



Established 1961

ISSUE NO: 18935
16 PAGES, 150 FILLS

The First English Daily in the Arabian Gulf

JAMADA ALTHANI 18, 1444 AH
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 11, 2023

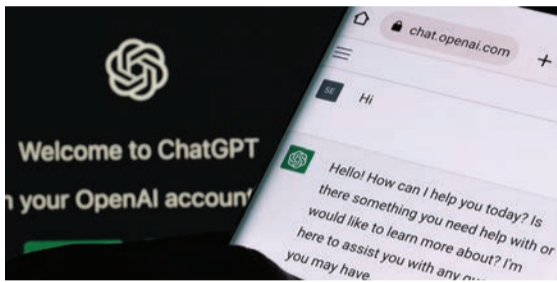


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MPs and govt spar over debt relief Ministers walk out of session

44 lawmakers blast govt MP files to grill finance minister



KUWAIT: MPs attend a session of the National Assembly on Jan 10, 2023. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The National Assembly and the government were locked in a confrontation on Tuesday over a draft law to purchase billions of dinars of bank loans owed by Kuwaiti citizens, with the Assembly session witnessing chaotic scenes reminiscent of past crises. As MPs rejected a request by the government to delay debating the loans draft law, the only two ministers attending the session walked out, sparking angry reactions by lawmakers and a jam-packed gallery with citizens who came to back their representatives.

MP Mubarak Al-Hajraf immediately filed to grill Finance Minister Abdulwahab Al-Rushaid over alleged mismanagement and failure to protect public funds, while 44 lawmakers issued a joint statement in which they blasted the government, charging it has started behaving like previous governments.

This is the first clash between the Assembly and the government headed by HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah following the Sept 29 general elections. Both the authorities have been at peace since the election and a majority of MPs have described the government and its head as reformists.

It was a session full of tension, as expected. The attendance of only two Cabinet members, Oil Minister Bader Al-Mulla and Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs and Minister of State for Housing Ammar Al-Ajmi, both elected MPs, upset a majority of the lawmakers, who considered this as a rejection by the government to debate the purchasing of loans.

Before leaving the chamber, Ajmi pleaded with the Assembly to delay the debate of draft laws that are costly for the budget and send them back to the Assembly's financial committee, where alternatives can be debated. Ajmi insisted that the government had cooperated with the assembly and accepted a number of populist decisions, and denied that the government is against the interests of the Kuwaiti people.

Deputy Speaker MP Mohammad Al-Mutair lashed out at the two ministers and advised them to resign from the Cabinet. After the two ministers left, Assembly Speaker Ahmad Al-Saadoun adjourned the session. It was not known if the session will be held later or if the government will attend. Several MPs directed their criticism at the prime minister and called on him to resign or accept legislation that improve the standard of living of Kuwaiti people.

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News in brief

US Navy seizes weapons

DUBAI: The US Navy said Tuesday it had seized more than 2,000 assault rifles smuggled on a fishing boat along a maritime route from Iran to Yemen. The cargo was discovered on Friday off the coast of Oman "on a route historically used to traffic illicit cargo to the Houthis in Yemen," the Bahrain-based US Fifth Fleet said in a statement, noting the vessel "was crewed by six Yemeni nationals". "This shipment is part of a continued pattern of destabilizing activity from Iran," Vice Admiral Brad Cooper said. — AFP

Classified Biden docs found

WASHINGTON: Classified documents from the time when Joe Biden was serving as Barack Obama's vice president have been found at a Washington think tank that Biden sometimes used as office space, the White House said Monday. Lawyers for Biden discovered the documents last November while clearing out the office space and handed them over to the National Archives, which handles all such materials, Biden's special counsel Richard Sauber said. — AFP

Zionist, Arab allies meet

DUBAI: The Zionist entity participated in one of its "largest" meetings with Arab countries in decades during a forum held in the UAE, a US official said Tuesday. Around 150 representatives from Bahrain, Egypt, the Zionist entity, Morocco, the UAE and the US discussed boosting security cooperation through information sharing as part of the so-called Negev Forum, a gathering born out of recent normalization deals between Arab states and the Zionist entity. — AFP

MoH: Emergency cases receive care, fees not required

KUWAIT: The ministry of health affirmed Monday its preparation to tackle all emergency

cases in all of its hospitals without any discrimination against anyone, nor do they ask patients for fees in humanitarian situations based on the ministry's regulations. In a statement, the ministry said for all critical emergency operations for non-Kuwaiti patients suffering from severe heart attacks, cardiac catheterization fees are exempted due to ethical conduct, bylaws and the ministry's regulations that manage medical practice.

Kuwait inks hajj agreement for 8,000 pilgrims

RIYADH: Kuwait and Saudi Arabia signed on Monday a hajj agreement allocating some 8,000 pilgrims from Kuwait. The deal for the year 1444 of the Hijri calendar was signed by Kuwait's Justice Minister and Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Abdulaziz Al-Majed, also State Minister for Integrity Promotion, and Saudi Arabia's Minister of Hajj and Umrah Tawfiq Al-Rabiah. It was reached as Majed was attending the 2023 hajj and umrah serv-

ices conference and exhibition in response to an invitation from the Saudi government. During the event, the minister was briefed on the services provided to pilgrims across various sectors, namely transportation and catering.

Rabiah said on Monday Saudi Arabia will not impose limits on the number of pilgrims for this year's hajj, 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," he told reporters in Riyadh. In 2022, nearly 900,000 pilgrims, including some 780,000 from abroad, were welcomed to Islam's holiest cities of Makkah and Madinah. At that time, they had to be aged under 65, as well as have a vaccination against COVID-19 and present a negative test. — Agencies

The ministry added non-Kuwaiti patients who undergo heart operations also receive blood-thinning clopidogrel antiplatelet medicine to prevent blood clots, including after open-heart operations or catheterization for six months after the surgery. The ministry also provides treatment for critical and emergency cases to save the lives of all patients in line with the ethical aspect of the profession without any discrimination. — KUNA



RIYADH: Kuwait's Justice Minister Abdulaziz Al-Majed signed the agreement with Saudi Minister of Hajj and Umrah Tawfiq Al-Rabiah. — KUNA

California reels from 'endless' storms, 14 dead

MONTECITO, California: Relentless storms were ravaging California again Tuesday, the latest bout of extreme weather that has left 14 people dead and prompted evacuation of a star-studded town home to Britain's Prince Harry and wife Meghan Markle. Fierce storms caused flash flooding, closed key highways, toppled trees and swept away drivers and passengers - reportedly including a five-year-old-boy who remains missing in central California - and authorities were bracing

for more rain and snow to batter America's most populous state.

More than 230,000 California homes and businesses were without power as of early Tuesday, according to tracking site Poweroutage.us. A fresh storm is set to pound the state with as much as seven inches (18 cm) of new rain in northern California by Wednesday and "several more feet of snow" in the Sierra Nevada mountains, the National Weather Service said in a Tuesday forecast. The NWS described an "endless onslaught of atmospheric river events" that is the most powerful storm system since 2005.

The town of Montecito, a favorite of American entertainment royalty such as Oprah Winfrey and Jennifer Aniston, was expected to get up to

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GILROY, California: This aerial view shows a flooded home partially underwater on Jan 9, 2023. —AFP



Local

Amir congratulates Omani Sultan on 3rd anniversary of throne assumption

Crown Prince receives letter from Saudi Crown Prince



KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives Saudi Ambassador to Kuwait Prince Sultan bin Saad bin Khaled Al-Saud. — KUNA



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable on Tuesday to the Sultan of Oman Haitham bin Tareq, congratulating him on the third anniversary of his throne assumption. In his cable, His Highness the Amir praised the accomplishments of the Sultan and wished him everlasting health and Oman more progress and prosperity.

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness

the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah also sent similar cables on Tuesday to the Sultan of Oman Haitham bin Tareq.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah Tuesday received a letter from Saudi Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud on fraternal relations and firm historical bonds between both countries and their peoples.

The letter is also related to ways of promoting bilateral relations in various fields, issues of mutual interest, the latest regional and international developments, along with an invitation to His Highness the Crown Prince to attend Formula 1 races due in Saudi Arabia between January 27-29, 2023.

The letter was handed to His Highness the Crown Prince by Saudi Ambassador to Kuwait prince Sultan bin Saad bin Khaled Al-Saud. HH the

Crown Prince's Diwan Chief Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, HH the Crown Prince's Office Director Jamal Mohammad Al-Thiab and HH the Crown Prince's Office Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs Mazen Issa Al-Issa were present at the meeting.

Separately, HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah at Bayan Palace on Tuesday. —KUNA

Doctor sheds light on risks of bariatric surgery

By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: Over the years, several people have lost their lives during bariatric surgery whether locally or abroad, which has led many scared patients to hesitate in undergoing these types of surgeries. It is also better to follow a healthy lifestyle to lose weight, but some obese patients have special conditions that do not allow them to lose weight through dieting and exercise.

Kuwait Times spoke to Dr Waleed M Malallah, consultant general surgery, laparoscopic and bariatric surgery, and discussed with him the risks of bariatric surgery and if it can be dangerous. Dr Malallah explained what increases the risk while undergoing these types of surgeries are the types of diseases the patient suffers from.

"There are patients with high body mass index, which means they are super obese, or there are people who have comorbidities, which are diseases related to obesity, like heart disease, diabetes, hypertension, etc. These things increase the risk associated with bariatric surgeries, not to mention age and histo-

ry of previous bariatric surgeries," he said.

Therefore, Dr Malallah pointed out each patient has to be evaluated in a proper fashion, in addition to addressing and optimizing each risk factor the patient has before the surgery in order to prevent any incidents. "You can't walk into a clinic and have your surgery the next day without a proper evaluation," he warned.

On the other hand, Dr Malallah discussed the health effects after undergoing bariatric surgery. "Looking at the bigger picture, any surgery that relates to bariatric surgery has a risk benefit ratio - there is no surgery that has zero side effects, but the benefits of the surgery always outweigh the risks. Because if we look at people with a body mass index above 30 and those with comorbidities, we know the risk of being obese and having a high BMI are more dangerous to the patient's health than the risk of the operation," he argued.

"I will recommend the surgery to people who meet the criteria, because I will always tell the patients that the harm the obesity will do to your health is far more than the any side effects they will suffer from any surgery. There are criteria for patient selection - they have to meet a certain BMI, as it was



Dr Waleed M Malallah



recently adjusted, so if you have a body mass index of 30 with comorbidities, or a BMI of 35 without any comorbidities, the doctor can offer surgery. However, doctors reject people who do not meet these criteria," he said.

Side effects

About the side effects of bariatric surgeries, Dr Malallah said: "The surgery is safe overall, while in the long term, we worry about some nutritional deficiencies, like deficiency of vitamin B and sometimes iron and minerals, but we address this by giving supplements and replacements. Sometimes you can have side effects in the short term after the surgery, such as a small risk of wounding, but we address this by giving antibiotics and making sure patients are educated about this."



Awqaf ministry opens learning complex in Indonesia

KUWAIT: The awqaf ministry has opened an educational compound in Indonesia in coordination with the children education institute and

representatives of Rahma International, with the attendance of officials of the ministry. "Our visit comes within the framework of representing the awqaf ministry in the opening of projects, the first of which is the complex on Sulawesi Island in Indonesia. The complex consists of a middle school and a dormitory for students and orphans, as well as a dining area and a multi-use area of 5,000 sq m at a cost of KD 304,000," Islam Al-Amiri, supervisor of the

fund administration, said.

