said that narcotics are threatening the families, and youth, so this danger should be fought by all possible means. In this regard, the ministry has formed a permanent committee to perform a number of tasks, mainly studying the cases of addicts involved in the Central Prison's rehabilitation program, she added. The committee is also tasked with studying the cases of juveniles who are already drug addicts or are prone to addiction, and setting out a rehabilitation program for them. Furthermore, the newly-formed committee has already studied 154 cases, affiliated to the rehabilitation program, and provided the

Central Prison with relevant findings for the period between February 2022 and end of September of the same year, she said. Another 86 cases are currently under consideration by the same panel, the minister of social affairs pointed out.

Also as part of its efforts to fight drug addiction and to save young people from relevant hazards, the ministry held a four-day training course for drugs prevention, themed: "Our Youth, Our Responsibility", she said. "The ministry is keen on protecting students by organizing various awareness-raising lectures for them at schools in cooperation with the Ministry of Education," she said. The Ministry of Social Affairs, through its national cooperative projects committee, also financed a KD 3.3-million project for treating drug addicts at Al-Shuwaikh health district, the minister informed.

The minister concluded by emphasizing that her ministry is doing all what it can in order to raise public awareness about the scourge of illegal drugs and risks of addiction.

Kuwait addiction treatment center welcomed voluntary admission as it is the first positive sign towards recovery from addiction. According to the Interior Ministry's anti-narcotics department periodic bulletin said that it was important to test individuals for substance abuse to determine the cor-



May Al-Baghli



rect way for treatment.

The most important step is acknowledging the problem by the individual by himself or herself and seeking voluntary admission, indicated the bulletin. Parents or family members of the addict could also come forward and report a case of addiction. Several steps are included in the treatment journey with the first being the admission to the center, the second is the withdrawal symptoms and finally the most important part soldiering on the road of recovery. The life of an addict could continue after recovery with education, working and other activities of life. — KUNA



Hilal Al-Sayer

KRCS will continue to aid disaster-hit worldwide: Al-Sayer

KUWAIT: Chairman of Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) Hilal Al-Sayer said on Monday that the charity would keep offering humanitarian aid to disaster-affected people and the needy both at home and abroad.

Speaking to KUNA to mark the KRCS's 57th anniversary, which falls on January 9, Al-Sayer said the charity's activities are considered a landmark in humanitarian and charitable action, based on its response to humanitarian appeals as well as its fast-track field endeavors in different world countries.

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

Kuwait commits to carrying on promoting its

fruitful diplomacy centered on backing global humanitarian action by carrying out its humanitarian aid and initiatives that are deemed a distinguished asset of Kuwait's foreign policy, thus drawing the attention of world countries and organizations to its diplomatic and humanitarian role, he boasted. Internally, the charity

provides relief, educational and medical services to needy families, while, regionally and internationally, it sends relief aid to Yemen, Palestine, Comoros, Somalia, Sudan, Pakistan, Niger, Nepal, the Philippines, Senegal, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan, Al-Sayer noted. The Kuwait Red Crescent Society is one of the leading Kuwaiti beacons in the field of humanitarian work. It plays an integral role in activities and projects both inside and outside Kuwait and is highly appreciated by a large number of international and regional organizations concerned with humanitarian work. — KUNA

Hawally governor urges cooperation in health sector

KUWAIT: Hawally Governor and Acting Capital Governor Ali Al-Asfar said that the country's health sector needed more support from various quarters to ensure better health security to the people. "There should be enhanced cooperation between the concerned authorities to remove any possible impediments in offering health services to the people," he said. The governor was speaking after receiving the new Hawally health zone director Dr Abdelaziz Al-Farhoud.

Al-Asfar said that the role of the private sector in the governorate has become all the more important today in maintaining the health security of citizens and residents, particularly following the pandemic around the world.



KUWAIT: Ali Al-Asfar with Dr Abdelaziz Al-Farhoud.



Scan & Subscribe
KD 20 a year

For Individuals Only



Scan Now

Kuwait Times
Established 1961
The First English Daily in the Arabian Gulf



Tel: 24833199 Ext:220



Malaysia's Anwar Ibrahim in Indonesia on first foreign trip

Greek mother accused of killing three daughters goes on trial

Page 6

Page 7



SANTA LUCIA: US President Joe Biden walks through an honor cordon with Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador as he arrives at Felipe Angeles International Airport in Santa Lucia, Mexico. —AFP

Biden in Mexico for talks on migrants

'Our problems at the border didn't arise overnight'

MEXICO CITY: A regional migration and drug smuggling crisis is expected to dominate talks between US President Joe Biden and his Mexican counterpart Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador on Monday. Biden arrived in Mexico City late Sunday after a politically charged stop at the southern US border—his first since taking office.

He will meet Monday and Tuesday with Lopez Obrador and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau one-on-one and also together in what is dubbed the "Three Amigos" summit. While trade and environmental issues are also on the table, Biden has put a surge in irregular migration and dangerous drug trafficking front and center of his trip, his first to Mexico as president.

"Our problems at the border didn't arise overnight," Biden tweeted after his arrival. "And they won't be solved overnight. But, we can come together to fix this broken system. We can secure the border and fix the immigration process to be orderly, fair, safe, and humane."

Lopez Obrador, who joined Biden in his armored limousine for the journey from the airport, called for increased investment in the region so that people are less likely to

flee their countries. "Opportunities must be guaranteed to citizens, to workers of all countries in their places of origin," he told reporters.

'Where are our rights?'

On his way to Mexico, Biden stopped for several hours in El Paso, Texas, a city at the heart of the troubled border. He met with US officials at the Bridge of the Americas crossing, watching a demonstration of the latest border enforcement technology, as well as a customs sniffer dog.

He later got out of his motorcade to inspect a section of the tall fencing that snakes between El Paso and its twin city Juarez on the Mexican side. "They need a lot of resources. We're going to get it for them," Biden told reporters after his visit to the customs post.

Just ahead of Biden's arrival in Mexico, a line of migrants, some with children in their arms, were deported from El Paso to Ciudad Juarez, according to an AFP reporter at the scene. Venezuelan Jose David Melendez told AFP that he had been apprehended by border guards at a church where he was taking refuge.

"The police officers from the border

patrol came and hit us, made us run, pointed guns at us, pointed at children with firearms. Where are our human rights?" the 25-year-old said. Biden is under political pressure in the face of spiraling illegal border crossings and applications for asylum.

Adding to the crisis has been a surge in cross-border smuggling of the highly addictive and often deadly narcotic fentanyl. Biden's visit sought to respond to Republican accusations that he has been ignoring the situation.

On Thursday Biden announced an expansion of powers to expel people showing up at the border without clearance. At the same time, a legal, strictly enforced pathway will be created for up to 30,000 migrants a month from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela.

The quota will be restricted to those who already have a US sponsor, while anyone attempting to cross the border illegally will be expelled in coordination with Mexico. Human rights groups harshly criticized this as closing the door on desperate people, but the Biden administration says its actions will essentially kill the market for human smuggling networks,

while encouraging legitimate arrivals.

Cartel violence

In 2021, the United States and Mexico announced a revamp of their fight against drug trafficking to address the root causes of migration, encourage economic development and bolster curbs against cross-border arms smuggling.

Mexico is plagued by cartel-related bloodshed that has seen more than 340,000 people murdered since the government deployed the military in the war on drugs in 2006. Days before Biden's visit, Mexican security forces captured a son of notorious drug kingpin Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman, who is serving a life sentence at a US prison.

The United States had offered a reward of up to \$5 million for information leading to Ovidio Guzman's arrest, accusing him of being a key player in the Sinaloa cartel founded by his father. Climate change and cooperation in clean energy technologies will also be on the summit agenda, with Mexico hoping to benefit from Washington's efforts to reduce its reliance on Asia-based manufacturers. —AFP

Historic UK rocket mission set for liftoff

LONDON: Final preparations were under way Monday for the first rocket launch from UK soil, catapulting it into the "exclusive" club of nine nations able to send crafts into Earth's orbit. A repurposed Boeing 747 carrying the 70-foot (21-metre) rocket containing nine satellites will take off from a spaceport in Cornwall, southwest England, at 22:16 GMT.

The rocket will detach from the aircraft at a height of 35,000 feet over the Atlantic Ocean to the south of Ireland before later discharging the satellites. The aircraft will then return to Spaceport Cornwall, a consortium that includes Virgin Orbit and the UK Space Agency, at Cornwall Airport Newquay.

The launch will be the first from UK soil. UK-produced satellites have previously had to be sent into orbit via foreign spaceports. "Joining that really exclusive club of launch nations is so important because it gives us our own access to space... that we've never had before here in the UK," Spaceport Cornwall chief Melissa Thorpe told BBC television on Monday.

Over 2,000 people are expected to watch the launch named "Start Me Up" after the Rolling Stones song. "There's two stages to it... two bits of excitement, really, the takeoff and then the deployment of the rocket," Thorpe added.

The satellites have a variety of civil and defence functions from sea monitoring that will help countries detect people smugglers trafficking migrants to space weather observation. Although scheduled for Monday evening, adverse weather conditions could see the launch delayed or postponed to back-up dates later in January. —AFP

World leaders condemn anti-government mob attacks in Brasilia

WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden assailed Sunday's attacks by supporters of ex-president Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil as "outrageous," as condemnation poured in from around the world against mobs that smashed their way into the halls of power in Brasilia.

Biden issued his one-word verdict to reporters before later tweeting to assure his support to Brazil's new leader, Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, after pro-Bolsonaro rioters broke into Congress, the Supreme Court and the presidential palace in Brasilia to protest the far-right incumbent's loss of power.

"I condemn the assault on democracy and on the peaceful transfer of power in Brazil. Brazil's democratic institutions have our full support, and the will of the Brazilian people must not be undermined. I look forward to continuing to work with @LulaOfficial," the US president wrote.

As part of an outpouring of support for Lula after the stunning scenes in Brazil's capital, Argentine President Alberto Fernandez also assailed the "coup attempt" by supporters of Bolsonaro. Fellow South American leaders in Chile, Colombia and Venezuela deplored the mob action, and French President Emmanuel Macron tweeted his support for Lula, the leftist who took office as Brazil's new president a week ago.

"The will of the Brazilian people and the democratic institutions must be respected!" Macron tweeted. The European Union's top foreign affairs official, Josep Borrell, tweeted that he was "appalled by the acts of violence and illegal occupation of Brasilia's government quarter by violent extremists today..."

"Brazilian democracy will prevail over violence and extremism," he added. The attack "cannot leave us indifferent," tweeted Italy Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni. Such an attack on government offices is "unacceptable and incompatible with any form of democratic dissent," the far-right leader continued, calling for a "return to normalcy."

The Twitter account of Democrats on the US Senate foreign relations committee noted that the Brasilia ransacking came nearly two years to the day after supporters of then-president Donald Trump stormed the US Capitol in an attempt to overturn the 2020 election, leaving five dead.

"Trump's legacy continues to poison our hemisphere," the tweet said. Around the Americas, reaction was particularly swift from leaders ideologically akin to Lula. Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador tweeted: "Lula is not alone, he has the support of the progressive forces of his country, of Mexico, of the Americas and of the world." Chilean President Gabriel Boric decried "this cowardly and vile attack on democracy" and said the

Lula government has Chile's "complete backing." Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro, a leftist authoritarian, condemned what he called the "neofascist groups" seeking to unseat Lula. —AFP

More condemnation came in from across Latin America. Cuba's President Miguel Diaz-Canel offered solidarity and condemned what he described as anti-democratic acts aimed at "generating chaos and disrespecting the popular will."

Bolivia's foreign minister Rogelio Mayta said the events showed that Latin America faces a challenge of "defending our democracies by preventing the triumph of hate speech... fratricidal violence and anti-democratic actions." —AFP



BRASILIA: Planalto Presidential Palace security members walk along one of the entrances of the building destroyed by supporters of Brazilian former President Jair Bolsonaro during an invasion in Brasilia on January 9, 2023. —AFP

AU الجامعة الأسترالية
AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITY
كويت - الكويت

YOUR SUCCESS IS IN YOUR CHOICE

CHOOSE AU

Apply Now
www.au.edu.kw

COLLEGE OF BUSINESS | COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING | SCHOOL OF AVIATION

International

Greek mother accused of killing three daughters goes on trial

Forensic examinations revealed that both girls died of asphyxiation

ATHENS: A 34-year-old mother accused of killing her three daughters over three years went on trial on Monday in Athens, in a case that has sparked outrage in Greece. Roula Pispirigou, who is being held in a high-security prison, is being tried for the "attempted premeditated homicide" and "premeditated homicide" of her eldest daughter.

She has denied all charges. She stands accused of poisoning nine-year-old Georgina in January 2022 by administering ketamine, an anaesthetic. At the time of her death, Georgina was in hospital where she had been for several stays since first suffering convulsions in April 2021 which left her a quadriplegic.

Pispirigou was arrested in March 2022 and has maintained her innocence since. Following her arrest, authorities began investigating the deaths of her two other daughters—Malena, aged three when she died in 2019, and Iris,

six months old when she died in 2021.

Forensic examinations revealed that both girls died of asphyxiation and although that investigation is ongoing, in August Pispirigou was charged with those deaths as well. Pispirigou arrived in court on Monday handcuffed, surrounded by police in balaclavas, dressed in black and looking haggard.

The judge rejected the request by her lawyer for all three cases to be merged, but agreed to adjourn the trial until Wednesday, after Pispirigou appears before a judge investigating the cases of the two younger girls.

'Modern-day Medea'

Greek media have nicknamed Pispirigou, a nurse by training, as a "modern-day Medea", a figure in Greek mythology who murders her sons after their father leaves her for another woman. The alleged triple infanticide has received widespread media atten-

tion in Greece, where such crimes are relatively rare.

In April 2022, the government urged calm in the face of calls for Pispirigou to be killed. When she appeared in court shortly after her arrest, she wore a bullet-proof vest and riot police were deployed to control a crowd shouting: "Murderess, confess your crime."

One person told Greek television she thought Pispirigou should be hanged, and the front of her house in Patras was daubed with the words "Death to child killers". "People can't forgive the fact that she allegedly killed not one but three children and at different times," said Effi Lambropoulou, lecturer in criminology at the Athens Panteion University.

Media "focus above all on the emotions of viewers", Lambropoulou said. "This information is then exaggerated on social networks, where there is no control whatsoever." —AFP



ATHENS: Roula Pispirigou (C), a 34-year-old mother accused of killing her three daughters, is escorted by police officers to Athens courthouse prior to the opening hearing of her trial for the "attempted premeditated homicide" and "premeditated homicide" of her eldest daughter in Athens. —AFP

Gunmen attack Nigeria train station, kidnap 30

LAGOS: Gunmen attacked a train station in southern Nigeria, kidnapping around 30 people and wounding others, police and officials said, nearly a year after a bomb assault on a train travelling from the capital.

Kidnapping for ransom is a major problem in Nigeria where gunmen have repeatedly attacked and abducted people in large groups, but mostly in the northwestern and central states. The train station attack in Edo state, 360 km (223 miles) east of Lagos, took place on Saturday evening. Gunmen opened fire before abducting passengers who were waiting for a train to Warri in southern Delta state, police said in a statement to local media. Edo State Information Commissioner Chris Nehikhare told AFP that 32 people had been abducted.

One person managed to escape, lowering the toll to 31, he said, as police and local hunters tracked the remaining captives. "We have the area cordoned off. We know the forests better than them," said Nehikhare.

In one of the country's most high-profile attacks, in March last year, gunmen with explosives blew up the tracks and assaulted a train travelling from the capital Abuja to the northwestern city of Kaduna. Eight people were killed and dozens more kidnapped. The train service only resumed eight months later after the final hostages were released. —AFP

Iranians protest at French embassy after cartoons

TEHRAN: Dozens of Iranians gathered Sunday outside the French embassy in Tehran protesting against cartoons of the Islamic republic's supreme leader by French satirical weekly Charlie Hebdo. The magazine on Wednesday published caricatures of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in support of the protests in Iran, sparked by the September 16 death in custody of Mahsa Amini, following her arrest for allegedly violating the country's strict dress code.

Iran has warned France over the "insulting and indecent" cartoons, which appeared in a special edition to mark the anniversary of the deadly 2015 attack on the magazine's Paris offices. Dozens of demonstrators, most of them religious seminary students, gathered in front of the embassy in the centre of the capital Tehran and set fire to French flags, AFP journalists reported.

"France, be ashamed!", the crowd chanted. Waving Iranian flags, they held pictures of Khamenei and signs reading "I will sacrifice my life for the leader", and "Shame on Charlie Hebdo". "I came to support my revolution, my leader", 17-year-old seminary student Karim Heydarpour said.

Similar pro-government rallies were held in Iran's holy city of Qom, 128 kilometres (80 miles) south of Tehran, the state broadcaster reported. Iranian authorities brand the months-long protests in the country as "riots" and accuse foreign countries and opposition groups of stoking the unrest.