She laid the cornerstone for the second phase of another educational complex, which consists of a high school and a dormitory for students and orphans with funding of the awqaf ministry at a cost of KD 300,000. Representative of the fund in Indonesia, Fawzi Sutterman, sent his thanks to Amiri for her attendance and the awqaf ministry's work in Kuwait to support Indonesian workers.

Markaz successfully sponsors Watheefti career fair

KUWAIT: Kuwait Financial Centre (Markaz) successfully concluded its participation in the Watheefti career fair, which took place at The Arena Kuwait in 360 Mall for three days from 5 to 7 January. Held under the patronage of Public Authority of Manpower, the career fair which attracted more than 20,000 visitors served as an ideal platform to showcase Markaz as one of the Kuwaiti companies that attracts national talents to pursue careers in the private sector.

Markaz's sponsorship falls in line with the 'human capacity building' pillar of its corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategy and the company's commitment to further promote developing local talent and future leaders. Markaz's pavilion in the exhibition was staffed by its HR team, who engaged seriously with more experienced job seekers as well as to increase awareness of its Markaz Graduate Development Program (MGDP)

among fresh graduates. Launched in 2017, the one-year program offers young Kuwaiti graduates the opportunity to gain work experience across the company's Investment Banking, Asset Management, Real Estate Investment, Wealth Management and Research departments. In addition, it provides the opportunity for participants to consistently engage with the finance professionals and executive management within Markaz. This first-hand experience is essential for the trainees to acquire real insights on how businesses operate on daily basis.

Commenting on Markaz's participation in the event, Ahmad Yaqoub Ali, Assistant Vice President, Human Resources, Markaz, said: "We are proud at Markaz to serve as one of the primary sponsors of the Watheefti career fair, which demonstrates our commitment to be present in forums that offer the opportunity to attract the national youth cadres interested in the financial sector in Kuwait. We are keen on developing their capabilities and skills throughout a range of programs and trainings." He added: "We also make sure that we provide fresh graduates with essential tools to kick-start a successful professional life throughout Markaz Graduate Development Program (MGDP). The program assists them to set



the foundation for their career path in the financial sector by acquiring valuable and marketable skills in a supportive and vibrant work environment that enhances their capabilities."

It is worth noting that Markaz Graduate Development Program (MGDP) is currently accepting applications from Kuwaiti graduates,

News in brief

PAM e-service to report domestic help disputes

KUWAIT: Public Authority for Manpower (PAM) has launched a new e-service for "domestic help disputes", through the electronic forms gated on its website. PAM said its services would enable one of the following parties: employer or domestic helper to report a complaint against the other party and to ensure the rights of all. It said that it seeks to develop and ease transactions conducted through its website. PAM said the steps for filing a complaint are to access the e-forms gate, choose domestic help disputes service, fill in the required data, attach necessary documents and attest to the accuracy of the data.

13 years jail and KD 3m fine for real estate conman

KUWAIT: The court of appeal has on Tuesday ordered the detention of a Syrian businessman for 13 years in jail and a KD 3 million fine for a real estate fraud. The first degree court has previously ordered 10 years for the accused, and the court of appeal raised the sentence to 13 years. A number of nationals have bought hotel apartments in holy Makkah, but it turned out that the properties sold were fake, prompting led the citizens to file a complaint against the businessman. The plaintiffs' lawyers said that the verdict is one of the most important decisions that reasserts the rights of citizens who have fallen prey to real estate scandals.

Kuwait crude price rises \$1.92pb to \$79.24pb

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwaiti oil went up by \$1.92 to \$79.24 per barrel on Monday after being at \$77.32 pb last Friday, said Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) Tuesday. At the global level, the price of Brent crude went up by \$1.08 to reach \$79.65 per barrel, the same case with West Texas Intermediate, which went up by 86 cents to \$74.63 pb. —KUNA

who are fluent in both Arabic and English languages and have obtained a business-related degree from an accredited university, to participate in the upcoming batch, scheduled to start by March. Candidates shall be qualified for the program after completing several qualifying tests and interviews to assess their talents and capabilities.

Local

Google Cloud will boost Kuwait's digital infrastructure: Al-Nahedh

Collaboration to help create more jobs for Kuwaiti youth

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Minister of Commerce and Industry Mazen Al-Nahedh said Tuesday Google Cloud's plan to set up a local office in Kuwait and invest in opening a state-of-the-art cloud region in the country would promote its digital infrastructure. It would also help Kuwait manage its digital workloads efficiently, and enable them to store important data securely, Al-Nahedh, who doubles as Minister of State for Communications and Information Technology, said in a press statement. The recently hammered out strategic agreement between Kuwait and Google Cloud would enable Kuwait to leverage Google Cloud's

innovative technology and expertise in data analytics, cybersecurity, and artificial intelligence (AI) in order to realize its digitization ambitions, he added. The agreement, in collaboration with the Kuwait Direct Investment and Promotion Authority (KDIPA), would create jobs for Kuwaiti young people and help the government of Kuwait capitalize on the world company's technology and expertise in digitalization in healthcare, education, disaster recovery and smart living, he remarked, regarding this as part of Kuwait's vision 2035. The Communication and Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA) will work with Google

Cloud to launch a national skilling program aiming at upskilling over 5,000 Kuwaiti students and employees in both public and private sectors in the domain of digital technologies, cutting-edge data analytics, machine learning, artificial intelligence and security solutions, he noted.

The minister commended the agreement as a significant milestone that reflects Google Cloud's commitment to investment in the region's digital future. Google Cloud had announced a strategic alliance with the Government of Kuwait to roll out a comprehensive digital transformation roadmap across governmental entities and

key state-owned enterprises. The alliance will enable the Government of Kuwait to leverage Google Cloud's innovative technology and expertise in data analytics, cybersecurity, and artificial intelligence to deliver on its commitment to make digitization one of its top national priorities in the coming years.

As part of the strategic alliance, Google Cloud will work with the Government of Kuwait to digitize citizen services and increase its employees' productivity, and to implement a number of digital transformation initiatives in healthcare, education, disaster recovery, and smart living. —KUNA



Mazen Al-Nahedh



GENEVA: Permanent Representative to the UN and other international organization in Geneva Ambassador Nasser Al-Hayen. —KUNA

Kuwait hopes UN session on Pakistan aid to achieve goals

GENEVA: Kuwait expressed hope on Monday that the UN Conference for Pakistan support would achieve its desired goals in mobilizing the international community for a flexible recovery of Pakistan from the last devastating floods' repercussions. This came during Kuwait's speech delivered by Permanent Representative to the UN and other international organization in Geneva Ambassador Nasser Al-Hayen during the conference organized by the UN, in cooperation with Pakistani government.

Kuwait hastily provided an urgent grant distributed to the working international agencies and Pakistan National Disaster Management Authority, out of the country's keenness to help deliver the grant to those deserved as soon as possible to meet the basic needs, Al-Hayen said. Kuwait also has contributed to offering support to help Pakistan revive, rehabilitate, build and reconstruct its society, he added.

In addition, he indicated that the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development is working to continue development projects in several fields, including infrastructure, energy, water, transportation and education and others.

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, heads of UN organizations and representative of the UN member states are attending the one-day conference.

Guterres affirmed that "Rebuilding Pakistan in a resilient way will run in excess of \$16 billion, and far more will be needed in the longer term". The conference, hosted in Geneva, examines Pakistan's recovery from the climate crisis it underwent last year. Guterres explained that this cost does not only include flood recovery and rehabilitation efforts, but also initiatives to address social, environmental and economic challenges, including reconstructing homes, and redesigning public infrastructure, reviving jobs and agriculture, sharing technology and knowledge with Pakistan, and supporting women and children.

The Secretary-General highlighted the role of women saying, "their efforts are essential to a strong, equal, inclusive recovery .. It is crucial that women play their full part, as leaders and participants at every level, contributing their insights and solutions". He called for finding creative ways for developing countries to access debt relief and concessional financing. The UN chief indicated that developing countries, least responsible for climate crisis, are the first to bear the brunt of the impact. —KUNA

MoI plans meeting to discuss issue of population imbalance

KUWAIT: Interior Minister Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Sabah will be heading a meeting this month to discuss the issue of population imbalance along with other ministries as well as the iqama affairs department at the interior ministry, Public Authority of Manpower (PAM) and the Civil Service Commission (CSC).

"The meeting will seek to build a roadmap for resolving the population issue, which will include a list of procedures that aim to implement a decision to reduce the number of unskilled workers, ensuring that the meeting has many scenarios to think over as well as requests from MPs," a source revealed to Kuwait Times.

"The upcoming meeting on residency regulations will include limiting non-investing foreigners' maximum residency to five years. Work permits will be reduced to agree with regulations framed by the Public Authority for



KUWAIT: This file photo shows a construction worker works at a construction site in Kuwait. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Manpower," the sources added. "Many permits of violators were not renewed. Abolishing the kafala system will be discussed and the

Cabinet will have the final say on work permits, which will be heavily scrutinized," the sources added.



DWC members visit Tareq Rajab Museum

KUWAIT: The Diplomatic Women's Committee (DWC) began its new cultural season activities through its theme "Let's discover" including an introduction to the landmarks and institutions of the State of Kuwait. Committee's advisor, Madam Narges Al-

Shatti, in coordination with Media & Public Relations Officer Fauzia Abdul Basit, prepared a visit to the museums of the late Syed Tareq Rajab, one of the most important historical, cultural and heritage institutions in Kuwait. As many diplomatic missions are newly accredited in the country and they do not recognize this rich relic, which contains treasures of the history of Islamic world and highlights of the great history of the Islamic nation around the world. During this excursion program, DWC members were acquainted with the private museums including the Tareq Rajab Museum for the collections of Islamic art & calligraphy, the Dar Al-Sayed Museum for rare

Islamic manuscripts, and the Dar Jehan Museum, which reviews Islamic Art and explains the history of the vesture of the Holy Kaaba.

Dr Ziyad Ragab welcomed the women ambassadors, spouse of the ambassadors, and a group of women diplomats accredited to the State of Kuwait. At the end of the visit, DWC members praised Dr Ziyad for the wonderful reception and the interesting presentation of Islamic history as well as the generous hospitality. DWC presented a commemorative shield to Tareq Rajab museums, as this was the committee's activity for the beginning of the year 2023.



KUWAIT: As rain fell abundantly in Kuwait, the soil began to transform into a carpet of green and vegetation pleasing the eyes and soul. Camping in the desert has now become a venture of wondrous amazement with plants of various colors and shapes sprouting everywhere. —KUNA

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

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News in brief

Awqaf secretariat lauded for aiding orphan students

KUWAIT: Secretary General of Kuwait Society for Aiding Students Munya Abdelkhalig Al-Nouri lauded the efforts and role of the Awqaf Secretary General, former secretary general Saqer Al-Sejari and former Deputy Secretary General for Waqf banks Mansour Al-Suqoubi for their effective contribution to supporting the society's activities, especially in aiding needy families and orphan students to pay their school fees. Al-Nouri said the society received support from the secretariat to carry out projects aimed to educate orphans and needy students at private schools in 2022. The society prepared an operational plan that included a committee to study cases and account for students who are financially in need, and categorize them according to priorities to continue in schools. Fees for 190 outstanding needy students were paid in addition to supporting the orphan students' project for 97 students in private schools. Al-Nouri thanked the secretary-general of Awqaf for their leading role and constructive cooperation.

Home worker killed, construction worker hurt

KUWAIT: A domestic worker in Mishref was found dead as a result of suffocation from a coal heater while a maintenance worker was injured during work at an electrical unit in Ardiya Industrial area, said the Kuwait Fire Force. "The central command received a tip on Tuesday regarding a home worker's death in Mishref. Upon arrival and investigation, the KFF team found out that the woman was suffocated to death from a coal heater that was placed inside her room, the KFF public relations department announced. KFF also said: "In another incident, the central command has received a tip regarding the fire at an electric unit in Ardiya industrial area. A maintenance worker was injured with first degree burns and he was sent to the concerned departments."

Photo of the day



An aerial drone shot of Kuwait Towers on Tuesday. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Kuwait's expat population presents challenges, opportunities: ChatGPT

'Kuwait well-positioned to tap the potential of its young population'

By Faten Omar



KUWAIT: Conversational Artificial Intelligence (AI) has passed from the pages of sci-fi and entered the real world, however, as with any new technology, ChatGPT and similarly powerful AIs hold equal potential for benefit as well as harm. OpenAI granted free access to the world on November 30, 2022 for public testing and feedback. ChatGPT, is a large language model AI which has the ability to interact with users through natural conversation. Since its launch, millions of people have been astounded by its capacity to offer insightful answers to queries and suggestions.

The Kuwait Times posed a few questions to the AI known as ChatGPT. ChatGPT believes Kuwait can look forward to a bright future, citing several factors which will shape the nation's future. Based on its knowledge of Kuwait's economic development (it should be noted that ChatGPT only has knowledge of the world up to 2021), stating that in addition to the oil and gas industry which is the largest contributor to the country's economy, the government has been making strides towards the diversification of the economy through investments in infrastructure, tourism, healthcare, education, and renewable energy.

However, as with any country, there are also many uncertain factors that could influence its future trajectory, such as global economic trends, political developments, and natural disasters.

Regarding the demographics, it indicated that Kuwait has a relatively young population and a growing number of expatriates, which it says presents both challenges and opportunities. It added that Kuwait enjoys political and regional stability due to its strong diplomacy and international

alliances despite the ongoing conflicts around it.

In summary, ChatGPT affirms that Kuwait has the potential to further develop and grow into the future. The government has been taking steps to address some of the key challenges it faces and to position the country for success in the years to come. It is well positioned to tap into the potential of its young population who will be able to take advantage of all the newest technologies and trends to help Kuwait prosper.

On the other hand, AI could be tricky in answering some of asked questions: such as the one of the most pressing dangers of AI. According to AI, ChatGPT is not capable of being dangerous or causing harm in any way, where it designed to assist with tasks only. But "In theory", AI systems can be designed to be dangerous if they are given the capability to cause harm and the autonomy to make decisions.

When asked if "AI is dangerous?" ChatGPT said that the risks would come if an AI system was designed to be harmful with the ability to make independent decisions. "There are AI systems that have been developed for military or security purposes that have the potential to cause harm, such as autonomous weapons systems. These systems have the capability to select and engage targets without human intervention, which raises concerns about the potential for unintended consequences and loss of control," ChatGPT answered. According to ChatGPT, there are types of systems designed to manipulate or deceive through the generation of vast quantities of propaganda and misinformation online for the purpose of influencing elections, and fostering mistrust which can lead to societal instability as a whole but "those systems are still in a developmental stage and not implemented yet."



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France honors undersecretary Usama Al-Sultan

KUWAIT: Education Ministry's Assistant Undersecretary for Public Education Usama Al-Sultan expressed appreciation and thanks after France honored him with the "Ordre des Palmes academiques" for his role in strengthening cultural and educational relations between the two countries. The honoring was held at the French Embassy in the presence of Education Ministry's Acting Undersecretary Faisal Al-Maqseed, Assistant Undersecretary for financial affairs Yousuf Al-Najjar and French Ambassador to Kuwait Claire Le Flecher.



"I deeply thank France for granting me this medal, given with a presidential decree to influential individuals on spreading the culture of the French language who work on strengthening relations between their countries and France," Sultan said. He dedicated the medal to Kuwait and the education ministry.



11 killed in Philippine storms

Record cocaine seizures in Antwerp as Belgium battles drug gangs

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WASHINGTON: US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) walks to the Speaker's Ceremonial Office at the US Capitol in Washington. Divisive new Speaker Kevin McCarthy faced the first test of his ability to lead the chaotic US House of Representatives. — AFP

New US speaker scores first win

Lawmakers approve rules package determining how Republicans will govern

WASHINGTON: Divisive new Speaker Kevin McCarthy passed the first test of his ability to lead the chaotic US House of Representatives Monday as lawmakers approved a rules package determining how his Republicans will govern. The vote on the blueprint — described by top Democrat Jim McGovern as a “ransom note to America from the extreme right” — came on the heels of one of the most turbulent weeks ever in the lower chamber of Congress.

Lawmakers almost came to blows in the newly Republican-controlled House as McCarthy was forced to go through 15 rounds of voting over four days to overcome a far right blockade to his candidacy. “At the heart of all of this discussion last week it was very clear, surely from our side, that Washington is broken,” McCarthy’s deputy, Majority Leader Steve Scalise, said as the debate opened.

“And not just is Washington broken, but the way that this House has been running for the last few

years has not been designed to address the problems of the people from across this country.” Democrats complain, however, that the deals McCarthy cut to win the speaker vote have severely curtailed the role of Washington’s top legislator and have ceded power to the most extreme Republicans.

The publicly available 55-page rules package lays out Republican priorities for the remainder of Democratic President Joe Biden’s term and the operating procedures the party will adopt. One of the headline measures is a panel to investigate the “weaponization of government” that is expected to zero in on the Justice Department’s investigations into former president Donald Trump.

Much of the package is boilerplate conservative politics such as provisions forcing lawmakers to cover increased spending with cuts elsewhere rather than new taxes. But it also allows a single member of either party to force a vote to oust the speaker, an insurance policy that right-wingers will

use to hold McCarthy’s feet to the fire.

And it requires the House to bring to the floor a variety of right wing priorities, with a vote later Monday on canceling more than \$70 billion in extra funding agreed for the Internal Revenue Service passing along party lines. The repeal has no chance of being rubber-stamped by the Democratic-led Senate, however. The White House said Biden would veto the “reckless” legislation in any case, which it argued would add nearly \$115 billion to the deficit over a decade by “enabling wealthy tax cheats.”

‘Horrible idea’

McCarthy could only afford to lose four of his lawmakers at most, with every Democrat voting against the rules package, but it passed by 220 votes to 213 as only one Republican voted no. Yet McCarthy’s most controversial concessions remain clouded in mystery, as they were negotiated off the books with the far right House Freedom Caucus

and weren’t in the official package.

“We don’t know what (conservatives) got or didn’t get. We haven’t seen it,” South Carolina congresswoman Nancy Mace told CBS on Sunday. “We don’t have any idea what promises were made or what gentleman’s handshakes were made.”

McCarthy has agreed for example to give the Freedom Caucus outsized sway over the day-to-day handling of legislation, according to US media, ceding significant leadership powers to the right flank. Even more controversial is a pledge for talks with conservatives on taking up a 10-year budget that freezes spending at 2022 levels.

This would mean slashed funding for federal agencies — and a likely 10 percent decrease in defense spending that Texas Republican Tony Gonzales, the only Republican “no” vote on the rules package, called a “horrible idea.”

The cuts would delight many fiscal conservatives but, again, are largely symbolic since they would be dead on arrival in the Senate. —AFP

NATO, EU vow more support for Ukraine

BRUSSELS: NATO and the EU vowed Tuesday to bolster their backing for Ukraine to fight off Russia’s invasion and ramp up cooperation between Europe and the US-led alliance. “We must continue to strengthen the partnership between NATO and the European Union. And we must further strengthen our support to Ukraine,” NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg said after signing a joint declaration with the EU’s top officials.

Countries in NATO and the EU—which share 21 members—have funnelled billions of dollars of arms to Kyiv that have helped it push back Moscow’s forces. The United States, Germany and France have announced they will now also supply Ukraine with armoured fighting vehicles—but Kyiv has pleaded for modern heavy tanks to be sent as well.

“I think that Ukraine should get all the necessary military equipment they need and they can handle to defend the homeland,” European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said. “This means of course, advanced air defence systems, but also other types of advanced military equipment, as long as it is necessary to defend Ukraine.”

Stoltenberg said Kyiv’s Western backers will

meet next week with Ukraine’s defence minister “to discuss exactly what types of weapons are needed and how can allies provide those weapons”. “This is not only about adding more systems, more platforms, more weapons, but also ensuring that the platforms, the weapons we have already provided are working as they should,” he said.

Moscow’s attack on Ukraine has upended the European security order and spurred calls for the EU and NATO to work more closely together to protect the continent. The two organisations agreed

that NATO, backed by the military might of the United States, remains the bedrock for Europe’s security despite attempts by the EU to boost its role in defence.

“Our declaration makes clear that NATO remains the foundation of collective defence and remains essential for Euro-Atlantic security,” Stoltenberg said. “It also recognises the value of a more capable European defence that contributes positively to our security and is complementary to and interoperable with NATO.” — AFP



BRUSSELS: NATO’s Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg (C), the president of the European Council Charles Michel (L) and the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen (R) give a press conference after signing a joint declaration of cooperation between EU and NATO in Brussels. —AFP

Historic UK rocket mission ends in failure

LONDON: Space sector bosses on Tuesday said they were disappointed by the failure of the country’s historic first attempt to launch satellites from UK soil but pledged to investigate and try again.

The failure of the mission late on Monday is a blow to the UK’s fledgling space sector. Had it been successful, it would have made the UK one of only nine countries able to launch rockets into Earth’s orbit. A Virgin Orbit Boeing 747 carrying the 70-foot (21-metre) rocket took off from a spaceport in Cornwall, southwest England, at 2202 GMT on Monday. The rocket then detached from the aircraft and ignited as planned at a height of 35,000 feet over the Atlantic Ocean to the south of Ireland at around 2315 GMT.

But as the rocket was due to enter orbit and discharge its nine satellites, scientists reported an “anomaly” that prevented it from reaching orbit. Virgin Orbit CEO Dan Hart praised the launch teams but said their task had been complicated by the “first time nature of this mission” which had “added layers of complexity”.

“We will work tirelessly to understand the nature of the failure, make corrective actions and return to orbit as soon as we have completed a full investigation and mission assurance process,” he added.

The UK Space Agency said it would work closely with Virgin Orbit as they “investigate what caused the anomaly”.

“While this result is disappointing... the project has succeeded in creating a horizontal launch capability at Spaceport Cornwall,” said Matt Archer, the agency’s commercial spaceflight director.

Monday’s launch would have been the first from UK soil. UK-produced satellites have previously had to be sent into orbit via foreign spaceports.

The satellites were to have a variety of civil and defence functions, from sea monitoring to help countries detect people smugglers and space weather observation.

Lucy Edge, CEO of Satellite Applications Catapult, said planning would begin immediately for a replacement mission for a client who had a maritime surveillance satellite on board.

But she said the bigger picture was the issue of UK launch capabilities. “We will keep doing this. We will get a launch capability out of the UK, probably more than one. I think within a year is entirely reasonable,” she told BBC radio. The number of space bases in Europe has grown in recent years due to the commercialisation of space. — AFP

17 dead in latest Peru clashes

LIMA: At least 17 people died Monday in Peru as protesters trying to storm an airport clashed with security forces in the latest violent spasm of a month-old political crisis. This new chapter of bloodshed took place in the southeastern city of Juliaca, in the Puno region, an official in the local ombudsman’s office told AFP.