On Sunday evening, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi condemned the publication of the cartoons, state news agency IRNA reported. "Resorting to insult and offence under the pretext of freedom is a



TEHRAN: Demonstrators gather with images of Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei during a protest against defamatory cartoons depicting him published by French satirical weekly Charlie Hebdo, outside the French embassy in Iran's capital Tehran. —AFP

clear evidence of the absurdity of the logic of those who insult, and their disappointment at the non-fruition of the conspiracy of chaos and insecurity in the country," Raisi said.

Earlier in the day, Iran's foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani said freedom of speech should not be used as a pretext for "insulting" religion. France "has no right to justify insulting the sanctities of other countries and nations and followers of divine religions under the pretext of freedom of speech", he said on Twitter.

Paris should observe the "fundamental principles

of international relations—namely mutual respect (and) non-interference in the internal affairs of others", he said. On Thursday, Iran said it was closing the Tehran-based French Institute for Research in Iran "as a first step" in response to the cartoons, after summoning Paris ambassador to protest the publication.

Located in the centre of Tehran, IFRI had been closed for many years, but was reopened under the 2013-2021 presidency of the moderate president Hassan Rouhani as a sign of warming bilateral relations. —AFP

Lula slams far-right...

Continued from Page 1

justice of the Supreme Court in condemning what many called the South American country's version of the Capitol riots in Washington two years ago. "The three powers of the republic, the defenders of democracy and the constitution, reject the terrorist acts and criminal, coup-mongering vandalism that occurred," they said in a joint statement.

Large contingents of riot police meanwhile deployed to lock down the capital's Three Powers Square, home to the iconic modernist buildings that serve as the headquarters of the three branches of government. Around 1,500 people were arrested at the pro-Bolsonaro protest camp, officials said. Many Brasilia residents were still in shock as they returned to their normal workday routines. "People have the right to express their opinions, but not destroy our national heritage," 43-year-old resident Ionar Bispo told AFP.

Condemnation continued to pour in from around the world, with Pope Francis criticizing the unrest as a sign of "weakening of democracy" in the Americas. In a joint statement ahead of summit talks in Mexico City, US

President Joe Biden, Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau condemned the attacks and said they "stand with Brazil as it safeguards its democratic institutions."

Many drew the inevitable comparison to Jan 6, 2021, when supporters of then-US president Donald Trump invaded the Capitol in a violent, failed bid to stop Congress from certifying his election loss. Spain's foreign minister said the attacks in Brasilia bore "traces of Trumpism", and echoed condemnation from the United Nations and European Union. In a rare moment of unity with Western powers, even Russia joined in, with Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov telling reporters, "we condemn in the strongest terms the actions of the instigators of the riots".

Bolsonaro, who left Brazil for the US state of Florida - where Trump resides - on the second-to-last day of his term, condemned "pillaging and invasions of public buildings" in a tweet Sunday night. But the politician dubbed the "Tropical Trump" rejected Lula's claim he incited the attacks, and defended the right to "peaceful protests". Lula, who was in the southeastern city of Araraquara visiting a flood-hit region when the riot started, signed a decree declaring a federal intervention in Brasilia, giving his government special powers over the local police force to restore law and order in the capital. His government vowed to find and arrest those who planned and financed the attacks. —AFP

rest of the world in about 20 years.

An intact ozone layer filters out most of the Sun's short-wave ultraviolet radiation, which damages DNA in living organisms and can cause cancer. At ground level, however, ozone is a major component of air pollution and exacerbates respiratory disease. Efforts to repair the ozone layer intersect with the fight against global warming.

The phase-out of ozone-depleting substances - some of them powerful greenhouse gases - will have avoided up to one degree Celsius of warming by mid-century compared to a scenario in which their use expanded some three percent per year, according to the assessment. A class of industrial aerosols developed to replace those banned by the Montreal Protocol also turned out to be powerful greenhouse gases, and will be phased out over the next three decades under a recent amendment to the 1987 treaty.

But while the world pulled together to tackle the

Suez traffic 'normal' after...

Continued from Page 1

"mobilized four tugboats to tow the ship" allowing it to resume its passage through the canal. "The canal is on track to register 51 vessels passing in both directions Monday," he said in a statement.

Smooth traffic through the Suez Canal is vitally important for Egypt, the Arab world's most populous country, which is currently battered by an economic crisis that has seen the currency lose 75 percent in value in less than a year. The waterway, used for about 10 percent of the world's maritime trade, is one of Egypt's main sources of foreign currency revenue, bringing in more than \$7 billion a year. Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi approved a project last year to widen and deepen the southern section of the canal where the Ever Given got stuck.

In 2021, the Ever Given became wedged diagonally across the canal when visibility was sharply reduced during a sandstorm, disrupting trade flows for nearly a week. According to the SCA, Egypt lost

damage to the ozone layer, it has failed to curb carbon emissions quickly enough to forestall dangerous warming. A world barely 1.2C above pre-industrial levels has already been buffeted by record heatwaves, droughts and temperatures, and is headed for a disastrous 2.7C above that benchmark. With emissions continuing to rise and time running out to avoid some of the worst impacts, controversial geoengineering schemes are moving to the center of climate change policy debates. These include proposals to blunt global warming by depositing sulfur particles into the upper atmosphere.

But the report cautioned this could sharply reverse the recovery of the ozone layer. So-called stratospheric aerosol injection (SAI) is increasingly seen as a potential stop-gap measure for capping temperatures long enough to tackle the problem at the source. Nature demonstrates that it works: The violent 1991 eruption of Mount Pinatubo in the Philippines - which spewed millions of tons of dust and debris - lowered

global temperatures for about a year.

Scientists calculate that injecting 8 to 16 million tons of sulfur dioxide into the stratosphere each year, roughly equivalent to Pinatubo's output, would cool Earth's temperature by about 1C. Simulations over Antarctica in October - when the ozone hole is biggest - show that so-called stratospheric aerosol injection over 20 years would lower global temperatures by 0.5C.

But there's a trade-off: The ozone layer would be reduced to its 1990 levels, only a third of what it was before the impact of human activity. The world would see "a continuing severe depletion of ozone while such solar radiation management continues", Pyle said. The UN's climate science advisory panel, the IPCC, has warned of other unintended consequences, ranging from the disruption of African and Asian monsoons, upon which hundreds of millions depend for food, to a drying of the Amazon, which is already transitioning toward a savannah state. —AFP

Ozone layer healing but...

Continued from Page 1

"Ozone is recovering, this is a good story," John Pyle, a professor at the University of Cambridge and co-chair of Scientific Assessment of Ozone Depletion, told AFP.

The ozone layer should be restored - both in area and depth - by around 2066 over the Antarctic region, where ozone depletion has been most pronounced, according to the report, jointly released by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the UN Environment Program, and government agencies in the US and the European Union. Over the Arctic, full recovery will happen around 2045, and for the

International

New Malaysia premier Anwar in Indonesia on first foreign trip

‘When I was in a difficult situation, Indonesia welcomed me as a true friend’

BOGOR: Malaysia's new prime minister met with Indonesia's president Monday on his first foreign trip after winning a confidence vote and cementing his mandate last month following an inconclusive election. Anwar Ibrahim, a long-time opposition leader, was sworn in as the country's 10th prime minister on November 24 to head a unity government in a shaky alliance with the graft-tainted party of his former political rivals.

He met Indonesian President Joko Widodo for talks at a presidential palace in Bogor, south of capital Jakarta where he thanked his counterpart for his support after the election. "This is a bit personal, Mr President. When I was in a difficult situation, living in uncertainty and suffering, Indonesia welcomed me as a true friend," he said after the meeting.

Widodo said the world's two biggest exporters of palm oil would boost cooperation on the commodity and work together to battle "discrimination" against the sector, which environmentalists say is stoking deforestation in both countries.

The European Union last month agreed on a new law preventing companies from selling products linked to deforestation. "We have agreed to strengthen the cooperation through the Council of Palm Oil Producing Countries (CPOPC) to increase the palm oil market," he said.

The Indonesian leader also lauded the interest of Malaysian companies in investing in the country's new capital Nusantara, which is scheduled to open on the island of Borneo next year. Ahead of the talks the Indonesian leader greeted Anwar before driving him around the palace's gardens in an electric buggy.

The pair then discussed issues including trade, border disputes and the situation in coup-hit Myanmar. It is customary that the first foreign visit of a new



BOGOR: Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim (R) and Indonesian President Joko Widodo (L) attend a welcome ceremony at the presidential palace in Bogor, West Java on January 9, 2023. — AFP

Malaysian premier takes place in neighbouring Indonesia, which counts Kuala Lumpur as its fifth biggest export market.

Indonesia, the world's third-largest democracy, this year takes the chairmanship of the ASEAN group of Southeast Asian nations—in which junta-led Myanmar remains a member—and will host a leaders' summit in November.

They also spoke about migrant worker rights after Indonesia last year imposed a temporary ban on recruitment to Malaysia where the majority of Indonesian migrant workers reside. Eight Malaysian companies had also signed memorandums of understanding with Indonesian firms worth up to 1.66 billion Malaysian ringgit (\$379 million), the Malaysian foreign ministry said in a statement. — AFP

They are set to meet with "senior figures from politics, civil society and the military" Strack-Zimmermann said, and would also discuss the current "threat situation" in their meetings.

'After Putin comes Xi'

The first meetings on Monday were with fellow lawmakers in Taiwan. FDP lawmaker Johannes Vogel described Taiwan's situation as "very complex" and said both Germany and Europe "support a One-China Policy". "But having said that... we support Taiwan when it comes to making it totally clear that military aggression and the threat of military aggression coming from Beijing is unacceptable," he told lawmakers.

"We want you to also see our visit here as a gesture of support." The trip is set to be followed by a visit from German Education Minister Bettina Stark-Watzinger, also of the FDP, in the next few months, sources told AFP. It would be the first by a member of the German cabinet in 26 years. Ahead of the trip Vogel said support for Taiwan was needed following Russia's invasion of Ukraine because Xi could also unleash a similar war.

"After (Russian President Vladimir) Putin comes Xi," Vogel told AFP. "We must take autocrats seriously and literally." The two senior FDP deputies also warned against Germany becoming too economically dependent on China, its biggest trading partner in 2021.

"It can only be to our disadvantage to make ourselves dependent economically on autocratic states," Strack-Zimmermann said, highlighting Germany's recent experience with Russia—on whose natural resources it had become dependent before the Ukraine invasion.

China routinely opposes official exchanges with Taiwan, and has reacted with growing anger to a flurry of visits by Western politicians to the island. Last year saw a spike in tensions as Beijing ramped up military pressure and launched its largest war games in decades to protest against a visit by then-US House speaker Nancy Pelosi in August. — AFP

China invokes Germany's 'painful' past

TAIPEI: China Monday invoked Germany's "painful" history in slamming a Taiwan visit by a high-ranking parliamentary delegation from Berlin, in an apparent reference to the country's wartime record. The group of German lawmakers arrived in the self-ruled island on Monday ahead of an anticipated ministerial visit later this year with one delegation member describing Beijing's increased sabre-rattling towards Taiwan as "unacceptable".

China's foreign ministry Monday swiftly condemned the visit. "The root cause of the Taiwan problem is precisely that the law of the jungle, hegemonism, colonialism, militarism and nationalism were rampant in the world, and China suffered deeply from them," foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told a briefing. "Germany has (experienced) a profound and painful historical lesson in this regard," he added. "We urge these German politicians to earnestly abide by the One-China principle." China's Communist Party regards democratic Taiwan as its own territory and has vowed to one day take the island.

Under President Xi Jinping, Beijing has ramped up military, economic and diplomatic pressure on Taiwan because its current elected government regards the island as an already sovereign nation and not part of "one China".

The deputies on the Taiwan visit are from the pro-business Free Democratic Party (FDP) — a junior partner in Germany's coalition government. The four-day visit is a "sign of solidarity" with the democracy which China claims as part of its territory, Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann, chair of the parliamentary defence committee and a leader of the delegation, told AFP.



TAIPEI: Picture released by Taiwan's Central News Agency (CNA) shows German Member of Parliament Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann (front row 5th L), chair of the parliamentary defence committee and her delegation posing for photographs with Taiwan Parliament Speaker You Si-kun (front row 6th L) at Parliament House in Taipei. — AFP

secretary general of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), and Mirza Abbas, a former minister and member of the party's top decision-making body, were freed from a jail outside the capital Dhaka. Hundreds of supporters greeted the pair after they arrived at BNP headquarters in central Dhaka where Alamgir spoke briefly, a party spokesman told AFP. Alamgir and Abbas were arrested on December 9 a day before the BNP were set to hold their biggest political rally in over a decade.

The party said more than 2,000 of its activists were arrested, at least one was shot dead and thousands were charged as part of a police crackdown to

deter people from attending the rally. Police said the pair had been arrested on charges of instigating violence and obstructing police work during clashes with officers on December 7 when police opened fire on hundreds of opposition activists.

Alamgir is currently the highest opposition official in Bangladesh since BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia began serving a 10-year prison term. Zia's son and heir apparent is living in exile in London and has also been sentenced to life in prison. In recent years Alamgir has emerged as the nation's main opposition figure rallying a diverse group of centrist, right of centre and leftist parties as they staged

UN declares '5 years of development of mountain regions in Kyrgyzstan'

President of Kyrgyzstan Sadyr Nurgozhoevich Japarov said "we can all see how the problem of smog has become one of the most pressing problems in our country in recent years". Smog is especially strong in the fall and winter period, since the use of coal for heating plays a significant role in this. Undoubtedly, the solution to this issue requires a comprehensive approach. In my first year as the president, I identified environmental and green economy issues as one of the top priorities of the state policy.

On our initiative, the UN declared 2022 as the "International Year of Sustainable Mountain Development," in Kyrgyzstan last year was also declared the 'Year of protection of mountain ecosystems and climate sustainability'. The issues of the negative effects of climate change concern all countries of the world, including Kyrgyzstan, which has thousand-years' glaciers.

In November 2021, in my speech at the opening of the Summit of the World Leaders on Climate Change in Glasgow, I said that by 2030, Kyrgyzstan aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 44%, and by 2050 will try to achieve carbon neutrality, which is possible primarily through development of the hydropower sector.

Kyrgyzstan is a country rich in hydro-resources. It is sad to note that being in the upper reaches of water resources, we were not able to build new hydropower plants during the years of independence and were forced to import electricity in winter time. For the last 30 years we have been using coal, fuel oil and the power of previously built hydropower plants. At the moment we are using only about 10% of our hydropower potential.

Therefore, on my instructions, over the last two years we have actively started building small and medium hydropower plants across the country, and appropriate regulations have been adopted to provide preferences to investors.

The largest construction project, Kambar-Ata HPP-1, the future flagship of the national energy sector, has been launched. With implementation of these projects, Kyrgyzstan can truly be called an energy-independent country that will export electricity to foreign countries.

Perhaps if more attention had been paid to this issue in earlier years, the smog issue would not be so acute today. We could have used more electricity for heating in the fall and winter. Now we are firmly committed to development of the green economy, the whole modern world pays special attention to this. That is why I have instructed us to begin actively working on exchanging the country's foreign debt for green initiatives.

Today, Kyrgyzstan's foreign debt totals around \$4.2 billion. Of course, we are and will be in full compliance with all our foreign debt repayment obligations, and we have every opportunity to do so. We are just taking the initiative to develop the green economy and jointly contribute to improving the environmental situation in the world.

It would be good if the funds earmarked for repayment of the foreign debt were used to support the green initiatives. We are not saying that these projects should only be financed by donors and partners. We are also ready to invest from our side and implement these projects.

For many years the green economy has been at various levels, but unfortunately in most cases it is all in theory. We want to move from words to deeds, together we can change this. It is no secret that we are far behind other countries in the world in terms of the green economy. We want to correct this as soon as possible.

We are sure that these initiatives will be supported by the donor countries and development partners. At the moment, 50 small and medium hydropower plants are being built in Kyrgyzstan. But even this is not enough. We have investment projects ready. We have the capacity to build small and medium hydropower plants with the capacity from 1 to 1,000 MW; the rivers are ready.

The countries and financial institutions, of which Kyrgyzstan is a debtor, could take part in construction of energy facilities and hydropower plants in the country. Together we will cut the ribbons of these green economy facilities. Together we are implementing green projects in Kyrgyzstan, in exchange for us being written off foreign debts.

We all want our children to live in a rich country with a good environment. We want to be a truly energy-independent country which uses its potential rationally. Therefore, the state will continue to move in this direction, paying more and more attention to the ecology and green economy issues.



BRUSSELS: File photo shows Cambodian Prime minister Hun Sen as he speaks at a press conference during the EU-ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) summit at the European Council headquarters in Brussels. — AFP

Cambodian leader warns rivals face 'legal action'

PHNOM PENH: Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen warned opponents Monday they would face legal action or a beating with sticks if they accused his ruling party of vote theft in national polls later this year. One of the world's longest-serving leaders, Hun Sen will mark 38 years in power this weekend and has vowed to run again when Cambodia holds elections in July.