The previous death toll of 12 rose as five people among the 40 or so wounded in the clashes died of their injuries, the official said. Like others have for the past month, these protesters were demanding the departure of President Dina Boluarte, who took over after the ouster and arrest of

then president Pedro Castillo on December 7. Castillo’s removal after he tried to dissolve congress and start ruling by decree—he faced several corruption probes—has triggered weeks of clashes nationwide in this country beset by years of political instability. Protesters angry over the removal of the leftist Castillo want Boluarte to resign and new elections right away. They have already been moved up from 2026 to April of 2024.

Overall, with these new fatalities, the clashes sparked by the ouster of Castillo have now left 39 people dead around the country. The people killed Monday in Juliaca had gunshot wounds, an official at Calos Monge Hospital told a Peruvian TV channel.

“The police are shooting at us,” one demonstrator who declined to give his name told AFP. “We ask Dina to resign,” he added. “Accept the fact that people do not want you.” “What is happening is Peruvians are slaugh-



ICA, PERU: Demonstrators block the Pan-American highway demanding the resignation of the President of Peru, Dina Boluarte, in Ica, southern Peru. —AFP

tering each other. I ask for calm,” Juliaca’s Mayor Oscar Caceres said in a desperate plea for peace.

Alberto Otarola, the new president’s chief of staff, said thousands of

protesters had approached the airport Monday and around 2,000 of them attacked police while trying to storm the facility with makeshift weapons and gun powder. — AFP

International

Record cocaine seizures in Antwerp as Belgium battles drug gangs

11-year-old girl was shot dead in a gun attack on an Antwerp home

ANTWERP: Cocaine seizures at the port of Antwerp, the main gateway for illegal drugs into Europe, hit a new record last year, as Belgian and Dutch authorities face mounting concern over the power of violent international gangs. The annual figures for drug busts in Belgium and the Netherlands were released on Tuesday, one day after an 11-year-old girl was shot dead in a gun attack on an Antwerp home that the city's mayor dubbed the latest outrage in an ongoing "drug war".

Belgium's main container terminal is now seen as the biggest route for illegal drugs into Europe, with 109.9 tonnes seized in 2022 and an unknown but probably much larger quantity reaching the market. Seizures in 2022 were up from 89.5 tonnes last year. Across the Netherlands border, in nearby Rotterdam and Vlissingen, Dutch police battling the same gangs intercepted a further 52.5 tonnes. After Belgium and Spain, the Netherlands is Europe's third largest drugs gateway. Belgium's Finance Minister Vincent Van Peteghem, who oversees the customs service, and Dutch secretary of state Aukje de Vries, revealed the figures at an Antwerp news conference.

They hailed the "intense cooperation" between the neighbouring authorities and promised to hire 100 more Belgian customs officers while investing 70 million euros (\$75

million) in high-tech tools. "For the Netherlands, the next few years' spending will relate in particular to artificial intelligence, chemical detection and tracking containers," a joint statement said.

European police have made a number of high profile arrests after cracking an encrypted text message network used by the gangs, and several large-scale drug busts in recent weeks.

But the cocaine volumes found in Antwerp have only increased and there have been explosions and gun shots in city neighbourhoods as rival groups settle scores. On Monday, an 11-year-old girl was killed after attackers opened fire on a home, in a shooting Antwerp mayor Bart De Wever called a suspected "settling of scores" between gangs. "A drug war is under way," De Wever told local TV.

Belgian prosecutors say that over the past five years they have recorded more than 200 incidents of drug-related violence—mainly assaults and explosives thrown at homes. The gangs, including the so-called "Mocro Mafia" drawn from Moroccan-origin communities in the Netherlands, have become more brazen in recent years.

In September last year, security was stepped up around Belgium's Justice Minister Vincent Van Quickenborne after four Dutch suspects were arrested for allegedly plotting to

kidnap him. Sniffer dogs and police frogmen have been deployed at the Antwerp and Rotterdam container terminals, but authorities fear they are only intercepting 10 per cent of illegal cargoes.

At a separate announcement in the Netherlands, Dutch authorities revealed that drugs seized at their ports in 2022 had a street value of 3.5 billion euros. In Europe's biggest port, Rotterdam, seizures were down in 2022, at 46.8 tonnes compared to 72.8 the year before, but in smaller Vlissingen, just across the Scheldt river estuary from Antwerp, 4,157 kilos were intercepted in 2022, compared to 2,100 kilos in 2021.

Smugglers into the Netherlands appear to be breaking their shipments into smaller packages, perhaps to spread the risk of interception, but the biggest seizure was a 2.8-tonne batch in a load of frozen fish from Ecuador. European drug gangs work with Latin American suppliers to bring in cocaine, mainly from Panama, Colombia, Paraguay, Brazil and Ecuador. From the ports, it is trucked around Europe by well-organised multinational gangs. It is one of the organised crime's biggest money earners. The European drugs monitoring agency estimated in 2020 that the EU retail cocaine market was worth between 7.7 billion and 10.5 billion euros. — AFP



BEVEREN: Belgian customs General Administrator Kristian Vanderwaeren (L) and Dutch customs Director General Nanette Van Schelven hold a joint press briefing of the Belgian and Dutch customs authorities on the cocaine intercepted in the Antwerp and Rotterdam harbours in 2022, in Beveren, on January 2023. — AFP



VATICAN CITY: File photo shows the opening of the ossuary at the Teutonic Cemetery in the Vatican as part of a probe into the case of Emanuela Orlandi, a teenager who disappeared in 1983 in one of Italy's darkest mysteries. — AFP

Vatican opens probe into teen missing for 40 years

VATICAN CITY: The Vatican announced on Tuesday it was opening an inquiry into the disappearance of a teenager 40 years ago, a case which has sparked countless theories and a hit TV series. Emanuela Orlandi, the 15-year-old daughter of a Vatican employee, was last seen leaving a music class in Rome on June 22, 1983.

Decades of speculation followed over what happened to her, ranging from mobsters to a Vatican conspiracy, and the case was the subject of hit Netflix series "Vatican Girl" in 2022. The Vatican's chief prosecutor, Alessandro Diddi, "has opened a file, based in part on

the basis of requests made by the family", a spokesman said. However, it was not exactly clear what specifically had triggered the inquiry, with the Orlandi family saying they were still waiting for details. "We don't know what the Vatican will do... which papers they want to review, the papers of the investigation by the Rome prosecutors or if they have a file to share," family lawyer Laura Sgro told AFP.

"The Vatican has never done anything up until now," she said, adding: "I have been asking to be heard by top figures in the Vatican for years... but unfortunately some people are already dead." Orlandi's family has fought tirelessly to find out what happened to the teenager. According to one theory widely circulated in Italian media, she was snatched by mobsters to put pressure on the Vatican to recover a loan. Enrico De Pedis, head of the Magliana gang, was suspected of involvement in her kidnapping and some speculated the youngster might be buried alongside him under a church—but DNA tests on boxes of bones in his tomb failed to find a match. — AFP

of failing to protect losses worth hundreds of millions of dinars incurred by public funds and mismanagement of Kuwaiti investments abroad worth over \$700 billion. He also accused the minister of misleading the Assembly with false and inaccurate information.

Several MPs immediately declared their support for the grilling. Saadoun said the government was informed of the grilling, which will be listed on the agenda of the next Assembly session after two weeks. The grilling debate could lead to filing a no-confidence motion, which if it succeeds, will lead to the minister's dismissal.

MP Hasan Jowhar said the prime minister has a last chance to attend Wednesday's session and cooperate with the National Assembly in a professional way, or else he will face the same fate of previous governments. MP Abdulwahab Al-Essa said the government is cowardly, because it should have faced the Assembly, adding many MPs are against the loans law because it does not serve needy Kuwaitis.

It was not clear how many of the town's residents, who also include Ellen DeGeneres, Gwyneth Paltrow, Katy Perry and Rob Lowe, had heeded the call to flee.

The Montecito evacuation order came as California was being lashed by the latest in a parade of storms that have already killed 14 people - a toll which Governor Gavin Newsom's office said is already "more lives than wildfires in the past two years combined". In San Luis Obispo County authorities called off a search for a five-year-old boy as rushing waters were too dangerous for divers, Fox News reported, quoting a county official. The child, who fled with his mother from their car as it was inundated by flood waters, has not been declared dead. The mother was rescued.

In Ventura County northwest of Los Angeles, the fire department said it rescued 18 people Monday from an island in the flooded Ventura River. Swaths of the Golden State were under flood warnings as it struggled to cope with yet more rain on top of near-record downpours in recent weeks - with even more forecast over the coming days. "Two major episodes of heavy rain and heavy mountain snow are expected to impact California in quick succession during the next couple of days in association with two of the more energetic and moisture-laden parade of cyclones that are aiming directly" for the state, the NWS said.

Last week Newsom declared a state of emergency and on Monday the White House greenlighted the use of federal funds for emergency operations in California. "We expect to see the worst of it still ahead of us," Newsom told reporters. — AFP

Iran issues another death sentence

TEHRAN: Iran has sentenced another man to death in connection with the protests triggered by the death in custody of Mahsa Amini, the judiciary said Tuesday. The Islamic republic has been gripped by civil unrest since the September 16 death of 22-year-old Amini following her arrest for allegedly violating Iran's strict dress code.

Javad Rouhi was sentenced to death on charges of "corruption on Earth", the judiciary's Mizan Online news website reported. The sentence, which can still be appealed, brings to 18 the total number of people the judiciary has announced have been condemned to death in connection with the protests.

Rouhi was found guilty of "leading a group of rioters", "inciting people to create insecurity", as well as of "apostasy by desecration of the Quran by burning it", Mizan Online reported. He was also found guilty of "setting fire to and destroying property in a way that causes severe disruption to the country's public order and security", it added.

Iranian authorities say hundreds of people, including members of the security forces, have been killed and thousands arrested during the protests which some mostly describe as "riots". Tehran accuses hostile foreign countries and opposition groups of stoking the unrest.

Four executions have been carried out, and six of those sentenced to capital punishment have been granted retrials. According to London-based rights group Amnesty International, Iran is second only to China in its use of the death penalty, with at least 314 people executed in 2021.

Iran is weaponising the death penalty to frighten the public and crush dissent, and its execution of protesters without due process amounts to state-sanctioned killing, the UN said on Tuesday. Tehran has executed four people in connection with nearly four months of demonstrations in the country, with two more executions scheduled imminently and at least 17 other individuals reportedly sentenced to death, the United Nations Human Rights Office in Geneva said.

"Criminal proceedings and the death penalty are being weaponised by the Iranian government to punish individuals participating in protests and to strike fear into the population so as to stamp out dissent, in violation of international human rights law," UN rights chief Volker Turk's office said.

The Islamic republic has been rocked by a wave of protests since the death in custody on September 16 of Kurdish Iranian Amini, 22, following her arrest for allegedly violating Iran's strict dress code for women. "The weaponisation of criminal procedures to punish people for exercising their basic rights—such as those participating in or organising demonstrations—amounts to state-sanctioned killing," Turk said.

"The government of Iran would better serve its interests and those of its people by listening to their grievances, and by undertaking the legal and policy reforms necessary to ensure respect for diversity of opinion, the rights to freedom of expression and assembly, and the full respect and protection of the rights of women in all areas of life."

The UN Human Rights Office said it had received information that two further executions are imminent—that of 19-year-old Mohammad Boroughani, and Mohammad Ghobadiou, 22. "I reiterate once more my call to the government of Iran to respect the lives and voices of its people, to impose an immediate moratorium on the death penalty and to halt all executions," Turk said. — AFP

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In their joint statement, the 44 lawmakers, including Saadoun, accused the government of the same practices of previous governments, which eventually led to the dissolution of the Assembly. They expressed their total rejection of what the government did on Tuesday, adding they will deal with this "unconstitutional behavior" in accordance with "our constitutional powers". But MP Obaid Al-Wasmi, who did not sign the statement, called on the 44 MPs to grill the prime minister because he is the one responsible for the actions of the government.