Speaking at a ceremony in Kampong Cham province, he said political challengers would need to choose between the courts and violence if they criticised his ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP). "There are only two options — one is using legal action, the other is using sticks... What do you want?" he said. "Either you face legal action in court or I rally CPP people for a demonstration and beat you guys up."

He also instructed lawyers to monitor speeches by his rivals. "We won't let you accuse us of being thieves all the time. The CPP cannot accept being called thieves who steal votes. We must sue whoever says that," Hun Sen added. He later claimed he did not encourage violence.

Scores of opposition politicians, including long-time rival Sam Rainsy, have been convicted of crimes in absentia and remain in exile. Critics and rights groups say Hun Sen has ruthlessly crushed dissent by jailing opponents and activists ahead of every election.

In the latest mass trial last month, 36 people including Rainsy were handed between five and seven years on charges of plotting against the government. The prime minister has promised to crush Rainsy, who was sentenced to life imprisonment in October, and to squeeze his political allies.

The emerging opposition Candlelight Party took 18 percent of the vote in last year's local polls. Its deputy leader Son Chhay — a long-time Rainsy ally who holds Australian citizenship — was convicted of defamation in October and ordered to pay \$750,000 in compensation to the ruling party for criticising the polls. — AFP

Bangladesh oppn leaders released on bail

DHAKA: Two top leaders of Bangladesh's main opposition party were released from prison on Monday, officials said, a month after they were arrested during a massive crackdown on political activists. Police said Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir,

a series of demonstrations across the country. Protests sparked by power cuts and fuel price hikes have erupted across Bangladesh in recent months demanding that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina step down and make way for fresh elections under a caretaker government.

Despite the arrests, the BNP staged a huge demonstration on December 10 with at least 100,000 supporters turning up in the capital and the party's MPs quitting parliament in protest. Western governments—along with the United Nations—have expressed concerns over the political climate in Bangladesh, one of the fastest-growing economies in Asia. — AFP

TUESDAY, JANUARY 10, 2023

Business

Gulf Exchanges Committee launches unified ESG metrics

Bursa Kuwait supports development of capital market, GCC counterparts

KUWAIT: The GCC Exchanges Committee launched a unified optional package of standards for disclosure of governance and social and environmental responsibility for listed companies. In a press statement, Kuwait Bourse said that the package comprises of 29 standards aligned with the UN sustainable development goals, including categories for GHG emissions, energy and water usage, gender pay, employee turnover, data privacy, ethics and more. "The metrics, which are optional and do not replace existing ESG disclosure guidelines, are an important step towards standardizing ESG disclosure across the GCC region's capital markets, serving as a guide for companies wishing to disclose ESG-related performance", the statement explained. Chief Executive Officer of Bursa Kuwait Mohammad Saud Al-Osaimi hailed the release of the GCC guide saying, "Bursa Kuwait supports the development of the Kuwaiti capital market and its regional counterparts for the benefit of investors and market participants". "It plays an important role in fostering the long-term economic development of Kuwait as a partner and supporter of the United Nations' Sustainable Stock Exchange initiative.", he added.



Mohammed Al-Osaimi

The optional GCC Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) metrics are a valuable tool for encouraging regional issuers to provide information for investors, helping them assess listed companies more soundly in order to make responsible and smart investment decisions. Bursa Kuwait is currently collaborating with the Capital Markets Authority (CMA) on the implementation of the requisites of sustainable finance, which aims to make the Kuwaiti capital market more sustainable according to the best standards and practices described by the International Organization of Securities Commissions (IOSCO) and in support of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. The GCC Exchanges Committee is comprised of Bursa Kuwait, Saudi Tadawul, Bahrain Bourse, Qatar Stock Exchange, Muscat Stock Exchange,



KUWAIT: The GCC Exchanges Committee members pose for a group photo. — KUNA photos

Abu Dhabi Securities Exchange and Dubai Financial Market. The committee aims to support the development of regional capital markets, cre-

ate an advanced capital market ecosystem in the GCC region, and elevate their position on the global stage. — KUNA

Pakistan asks IMF for restructuring 'pause'

GENEVA: Pakistan's prime minister on Monday asked the IMF for a pause in its demands for economic reforms before releasing more financial aid, as the country tries to rebuild after catastrophic floods. Shehbaz Sharif said he was trying to persuade the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to give Islamabad some breathing space as it tackles the "nightmarish" situation.

The global lender wants Pakistan to withdraw remaining subsidies on petroleum products and electricity, aimed at helping the masses. At the United Nations in Geneva for a conference on Pakistan's recovery from last year's catastrophic monsoon floods, Shehbaz was asked by reporters about the block on IMF funds.

Pakistan's economy has crumbled alongside a simmering political crisis, with the rupee plummeting and inflation at decades-high levels, but the floods and the global energy crisis have piled on further pressure.

Shehbaz came to office in April last year, ahead of the floods in July and August.

A \$6-billion IMF deal negotiated by the previous government was restarted after Pakistan finally met conditions such as ending subsidies on fuel.

But Islamabad has so far only received half the funds—the last payment in August—with a further review of the package ongoing.

"Even before these floods hit Pakistan, we were already facing humongous challenges," he said.

"Yet we had to again connect with the IMF and resurrect an agreement which was violated by the previous government—and accept even harsher conditionalities," said Shehbaz.



RAWALPINDI: Labourers pull carts loaded with grain sacks at a grocery market in Rawalpindi on January 9, 2023. —AFP

He said Pakistan was complying with the IMF's conditions "as best as possible" but asked "how on Earth" the additional burdens could be shouldered by the country's poorest.

"Yet we are committed to IMF's programme. We will do everything to comply with the terms and conditions. Though I am constantly trying to persuade them: please give us a pause," he said.

'Be considerate'

Shehbaz spoke with IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva on Saturday and asked her to "kindly be considerate and compassionate and give us some breathing space", he said.

"This is an ongoing dialogue. I'm sure one day soon we will be able to convince them through logic

and through facts. "That said, regardless, we will comply with the IMF programme." Finance Minister Ishaq Dar is due to meet an IMF delegation in Geneva on Monday, a Pakistani minister confirmed to AFP on condition of anonymity.

Economists and traders estimate the country has around three weeks of foreign exchange reserves left to service imports and a swift IMF cash injection is the only way to shore up the economy.

At the Geneva conference, Britain encouraged Pakistan to continue its macroeconomic reforms and conclude the ninth review of the IMF programme.

Development Minister Andrew Mitchell said it would be much easier for the world to help Pakistan "if Pakistani taxpayers are seen to be playing a core part in this effort". — AFP

UK unions left disappointed after pay talks

LONDON: UK trade unions branded talks Monday with the government to discuss pay rise demands across the public and private sector "disappointing", as workers prepare to stage the latest in months of damaging strikes.

The talks were convened at the urging of Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, and are perceived as a shift in strategy after ministers previously minimised their involvement in the months-long disputes. But union leaders said the separate discussions with transport, health and education ministers had offered little progress in resolving the standoffs, two days before ambulance workers in England and Wales walk out again.

Others set to stage stoppages this week include some civil servants, some transport staff in parts of London and some secondary school employees. Last week saw the latest in a series of highly disruptive strikes by railway workers. They come as the UK suffers from decades-high inflation amid stagnant economic growth, prompting calls for big salary hikes as the worst cost-of-living crisis in a generation bites.

"There is no resolution to our dispute yet in sight," Joanne Galbraith-Marten of the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) said following talks with Health Secretary Steve Barclay. The union has organised unprecedented walkouts by nurses in



LEEDS: Britain's Prime Minister Rishi Sunak (2nd R) meets with members of a multi-disciplinary team who provide virtual care (from L) Steph Smith, Caroline McNamara, Victoria Tate, Andrew Merriman and Donna Pereira during a visit to the Rutland Lodge Healthcare Centre in Leeds on January 9, 2023. —AFP

recent weeks—the first in its 106-year history.

"Today's meeting was bitterly disappointing—nothing for the current year and repeating that 'the budget is already set' for next year," Galbraith-Marten added on agreeing new salary rates.

'No change'

Kevin Courtney, of the National Education Union, said the education secretary had offered further discussions during their talks, but that there

had been "no offer" and "no change". "There's no sense of concrete progress," he told UK media afterwards.

Meanwhile Mick Lynch, who leads the main RMT rail workers' union, declined to say whether any progress had been made following their meeting with rail ministers. "We're just going to have further talks with them," he told reporters as he left the department some 75 minutes after arriving. —AFP

Stock markets extend gains on Fed hopes

LONDON: Major stock markets mostly climbed Monday and oil prices rallied, building on optimism generated by China's COVID reopening and hopes the Federal Reserve will slow its pace of interest rate hikes.

A closely watched report on Friday showed a forecast-busting rise in new US jobs, along with a slowdown in wage growth. That came as separate figures showed a shock contraction in the US services sector — the first since spring 2020, at the height of the COVID pandemic. The readings, while suggesting the world's largest economy was showing signs of weakness, were seized on by traders hopeful that the Fed would begin to temper the pace of US interest rate increases.

"Expectations have risen that aggressive moves by the Federal Reserve are finally bruising the resilient labour market and wounding a wage spiral," said Susannah Streeter, senior investment and markets analyst at the brokerage firm Hargreaves Lansdown. "However, policymakers are still likely to stay cautious, fearful that if they drop their guard, inflation may still come back to bite," she said.

Investors are betting on the US central bank to lift borrowing costs about 25 basis points at its next meeting at the end of the month. Policymakers have warned that rates will continue to go up as they aim to bring decades-high inflation under control, with some saying they will not likely be cut until 2024.

The eurozone will meanwhile experience "very strong" growth in wages in the coming months as salaries catch up with galloping inflation, the European Central Bank predicted Monday. As the new trading week kicked off, the biggest stock market gains came in Asia amid China's emergence from its strict zero-COVID policies of lockdowns and other restrictions, and the country's pledges to help its struggling economy, particularly the property sector.

The borders between Hong Kong, Macau and China were partially opened Sunday, providing a much-needed boost to Hong Kong. Stocks in Macau-based casinos surged on the move. "The U-turn in China's Covid policy is consequential to growth and equity returns," said Stephen Innes, managing partner at SPI Asset Management.

"So with the lifting of border restrictions between China/Hong Kong/Macau and international travel reopening, local travellers are not only in a celebratory mood but also investors." Oil prices jumped more than three percent Monday, having plunged around eight percent last week on weaker demand concerns caused by the spike in COVID infections in China as containment measures are lifted. — AFP

Business

Second coming of once-banned conspiracy theorists after Twitter amnesty

Twitter has turned into what campaigners call a cesspool of misinformation

WASHINGTON: A conspiracy theorist urging Americans to burn voting machines, an anti-Muslim activist posting a photo with a gun, a retired general who called for a coup—Elon Musk's Twitter has reinstated thousands of once-banned accounts.

Twitter has turned into what campaigners call a cesspool of misinformation, hate-filled conspiracies and racial slurs amid what appears to be reduced content moderation in recent weeks following mass layoffs and an exodus of key staff focused on user safety.

Musk, a self-proclaimed free speech absolutist who completed his \$44 billion buyout of the influential platform in October, has further stoked alarm by restoring what one expert estimates are over 27,000 accounts once suspended for fuelling falsehoods, harassment and violence.

"Restoring these accounts will make the platform a magnet for actors who want to spread misinformation," Jonathan Nagler, co-director of the New York University's Center for Social Media and Politics, told AFP. "And there will likely be less moderation of hate speech, making the platform less hospitable to many users." Those reinstated include far-right activists, anti-Muslim extremists as well as others peddling election conspiracies and COVID-19 misinformation, according to an analysis by the non-profit Media Matters of dozens of restored accounts with millions of combined followers.

Among those allowed back is former US President Donald Trump, who was handed a "permanent" ban by Twitter after his supporters stormed the Capitol on January 6, 2021. Trump has so far resisted the offer to return and remained on Truth Social, a platform he founded where his following pales in comparison to his Twitter account with 87.7 million followers.

'Misinformation superspreaders'

Many other reinstated influencers have actively returned to the platform, including flamboyant anti-Muslim activist Pamela Geller and Mindy Robinson, a



Customer checks information on Twitter account.

supporter of the QAnon conspiracy movement whose first tweet after being restored included a picture of herself with a gun.

Also reinstated was controversial former kickboxer Andrew Tate, who is notorious for his misogynistic remarks. After a heated Twitter exchange with environmentalist Greta Thunberg, Tate was recently arrested in Romania for alleged human trafficking and rape. After thanking Musk for restoring his account, election conspiracy theorist Mike Lindell called on his followers to "melt down the electronic voting machines and turn them into prison bars."

Former national security advisor Michael Flynn, who once appeared to endorse the idea for a Myanmar-style

coup in the United States, also thanked Musk on Friday—the second anniversary of the January 6 insurrection—after his account was restored.

"Under Musk, misinformation superspreaders are emboldened, and readers have less information about the reliability of the sources feeding them news and information," Jack Brewster, from the media watchdog NewsGuard, told AFP.

Musk's interventions, he added, "have the effect of catering to the extreme on both sides of the aisle—and obscuring readers' path to high-quality information." Twitter has not publicly said how many accounts have been reinstated.

Several advocacy groups, including Media Matters

and Accountable Tech, pointed to data gathered by Travis Brown, a software developer based in Berlin. Brown has compiled an online list of more than 27,000 reinstated Twitter IDs since Musk's takeover in late October. Brown told AFP that the list was incomplete and the actual number of restored accounts could be higher.

'Dangerous decisions'

In a tweet in mid-December, the company said that "permanent suspension was a disproportionate action for breaking Twitter rules." "We recently started reinstating accounts that were suspended for violations of these policies and plan to expand to more accounts weekly over the next 30 days."

Apparently seeking to allay the concerns of advertisers and users on the platform, it added that Twitter remained "fully committed to preventing harmful content and bad actors." But in a test of that commitment, the platform recently saw an explosion of anti-vaccine conspiracies after NFL player Damar Hamlin suffered a cardiac arrest during a match.

Tweets mentioning "died suddenly"—a phrase that references an anti-vaccine film-spiked on the platform, according to the Center for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH). Some of those peddling the conspiratorial phrase were once-banned accounts that have been restored, CCDH told AFP.

Musk has sought to shake up the money-losing company after his acquisition. The South African-born billionaire has said his interventions at Twitter have saved the company and announced that he would step down as chief executive once he finds "someone foolish enough to take the job".

"Fixing Twitter requires more than just replacing Musk," Nora Benavidez, from the nonpartisan group Free Press, told AFP. "It requires a series of measures to reverse dangerous policy decisions Musk has made, reinvest in content moderation and enforcement, and restructure the governance of the platform." — AFP

Wages set to rise sharply to catch spiralling inflation

BERLIN: The eurozone will experience "very strong" growth in wages in the next months as salaries catch up with galloping inflation, the European Central Bank predicted on Monday. "Wage growth over the next few quarters is expected to be very strong compared with historical patterns", the ECB wrote in its monthly bulletin.

The authors forecasted "some catch-up between wages and high rates of inflation" experienced since 2021, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. "Robust labour markets" alongside "increases in national minimum wages" and "trade unions demand(ing) higher wage increases" are also set to place upward pressure on wages.

In December, inflation in the eurozone dipped under the symbolic figure of 10 percent, after 18 months of uninterrupted increase. However, the report explained that "real wages are substantially lower than before the pandemic" in 2019 because inflation has eroded consumption power, with the annual wage growth rate for the second quarter of 2022 in the eurozone at -5.2 percent.

The services sector, which is experiencing "serious labour shortages" has bucked this trend, with pay "above their pre-pandemic levels". Trade unions are expected to push for salary increases "especially in sectors with lower wages".

In Germany, the Verdi trade union has demanded a 15 percent increase in wages for the approximately 160,000 employees of the mail giant Deutsche Post, and 10.5 percent for the 2.5 million federal, state and municipal employees.

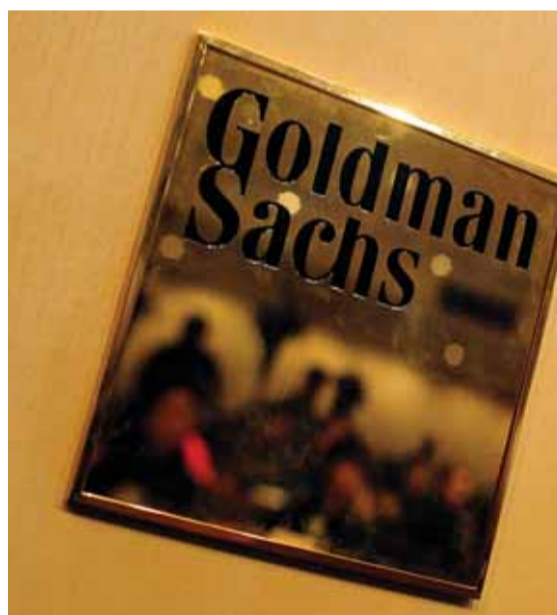
The healthy job market looks set to guide further wage increases, despite a likely slowdown in economic growth. In December, the ECB predicted wages would rise by 5.2 percent in 2023 after having already grown 4.5 percent in 2022.

ECB vice president Luis de Guindos forecasted wage increases would not lead to a "wage-price spiral", but noted the ECB needed to tread carefully regarding inflation expectations. In the longer term, the ECB indicated wage growth would face further barriers, namely "the expected economic slowdown in the euro area and uncertainty about the economic outlook" due in part to the ongoing war in Ukraine. — AFP

Swiss central bank faces record loss

ZURICH: The Swiss central bank said Monday it expects to have logged a record loss totalling 132 billion Swiss francs (\$143 billion) last year, preventing it from providing funds to the government. The Swiss National Bank fell into the red after posting a profit of 26.9 billion Swiss francs in 2021.

Most of last year's losses — 131 billion Swiss francs—were linked to a drop in the value of its holdings in foreign currencies, the Swiss National Bank said in a statement. It lost another one billion Swiss francs due to a fall in the valuation of its



HONG KONG: File photo shows a plaque for investment banking giant Goldman Sachs reflects attendants at a press conference in Hong Kong. Goldman Sachs plans to cut 3,200 jobs. — AFP

Goldman Sachs to cut 3,200 jobs: Source

NEW YORK: Goldman Sachs plans to cut 3,200 jobs and could announce this as early as this week, a source close to the issue said Sunday, confirming press reports. The American investment bank did not respond to an AFP query seeking comment.

A source close to the issue said there would be a maximum of 3,200 jobs eliminated—less than the figure of 4,000 cited in the press last month—and that it could end up being slightly less.

The larger figure of 4,000 would be about 8 percent of the bank's staff. Goldman Sachs typically trims about one to five percent of headcount each year, targeting underperforming staff. This year's culling will be deeper than usual in light of the uncertain economic outlook and the growth in Goldman's staffing in recent years, a person familiar with the matter told AFP in mid-December.

Goldman's staff stood at 49,100 at the end of October, up nearly 30 percent from the end of 2019 after hiring campaigns and acquisitions. The planned job cuts come as Goldman Sachs and other investment banks have seen a big drop in fees tied to initial public offerings and described a cloudy outlook for merger and acquisition advising in 2023 due to economic uncertainty. — AFP

positions in the national currency. "This net loss precludes a distribution for the 2022 financial year," the bank said. "This affects both dividend payments to the SNB shareholders and the profit distribution to the Confederation and the cantons," it said, referring to the national and regional governments.

While its currency positions took major hits, the bank gained 400 million Swiss francs on its gold holdings. For years the SNB maintained an ultra-loose monetary policy and built up foreign currency holdings to keep the strength of the Swiss franc in check.

But soaring inflation prompted the SNB to start raising rates and selling foreign currency holdings last year. The definitive figures of the SNB's losses will be published on March 6. Last year, the bank distributed six billion Swiss francs to the confederation and cantons. — AFP

Pakistan flood recovery needs investment: UN

GENEVA: The UN chief called Monday for "massive investments" to help Pakistan recover from last year's devastating floods and better resist climate change, as financial pledges poured in. "No country deserves to endure what happened to Pakistan," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told an international conference in Geneva, which is seeking billions of dollars to support recovery from the disaster.

Guterres opened the one-day event appealing to the world to help Pakistan bounce back from floods which submerged a third of the country, killing more than 1,700 people and affecting more than 33 million others. Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif told the conference his country was "racing against time" to deal with towering needs.

"This is the greatest climate disaster in our country's history," agreed Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, decrying a "colossal calamity." According to Pakistan's so-called Resilient Recovery, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Framework, which it will officially present during Monday's conference, it will need \$16.3 billion over the next three years.

Pakistan's government has said the country should be able to cover half the cost, but is urging the international community to fund the rest.

'Life-line'

"I am asking for a sustained international support plan. I am asking for a new lifeline," Sharif said. Countries appeared to heed that call, with hundreds of millions of dollars promised even before the pledging part of the conference had begun.

Speaking via video-link, French President Emmanuel Macron told the conference that his country would contribute 360 million euros (\$384 million). He also said France was prepared to join an international support group being created to help Pakistan implement its plan, and said it would also provide an additional 10 million euros in emergency aid.

European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen said the European Union was contributing

Spain wants power price cap extended to end 2024

MADRID: Spain's government said Monday that it would ask the EU to extend a cap on electricity prices until the end of 2024, while awaiting an overhaul of the bloc's power market rules.

Known as the Iberian exception, the cap resulted from a deal with the EU that allowed Spain and Portugal to decouple the price of electricity from that of gas, enabling both governments to slash costs for consumers. "We want to keep benefitting from this exceptional measure that has been applied in Spain and Portugal and which in principle does not extend beyond May," Ecology Minister Teresa Ribera told Antena 3 television.

"So we intend to ask if the Iberian solution can be extended until European regulations are modified," she added, expressing hope that it would be in place "at least until the end of 2024". Madrid is aware that implementing a new EU pricing regime "may take a long time", she said. The cap came into

500 million euros towards Pakistan's reconstruction, as she announced a fresh injection of 10 million euros in humanitarian assistance. Months after the rains stopped, the situation in Pakistan remains dire.

Eight million people were displaced, millions of acres of agricultural land were ruined and around two million homes destroyed, while nine million more people were pushed to the brink of poverty.

Guterres said Pakistan and its people responded to "this epic tragedy with heroic humanity". "We must match the heroic response of the people of Pakistan with our own efforts and massive investments to strengthen their communities for the future," he told the conference.

Loss and damage

The UN chief said the international community had a particular responsibility to help Pakistan, which has been "doubly victimised by climate chaos and a morally bankrupt global financial system." With representatives of the World Bank and a range of multilateral development banks listening on, he slammed a system that "routinely denies middle-income countries the debt relief and concessional financing needed to invest in resilience against natural disasters."

Monday's event is broader than a traditional pledging conference, as it seeks to set up a long-term international partnership focused not only on recovery, but also on boosting Pakistan's climate resilience. Pakistan, with the world's fifth-largest population, is responsible for less than one percent of global greenhouse gas emissions but is one of the nations most vulnerable to extreme weather caused by global warming.

Guterres said Pakistan's "monsoon on steroids" proved the need for the agreement reached at the UN climate summit in November to create a "loss and damage" fund, which is aimed at covering the climate-related destruction endured by developing nations less responsible for global warming than wealthy polluters.

"If there is any doubt about loss and damage, go to Pakistan," he said. "There is loss. There is damage." Ahead of the conference, Achim Steiner, head of the UN development agency, told AFP that Pakistan would face "extraordinary amounts of misery" if the world did not step up and help.

"Today the waters may have partially receded," he told Monday's conference, "but what remains is a monumental reckoning for the entire world." — AFP

force in June with the promise of reducing household energy bills by up to 20 percent. It is set to remain in place until May 31.

Current EU rules require energy producers to sell electricity on the wholesale markets at a price determined by the most expensive production costs—that of gas-fired power plants.

But with prices soaring as a result of the war in Ukraine, Madrid and Portugal managed to secure EU approval to sever the pricing link to ease the impact of soaring energy prices for consumers. Spain and Portugal have long fought to change the pricing system they say is unsuited to the Iberian Peninsula, which has little interconnection with the rest of the European electricity grid and uses large amounts of renewable power.

France and Italy are also seeking an overhaul of the rules. But discussions have been delayed in recent months as countries like Austria and the Netherlands prefer to rely on free-market competition or increased network interconnections to lower prices. A pricing reform is necessary to "reduce the volatility of electricity prices" and "guarantee the development of renewable energies", said Ribera, adding that Madrid would soon offer new proposals on "modernising the regulation of the electricity market in Europe". — AFP

Business

How farmers can save time, money and the environment

Startups, agro-industry giants exhibit cutting-edge tools at CES

LAS VEGAS: Armed with a smartphone in today's ever more connected world, farmers can remotely monitor the health of their fields, the level of feed in their silos or even the aging of wine in barrels.

Both start-ups and agro-industry giants are exhibiting such cutting-edge tools-tools to help farmers collect and analyze data and improve decision-making-at the huge CES electronics show in Las Vegas, which closed Sunday. Thus, Olivier Lepine, who heads the French start-up Brad, has developed a sensor that can provide real-time information on temperature, moisture and light falling in a farm field.

With such data in hand, farmers can make more accurate decisions on when to irrigate, how to reduce pesticide use, and how to treat their soil-while saving time normally spent traveling from field to field. Farmers, and especially younger ones, "want to have an impact, but they also want to have a quality of life," Lepine said.

South Korean start-up AimbeLab meantime is offering a way to monitor the contents of the huge silos where grains and feed are stored. Farmers often "simply use a hammer to bang onto the silos to check the sound-which is still very inaccurate-to see how much they have left," said Seon Kwon.

AimbeLab's probe not only assesses the amount of grain in a silo but also its condition, allowing both the farmer and his suppliers to better anticipate deliveries and thus reduce trips.

Saving on herbicides

Simple Labs, an American start-up, has developed a sensor capable of measuring the temperature, humidity, pH value and phenolic content-which affects both taste and color-of wine in a barrel or vat, allowing more precise control over aging. And Meropy, a French company, is exhibit-

ing a sort of alien-looking wheel-with long spokes extending on either side-that can roll through a field and use its cameras to photograph crops from all angles, detecting the presence of weeds, pests or disease.

The "two main drivers to adoption of new technologies," said Amit Dhingra, a horticulture professor at Texas A&M University, are "the need, like when a disease appears, and the quest for the most cost-efficient ways." David Friedberg, who heads The Production Board, a California investment firm specializing in agricultural technology, put it simply: Farmers need to produce "more calories per acre with less inputs"-like pesticides-through genomics, digitization and data analysis.

John Deere, the giant farm-equipment maker famous for its green tractors, is also working on this.

The huge, 120-foot (36-meter) booms on its newest sprayer-tractors have cameras every few feet and very fast processors that, even as the vehicle rumbles along at 12 miles per hour (20 kph), can detect weeds and spray only where needed. "Instead of having to spray 100 percent of the field, we spray only about a third of the field and we save on chemicals," said Jorge Heraud, Deere's head of automation.

Drowning in data

The group has also developed an "Operations Center" available on computer or smartphone that allows farmers, thanks to data collected by multiple sensors on tractors, to monitor real-time information on their location, engine performance and so on. They can also review how seed trials are progressing or find where weeds are proliferating.

"The farmer can look at the map and understand what part of the field he needs to manage



LAS VEGAS: An attendee looks through a VR headset while sitting on a Moonbikes Motors SAS electric snowbike during CES Unveiled. —AFP

differently," said Lane Arthur, the product's designer. "He's going to save some money but he's also going to help the environment." As in other industries, said Vonnie Estes, head of innovation for the International Fresh Produce Association (IFPA), "farmers are starting to digitize their work."

Combined with increasing automation, data analysis can help solve problems of labor short-

ages-by knowing where workers are on a farm-of food waste in the supply chain or of greenhouse gas emissions. "It's not seamless," said Estes, noting that broadband connections are not always available, or reliable, in the countryside.

Another challenge, she said, is that a flood of technical data can be overwhelming. "Everyone is talking about 5G," Estes said, but "a lot of farmers would be happy with 3G." —AFP

Doughty union boss defending UK rail strikers

LONDON: For some in the UK he is The Grinch behind rail strikes that stole Christmas, yet others praise him for helping a crisis-hit workforce. Mick Lynch, the general secretary of the RMT rail workers' union, has been a highly visible figure during mass industrial action in recent months.

Facing strikes on a scale not seen since the 1980s, the government has agreed to meet union leaders on Monday in a bid to break the deadlock.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak hinted at a more conciliatory approach in a BBC interview Sunday. "When it comes to pay, we've always said we want to talk about things that are reasonable, that are affordable and responsible for the country," he said. The meeting comes after 40,000 rail workers resumed strike action last week, seeking wage hikes, to reflect soaring inflation, and better working conditions. With his blue eyes and shaved head, often clad in a tweed cap, Lynch, 60, has become the best-known public face of the strikers.

The rail workers' industrial action caused periods of mass train cancellations over the summer and autumn and in the run-up to Christmas. Other groups such as ambulance staff and nurses in the public health service and postal workers have also gone out on strike, eliciting more public sympathy.

"Most of our people haven't had a pay rise for four years" and "there's not many people can put up with a 20 percent cut in their income" in real terms, Lynch told AFP on a picket line outside Euston station in London.

'Straightforward'

His caustic, sometimes sarcastic responses to politicians and journalists have proved popular and are widely shared on social media. A YouTube poll in December found him to be far more popular than Sunak or the ruling Conservative party. Lynch says his role in protests is simply "what needs to be done at the minute". He says people respond well to his "frankness" and "straightforward talking", while insisting: "I don't want to (have a public) profile."

The Brexit supporter and passionate football fan

German industrial output ticks up

FRANKFURT: German industrial production recovered slightly in November, official figures published Monday showed, as fears of an energy crisis eased although prospects for Europe's top economy still looked gloomy. Output rose 0.2 percent on the previous month, according to preliminary data from federal statistics agency Destatis.

Updated figures showed that production

TikTok CEO to meet EU regulators in Brussels

BRUSSELS: TikTok's chief executive will hold talks with top EU officials in Brussels on Tuesday as the West steps up its scrutiny of the Chinese-owned social media giant. Shou Zi Chew will meet EU vice-presidents Margrethe Vestager and Vera Jourova, the bloc's home affairs commissioner Ylva Johansson and justice commissioner Didier Reynders.

On the agenda will be issues like privacy, content regulation and child safety online. TikTok, whose



LONDON: Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers Union (RMT) Secretary-General Mick Lynch talks to members of the media during an RMT union picket outside London Euston station. —AFP

grew up in a family of five children with little money.

After leaving school at 16, he became involved in the trade union movement while training as an electrician. Lynch then moved into construction but was blacklisted for having been a union member.

He later entered the rail sector and worked for Channel train operator Eurostar in the 1990s, gradually rising up the trade union hierarchy. He is married to a nurse in the public health service and they have three children. He took charge of the powerful RMT union in May 2021.

'Union baron'

Lynch has become a scourge of right-wing media, which depicts him as a Marxist agitator hellbent on destroying society. The Daily Mail tabloid nicknamed him Mick "the Grinch" Lynch, after the children's book character who hates Christmas. Business minister Grant Shapps likened him to "1970s union barons", invoking a time when powerful unions brought the

dropped 0.4 percent in October, a steeper fall than initially reported. "Business sentiment has brightened recently, and in the coming months, easing material bottlenecks could provide further support for the industrial economy," the economy ministry said in a statement.

"Nevertheless, the prospects for industrial activity in the first quarter remain subdued." Moscow's invasion of Ukraine and subsequent move to slash crucial gas exports sent inflation soaring in Germany, which relied heavily on Russian energy before the war.

Germany is heading for a recession this year but

parent company ByteDance is Chinese, is under pressure on both sides of the Atlantic, as the West reviews its relations with Beijing on multiple fronts. Some US lawmakers want to stop TikTok operating in the United States and last month Washington banned the video-sharing app from federal government devices, as fears grow about US citizens' data in the hands of China.

ByteDance is already under investigation by the Irish privacy regulator, the DPC, over whether it violated the EU's massive data protection law, the GDPR, in the way it processed children's personal data and over transfers of data to China. The DPC has submitted a draft decision in the investigation on children's data to relevant supervisory authorities. In November, TikTok admitted some staff in China can access the data of European users.

country to a standstill.

Lynch dismisses such attacks as "ridiculous" and "lazy", although he once told left-wing broadsheet The Guardian he wanted "a bit of socialism". He links the cost-of-living crisis gripping the UK to "a lot of reactionary policies that go back to (Margaret) Thatcher", prime minister from 1979 to 1990. With a lack of affordable housing, zero-hours contracts and inflation, "a lot of people feel really insecure", he said, with "fairly middle class" groups such as lawyers joining pickets.

Hence the failure, he says, of government efforts to turn the public against the strikers-even if the rail workers face greater hostility than nurses or paramedics. Ordinary people, seeing the strikers, "think 'Oh, well, they've got an argument. And actually, all of this is happening to me in my job'", he said. He wants to see greater coordination between strikers, particularly to protest against proposed legislation setting minimum levels of work that must be done in various public sectors. —AFP

government relief measures, including an energy price cap, mean the downturn is now expected to be less severe than earlier feared. Despite the slight improvement in November's figures, analysts said it did not indicate a major turnaround.

"Industrial activity in November provided more evidence that the economy did not fall off a cliff in the fourth quarter but was not strong enough to avoid a contraction either," said Carsten Brzeski, head of macro at ING bank.

"The former growth engine of the German economy is stuttering and improvement is not really in sight." —AFP

ByteDance also came under heavy criticism last year after it was revealed it spied on journalists from various media outlets including Bloomberg. The company strenuously denies the Chinese government has any control over TikTok.