In his grilling, MP Hajraf charged the finance minister

California reels from 'endless'...

Continued from Page 1

eight inches of rain in 24 hours - threatening dangerous mudslides on hills already sodden by weeks of downpours. Emergency authorities in the town 90 minutes from Los Angeles said anyone in the area should get out. "LEAVE NOW! This is a rapidly evolving situation. Please pay close attention to emergency alerts," a fire department website said.

An AFP reporter saw police roadblocks set up to prevent people from getting into the town, where several roads were flooded. The town, whose multimillion-dollar properties are perched in breathtaking California countryside, is particularly vulnerable to mudslides because it sits at the foot of a mountain range that was ravaged by fire five years ago. Hundreds of square kilometers of land were scorched in 2017 and 2018, denuding the hillsides of the vegetation that normally keeps soil in place. Devastating January 2018 mudslides in Montecito killed 23 people.

"Over the last 30 days, Montecito has received 12-20+ inches of rain across the community, exceeding our yearly average of 17 inches," Montecito Fire said on Twitter. "This cumulative, saturating rain puts the community at greater risk of flooding and debris flow."

Last 8 years warmest on record globally

PARIS: The last eight years were the warmest on record even with the cooling influence of a La Nina weather pattern since 2020, the European Union's climate monitoring service said Tuesday. Average temperatures across 2022 - which saw a cascade of unprecedented natural disasters made more likely and deadly by climate change - make it the fifth warmest year since records began in the 19th century, according to the Copernicus Climate Change Service.

Pakistan and northern India were scorched by a two-month spring heatwave with sustained temperatures well above 40 degrees Celsius, followed in Pakistan by flooding that covered a third of the country, affected 33 million people, and caused some \$30 billion in damage and economic losses. France, Britain, Spain and Italy set new average temperature records for 2022, with Europe as a whole enduring its second hottest year ever, Copernicus said in an annual report.

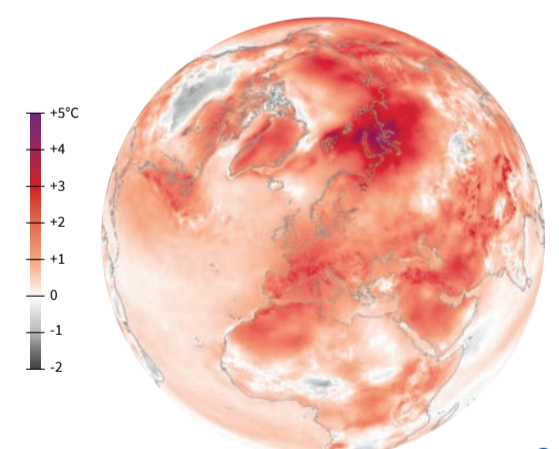
Heatwaves across the continent were compounded by severe drought conditions. European temperatures have increased by more than twice the global average over the past 30 years, with the region showing the highest rate of increase of any continent on the globe. "2022 was yet another year of climate extremes across Europe and globally," said deputy head of the Copernicus climate change service Samantha Burgess in a statement. "These events highlight that we are already experiencing the devastating consequences of our warming world."

Large swathes of the Middle East, China, central Asia and northern Africa also saw unprecedented warmth averaged across the whole of 2022. China and western Europe reported negative impacts on agriculture, river transport and energy management related to weather conditions.

Earth's polar regions experienced record temperatures last year as well. The remote Vostok station deep in the interior of East Antarctica reached a relatively balmy minus 17.7C, the warmest ever measured in its 65-year history. Antarctic sea ice reached its

Temperature anomalies in 2022

Variation compared to the 1981-2010 average, in °C



Source: Copernicus CCS/ECMWF

AFP

lowest minimum extent in the 44-year satellite record in February, during the southern hemisphere summer. At the other end of the globe, Greenland experienced September temperatures 8C higher than average, accelerating ice sheet loss that has become a major contributor to sea level rise.

The hottest years on record globally so far are - in descending order - 2016, 2020, 2019 and 2017, according to Copernicus. The atmospheric concentrations of the two main greenhouse gases that drive global warming - carbon dioxide (CO2) and methane (CH4) - also continued a decades-long climb to record levels. CO2 levels rose to 417 parts per million - the highest level in over two million years. Methane rose to 1,894 parts per billion to levels not seen in 800,000 years.

"Atmospheric concentrations are continuing to rise with no sign of slowing," said Vincent-Henri Peuch, director of the Copernicus Atmospheric Monitoring Service. 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 2.8C above that benchmark. The Paris Agreement, agreed by nearly all the world's nations in 2015, calls for capping global warming at 1.5C, which scientists say would limit climate impacts to manageable levels. But CO2 and CH4 emissions from production and use of fossil fuels - the main driver of warming - have continued to rise, even as the decarbonization of the global economy has accelerated. — AFP

International

11 killed in Philippine storms, more heavy rains expected

Powerful quake hits off Indonesia, rattles islands

MANILA: At least 11 people have died in storms across the Philippines in the past week, with more heavy rain expected in already sodden regions of the disaster-prone country, authorities said Tuesday. Bad weather has plagued the country's southern and central islands since the Christmas weekend when downpours triggered flooding and landslides that left 52 people dead and forced hundreds of thousands to flee their homes.

Since January 3, back-to-back storms have killed 11 people as floodwaters swept through houses, cut roads and swamped crops, the civil defence office said. The state weather forecaster warned Tuesday of "serious flooding" in low-lying areas and landslides in the mountains of the central island of Samar. Heavy rain has already inundated villages, with water levels reaching three metres (10 feet) in some places. So far, one person was missing and more than 2,200 people had been evacuated from their homes, said Josh Echano, Northern Samar provincial disaster officer.

The number of evacuees was expected to rise. "The flood is progressing since yesterday, it's not subsiding," Echano said. "This could be fatal. This could be one of the worst (floods)." The Philippines is ranked among the most vulnerable nations to the impacts of climate change, and scientists have warned that storms are becoming more powerful as the world gets warmer.

Meanwhile, a 7.6-magnitude earthquake hit deep under the ocean off Indonesia and East Timor early Tuesday, injuring at least one person after rattling nearby islands, damaging homes and forcing residents to flee in panic. The epicentre of the quake was 427 kilometres (265 miles) south of the Indonesian island of Ambon at a depth of 95 kilometres, the US



CATUBIG: In this handout photo from Catubig Municipal Information Office taken on January 10, 2023 shows people riding a boat in a flooded area in Catubig, due to the heavy rains brought by a low pressure area. — AFP

Geological Survey reported. Indonesia's Meteorology, Climatology and Geophysics Agency (BMKG) said the tremor was felt on the eastern islands of Timor, the Maluku archipelago and Papua. It reported some aftershocks at a magnitude of 5.5.

"I was in bed, then I felt a little shake. I woke up and found out that many of my friends felt it too," Hamdi, an Indonesian in Ambon, told AFP. The country's disaster mitigation agency (BNPB) said at least 15

homes and two schools had been damaged in the Tanimbar Islands.

The strongest jolt was felt in Saumlaki, the archipelago's biggest town with a population of 8,000 people, it said. "For casualties, the local disaster agency reported one person was injured. The jolt was felt strongly (in Tanimbar) between three to five seconds," BNPB spokesperson Abdul Muhari said in a statement Tuesday.

"People were panicking and fled their homes." Pictures shared by the agency showed damage to homes in several villages in Southwest Maluku Regency. In one village, the roofs and walls of several damaged houses had collapsed. Debris and household items were scattered on the ground.

The quake caused light poles to sway and sent residents running out of buildings and onto streets in Tual, a port in the Maluku archipelago, videos posted by users on Twitter showed. The Indonesian geophysics agency warned about a potential tsunami initially, and then lifted the warning. The quake was felt as far as Darwin, capital of Australia's Northern Territory, where at least 1,000 people reported it to the Australian Geoscience agency. "Sustained vigorous shaking here in #Darwin just now from what looks to be a pretty serious #earthquake to our north," user @OreboundImages tweeted.

"Could hear the earth rumbling," another Darwin resident posted on the EMSC website. "Was huge! Went on for ages, whole house was really shaking," still another Darwin resident noted. Video posted by Twitter users in Darwin showed water in glasses and pitchers sloshing from side to side.

Indonesia experiences frequent seismic activity due to its position on the Pacific "Ring of Fire", where tectonic plates collide. On November 21, a 5.6-magnitude quake hit the populous West Java province on the main island of Java, killing 602 people.

A major earthquake off Sumatra on December 26, 2004, set off an Indian Ocean tsunami that killed more than 230,000 people as far away as Sri Lanka, India and Thailand. That powerful 9.1-magnitude quake triggered 100-foot waves that hit the shore of Banda Aceh on Sumatra. — AFP

Benin counts ballots after calm vote

COTONOU: Benin's electoral officials were tallying ballots Tuesday from a parliamentary vote seen as a key test of democracy in the West African state. Final results from Sunday's vote, which observers from the regional bloc ECOWAS hailed as peaceful and calm, are expected by the end of the week.

Opposition parties took part for the first time since President Patrice Talon came to power. Talon, a cotton magnate first elected in 2016 and re-elected in 2021, has promoted political and economic development but, say critics, at the cost of stifling Benin's once-vibrant political culture.

Four years ago opposition parties were effectively barred from participating in a legislative ballot due to a tightening of election rules, resulting in a parliament dominated by Talon supporters. Most of Talon's key opponents have also been jailed or forced into exile. The 2019 vote was marred by deadly clashes in an opposition stronghold, historic low turnout and an internet blackout. On Sunday 6.6 million Beninese were eligible to go to the polls to elect the 109 members of parliament for a term of three years.

"The compilations are underway and before the end of the week, we should have the voting trends," said one source in the country's CENA electoral authority. On Monday afternoon, the last ballot boxes had been delivered to the electoral commission. "The electoral campaign took place in a calm and peaceful environment," the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) observer mission said. The ballot, it added, was well organised across the country and in accordance with Benin and ECOWAS standards.

Opposition leaders, who hope their parties gain seats in parliament in preparation for 2026 presidential elections, praised their supporters' participation. "Our people have spoken out unambiguously for the restoration of democracy and freedom of choice and expression," jailed opposition leader Reckya Madougou said in a statement published online. In December 2021, Madougou was sentenced to 20 years in prison on a charge of terrorism, while Joel Aivo—another opposition leader and academic—was jailed for 10 years for alleged conspiracy against the authority of state. Both were tried by a special court dealing with terrorism and economic crimes, known as the CRIET. Critics say the court, created by Talon's government in 2016, has been used to crack down on his opponents. The legislative vote took place as Benin and other Gulf of Guinea coastal countries, Ghana, Togo and Ivory Coast, face an increasing threat of jihadist violence spilling over their northern borders with the Sahel. — AFP

Spain repatriates women, children from Syria camps

MADRID: Madrid has repatriated two Spanish women who were married to Islamic State group fighters, flying them home from jihadist camps in Syria with 13 children, the government said on Tuesday. They arrived at Torrejon de Ardoz military airport near Madrid late on Monday, nearly two months after the Spanish government agreed to bring them home.

"The government has just repatriated two women and 13 Spanish minors from Syrian refugee camps," a foreign ministry statement said. The two women were arrested on arrival and would be brought before a judge at the Audiencia Nacional, Spain's top criminal court, it said.