The EU is building a formidable legal arsenal against technology companies, passing two major laws to ensure social media platforms follow the bloc's rules. Chew's visit comes after the Digital Services Act (DSA), which imposes stricter online regulation, came into effect in November.

The DSA forces social media platforms, online marketplaces and search engines to react more quickly to remove content deemed in breach of EU regulations. Vestager's spokeswoman said the meeting was part of many with social media platforms and technology companies, and that TikTok requested the talks. —AFP



Tata Consultancy Services head office in Mumbai.

Profits up but outlook 'cautious' at India's TCS

MUMBAI: India's largest software exporter Tata Consultancy Services on Monday reported higher earnings in the December quarter, but missed expectations and warned of a "cautious" business environment in the new year.

TCS is India's second-most-valuable company by market capitalisation and earns more than 80 percent of its revenues from Western markets. It has been at the forefront of an IT boom that has seen India become a back office to the world as firms in North America and Europe subcontract work, taking advantage of a skilled English-speaking workforce.

More recently, technology companies have benefited from a boost in demand for digital services since the pandemic. But fears of an impending recession in key Western markets have hit business sentiment in recent months as software clients turn cautious, the company said.

"Europe is a market where client decision-making is getting impacted by the ongoing geopolitical challenges there and requires close watching," chief executive officer Rajesh Gopinathan told a media briefing. Gopinathan added that North America, which contributes half of its business, remained "vibrant" even as clients are expected to remain "cautious" and watchful of inflation in the early part of the year. Net profit at the IT giant rose to 108.46 billion rupees (\$1.3 billion) in the three months ended December 31, 11 percent higher than in the same period last year.

Sustained demand across business segments pushed revenue from operations 19 percent higher year-on-year to 582.29 billion rupees, crossing \$7 billion for the first time in any quarter. The revenue figures beat expectations but profits missed slightly, media reports said.

The Mumbai-headquartered company said the value of its order book declined to \$7.8 billion at the end of December, compared to \$8.1 billion at the end of September, albeit within the \$7-9 billion guidance range.

The company, one of India's largest private employers, saw its employee headcount fall in the quarter as it continued to slow hiring. Employee attrition-a key metric for the industry-fell to 21.3 percent, compared to 21.5 percent in the previous quarter.

Operating margins rose 0.5 percentage points compared to the September quarter to 24.5 percent, but contracted 0.5 percentage points year-on-year. The company's board approved an interim dividend of 8 rupees per share and a special dividend of 67 rupees per share. Shares in the firm closed 3.35 percent higher in Mumbai ahead of the results announcement. —AFP



This picture shows a customer visiting Kama-Asa cutlery shop at Tokyo's famous Kappabashi kitchenware street. — AFP photos



Customers visiting Kama-Asa cutlery shop at Tokyo's famous Kappabashi kitchenware street.



A worker checking the quality of a knife being polished at a factory of Sumikama Cutlery in Seki, Gifu prefecture.



A worker finishing a knife with a rotating whetstone in the final process at a factory of Sumikama Cutlery in Seki, Gifu prefecture.



This picture shows a variety of knives displayed at a factory of Sumikama Cutlery in Seki, Gifu prefecture.

'CAN'T KEEP UP': PANDEMIC COOKING BOOM SHARPENS JAPAN KNIFE SALES

In a Japanese city once famous for forging samurai swords, craftsmen sharpen and polish kitchen knives, but even at full tilt their small factory can't keep up with global demand. The export value of knives and other bladed tools like scissors hit a record high in Japan last year, partly thanks to a home-cooking boom sparked by the pandemic. Japanese knives are also winning more

sushi or cut precise slices of Wagyu beef, the company uses machines that guarantee accuracy to one-thousandth of a millimeter, then artisans finish the job by hand.

But even at full capacity, "we can't keep up", Sumikama told AFP. "We're seeing demand stronger than pre-pandemic levels in all countries." Seki's renowned blade expertise dates back to

cool water.

When samurai were ordered to abandon their swords in 1876, the industry faltered, but after World War II the city began producing pocket knives for export. Business boomed at first, with the fixed yen-to-dollar rate a boon for mass exports to the United States. But when that policy ended in the 1970s and China began making cheaper products, Japan could no longer compete.

'Truly worldwide'

"There were difficult times," Sumikama said. "Seki's blade-makers decided they needed a new direction." At the time, German products, including knives by Zwilling, dominated the market for high-end knifeware, and luxury Japanese offerings were few and far between. In the 1990s, Sumikama went all in-launching a full line-up of top-of-the-range kitchen knives that cost up to several hundred dollars each.

To emphasize their made-in-Japan pedigree, his company adds a wavy two-tone finish to the metal that evokes the traditional appearance of samurai blades, and a kanji-character logo. Despite their elegant appearance, Sumikama said he faced skepticism from both within and outside the company that his expensive knives would sell. "We were trapped in the idea that Japanese products... would not be accepted by consumers unless they were cheaper than German products," he said.

But the line was a success and the company now sells their luxury knives in more than 50 countries. The export value of kitchen bladed tools hit a record 12 billion yen (\$90 million) in 2021, a 30 percent jump from around nine billion yen the previous year, according to Japan Customs.



Knives used by French chef Olivier Oddos, whose Tokyo restaurant boasted a Michelin star between 2014 and 2021, at his restaurant's kitchen in Tokyo.



A worker testing the sharpness of a knife in the manufacturing process at a factory of Sumikama Cutlery in Seki, Gifu prefecture.

French chef Olivier Oddos, whose Tokyo restaurant boasted a Michelin star between 2014 and 2021, has been a devotee for more than two decades. Japanese kitchen knives now have a "truly worldwide" reputation, he told AFP in his restaurant's small kitchen. "I know a lot of French chefs who have come to Japan, and every time they buy Japanese knives. Sometimes they even buy them for their whole team," he said.

'Essence of the knife'

Oddos says the formidable sharpness of the Japanese blades makes all the difference. "It cuts perfectly. It cuts straight. It's regular," he said, adding it "changes the quality of the cooking". Japanese knives have to be maintained regularly with sharpening stones, but "if you take good care of them, they have a pretty exceptional lifespan", Oddos said. Daisuke Kumazawa owns Kama-Asa, a shop that has operated on Tokyo's famous Kappabashi kitchenware street

for over a century.

He says Japanese knives have exploded in popularity overseas in the last decade along with a growing interest in Japanese food. Chefs want quality blades to do "delicate work", he said. The products are so popular that he opened a Paris branch four years ago. But he has also noted a pandemic rise in interest. "Probably because they were at home more often, more people wanted to take time to cook, and cook better," he said. At Kama-Asa, assistants explain dozens of different knives to a steady stream of Japanese and foreign customers. Kumazawa wants buyers to think about Japanese knives as more than a simple kitchen tool. "We want them to know why they are good—the essence of the knife, the thoughts of the craftspeople behind the knife." — AFP



French chef Olivier Oddos, whose Tokyo restaurant boasted a Michelin star between 2014 and 2021, preparing food at his restaurant's kitchen in Tokyo.

converts among aspiring and professional chefs, who prize their delicate precision, sleek finish and long lifespan.

Katsumi Sumikama, head of Sumikama Cutlery in the central city of Seki, puts the popularity down to a "combination of technology and traditional craftsmanship". To achieve the formidably sharp edge needed to make perfect

the 14th century, when the city became a major producer of swords thanks to its rich natural environment. "The clean water, charcoal and raw materials were ideal for sword-making," Sumikama said. High-quality iron made from irons and was forged into a tough sword by folding red-hot metal multiple times, and molded into a curved shape by plunging it into



Workers making knives at a factory of Sumikama Cutlery in Seki, Gifu prefecture.



A demonstration to test the sharpness of a knife with a tomato at a factory of Sumikama Cutlery in Seki, Gifu prefecture.



A worker finishing a knife at a factory of Sumikama Cutlery in Seki, Gifu prefecture.



French chef Olivier Oddos, whose Tokyo restaurant boasted a Michelin star between 2014 and 2021, cleaning a knife with whetstone at his restaurant's kitchen in Tokyo.



Knives in the middle of the manufacturing process at a factory of Sumikama Cutlery in Seki, Gifu prefecture.

Lifestyle | Features

Top restaurant noma to close at the end of 2024

Copenhagen restaurant noma, one of the world's top eateries with three Michelin stars, said Monday it would close at the end of 2024 to reinvent itself as a food laboratory. "To continue being noma, we must change... Winter 2024 will be the last season of noma as we know it", the restaurant, wrote in a post on Instagram. "We are beginning a new chapter", it said.

"In 2025, our restaurant is transforming into a giant lab—a pioneering test kitchen dedicated to the work of food innovation and the development of new flavours, one that will share the fruits of our efforts more widely than ever before." An abbreviation of the Danish words "nordisk" (Nordic) and "mad" (food), noma—which does not capitalize its name—opened in central Copenhagen in 2003 before shutting down in 2016.



It reopened two years later in a different, leafier neighborhood of the Danish capital. The restaurant has regularly ranked among the top 10 on "The World's 50 Best Restaurants" list, including number two in 2019 and number one for three

years running from 2010 to 2012 as well as 2021.

Chef Rene Redzepi has been hailed for reinventing Nordic cuisine, serving dishes such as edible pinecones, ragout of reindeer, and crispy marigold with

whiskey egg yolk sauce. This is not the first time the establishment has reinvented itself. Forced to close repeatedly for more than six months during the pandemic, it transformed into a burger and wine bar for a month in the summer of 2020. But even though it will become a test kitchen, diners will still be able to snag the occasional meal, with noma promising to organize pop-up restaurants from time to time, in Copenhagen and abroad.

"Serving guests will still be a part of who we are, but being a restaurant will no longer define us", it said. "Much of our time will be spent on exploring new projects and developing many more ideas and products". The restaurant announced last year that it would open for a stint in Kyoto for two months this year, from March 15 to May 20.—AFP

Prince Harry's interviews: Main points

Here are the main points from Prince Harry's first two television interviews to publicise his new autobiography "Spare", aired on Sunday.

On why he wrote the book

Harry told Britain's ITV channel he had endured "38 years... of intentional spin and distortion". He said he had "no intention" of harming anyone in his family by releasing the book. But he said he needed to speak out as "certain members have decided to get in bed with the devil to rehabilitate their image", at his and his family's expense.

On his mother's funeral

Harry recalled walking behind Princess Diana's coffin at her funeral in 1997, when he was aged just 12. "The brides thinking, you know, going down The Mall, the hooves going down the concrete and the occasional... gravel underneath the foot and the walls from the crowd," he recalled. "But otherwise complete silence is something that will stick with me forever."

On Diana's death

Harry said he read the secret government file into Diana's death, redacted by his private secretary of the most graphic descriptions and photographs of the scene. He said he had driven as an adult through the Pont de l'Alma tunnel in Paris, where she died in a car crash. "There's a lot of things that are unexplained," he said.

"But I've been asked before whether I want to open up a, you know, another inquiry. I don't really see the point at this stage." In an interview aired later on America's CBS, Harry said that for "many years" part of him believed his mother had just disappeared and that "she would call us and we would go and join her."

On his relationship with William

Harry spoke of his long-standing sibling rivalry with Prince William, how they used to fight as boys, how William ignored him at school and even tried to get him to shave off his beard before his wedding to Meghan. He accused William of later swallowing the British tabloid media portrayal of Meghan, leading on one occasion to William physically attacking him.

Harry said that, had he not been having therapy after the trauma of his childhood, he would have fought back. Harry told CBS he and William were not currently in touch, nor had he spoken to his father "for quite a while."

On William, Kate and Meghan

Harry said William and Kate were fans of the US legal drama "Suits" in which Meghan starred. But he said he thought they were not expecting him to get involved with someone like Meghan and "there was a lot stereotyping" of her as a biracial, divorced American actress. That caused "a bit of a barrier" to welcoming her to the family, he said. Harry stressed though that William never tried to dissuade him from marrying Meghan.

On claims of royal racism

Harry denied he or Meghan had accused the royal family of racism but said there was unconscious bias at the palace which still needed to be addressed. A recent incident in which a senior courtier, Susan Hussey, repeatedly asked a black British charity worker, Ngozi Fulani, where she was "really from" was an example of that, he said. Harry said in the CBS interview: "Hell, I was probably bigoted before the relationship with Meghan."

On the media

Harry spoke at length about the British tabloid press, accusing it of complicity and collusion with the palace, as well as racism, cronyism and duplicity. He suggested the negative coverage he and Meghan had suffered was a result of his legal claims for alleged phone hacking against three British newspapers. The wider aim of the claims, he said, had been to rein in tabloid excesses.

On what he wants to achieve

Harry said he believed "100 percent" he could reconcile with his family and that could have a "ripple effect across the world". But he conceded that his father King Charles III and his brother were unlikely to read his book or watch the interview.

On the future

Harry said he was now "in such a good headspace" to deal with any tricky conversations with his family. "It's been hard, I'm not going to lie," he said of the last few years, but added: "The reality is I've never been happier." — AFP

'Avatar' on top but 'M3GAN' scares up strong sales in N America

Not surprisingly, James Cameron's "Avatar: The Way of Water" clung to first place on North American movie screens this weekend, pulling in an estimated \$45 million, but an unexpectedly popular horror movie placed a strong second. The "Avatar" sequel has now led the box office for four weeks, industry watcher Exhibitor Relations reported Sunday. The 20th Century sci-fi film has amassed domestic earnings of \$516.8 million and \$1.19 billion internationally, making it the seventh biggest movie in history.



But scary doll thriller "M3GAN" from Universal and Blumhouse—the title stands for Model 3 Generative Android—was also impressive, taking in a strong \$30.2 million in its first weekend, far above analysts' expectations. "M3GAN" tells the story of a creepily humanoid robot designed-but evidently not that well-to be the perfect companion for a young orphan girl (Violet McGraw).

"Horror movies are showing no slowdown at the box office," said David A. Gross of Franchise Entertainment Research. "Young moviegoers want to see them with their friends, on the big screen, for the maximum thrill." "Puss in Boots: The Last Wish," Universal's spin-off of the "Shrek" franchise, placed third. The family-oriented film took in \$13.1 million for the Friday-through-Monday period, bringing its gross in North America to \$87.7 million.

A new heart-warmer from Sony, "A Man Called Otto," took in \$4.2 million in its second week out to place fourth. An adaptation of the novel "A Man Called Ove" by Swedish author Fredrik Backman, "Otto" stars Tom Hanks as a curmudgeonly retiree whose rough edges are gradually softened by encounters with relentlessly upbeat neighbors. And in fifth was Disney's superhero sequel "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever," at \$3.4 million. That brings its domestic total to \$445.4 million. Rounding out the top 10 were:

"Whitney Houston: I Wanna Dance With Somebody" (\$2.4 million)
"The Whale" (\$1.5 million)
"Babylon" (\$1.4 million)
"Violent Night" (\$740,000)
"The Menu" (\$713,000)—AFP

Acclaimed US writer Russell Banks dies at 82

Russell Banks, a prolific American fiction writer whose work charted the interior lives of marginalized people at odds with social forces, has died at age 82. Banks "passed away peacefully last night in his home in upstate (New York)," fellow author Joyce Carol Oates said Sunday on Twitter. "I loved Russell & loved his tremendous talent & magnanimous heart," added Oates, who like Banks taught writing at Princeton University. "All his work is exceptional."



A poster advertising the forthcoming publication of the book 'Spare' by Britain's Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex, is pictured in the window of a book store in London.



A member of the public poses in his front room in Manchester, north-west England, watching a television interview broadcast on ITV, being given by Britain's Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex.

Harry's racism 'olive branch' dismissed in UK as book comes out

Prince Harry's denial that he accused his family of racism was interpreted in the UK press Monday as a bizarre peace offering, but commentators argued the damage had already been done as his unflinching memoir comes out. The midnight release of "Spare" is being accompanied by four television interviews in Britain and the United States, where Harry now lives with wife Meghan.

In the first to air, with Britain's ITV, the Duke of Sussex caused bafflement by insisting he and his mixed-race wife never accused the royal family of racism over comments made about the skin tone of their unborn son. "No I didn't. The British press said that," Harry said, adding that Meghan had also not called the royals "racist". The initial allegation, made in a bombshell interview given by Harry and Meghan in March 2021 to US chat show host Oprah Winfrey, caused a transatlantic uproar.



In this file photo Britain's Prince William, Prince of Wales and Britain's Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex follow the coffin of Queen Elizabeth II, during a procession from Buckingham Palace to the Palace of Westminster, in London. — AFP photos

Harry's elder brother and the heir to King Charles III's throne, Prince William, told reporters at the time that "we are very much not a racist family", but Harry himself stayed silent then. The late Queen Elizabeth II, the mens' grandmother, said



Copies of the Evening Standard newspaper, leading with stories about Britain's Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex's relationship with Britain's Prince William, Prince of Wales, are placed out for distribution, in London on January 5, 2023, ahead of the publication of Britain's Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex's book, Spare.

then that "recollections may vary" about what was said—a line that was repeated by some UK commentators in mocking response to Harry's interviews.