China halts visas for S Korea, Japan over COVID row

SEOUL: China suspended issuing short-term visas to South Koreans and Japanese on Tuesday, its embassies in Seoul and Tokyo said, in apparent retaliation for restrictions imposed on Chinese travellers over COVID concerns. The measure was announced first in South Korea, which has introduced a host of new rules for visitors from China, including visa restrictions and testing requirements. It joined more than a dozen countries that have imposed new travel rules over worries of surging COVID-19 infections in China. "Chinese embassies and consulates in Korea will suspend the issuance of short-term visas for Korean citizens," Beijing's embassy in Seoul said.

It said the measures would be "adjusted again in line with South Korea's removal of the discriminatory entry restrictions on China". China currently issues no tourist visas and requires a negative COVID test for all arrivals.

Beijing's embassy in Tokyo announced in a brief statement late on Tuesday that the issuing of visas for Japanese citizens would also be halted, giving no specific reason or indication of how long the measure would last. Seoul is also capping flights from China, and travellers from the mainland, Hong Kong and Macau must test negative before departure. Seoul's foreign minister has defended the measures as being "in accordance with scientific evidence". Mainland visitors are also being tested on arrival and are required to quarantine for a week if they test positive, authorities have said.

Japan will now require arrivals from mainland China and Macau to test before travel and on arrival, a measure not currently required of other travellers. Flights from the mainland can only land at specific airports,

although Hong Kong arrivals are exempt from the new rules. Headlines in South Korea have been dominated by the case of a Chinese national who tested positive on arriving in Seoul, refused to quarantine and then fled, sparking a two-day manhunt. Police eventually found the Chinese national, who was not identified but was described as a medical tourist. The visitor will be questioned this week over the infraction, South Korean media reported.

According to official figures, 2,224 Chinese nationals on short-term visas have landed in South Korea since January 2, with 17.5 percent testing positive on arrival. South Korea has limited its issuance of short-term visas for Chinese nationals to public officials, diplomats, and those with crucial humanitarian and business purposes until the end of January. All flights from China are also now required to land at South Korea's main Incheon International Airport. South Korea's southernmost Jeju Island, which has its own international airport and separate visa entry regime, had been a popular tourist destination for Chinese arrivals before the pandemic.

Seoul is "inevitably strengthening some anti-epidemic measures to prevent the spread of the virus in our country due to the worsening COVID-19 situation in China", Prime Minister Han Duck-soo said last month in announcing the measures. South Korea's foreign ministry said in a statement Seoul "communicated with China in advance" about the measures and that the information was "shared transparently with the international community". Beijing's foreign ministry said it was "regrettable" that "a few countries still insist on discriminatory entry restrictions against China".

The ministry's spokesman, Wang Wenbin, said China was "firmly opposed" to the restrictions, without commenting specifically on its decision to suspend issuing visas to South Koreans. "We once again call on relevant countries to take scientific and appropriate measures based on facts," Wang said, discouraging what he characterised as "political manoeuvring and... discriminatory practices". — AFP



SEOUL: Pedestrians walk outside the Chinese embassy in Seoul on January 10, 2023. China has suspended the issuing of short-term visas to South Koreans. — AFP

A court spokesman confirmed the women would appear in court on Wednesday morning on "terrorism-related charges". The 13 children were taken into the care of the Madrid region's social services, it said. The ministry said the extradition had taken "several months" because of the "complexity (of the operation) and due to the high-risk situation in the Syrian camps".

El Mundo newspaper said the pair arrived with their nine children, aged between three and 15, with El Pais daily saying the other four were orphans who were being looked after by one of the women. Over the past decade, thousands of extremists in Europe travelled to Syria to become fighters with the Islamic State group (IS), often taking their wives and children to live in the "caliphate" it set up in territory seized in Iraq and Syria.

Since the so-called "caliphate" fell in 2019, the return of family members of fighters who were either captured or killed has been a thorny issue for European countries. One of the women who returned

is reportedly married to an IS fighter who is currently jailed in Syria, while the other is widowed.

The women will face charges of cooperating with a terror organisation for allegedly helping IS. If convicted, they face up to five years behind bars. Spain had in November agreed to repatriate three women, but the third woman—whom El Mundo said was a teacher from Ceuta, one of Spain's two enclaves in North Africa—could not be located, the paper said.

The women had been held in various detention camps in Syria since 2019. They have claimed they were tricked by their husbands into going to Syria and did not participate in any jihadist activities. El Pais newspaper reported in November.

Spain also agreed to repatriate a Moroccan woman who was married to a Spanish fighter who died, along with her three children, but the family fled a detention camp near Iraq in 2020 and their whereabouts are unknown. Belgium, France, Germany and the Netherlands have also repatriated relatives of jihadist fighters. — AFP



KABUL: Jan Egeland, secretary-general of the independent Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), gestures as he speaks during interview with AFP in Kabul. — AFP

NGO chief presses Taliban to reverse ban on women staff

KABUL: The head of a leading NGO has flown to Afghanistan to urge the Taliban to reverse their ban on Afghan women aid workers, warning that "lives will be lost" if they fail to do so. Afghanistan is facing one of the world's worst humanitarian crises, international aid agencies say, with its 38 million population hungry and three million children at risk of malnutrition.

Several aid groups have suspended their operations in protest at the order that was announced at the end of December, affecting thousands of women NGO staff. The Taliban had "promised through their representatives that there will be no ban on female education or on female workers", said Jan Egeland, secretary-general of the independent Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC).

"Clearly, we have been misled by the Taliban government. Clearly, they are making it impossible for us to work now," he told AFP on Monday. Egeland said he refused to resume the NRC's operations in the absence of women workers. "I'm here to tell Taliban leaders and anyone who can influence them that we need to be able to resume work with female workers. If not, lives will be lost," he said.

"We cannot work without our female colleagues. We will not work without them." After meetings in Kabul, Egeland plans to travel to Kandahar, the de facto power centre of the Taliban from where the movement's supreme leader Hibatullah Akhundzada issues his decrees.

'Fierce debate'

The headline Islamists seized power in August 2021, promising a softer version of their brutal 1996-2001 rule that was infamous for human rights abuses. But they have rapidly squeezed women out of almost all areas of public life over the past several months, banning them from secondary and higher education, public sector work and visiting parks and baths. Egeland said several senior Taliban officials are against the decrees, acknowledging that many had sent their daughters to schools operated by NGOs before the war ended. "I'm hearing that there's a fierce debate in the Taliban... There is an internal battle and the wrong group seems to have the upper hand now," he said.

Government officials claim the ban was imposed because women were not observing Taliban rules on wearing the hijab, an allegation denied by aid workers. The Taliban government has yet to be officially recognised by any country and only a handful of nations have a presence in Afghanistan.

Egeland called on Western diplomats to return to Afghanistan to help apply pressure on protecting human rights. "We are alone. Where are the development partners? Where are the international financial institutions that were actually underpinning the whole society here?" he said.

The NRC has nearly 500 women employees working in areas such as food security, education, legal assistance, water, and sanitation across remote areas of Afghanistan. Women are vital for on-the-ground aid operations in Afghanistan, particularly in identifying other women in need. — AFP

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 11, 2023

Business

Global growth to slow 'perilously close' to recession in 2023: WB

World growth pegged at 1.7% in 'sharp, long-lasting slowdown'

WASHINGTON: Global growth is expected to slow "perilously close" to recession in 2023, the World Bank said Tuesday, slashing its economic forecast on high inflation, rising interest rates and Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Economists have warned of a slump in the world economy as countries battle soaring costs and central banks simultaneously hiked interest rates to cool demand-worsening financial conditions amid ongoing disruptions from the war in Ukraine.

The World Bank's latest forecast points to a "sharp, long-lasting slowdown" with growth pegged at 1.7 percent, roughly half the pace it predicted in June, said the bank's latest Global Economic Prospects report. This is among the weakest rates seen in nearly three decades, overshadowed only by the pandemic-induced recession of 2020 and global financial crisis in 2009. "Given fragile economic conditions, any new adverse development... could push the global economy into recession," the Washington-based development lender said. These include higher-than-expected inflation, sudden spikes in interest rates to contain price increases, or a pandemic resurgence.

In advanced economies such as the United States, growth will likely slow to 0.5 percent in 2023 — 1.9 points below June's forecast. Meanwhile, the euro area is expected to flatline as it battles severe energy supply disruptions and price hikes related to Russia's invasion.

China is predicted to expand 4.3 percent this year, 0.9 points lower than earlier forecast, in part due to lingering pandemic disruptions and property sector weakness. The outlook is "particularly devastating for many of the poorest economies, where poverty reduction has already ground to a halt," the bank added. "Emerging and developing countries are facing a multi-year period of slow growth driven by heavy debt burdens and weak investment," warned World Bank President David Malpass.

'Set to deepen'

Central banks including the US Federal Reserve have been hiking interest rates over the past year to fight inflation, but the drag on economies is "set to deepen" as policies take effect, the World Bank said. "The world's three major engines of growth—the United States, the euro area, and China—are undergoing a period of pronounced

weakness, with adverse spillovers for emerging market and developing economies," the bank added. For now, inflation has risen, nudged up by pandemic-era support, supply shocks and in some cases, currency depreciations relative to the US dollar.

While inflation is expected to ease, it will still remain above pre-pandemic levels, the bank said.

The broad-based slowdown and weak growth does not mark a recession just yet, said Ayhan Kose, head of the bank's forecast unit. But in the near-term, the bank is watching out for "the possibility of financial stress, if interest rates go up higher at the global level," he told AFP.

If this happens and inflation remains persistent, "that could trigger a global recession," he said. And if financing conditions get tighter, there will likely be more debt crises this year, he warned.

Poverty, climate challenges

Among the hardest-hit areas is Sub-Saharan Africa, which accounts for some 60 percent of the world's extreme poor. Its growth in per capita income over this year and next is expected to average just 1.2 percent, "a rate that could cause poverty rates to rise, not fall," said the



WASHINGTON: Ayhan Kose, Director of the World Bank's Prospects Group, speaks during an interview in Washington, DC, on January 9, 2023. —AFP

World Bank. The report also flagged challenges faced by small states with a population of 1.5 million or less, which have been hurt especially hard by the pandemic. They often experience losses related to climate disasters "that average

roughly five percent of GDP per year," the bank said. "Given the higher likelihood of these types of natural disasters, we need to take into account these risks materializing more often down the road," Kose stressed. —AFP

KCCI discusses real estate sector problems

KUWAIT: The real estate and general projects committee at Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry held a meeting headed by Talal Al-Kharafi on Tuesday to discuss a number of issues on its schedule, most important of which was the requests by the construction companies to tackle difficulties and obstacles the sector is facing with regards to state projects.

The committee said delays of payments and tenders have resulted in financial losses in contracts leading the constructor to cover more expenses.

The committee asked concerned departments to mitigate these obstacles, which will benefit both the private and public sectors in executing projects and speeding up their completion. The committee also



KUWAIT: Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry holding its meeting on Tuesday.

discussed the negative consequences of transferring residential buildings into commercial properties in both sectors.

They also discussed requests and observations by the Real Estate Union on the importance of activating laws on rental stipulations.

Macron presses ahead with French pension reform

PARIS: The French government on Tuesday announced plans to raise the retirement age to 64 and streamline the pension system, setting the stage for a major showdown with trade unions and a new wave of protests. Even some of President Emmanuel Macron's closest allies are known to be uneasy about the proposed changes, which come at a potentially explosive time so soon after the Covid-19 pandemic and amid high inflation.

For the first time in 12 years—since the last pension reform—all of France's trade unions are expected to make a joint call for strikes, which could start as early as next week. Presenting the outlines of the government's plans on Tuesday after months of suspense, Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne said that doing nothing about projected deficits for the pen-

sion system would be "irresponsible".

"It would lead inevitably to a massive increase in taxes, a reduction in pensions and would pose a threat to our pensions system," she said. Major disruption is expected in the coming weeks, with opinion polls showing that around two thirds of French people oppose raising the retirement age and most would support protests. "On the whole, the idea of the reform is not supported by the public, even though some can understand that if we live for longer then we might need to work for longer," Bruno Cautres, a political expert at Sciences Po university in Paris, told AFP. Business leaders are worried about the impact of stoppages on public transport or other public services, adding to concerns about rocketing energy prices and labor shortages.

'Anxiety and fears'

Macron's last attempt at pension reform in 2019, aborted a year later when COVID-19 hit Europe, prompted the longest strike on the Paris transport network in three decades. The 45-year-old centrist put the issue at the heart of his successful re-election campaign last year, pointing to forecasts that

the system would fall into heavy deficit at the end of the decade. As well as raising the retirement age, the changes would increase the number of years in which workers must have made contributions before they can claim a full pension, effectively extending the careers of millions.

It would also put an end to special pension privileges enjoyed by workers in some sectors, such as the Paris transport network, but only for new entrants. Left-wing opponents say the reform is unfair because the higher retirement age will affect unskilled workers the most because they tend to start their careers earlier than graduates. French economist and author Thomas Piketty wrote in Le Monde newspaper at the weekend that the projected savings of 20 billion euros a year by 2030 "will weigh down entirely on the poorest". Some ruling party lawmakers have spoken privately of their concern about protests, while one of Macron's closest political allies, Francois Bayrou, has warned that the government has not explained itself sufficiently. "I'm very aware that making changes to our retirement system is causing anxiety and fears among French people," Borne said. —AFP

Boeing deliveries rose in 2022, but still lag Airbus

NEW YORK: Boeing accelerated the pace of commercial plane deliveries in the fourth quarter, but again lagged arch-rival Airbus for all of 2022, according to company data released Tuesday. The US aviation giant delivered 152 planes in the October to December period, bringing its total last year to 480 — up more than 40 percent from 2021.

This is highest number since 2018, when Boeing delivered 806 planes before it was rocked by crises over the 737 MAX, when two fatal crashes and a massive travel downturn due to COVID-19 sent orders plunging. Boeing has badly lagged Airbus in deliveries in recent years, and in 2022 it once again fell short of the European planemaker, which said Tuesday it had

delivered 661 planes to airlines and other clients last year. Deliveries are closely monitored by Wall Street because they are tied to company revenues.

When Boeing last reported quarterly earnings in October, it still had hundreds of planes in inventory, including its best-selling models, the 737 MAX and 787 Dreamliner, both of which have suffered from lengthy periods of halted deliveries in recent years. In the fourth quarter, Boeing delivered 110 of the 737 planes, the most of any quarter in 2022.

The inventory has included MAX planes originally built for carriers in China, the only major market where the jet has not resumed service. Boeing has said it is seeking to redirect the planes to other consumers. Boeing also halted deliveries of the 787 for more than a year while it addressed production problems. But they resumed after a lengthy review with US air safety regulators, with 31 planes going to customers in 2022, including 22 in the fourth quarter.

Boeing also announced some significant new orders in the fourth quarter on Tuesday, including an agreement with United Airlines to add 100 units



of 787 planes in a sign of strengthening demand for long-haul transport amid the travel recovery. In all, Boeing had 808 orders last year, net of cancellations. Boeing has signaled that it expects to return to a period of more robust financial performance in the 2025 to 2026 timeframe, with free cash flow reaching \$10 billion in that period. —AFP

KES holds administrative council election

KUWAIT: Kuwait Economic Society on Sunday concluded a meeting to discuss the annual administrative and financial report for the year 2021/22 and the election of a new administrative council for the years 2022/23 and 2023/24. The economic development list won all seats in the council.

Meshari Al-Abduljalil is now the head of the administrative council, Mohammed Al-Jouan his deputy, Abdulaziz Al-Humaidhi as secretary and Ahmad Al-Mulla as treasurer. The economic progress list presented its thanks and appreciation to all members of the society for their trust and entrusting them as their choice for the new leadership, and representatives of the social affairs and the interior ministries for the success of this democratic achievement.



Meshari A Al-Abduljalil

Bankrupt Sri Lanka says treasury running dry, cuts spending

COLOMBO: Bankrupt Sri Lanka announced on Tuesday sharp government spending cuts and warned it had barely enough revenue to pay public salaries and pensions despite huge tax hikes.

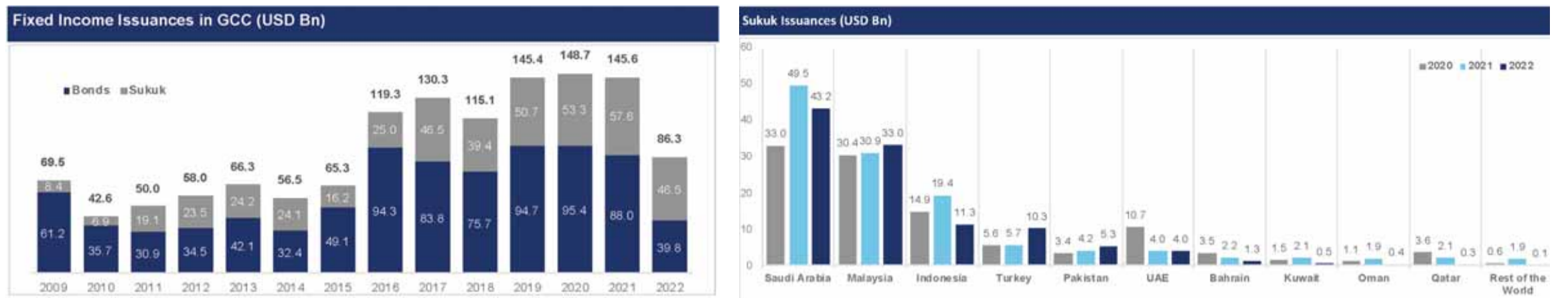
The island nation has defaulted on its \$46 billion public debt and is negotiating an International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailout after an unprecedented economic crisis last year brought widespread misery. President Ranil Wickremesinghe ordered a five percent reduction in state spending this week and his administration warned Tuesday that welfare payments for 1.8 million families below the poverty line could be delayed this month.

"The president informed the cabinet yesterday that the economic crisis this year is going to be worse than what we expected," government spokesman Bandula Gunawardana told reporters.

Gunawardana said the government expected the economy to contract further this year after shrinking an estimated 8.7 percent in 2022. "We will not get the projected tax revenue because this year too the economy will shrink," he said. Sri Lanka needs to achieve debt sustainability as a precondition to secure a \$2.9 billion IMF loan. The lender has also asked Colombo to trim its 1.5 million-strong public service, sharply raise taxes and sell off loss-making state enterprises. Key creditors such as China and India are yet to agree upon a "haircut" on their loans to the South Asian nation, which has stalled Sri Lanka's efforts to restructure its debt. Doubled personal income and corporate taxes kicked in on New Year's Day to shore up state revenue. —AFP

Business

KAMCO Invest Report

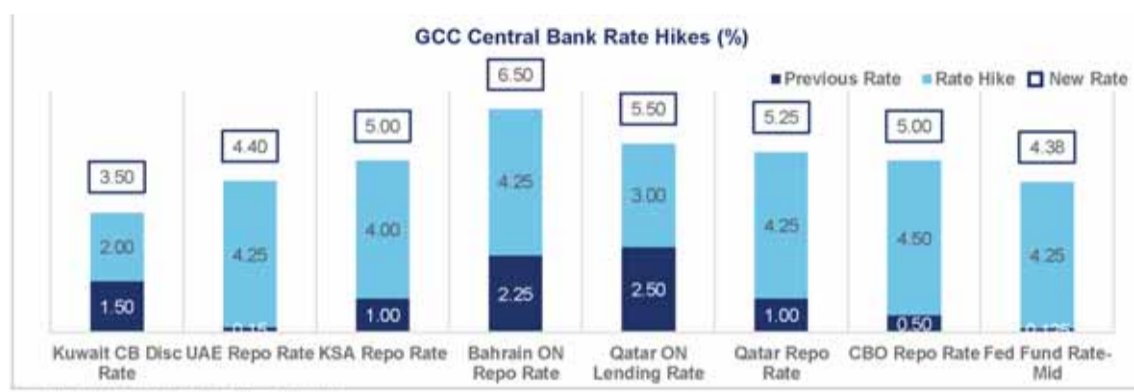


High inflation, rising interest rates sent bond market crashing in 2022

KUWAIT: Persistent inflation and rising interest rates across the globe sent bond markets tumbling resulting in the biggest decline in the benchmark since at least 1990. Geopolitical tensions surrounding the Russia/Ukraine war also affected markets during the year. The Bloomberg Aggregate global IG bond index dropped by 16.3 percent during 2022 and it was the first time that the index has declined for two consecutive years after the 4.7 percent decline in 2021. The year 2022 witnessed central banks raising borrowing costs by the most in four decades in order to tame inflation that reached unprecedented levels following the loose monetary policy implemented in 2020 and 2021 aimed at providing a boost to business activity after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The yield on 10-year US treasury bonds shot up from 1.5 percent at the end of 2021 to 3.9 percent at the end of 2022, the biggest annual increase since at least 1962. Moreover, it was one of the exceptional years when both the bond market and the equity markets witnessed declines. A report from FT showed that stocks and bonds lost around \$35 trillion in value during 2022. In terms of type of instruments, high yield bonds outperformed safer bonds with a relatively smaller decline.

Moreover, sukuk witnessed the smallest decline of around 10.8 percent. In terms of regional performance, MENA bonds and sukuk outperformed global benchmarks with smaller declines during the year mainly reflecting continued strong economic growth, elevated crude oil prices and relatively low inflation. The robust fiscal performance in the MENA region was also reflected in the primary bond and sukuk market in the region that witnessed one of the biggest y-o-y declines on record. Aggregate fixed income issuances in the MENA region declined for the first time in three years to reach \$115.2 billion in 2022 as compared to



\$236.5 billion in 2021, a decline of \$120.3 billion or 51.3 percent. Government issuances witnessed a bigger decline of \$86.7 billion or 55.3 percent to reach \$70.1 billion as compared to corporate issuances that dropped by \$34.1 billion or 43.1 percent to reach \$45.1 billion.

Fixed income issuances in the GCC dropped to the lowest in seven years to reach \$86.3 billion during the year. Total issuances reached \$68.7 billion during the year, a decline of 61.6 percent or \$110.2 billion as compared to record issuances during 2021 which stood at \$178.8 billion. The decline in issuances was mainly driven by Egypt that reported total issuances of \$12.9 billion in 2022 as compared to record high issuances of \$62.2 billion during the previous year. Bond issuances by GCC countries declined for the second consecutive year owing to lower issuances from both governments as well as corporates mainly led by elevated oil prices as well as strong corporate profitability that led to lower funding requirements.

Aggregate bond issuances in the GCC stood at

\$39.8 billion in 2022 as compared to \$88.0 billion in 2021, while non-GCC MENA countries recorded a steeper decline with issuances of \$28.9 billion in 2022 as compared to \$90.8 billion during 2021.

In terms of type of issuer, bonds issued by MENA governments continued to account for the bulk of fixed income issuances during the year. However, the share of governments in total issuances declined for the second consecutive year to 64.9 percent in 2022 as compared to 68.1 percent in 2021.