Several described his denial to ITV as an "olive branch", but one that was contradicted by the Oprah interview and coming too late, given the incendiary nature of his other allegations in the book. The British public is not impressed, a YouGov poll indicated Monday, finding that 64 percent have a negative view of Harry and that Meghan also scores dismally. And after days of TV trailers and newspaper leaks, a relatively low figure of 4.1 million people tuned into the ITV interview, according to official ratings data.

'Probably bigoted'

Accusing the press of effectively killing his mother Princess Diana, Harry used another interview with US network CBS to take aim also at his father's second wife, Camilla. The queen consort waged a cunning but "dangerous" campaign to win over the press herself, he said, calling her "the villain". The book includes a claim that William physically attacked Harry as they argued about Meghan.

It also gives an account of how he lost his virginity, an admission of teenaged

drug use and a claim he killed 25 people while serving in Afghanistan with the British military. To ITV, Harry also defended a long-serving royal courtier, Susan Hussey, after she grilled a black British guest at a palace reception about where the woman "really" came from.

But to CBS, the prince also admitted to being "probably bigoted" before he met Meghan, and accused William and his wife Kate of never giving her a chance. The Sun newspaper said Harry had "astonished" viewers with his racism "U-turn", and described the 38-year-old prince as a "troubled, lonely man". "Nothing is Harry's fault and almost everything can be blamed on the press," the Daily Telegraph wrote.

"Some of it made no sense: Meghan and Harry are fans of Lady Hussey and think it was the press that accused her of being racist?"

"The press made up the accusations that the royal family was racist, when the couple were making a very different allegation about 'unconscious bias'?" The left-leaning Guardian wrote: "If she had lived to see this, it wouldn't have killed the queen. But it might have made her a republican." — AFP

Banks's literary agent Ellen Levine said the cause of death was cancer, according to The New York Times. His notable works include the novels "Affliction," "The Sweet Hereafter," "Cloudsplitter" and "Continental Drift"—the latter two of which were Pulitzer Prize finalists. Banks in 1995 won the John Dos Passos Prize for Literature. He also served as president of the International Parliament of Writers.

His protagonists were often blue collar, reflecting his own working-class upbringing as the son of an alcoholic plumber—a man he later said he both hated and adored. His characters struggle with poverty, drug abuse, and class and racial issues. He told a Le Monde interviewer in 2016 that he considered himself lucky as a writer but pessimistic as the citizen of a country where middle-class Americans no longer felt their children would enjoy better

lives. He claimed allegiance to an American literary tradition going back to Mark Twain "whose work is generated by love of people who are scorned and derided," he once told The Guardian. "I have an almost simple-minded affection for them." Politically active, Banks staked out positions against the US military intervention in Iraq, and the intrusions of the post-9/11



In this file photo US author Russell Banks attends the "Etonnant Voyageur" International Book Fair in Port-au-Prince. — AFP

Patriot Act. Two of Banks's works were made into widely acclaimed films. "Affliction," adapted to the cinema by Paul Schrader in 1997 and starring Nick Nolte and Sissy Spacek, was about a small-town cop who investigates a hunting death. And in "The Sweet Hereafter" (1997) Banks employed several voices to tell the wrenching story of a deadly school bus accident that lastingly traumatizes a small town in upstate New York.

In 1998, Banks told the Paris Review that an early inspiration was his discovery in his teens of the American poet Walt Whitman. "It was the first time I had the sense that you could be a writer and it would be a lofty, noble position," he said, "yet still connected to the reality around you." — AFP

Lifestyle | Features

Rapper Young Thug set to go on trial for gang conspiracy

The American rapper Young Thug was set to go on trial Monday on charges that his record label is a front for a crime ring. The influential hip-hop star born Jeffery Williams was one of more than two dozen people charged last spring by a Georgia grand jury, which said those named belong to a branch of the Bloods street gang identified as Young Slime Life, or YSL. The indictment shook the rap world in Atlanta-long a nexus of hip-hop, where Young Thug is considered among the industry's most impactful figures, one who forged contemporary rap's sound.



In this file photo US rapper Young Thug performs during the 61st Annual Grammy Awards in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

Georgia prosecutors hit all the defendants with conspiring to violate the state's criminal racketeering law, which is modeled on the federal RICO Act. In its early days, that statute was used to go after the mob, and more recently to take down the disgraced R&B singer R. Kelly for sex crimes.

Alleged individual crimes supporting the YSL conspiracy charge include murder, assault, carjacking, drug dealing and theft.

Young Thug, who founded the hip-hop and trap label YSL Records in 2016, also faces one count of participation in criminal street gang activity. Defense lawyers insist YSL-also known as Young Stoner Life Records-represents nothing more than a label and vague association of artists.

Controversially, prosecutors are holding up rap lyrics from musicians including Young Thug and Gunna-who was also charged but took a plea deal-and even a bar from a posthumous Juice WRLD single. "I think if you decide to admit your crimes over a beat, I'm going to use it," said Fani Willis, the district attorney of Fulton County, which includes Atlanta.

'Rap on Trial'

It's far from the first time hip-hop lyrics have featured in courtrooms, a practice that's sparked controversy numerous times over the past decades. Erik Nielson, a University of Richmond professor and specialist on rap music as evidence in criminal trials, will likely testify as an expert witness on behalf of the defense. His 2019 book with Andrea L. Dennis, "Rap on Trial: Race, Lyrics, and Guilt in America," holds that courts routinely take slice-of-life lyrics out of context to criminalize and imprison both professional rappers and aspiring artists who are primarily Black and brown.

Out of the 28 people originally named in the YSL indictment, 14 are anticipated to stand in the trial, which could last six to nine months. Six of the original defendants will be tried separately, and eight-including Gunna and Young Thug's brother, Quavious Grier-have taken plea deals. Court documents show the state could potentially call well over 300 witnesses, including prominent rap world figures like Lil Wayne. — AFP



Travelers from a Xiamen Airlines flight arrive at Suvarnabhumi Airport in Bangkok as China removed COVID-19 travel restrictions. — AFP photos



Flowers and face masks as Chinese tourists return to Thailand

Chinese tourists bounded back into Thailand on Monday after Beijing eased travel rules, welcomed at Bangkok's main airport by officials with flowers and gift bags. The Southeast Asian kingdom was heavily reliant on visitors from China pre-pandemic, with Chinese travelers accounting for roughly 30 percent of its tourists. Thailand's economy has been battered by COVID-19 and the current global downturn, with officials now hopeful Beijing's decision to reopen could help its recovery.

The 269 arrivals on a flight from the southeastern Chinese city of Xiamen on Monday were greeted with flowers and gift bags-containing hand sanitizer and face masks. "I'm very excited and almost can't believe it," said university teacher Jiang Shanna, among the first arrivals. The 36-year-old, visiting Thailand for a month to go diving, said it was "very familiar to visit here, and the weather is good too". Jiang, who booked her flight two weeks ago, said she had a last-minute panic about possible travel restrictions.

"We worried the policies would be different from what we expected and we would be stopped from flying," she said, adding that none of the ground staff at Xiamen airport had known the latest Thai policy. China is experiencing a surge in COVID infections, with one official admitting Monday that 90 percent of people in

the Thai civil aviation authority appeared to imply that tourists would be required to present vaccination records. Health Minister Anutin Charnvirakul said Monday that arrivals would not be required to show vaccination records, or undergo tests.

"The decision was decided not only



Travellers from a Xiamen Airlines flight are greeted by Thai health and government officials as they arrive at Suvarnabhumi Airport in Bangkok as China removed COVID-19 travel restrictions.

Henan province, the country's third most populous, were infected.

Unlike many other countries-among them the United States, Canada, Japan and France-Thailand has decided against requiring pre-departure COVID tests for travelers from China. However, confusion reigned over the weekend after mixed messaging from the health ministry and

for economic reasons, but also based on medical information," he told reporters at the airport. Tourism Authority of Thailand governor Yuthasak Supasorn said there had been discussions over entry requirements but the issue had been resolved.—AFP

With sands of varying hues of white, pink, brown and black, lush green forests, and tantalizing clear turquoise waters, the Caribbean is the first choice of many to escape the bustle of life and soak in soothing nature.

However, this collection of over 700 islands has much more to offer than some R&R. The visual feast across the archipelago is layered upon the region's rich history that will have you dancing in the streets to pulsating soca and reggae and licking your fingers from freshly caught fish fried to perfection by street vendors. When it comes to the Caribbean, there is something for everyone. The region's diversity sets it apart from other destinations and despite their historical and cultural similarities, each island offers you a unique experience.

You could soak in a hot spring in the untouched natural beauty of Dominica, marvel at the preserved history of revolutionary Cuba, transform into a costumed goddess at Trinidad Carnival or bask on the white sands of the famous Grace Bay Beach in sleepy Turks and Caicos.

As well as experiences, the islands also differ in cost. Traveling to the Caribbean can be an expensive venture with its all-inclusive resorts, especially during the high season when the region is in great demand. Many islands cater to luxury travel but if you are a budget-conscious traveler, you too can enjoy everything the Caribbean has to offer. It just calls for some careful planning, lots of research and a sense of adventure.

From swimming at public beaches to choosing the right time of year to visit, here are some tips to help you unlock an enriching Caribbean experience for less.

Know when to travel

Avoid traveling to the Caribbean during the high season (November to April) as flight prices and accommodation are more expensive. Prices are lower in both the low and shoulder seasons (May/June and September/October) when hotels may have discounts and added incentives to lure travelers, such as an extra night free or group specials.

Keep in mind that the fall months, September and October, tend to see



How to visit the Caribbean on a budget

heightened activity during the hurricane season that can pose tremendous danger to lives and infrastructure. However, islands such as Trinidad and Tobago and Curaçao lie just outside of the hurricane belt and are good options to visit at this time.

Shop around for flights

There are a number of airlines that service routes between the Caribbean, the United States, Canada and Europe but the most important consideration when it comes to your budget is knowing when to book. If there is a high-demand event like Carnival taking place, flights are more expensive and you need to book your ticket months in advance. Carnivals happen year-round on different islands so do your research on your chosen destination.

Ditch the fancy restaurants

Eating in the Caribbean does not have to be expensive. From street food to fresh fruits and vegetables at markets, cheap choices abound. For less than US\$10, you can enjoy anything from "hot doubles" in Trinidad (a spicy flatbread filled with chickpeas) and delicious fried fish in the popular Oistins area in Barbados, to a plate full of root crops such as cassava, yam and dasheen with fish in Dominica,

and authentic "oil down" in Grenada, a delicious dish made with breadfruit and pigtales.

Attend free weekly fish fry events, popular in Turks and Caicos, where you can enjoy live music and an array of street-food vendors, or take a walking culinary tour in Puerto Rico where you can learn about the country's history while enjoying several meals along the way.

Immerse yourself in the local culture

There are Carnivals taking place in the Caribbean almost every month of the year. If you want to experience the distinct culture of an island, planning a trip during one of those festivals is highly recommended. The summer period - low season in the Caribbean - has a string of back-to-back Carnivals in St Vincent, Grenada, Barbados, Antigua and Barbuda, and St Lucia.

Once on the ground, you can enjoy the activities without having to fork out a lot of money. From the cost-free spectacle of a costumed street parade or a visit to a pan yard to enjoy steel band orchestras rehearsing for their competitions, to attending calypso and cultural shows for under US\$20 per person, there are a wealth of low-cost cultural delights to enjoy.

Use local ferries to island-hop on a budget

Island hopping across the Caribbean is expensive and challenging due to a lack of daily flights. However, you can enjoy a relatively affordable island-hopping vacation if you stick to particular areas. There are ferries and airlines that operate bar-



gain routes around island clusters, mainly those in the northern Caribbean. Express de Iles, for instance, operates a ferry between four islands - St Lucia, Martinique, Guadeloupe and Dominica. A round trip between any two of these islands can cost around US\$100.

Look around for special offers on accommodation

Just like airfares, accommodation prices don't go down the closer you get to your travel date in high season. Smaller hotels and guesthouses often have rate cards that don't change based on demand, but large hotels and resorts do run all manner of specials that can mean big savings for those willing to commit many months before they plan to travel. Here again, the time you spend shopping online booking sites will pay off in savings. Look for deals that include free meals, excursions, room upgrades and more. Large resorts and online booking sites may also offer package deals that include

airfare to the island. These can offer great savings overall, but not always. Check the cost of flying separately so you can smartly evaluate package deals.

Look for alternative transportation

There aren't a lot of islands with ride-shares so when it comes to transportation, moving around could be expensive if you depend on private taxis. Renting a car is an option but the price of gas can be prohibitive. Cut costs by using public transportation but always put your safety first and don't wear expensive or flashy jewelry and carry minimum cash.

If you love cycling, there are islands such as Curacao, Jamaica and Guadeloupe where you can rent bikes or go on cycling tours for under US\$70. In Puerto Rico's capital, San Juan, you can rent an electric scooter and tour the city for around US\$20. Walking is also a great way to get to know a new city - take a stroll around downtown Havana and soak up its history.

Make the most of the great outdoors

In the Caribbean, you are spoilt for choice when it comes to nature's bounty. While there are some beaches and spaces that you have to pay to access,

there are many others that are free.

Many islands have public beaches that cost nothing to access and you don't even need to spend money on a lounge chair - just spread your blanket on the sand and soak up the sun. If you love hiking, look for easy trails that won't require a guide or look for cheap group tours that will take you to some scenic spots.

Daily costs

- Hostel room: \$30-70
- Basic room for two: \$60-200 or more
- Self-catering apartment: \$100-350 or more
- Public transport ticket: \$1-2
- Coffee or tea: \$1-2
- Cheeseburger: \$5-12
- Dinner for two: \$40-120 or more
- Beach lounge rental: \$10

— www.lonelyplanet.com



Sports



Zain transported over 300 fans via 10 buses.



Families and children were keen to join Zain's trip.



Fantastic turnout by fans to support the national team.

Zain's first trip to 'Khaleeji Zain 25' tourney a success

Hundreds of fans joined Zain's initiative to support national team

KUWAIT: Zain, Kuwait's leading digital service provider, successfully concluded its first trip to transport Kuwait fans to the Arab Gulf Cup, now known as "Khaleeji Zain 25", to support and cheer the Kuwait National Football Team in the competition held in Basra, Iraq with Zain Group as the title sponsor. Zain sent 10 buses and transported over 300 fans to cheer the National Team at their first group stage game against Qatar. The company covered the trip's expenses, including transportation, match tickets, and

more, and the initiative witnessed fantastic feedback and great turnout from fans.

Zain's first trip saw fans from all age groups showing great interest and huge enthusiasm to be on the stands to support the National Team during this tournament, which is much cherished among Kuwaitis given that Kuwait is the nation with the most titles in the competition's history. Zain values the role of the KFA and the Ministry of Interior in facilitating the logistics of the trips.

The initiative came under Zain's strategic

partnership with the Kuwait Football Association (KFA), and as part of its keenness to reflect its national role as a leading private sector company that supports the local sports sector and contributes to elevating Kuwaiti sports and athletes.

Zain Group recently announced its title sponsorship of the Arab Gulf Cup silver jubilee edition, now called "Khaleeji Zain 25". The company is a passionate supporter of youth and sports tournaments across the region, and the reintro-

duction of international football activities to Iraq re-establishes the country's presence on the regional football map once more.

"Khaleeji Zain 25" is organized and supervised by the Arab Gulf Cup Football Federation in Basra, with live telecast and streaming available on various TV and online media channels. Following the successful hosting of the World Cup in the region, "Khaleeji Zain 25" will bring together fans, officials and the best Gulf players on Iraqi soil in Basra.

Australian Open no-show fuels fears for Osaka

NEW YORK: Naomi Osaka has not played a tennis match since September and her withdrawal from next week's Australian Open has raised concerns that the former world number one may never appear on court again. Osaka's social media accounts have stayed silent since Tennis Australia tweeted on Sunday that the two-time Melbourne champion would miss the first Grand Slam of the year, giving no reason for her absence.

Osaka's posts over the past few months have shown her travelling in Europe with her boyfriend, the rapper Cordae, and announcing that her sports management agency had signed up world number two Ons Jabeur. But there has been little evidence of the Japanese player spending time practicing on court, fuelling speculation that the four-time Grand Slam champion's tennis career could be over at the age of 25.

Tennis writer Ben Rothenberg, who has authored a biography of Osaka due out later this year, believes she has already taken a "meaningful step back" from the sport and is deliberately keeping quiet. "I think she might want to be opaque about it because she doesn't want to put a label on it necessarily," he told AFP. "I don't think she would use the word 'retiring', but if she was stepping away from the sport for a while - and it could be for any length of time - I don't know that she would want to speak that out loud. I think she would sense that that would raise a lot of bells and whistles."

Osaka has previously talked about struggling with her mental health and revealed that she suffered depression. She spent all of 2022 outside the top 10, enduring first-round defeats at both the French and US Opens and withdrawing from Wimbledon with an Achilles' injury. She also split from long-time coach Wim Fissette last summer, replacing him with her father Leonard Francois.

Her last appearance was at the Pan Pacific Open in Tokyo in September, where the home favorite withdrew before her second-round match, complaining of abdominal pain. She told reporters at that tournament that she had gone through "more down than up" in 2022 and that she had "learned a lot" about herself. She is now ranked 47 in the world, having hit the summit for the first time in 2019. —AFP



Naomi Osaka

Kuwait coach: We will do whatever necessary to win

BASRA: Kuwait national football team coach Rui Bento said on Monday that the team will do whatever necessary to win against the UAE on Tuesday in the second round of the 25th Arabian Gulf Cup (Khaleeji Zain 25). "Even though we lack time, we are building a team for the future with youth and amateurs, as the main target in mind is to gain experience, but that does not mean we will not perform," said Bento in a press conference held in Basra.

On his part, Kuwait player Faisal Zayed said the UAE has a good team with professional players, but the Kuwaiti team aims to achieve a positive result in the match. The Kuwaiti national football team lost the first round of the tournament against Qatar and seeks to improve its situation in Group B alongside the UAE and Bahrain. —KUNA



BASRA: Kuwait national football team coach and players at the press conference. —KUNA

Nets edge Heat but Durant limps out, 76ers cruise

LOS ANGELES: The Brooklyn Nets eked out a 102-101 NBA victory over the Miami Heat on Sunday on Royce O'Neale's game-winner but saw superstar Kevin Durant limp out with a knee injury in the third quarter. Durant, averaging 30 points per game for the surging Nets, was hurt with little more than a minute remaining in the third when Australian teammate Ben Simmons rose to block a shot by Jimmy Butler, who fell back into Durant.

Durant sat on the floor for several moments, tried to rejoin the contest and then departed for the locker room. "He'll get evaluated tomorrow and then hopefully I'll have more info," Nets coach Jacque Vaughn said. "Most likely it will include imaging, just to make sure we're good." Immediately after the game Vaughn said he hadn't yet discussed the injury with Durant, who was congratulating teammates as they came off the court.

Kyrie Irving led the Nets with 20 points. Durant finished with 17 in 30 minutes on the court and O'Neale came through after the Heat led by nine with 9:24 to play. Miami were up 101-100 after a pair of baskets from Butler but when Irving missed a three-pointer with 5.5 seconds left O'Neale got the rebound and delivered what proved to be the game-winner.

Butler led Miami with 26 points but missed a layup at the buzzer. Despite the concerns over Durant, Vaughn was happy with what he saw from the Nets, who improved to 27-13, one game behind the Boston Celtics atop the East. "You've got to give our guys credit for staying with it," he said. "I think we were down eight or nine - to finish the game and stay together, pretty impressive."

Durant's former Nets teammate James Harden delivered a 20-point triple-double to help carry the short-handed Philadelphia 76ers to a convincing 123-111 victory over the Pistons in Detroit. Harden added 11 rebounds and 11 assists in his second triple-double of the season and had plenty of support despite the continued absence of star center Joel



MIAMI: Royce O'Neal of the Brooklyn Nets drives to the basket during the game against the Miami Heat on Jan 8, 2023 at FTX Arena. —AFP

Embiid and P J Tucker.

Embiid missed his third straight game with a sore left foot while Tucker was out with a sinus infection. "He was terrific," Sixers coach Doc Rivers said of Harden but noted it was a "good team performance". Montrezl Harrell scored a season-high 20 points and combined seamlessly with Harden to

keep the Sixers offense clicking. Tyrese Maxey scored 23 points, and the 76ers reserves scored 48 points as Philadelphia pushed their lead to 23 points midway through the fourth quarter. Harden reached a career milestone during the game, becoming the 27th NBA player to score 24,000 career points. —AFP

Rahm powers to Kapalua victory as Morikawa collapses

LOS ANGELES: Jon Rahm fired nine birdies and an eagle in a 10-under par 63 on Sunday to surge past faltering Collin Morikawa and win the US PGA Tour Tournament of Champions by two strokes. Rahm trailed third-round leader Morikawa by nine after a bogey at the first hole, and two-time major winner Morikawa had pushed his six-shot overnight lead to seven after his third birdie of the day at the sixth.

Spain's Rahm, however, poured it on and Morikawa cracked, Rahm capturing his eighth US PGA Tour title with a 24-under par total of 265 on the par-73 Plantation Course at Kapalua in Hawaii. Morikawa, whose bogeys at the 14th, 15th and 16th were his first of the week, carded a one-under par 72 for 25-under 267. Rahm said he'd never have dreamed after his opening bogey he'd walk off the 72nd green with a three-shot lead.

"At that point it's not like winning is really

that in mind," he said. "You've just got to get to work and start making birdies, and that's what I did." He drained a 12-footer for birdie at the second, then birdied the fourth, fifth and sixth before punctuating his outward run with a birdie at the ninth. "That stretch of four through six, birdying nine, allowed me to get into a rhythm," Rahm said.

But the real push came later, when he picked up five strokes in four holes with birdies at the 12th, 13th and 14th and an eagle at the par-five 15th. The run started with a two-foot birdie at 12. After a 13-footer at 13 he tapped in at 14. After he rolled in an 11-foot eagle putt at 15 to get within one stroke of Morikawa, "that's when I started thinking about it," Rahm said. He couldn't get a 10-foot birdie attempt to drop at 16, and he got a scare when he missed the green at 17 but got up and down for par before closing with a birdie at the par-five 18th.

Morikawa couldn't respond. "Sadness," said the 25-year-old American, who was looking for his first victory since he won his second major title at the 2021 British Open at Royal St George's. "It sucks," he said. "You work so hard and you give yourself opportunities and just bad timing on bad shots and it kind of added up really quickly."



LAHAINA, Hawaii: Jon Rahm of Spain celebrates with the trophy after winning the Sentry Tournament of Champions at Plantation Course at Kapalua Golf Club on Jan 8, 2023. —AFP

Morikawa was in a greenside bunker at the 14th, made a poor shot out and was unable to make the 10-footer to save par. He needed four shots to reach the green at the par-five 15th and missed an eight-footer and made bogey from the fairway at 16. Morikawa said the result was more painful than his 2021 Hero World Challenge finish, where he took a five-shot lead into the final round with a chance to claim the number one ranking but ended up tied for fifth. —AFP

Today's matches

ARABIAN GULF CUP

United Arab Emirates v Kuwait 16:15

Dubai Sports 1

AD SPORTS 1 HD

Qatar v Bahrain 19:15

Dubai Sports 1

AD SPORTS 1 HD

ENGLISH LEAGUE CUP

Newcastle United v Leicester City 23:00

beIN Sports HD 1 English

beIN Sports 1 HD Premium

Manchester United v Charlton Athletic FC 23:00

beIN Sports 2 HD Premium

Sports

Man City crush Chelsea in FA Cup, Villa upset by Stevenage

LONDON: Manchester City piled pressure on Chelsea boss Graham Potter as Riyad Mahrez inspired a 4-0 rout in the FA Cup third round, while Aston Villa crashed to a stunning 2-1 defeat against fourth tier Stevenage on Sunday. After Premier League sides Newcastle, Nottingham Forest and Bournemouth were humiliated by lower-league opposition on Saturday, Villa were rocked by Stevenage's two-goal blast in the final minutes.

Premier League champions City rarely suffer such embarrassment and they made the strongest possible start by dismissing abject Chelsea with contemptuous ease at the Etihad Stadium. Pep Guardiola made seven changes from the City side that won 1-0 at Chelsea in the Premier League on Thursday. But City were still far too dynamic for struggling Chelsea as Mahrez struck with a brilliant free-kick and a late penalty, with Julian Alvarez and Phil Foden also scoring.

In the fourth round, City will host Premier League leaders Arsenal or third-tier Oxford, who meet on Monday. City had already eliminated Chelsea from the League Cup this season and the west London club's first FA Cup third-round exit since 1998 was another blow to a season in danger of spiraling out of control.

While it is probably too early for Potter to be fearing the sack, just four months after he arrived from Brighton to replace the axed Thomas Tuchel, the 47-year-old might be having a few sleepless nights as he wrestles with his team's woeful form. Chelsea have won just three of their last 12 games in all competitions and sit 10th in the Premier League, 10 points adrift of the top four place the club's American owners would surely have expected Potter to deliver.

"The results in a small space of time are not positive. You can make excuses and look for reasons or say it isn't good enough. Both of those answers are

correct," Potter said. "We have to keep improving and stick together because clearly we are suffering as a football club and it's not nice at all." Potter will hardly have been comforted by the sound of Chelsea fans chanting Tuchel's name as they pine for the German who led them to Champions league glory in 2021.

"I would tell (Chelsea co-owner) Todd Boehly to give Graham Potter time. All coaches need time. At Barca, I didn't need two seasons, but that's because I had Messi," Guardiola said. Given Chelsea's predicament it was curious that Potter elected to make six changes, with Bashir Humphreys given his debut and fellow teenager Lewis Hall also starting. Mahrez had scored the winner against Chelsea on Thursday and this time he bent a superb free-kick into the top corner in the 23rd minute.

Woeful Chelsea

City's second goal was a gift from Chelsea forward Kai Havertz, who punched the ball as he challenged Aymeric Laporte at a corner, with Alvarez converting the 30th minute penalty. Chelsea were being torn apart and Foden hit the third goal in the 38th minute, the England forward finishing off Kyle Walker's cross. Beaten in the last three FA Cup finals, Chelsea's misery was compounded in the 85th minute as Mahrez scored from the spot after Kalidou Koulibaly fouled Foden.

Villa had eight changes against Stevenage and the team currently second in League Two took full advantage. Morgan Sanson put Villa ahead in the 33rd minute but Jamie Reid equalized with an 88th minute penalty after Leander Dendoncker was sent off for fouling Dean Campbell. And Campbell sparked wild Stevenage celebrations in the 90th minute when he smashed home from a short corner.



BIRMINGHAM: Stevenage's English striker Danny Rose vies with Aston Villa's Swedish defender Ludwig Augustinsson at Villa Park on Jan 8, 2023. —AFP

"It is really special. The chairman just said to me it's the greatest day in his life and he's been with the club for over 20 years," said Stevenage boss Steve Evans, whose side face Championship team Stoke in the fourth round. Villa boss Unai Emery added: "I'm really

sorry for the supporters. Today was really so disappointing." Leeds escaped with a dramatic 2-2 draw at Cardiff thanks to teenager Sonny Perkins' stoppage-time equalizer after the second tier side raced into a two-goal lead. —AFP

Napoli beat Sampdoria to move 7 clear

MILAN: Napoli extended their lead at the top of Serie A to moved seven points on Sunday after they won 2-0 at grieving Sampdoria and AC Milan threw away a two-goal lead to draw 2-2 with Roma. Victor Osimhen poked Napoli ahead in the 19th minute before Eljif Elmas sealed the points with a perfectly-placed penalty with eight minutes remaining at a soaking Stadio Luigi Ferraris in Genoa.

The win means Napoli lead both second-placed Juventus, winners over Udinese on Saturday who travel to Naples on Friday, and Milan by the same margin after seeing their advantage cut to five on Wednesday. "Big game, big team, we have a great squad and the most important thing is to win," said Osimhen. "Now we go back, relax and then start training to prepare for the game with Juventus."

After netting his league-leading 10th goal of the season Osimhen was also the victim of a brutal foul from Tomas Rincon, who was sent off in the 38th minute for chopping the 24-year-old down as he charged towards goal. Luciano Spalletti's side bounced back from their defeat at Inter Milan on Wednesday and dampened an emotional evening for Sampdoria whose fans said goodbye to two of their most popular former players.

Gianluca Vialli's death to pancreatic cancer on Friday at the age of 58 was particularly painful for supporters as the former Italy forward is one of



GENOA: Napoli's Italian forward Matteo Politano attempts to shoot on target against Sampdoria on Jan 8, 2023 at the Luigi-Ferraris stadium. —AFP

Sampdoria's all-time greats and a key figure in their only league title triumph in 1991. Sinisa Mihajlovic, who played for Sampdoria in the mid-1990s and later managed the club, succumbed to leukemia last month and Sunday's match was their first home fixture since he passed away.

The Samp players warmed up for the match in shirts bearing Vialli's number nine, while fans in the stands chanted both players' names as a wreath was laid in their honor by visibly moved coach Dejan Stankovic. A giant banner hung in the stands for Vialli read "Striker. Champion. Legend." Another said "Thanks to you we know that nothing is impossible". However Serie A survival is beginning to look increasingly difficult as Sampdoria are 18th, six points behind Spezia who sit just outside the relegation zone and drew 0-0 with Lecce in similarly wet conditions. —AFP

Sports Minister Amelie Oudea-Castera waded in too, demanding an apology.

The 81-year-old head of the FFF duly did apologize on Monday, Le Graet saying: "I would like to apologize for these remarks, which absolutely do not reflect my views, nor my consideration for the player he was and the coach he has become. I gave an interview to RMC that I should not have given because they were looking for controversy by opposing Didier and Zinedine Zidane, two greats of French football. I admit that I made some clumsy remarks which created a misunderstanding."

Deschamps' contract expired after the World Cup in Qatar, where reigning champions France lost to Argentina in a penalty shoot-out after a thrilling final on Dec 18. However, Deschamps - who took over in 2012 - on Saturday signed a new deal to stay in the job until the 2026 World Cup. —AFP



Noel Le Graet

Dembele earns Barca advantage in tense triumph

MADRID: Ousmane Dembele's strike sent Barcelona three points clear at the top of La Liga with a tense 1-0 win over Atletico Madrid on Sunday. Earlier David Silva produced a masterclass to help third place Real Sociedad beat Almeria 2-0, while Real Betis moved fourth with an entertaining 2-1 win at Rayo Vallecano. Struggling Sevilla earned a crucial 2-1 win over Getafe to climb out of the relegation zone on goal difference.

Capitalizing on champions Real Madrid's defeat by Villarreal, Barcelona set out to make a statement victory over Atletico at the Metropolitano. Shorn of suspended top scorer Robert Lewandowski, Xavi selected Ansu Fati up front in his place, but it was Dembele who made the difference, finishing a slick move in the 22nd minute. Atletico ramped up the pressure, with the superb Ronald Araujo clearing off the line from Antoine Griezmann at the death, but Diego Simeone's side could not find an equalizer.

Both teams finished with 10 men after Ferran Torres and Stefan Savic were sent off for brawling with each other on the floor as tempers soured. "It's a win, but it's not just three points. It gives us morale and confidence for what's left of the league," Xavi told reporters. "We are capable of winning at place as tough as this, suffering, being a family. We knew how to suffer and we take three golden points. It's a real statement that we are candidates to win this league."

Barcelona have conceded just six goals in their first 16 La Liga matches but Griezmann twice came close to finding the equalizer Atletico craved. The Catalans only mustered two shots on target and Atletico goalkeeper Jan Oblak said his side deserved more. "We had a good game, apart from the first 25 minutes," Oblak told DAZN. "We pressed well, we had chances, but lacked a bit of luck to score. We started badly, the first 25 minutes we had little confidence, and later we woke up, but at 1-0 down it's already harder."

Decisive Dembele

Defeat means Atletico languish in fifth, 14 points behind leaders Barcelona. "It's not a worrying situation it is one that we have to deal with," Simeone told reporters. "The reality is that we lost. It's true the team had the merit to take away another result, that didn't happen because we didn't put it away. What happens in the boxes is crucial."

Youngster Fati had an early effort brilliantly



MADRID: Barcelona's French forward Ousmane Dembele is challenged by Atletico Madrid's Mozambican defender Reinildo Mandava and Uruguayan defender Jose Gimenez at the Wanda Metropolitano stadium on Jan 8, 2023. —AFP

blocked by the sprawling Jose Gimenez, as Barcelona dominated the opening exchanges. Xavi said on Saturday Atletico barely have any gaps in their defense but Pedri uncovered one to create the opening goal. The midfielder capitalized on space in front of the box, before feeding Gavi, who teed up Dembele to clinically slot home.

Marcos Llorente had Atletico's first decent opportunity after half an hour when Griezmann scooped a ball delicately over the defense to set him in, but Araujo deflected his effort wide. The hosts wrestled back control and Marc-Andre ter Stegen made a superb save at full stretch to deny the pink-haired Griezmann, becoming increasingly influential against his former side.

Atletico began the second half in determined fashion, pushing Barca deeper and deeper. Only Griezmann's compatriot Dembele offered the leaders an outlet on the break and he had a drive deflected into the side-netting. Xavi brought on Franck Kessie for De Jong and it helped steady the ship, with Barcelona managing some stretches of possession which frustrated the home fans.

Red cards for Torres and Savic reignited the game in stoppage time and Griezmann might have snatched a point but for Araujo's crucial clearance on the line. Real Sociedad's veteran Spanish playmaker Silva, 37, capitalized on defensive confusion in Almeria's box to nip in and fire home the opener just after half-time. Alexander Sorloth drilled home his sixth league goal of the season five minutes later to extend La Real's lead.

Without the suspended Brais Mendez, Imanol Alguacil's side were not at their best but still managed to inflict promoted side Almeria's first home defeat since September, leaving them 14th. The victory leaves Alguacil's side in high spirits ahead of next weekend's Basque derby clash with Athletic Bilbao. —AFP

FFF boss under fire for 'clumsy' Zidane comments

PARIS: French Football Federation president Noel Le Graet came under fire on Monday as he was forced to apologize for what he dubbed his own "clumsy remarks" about Zinedine Zidane's potential interest in coaching the France national team. Le Graet had quipped dismissively in an interview to French radio station RMC on Sunday that he "wouldn't even have taken his call on the phone" when asked whether Zidane had rung him to express an interest in taking over as coach from Didier Deschamps.

That drew criticism from France and Paris Saint-Germain star Kylian Mbappe, who said Le Graet had shown "a lack of respect" with his comments. Real Madrid, where Zidane enjoyed decorated spells as a player and a coach, also hit out at Le Graet, while French

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, DAWOOD MYDEEN JAKIR HUSSAIN holder of Passport No. L1169867 do hereby change my name to JAHIR HUSSAIN (as Given name) DAWOOD MYDEEN (as Surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name JAHIR HUSSAIN DAWOOD MYDEEN and I also undertake to carry out

this name change in all my documents. (C#2828)

I, SAIFUDDIN holder of Passport No. Z4825362 do hereby change my name to SAIFUDDIN FAKHARUDDIN (as Given name) and NASIR (as Surname). I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. (C#2829) — 10-01-2023

I, MIDHAT FATEMA, holder of Passport No. V3760728, do hereby change my name to MIDHAT FATEMA (as Given name) ZIAEE (as Surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name MIDHAT FATEMA ZIAEE and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. (C#2826)

I, Sreeram (current name as in Passport), holder of Indian Passport No. Z2815357, having permanent address Kerala, India, Pin Code: 682017, and residing in Kuwait at present, do hereby declare that I change my name to Sreeram (Given name) Sreekumar Pillai (Surname) for all purposes, and that I undertake to effect the change in all my official documents. (C#2827) — 09-01-2023

Automated enquiry about the Civild card is 1889988

Ronaldo 'to earn €400m' in Saudi

Like Cosmos signing Pele, says coach • Messi and Ronaldo to meet in friendly

NICOSIA: Footballer Cristiano Ronaldo will earn 200 million euros to promote Saudi Arabia's joint 2030 World Cup bid in addition to his club salary, a source close to his club told AFP Monday. The Portuguese superstar, 37, unveiled to thousands of Al Nassr fans in Riyadh last week, is by far the most famous player to sign for a club in Saudi or any other Gulf country. The oil-rich kingdom, along with Egypt and Greece, is considering a bid to host world football's 2030 showpiece tournament, and Ronaldo's ambassadorial role will bring his reported earnings in the country to over 400 million euros (\$428 million).

"Ronaldo will be paid more than 200 million euros (\$214 million) for the deal," said the source, with knowledge of the deal but who requested anonymity. "He will be an ambassador for the Saudi World Cup 2030 bid for another 200 million." The arrival of the former Manchester United, Real Madrid and Juventus player came just weeks after neighboring Qatar became the first Arab nation to host the World Cup.

The five-time Ballon d'Or winner, who has also won the Champions League five times and holds that tournament's goal-scoring record, is expected to make his Al Nassr debut on Jan 22. The deal has been financed by the conservative kingdom's sovereign wealth fund, the Public Investment Fund (PIF), the source added. "Al Nassr and the other Saudi clubs don't have this huge fund for such a big deal. It's PIF that secured the payment," the source said.

Recently the PIF has undertaken other high-profile sporting ventures, including the purchase of a majority stake in English Premier League club Newcastle United. It has also bankrolled the lucrative LIV Golf League, which has split the elite golf world by luring away top stars from the US PGA Tour and DP World Tour. Al Nassr has nine Saudi league titles but have never won the Asian Champions League, unlike four-time winners Al Hilal and Al Ittihad, who have lifted the trophy twice.

Like 'Pele'

Meanwhile, Ronaldo's new club coach Rudi Garcia on Sunday compared the Portuguese star's

arrival at Al-Nassr in Saudi Arabia to Pele's signing with the New York Cosmos in 1975. "It's a bit like Pele's arrival" in what was then the North American Soccer League, Garcia told AFP. "Especially for the development of football, sport and culture in Saudi Arabia."

At 34, Pele came out of partial retirement to spark an explosion of interest in football in the United States. Ronaldo, at 37, is coming out of a bitter divorce with Manchester United. "It's great. Great for us, for Al-Nassr. Great for Saudi Arabia," said Frenchman Garcia. "Cristiano Ronaldo is more than a player. He is one of the best players in the world."

Garcia was speaking on a visit to the Riyadh bivouac of the Dakar Rally which is being held in Saudi Arabia. "For the development of Saudi Arabia and the Middle East, it is very, very important," said Garcia. "If today the Dakar is here, it brings home that in sports and cultural development a country can do a lot. It's amazing how much it's put a spotlight on our club. Now everyone knows where our club is around the world," said Garcia of Ronaldo's off-field impact, particularly on social media. "We must have gone from 800,000 (followers) to 10 million in a few hours, a few days, because of Cristiano's arrival."

Garcia said he was delighted with his new star. "The greatest champions are the easiest to manage," he said. "He blended in with the squad. We saw him joking and laughing with pleasure with his new teammates. He was with us for the last game, even if he couldn't play. He was in the locker room, riding his bike."

'Smile again'

Garcia said the club was respecting Ronaldo's suspension for an incident with a fan at the end of his time in the Premier League and would not pick him for their next match, a top-of-the-table encounter with Al-Shabab. Instead, he said Ronaldo's first Saudi appearance "will not be in a Al-Nassr jersey" but in a joint Al-Hilal and Al-Nassr team due to face Qatari-owned Paris Saint-Germain, and potentially Lionel Messi, in an exhibi-



RIYADH: French rally driver Sebastien Loeb is presented with a Cristiano Ronaldo Al Nassr Jersey by the Saudi football club's French head coach Rudi Garcia at the bivouac in the Saudi capital on Jan 8, 2023. — AFP

tion game scheduled for Jan 19.

"As coach of Al-Nassr, I cannot be happy with this match," said Garcia, a former manager of two of PSG's great rivals Marseille and Lyon. "We have a league game three days later." Garcia said his first objective was to make Ronaldo happy. "The only thing I wish for Ronaldo is that he finds the pleasure of playing and smiles again," said Garcia. "These last months between Manchester, the national team and then at the private level he has not had any easy moments. If he finds the pleasure of playing it will be a goal already achieved."

Qatar-owned PSG will travel to Doha on Jan 17 before moving on to the Saudi capital for the match at the King Fahd Stadium, which will see Messi and Ronaldo renew their rivalry. Messi returned to

training with PSG last week after being given a fortnight off following Argentina's World Cup triumph in Qatar in December.

Ronaldo and Messi have dominated the sport over the last 15 years, winning the Ballon d'Or 12 times between them. Their rivalry grew during nine years in which they came up against each other in Spain, when Messi was starring for Barcelona and Ronaldo for Real Madrid. Riyadh clubs Al Hilal and Al Nassr are Saudi Arabia's two most successful sides. PSG have made a habit of travelling to Qatar in winter since the Gulf state bought the club in 2011. However, this trip comes despite the Ligue 1 leaders having a French Cup tie scheduled for the weekend of Jan 21 and 22 against lower-league opponents yet to be determined. — AFP



ORCHARD PARK, New York: Hunter Henry of the New England Patriots attempts to catch a pass while defended by Jordan Poyer and Matt Milano of the Buffalo Bills at Highmark Stadium on Jan 8, 2023. — AFP

Bills clinch second AFC seed, Eagles take NFC top berth

NEW YORK: Buffalo's Nyheim Hines returned kickoffs 96 and 101 yards for touchdowns on Sunday and the Bills captured a number-two NFL playoff seeding with an emotional 35-23 victory over New England, eliminating the Patriots from playoff contention. The Philadelphia Eagles took the number one seed in the NFC after a 22-16 win over the New York Giants on the final day of the regular season.

But the Green Bay Packers missed out on the playoffs after losing at home to the Detroit Lions 20-16, allowing the Seattle Seahawks to take the last available spot in the NFC. In their first game since Buffalo defender Damar Hamlin suffered a cardiac arrest and was revived on the field last Monday, the Bills set up a home playoff game next week against Miami.

The Dolphins ground out an 11-6 win over the New York Jets to make the post-season for the first time in six years. The Bills finish behind AFC top seed Kansas City and if those teams should meet in the conference final, it would be at a neutral site since last Monday's Cincinnati-Buffalo game will not be completed. It was an emotional return to NFL competition for the Bills.

Hundreds of supportive signs for Hamlin and his recovery were on display as a crowd of more than 71,000 watched the Bills play host to New England. Hines returned the opening kickoff 96 yards to deliver an electric start. New England's Jakobi Meyers caught a 2-yard touchdown pass from Mac Jones in response. Josh Allen capped a 75-yard drive with a 4-yard touchdown toss to Dawson Knox to give Buffalo another lead but again

New England equalized on a 2-yard Jones touchdown pass to DeVante Parker, making it 14-14 at halftime.

Nick Folk's 24-yard field goal after a Devin McCarty fumble recovery gave the Patriots their first lead early in the third quarter. But Hines responded with a 101-yard kickoff return in another shocker - there had been only four kickoff return touchdowns in the NFL all season - and Buffalo reclaimed the lead. Allen added a 42-yard touchdown pass to John Brown for a 28-17 Bills lead but Jones and Parker combined on a 26-yard touchdown pass to lift New England within 28-23 but a two-point conversion attempt failed.

Jones was 17-for-17 on passes in New England's three touchdown drives. Allen answered with a 49-yard touchdown pass to Stefan Diggs to create the final margin. "I can't remember a play that touched me like that in my life," Allen said when asked about the remarkable start to the game.

Miami's Jason Sanders kicked his third field goal of the game, a 50-yarder, with 18 seconds remaining to give the Dolphins an 11-6 victory over the visiting New York Jets. That combined with New England's loss gave Miami the last AFC playoff berth for the first time since 2016. The Dolphins were again without first choice quarterback Tua Tagovailoa and with back-up Teddy Bridgewater suffering with a dislocated finger, third choice Skylar Thompson started and did a solid job, throwing for 152 yards in the low-scoring game. "Nobody was telling me that I had to be a hero," said Thompson. "It may not have been pretty, but we got the job done."

Having squandered two prior chances to take the top seed and first-round bye, the Eagles finally finished the job albeit in less than impressive fashion. Philadelphia led 16-0 at half-time thanks to three field goals from Jake Elliott and a first quarter, eight yard touchdown rush from Boston Scott. Elliott ended with a career-high five field goals as the Eagles, with Jalen Hurts back from injury at quarterback, secured a franchise-best 14th win of the season. — AFP

Oman beat Yemen in Khaleeji Zain 25

BASRA: Oman beat Yemen on Monday 3-2 to boost their chances of qualifying for the semifinals of the 25th Arabian Gulf Cup (Khaleeji Zain 25). Yemeni player Ali Abbas scored an own goal in the second minute, but Yemen were able to overturn the result and advance with two goals through players Abdul Wasa Al-Matari in the 12th minute and Omar Al-Dahi in the 30th minute. But Oman quickly came back after Arshad Al-Alawi scored the equalizer in the 37th minute, while Essam Al-Subhi scored the winning goal in the 47th minute to give Oman all the three points. Oman tops Group A with four points, pending the result of the other match between Saudi Arabia and Iraq, which was played later in the



BASRA: Omani and Yemeni players vie for the ball during their Khaleeji Zain 25 match on Jan 9, 2023.

day. Yemen bid farewell to the tournament after sitting in last place without any points. — KUNA

Gareth Bale announces retirement

LONDON: Gareth Bale announced his retirement from club and international football at the age of 33 on Monday, bringing to an end one of the most decorated careers in British football history. Bale, who made a record 111 appearances for Wales, led his country from the international football wilderness to two European Championships - reaching the semi-finals of Euro 2016 - and a first World Cup since 1958.

The Los Angeles FC forward, who previously played for Southampton, Tottenham and Real Madrid, made his final competitive appearance during Wales' World Cup group-stage fixture with England on Nov 29. "After careful and thoughtful consideration, I announce my immediate retirement from club and international football," Bale wrote on his social media accounts. "I feel incredibly fortunate to have realized my dream of playing the sport I love. It has truly given me some of the best moments of my life. The highest of highs over 17 seasons, that will be impossible to replicate, no matter what the next chapter has in store for me."

Bale started his career at Southampton but made his name in the Premier League at Tottenham, before moving, for a then world record fee of £85 million (\$104 million), to Real Madrid, where he won five Champions League titles. The forward joined Los Angeles FC in June 2022

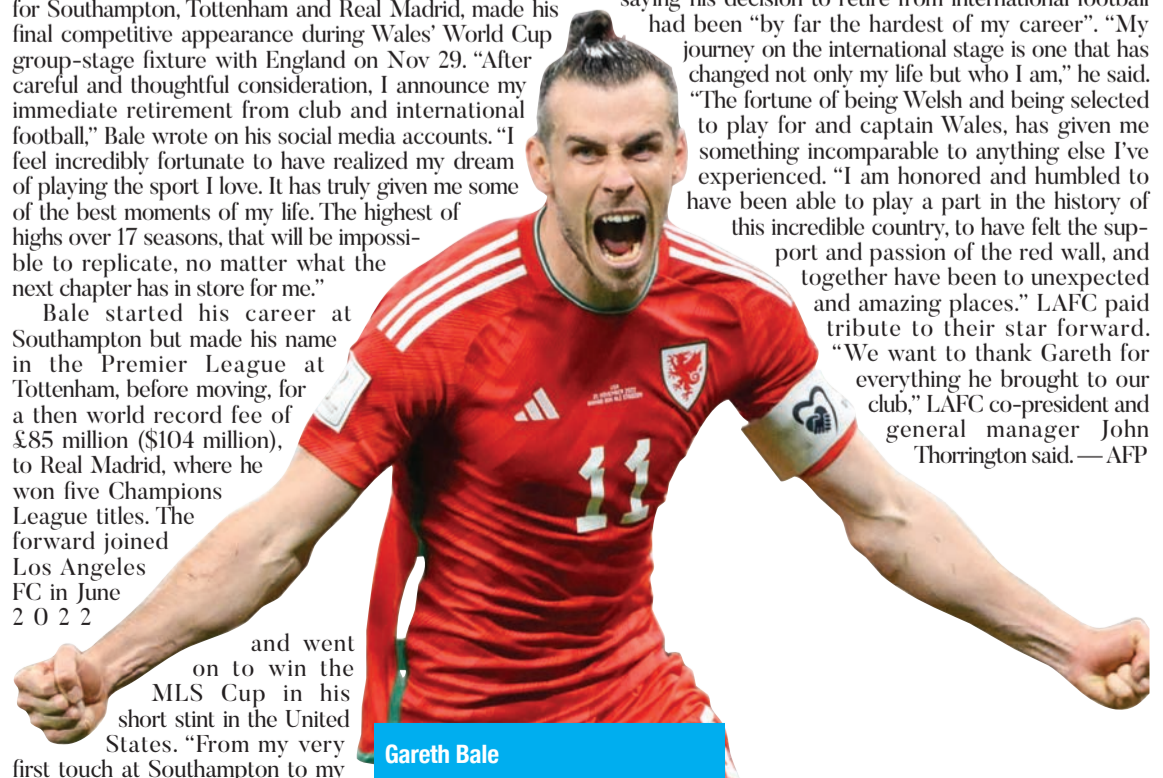
and went on to win the MLS Cup in his short stint in the United States. "From my very first touch at Southampton to my

last with LAFC and everything in between, shaped a club career that I have an immense pride and gratitude for," he said.

He added: "To show my gratitude to all of those that have played their part along this journey, feels like an impossibility. I feel indebted to many people for helping to change my life and shape my career in a way I couldn't have ever dreamed of when I first started out at nine years old." Bale scored from the penalty spot in his country's 1-1 draw with USA in Qatar but defeats to Iran and England meant Wales bowed out in the group stage. He said after their exit from the World Cup that he would keep going for "as long as I'm wanted" but the Cardiff-born attacker has now decided to hang up his boots.

'Hardest' decision

Bale issued a separate statement to his "Welsh family", saying his decision to retire from international football had been "by far the hardest of my career". "My journey on the international stage is one that has changed not only my life but who I am," he said. "The fortune of being Welsh and being selected to play for and captain Wales, has given me something incomparable to anything else I've experienced. "I am honored and humbled to have been able to play a part in the history of this incredible country, to have felt the support and passion of the red wall, and together have been to unexpected and amazing places." LAFC paid tribute to their star forward. "We want to thank Gareth for everything he brought to our club," LAFC co-president and general manager John Thorrington said. — AFP



Gareth Bale