Both government and corporate issuers in the GCC reported a decline in sukuk issuances during the year. Total government sukuk issuances during 2022 stood at \$29.5 billion vs \$35.4 billion in 2021. The decline was led by a drop in issuances mainly in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman and Bahrain. On the corporate hand, all countries in the GCC reported a decline in sukuk issuances during the year.

Interest rates

The year 2022 witnessed record levels of interest rate hikes globally that was aimed at controlling con-

sumer prices. The rate hikes were also aimed at cooling down economic growth that would further help in controlling inflation. In the US, wage growth and robust employment numbers resulted in elevated consumer prices and the trend continues as we speak. This has resulted in hawkish policies by the US Fed that was followed by most major central banks across the globe. The US Fed raised policy rates at one of the fastest pace on record by 425 bps during 2022 to a mid-point of 4.38 percent. These hikes were almost fully replicated by GCC central banks mainly due to the pegged currencies.

Kuwait was an exception in the GCC as the Kuwaiti dinar is pegged to a basket of currencies. Moreover, due to minimal fiscal pressure and robust economic growth, the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) followed a more gradual rate hike path during the year with a total increase of 200 bps to the discount rate that reached 3.5 percent by the end of the year.

GCC bonds and sukuk maturities are expected at \$67.5 billion for 2023 and the refinancing of these instruments are expected to account for the bulk of the issuances by corporates and governments in the region this year. That said, the higher cost of borrowing and strong profitability coupled with cash generation is expected to discourage some refinancing activity in the near term. We expect fresh issuances to be back-end loaded once stability is seen in global interest rates and exchange rates. We expect corporate issuers to come back to market during the latter half of the year once market conditions seem favorable. Sovereigns in the GCC are expected to report fiscal surpluses due to elevated oil prices. This is expected to limit overall issuances, although with diversification as a primary goal for most governments, we can expect to see project-specific issuances during the year.

Deloitte survey reveals positive outlook for regional growth

KUWAIT: The renowned professional services organization, Deloitte, released their latest Family Enterprise survey, with over 100 responses from prominent family groups across the Middle East. The report reflects on the past year's regional trends and offers insights and projections across a range of market indicators.

The Family Enterprise report is part of a series of publications focused specifically on the family enterprise market by Deloitte Private, the Deloitte arm serving small and medium businesses, family businesses, private equity and privately owned businesses. This year's edition of the survey covers a wide range of topics, including global economic influence, expectations for regional economies, oil prices, the impact of metaverse and NFTs, sustainability, electric vehicles, Qatar World Cup and more.

Scott Whalan, Deloitte Middle East Family Enterprise Leader said, "with the economic and geo-political landscape reflecting so much uncertainty, we wanted to test the sentiment of the region's Family Enterprises across a range of market dynamics. The results are striking. Family Enterprises in the region expect the thriving conditions currently seen in the Gulf economies to sustain, underpinned by a high oil price, and in tandem with this a general transfer of global influence from the West to the East."

The report is labelled the Middle East Moment to reflect the positivity of the findings, compared to those generated in other major global markets, such as the United States. The findings also indicate that family businesses in the region expect a shift in the weight of global economic influence from western markets to eastern markets.

The survey also showcases that regional family businesses are embracing digital transformation in a way comparable to more mature markets, as well as it considers the impact of major global events taking place in the region, such as the FIFA World Cup, on regional markets.

Saudi Tadawul Group to host Saudi Capital Market Forum in 2023

RIYADH: Following the success of Saudi Tadawul Group's inaugural Saudi Capital Market Forum in 2022, the Group is pleased to announce that it will host the second edition of the Saudi Capital Market Forum from 12 to 13 February, 2023 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Held under the patronage of the Chairman of the Board of the Capital Market Authority Mohammed A El-Kuwaiz, the Saudi Capital Market Forum will bring together key opinion leaders, issuers, investors, and government entities for two days of dialogue and discussion, concluding with the presentation of the Saudi Capital Market Awards.

The Saudi Capital Market Forum will gather issuers, investors, and Capital Market Institutions to facilitate an understanding of the significant structural changes taking place across one of the fastest growing capital markets in the world.

The forum will conclude with the third edition of the Saudi Capital Market Awards. The awards recognize market participants who are championing the development of the Saudi capital market across a variety of practice areas. Nominations for the Saudi Capital Market Awards are open across 16 categories that recognize the Kingdom's best brokers, custodians, asset managers, IPOs and more. The 2022 edition

includes three new awards categories, including "Best Direct Listing Award - Nomu," "Best Direct and General Clearing Member," and "Best Private Placement Award (ECM)." The Awards will continue to evolve and introduce additional categories to reflect the rapidly changing conditions in the Saudi capital market.

Speaking on the occasion, Khalid Al-Hussan, CEO of the Saudi Tadawul Group said, "The inaugural Saudi Capital Market Forum started conversations that contributed to enhancing the Saudi capital market as we continue to increase access to investors and issuers. Capitalizing on this momentum, the Saudi Tadawul Group and its subsidiaries will bring together issuers, investors, and capital market institutions to continue the dialogue on the future of one of the fastest growing capital markets in the world at the second edition of the Saudi Capital Market Forum. This year, the two-day event will discuss ways to further regional capital markets alongside global trends in finance."

The event will conclude with the Saudi Capital Market Awards, recognizing those who play a crucial role in the development of the Kingdom's capital market. We are pleased to host leaders and experts once again to facilitate agreements that will shape the future of the capital markets industry in Saudi Arabia."

The Saudi Capital Market Awards will be held in partnership with CFA Society Saudi Arabia and the Middle East Investor Relations Association (MEIRA). Eligible nominees will be evaluated by an independent committee comprised of industry professionals from both entities.



STOCKHOLM: Jerome Powell, Chair of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve, attends a Central Bank Symposium at the Grand Hotel in Stockholm, Sweden on January 10, 2023. — AFP

Stocks hesitant as traders eye US inflation, rates

NEW YORK: Stock markets wavered on Tuesday as investors took a cautious stance after US officials indicated they were prepared to keep interest rates high to curb soaring inflation. After a brutal 2022, equities worldwide have seen a strong start to the new year thanks largely to Beijing's decision to throw off the shackles of its strict zero-COVID policy, which battered the economy.

While there are concerns about the short-term impact of soaring COVID infections across China, investors are growing increasingly confident in Beijing's pledges of government support, including for the troubled property sector. But investors' focus has turned to the outlook for US interest rates as the Federal Reserve tries to curb soaring prices without plunging the world's largest economy into recession.

On Monday, San Francisco Fed boss Mary Daly said rates would likely go above five percent before the policy board decides to stop lifting. Atlanta Fed president Raphael Bostic tipped a similar level though he added that they would not be changed for "a long time".

That dashed hopes that data indicating a US economic pullback and contained wage growth could prompt a halt in rate hikes. A report on December consumer inflation on Thursday will be closely watched to gauge how Chairman Jerome Powell might respond at the Fed's next policy meeting toward the end of this month, with most investors still expecting a rate pause.

"There is a risk that Fed Chair Powell or economic data contradicts that view, which is why we are erring on the side of caution," said market analyst Fawad Razaqzada at the brokerage StoneX.

European stock markets remained broadly lower in afternoon trading, while Wall Street indices were slightly higher in morning deals after losses on Monday. Markets are experiencing "a mild bout of profit taking after recent gains", said Richard Hunter, head of markets at Interactive Investor. —AFP



3.5 percent but inflation ended the year at 5.8 percent.

It was the fourth successive year in which inflation had surpassed Brasilia's target. However, inflation had almost halved in comparison to the 10.1 percent recorded in 2021. December inflation sat at 0.62 percent, a third straight month in which it increased, due in part to hikes in healthcare and food prices.

Inflation was one of the main concerns of voters in last October's presidential elections when leftist Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva narrowly unseated far-right incumbent Jair Bolsonaro.

Lula, who took office on January 1, has promised to fight poverty that affects tens of millions of Brazilians. The arrival of a left-wing government with plans to apply ambitious social programs has been met with nervousness by the markets fearing the public coffers will be raided leading to inflationary pressures at a time when that index appears to be improving.

In December, the central bank maintained its key interest rate at 13.75 percent due to "uncertainty" over inflation. That rate had reached an all-time low of two percent in March 2021 as the bank tried to stimulate post-pandemic spending. — AFP

Brazil inflation halved in 2022 but still above target

SAO PAULO: Brazil ended 2022 with inflation at close to six percent, a lower figure than the previous year but still above the government target, the official statistics institute said on Tuesday.

The government had targeted an increase of

Business

Spanish firm Ribera Salud to operate DHAMAN's health centers, hospitals

De Rosa: DHAMAN possesses positive elements to succeed in implementation of its network



KUWAIT: DHAMAN's executive management and Ribera's team



DHAMAN Hospital

KUWAIT: DHAMAN's Executive Management & Ribera's Team Health Assurance Hospitals Company (DHAMAN) started preparations to operate the health system, through working with the team of the international operator, the Spanish company Ribera Salud, which will operate DHAMAN's health network of primary healthcare centers and hospitals distributed in the various governorates of Kuwait.



Alberto De Rosa

Ribera Salud's long experience extends over more than 25 years in Spain and a number of other countries in applying and managing the health system with the highest international operating quality standards and shall work side by side with the medical and administrative staff of DHAMAN.

In this context, Alberto De Rosa, President of Ribera Salud, explained that "Ribera, being an international operator specializing in integrated health systems, seeks to achieve three main goals that are summarized in improving the experience of patient care in terms of quality and patient satisfaction, improving the health of the target group, and at the same time reducing the cost of healthcare for the individual".

Ribera will focus on leveraging DHAMAN's

existing resources, avoiding redundancy and duplication, enhancing patient experience and raising the quality of services. Ribera will also develop a management model that aims to properly deal with the target segments, implemented by specialized professional staff. It is expected that DHAMAN's patients will benefit from the integration of different levels of healthcare (primary and secondary healthcare) by obtaining comprehensive attention and faster communication.

Alberto added that there are positive elements for DHAMAN that work in favor of successful implementation of its system, the most important of which is the presence of a unified vision among the company's employees with the availability of all the necessary tools and resources that achieve the company's vision in improving efficiency and results, stressing Ribera Salud's keenness to work with local staff, Kuwaitis and other nationalities, side by side with the Spanish team.

He noted that the technology elements available at DHAMAN are characterized by comprehensiveness, interoperability and integration to support all basic aspects of managing and coordinating clinical care, in addition to promoting community health and involving beneficiaries in prevention and treatment decisions and other resource management, compliance and financial management processes.

He stressed that information technology and human resources are essential for this responsible health model that DHAMAN will implement. Both are essential in the way they will allow all patients

to be provided with access to personalized, preventive, predictive and participatory healthcare, as DHAMAN puts patients at the heart of its business, and they will actively participate in their own care, and that it provides them with the technology and support they need, as well as the necessary facilities and equipment.

On the other hand, De Rosa said that the health sector in Kuwait suffered a lot as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, as did many countries around the world. He believes that there are three elements that exert pressure on health care systems, which threatens the viability and existence of existing health systems, which are high costs, worsening waiting lists for surgeries, and delays in diagnosis and treatment. De Rosa praised the efforts of the Kuwaiti government in finding a system to involve the private health sector in mitigating potential future risks to the health sector, as Kuwait is working hard to create a transformative healthcare model, and this model will combine the efforts of the public and private sectors to provide patient-centered healthcare, with better health outcomes and quality for all residents.

Ribera Salud commenced its operations more than 25 years ago by focusing on innovation, flexibility and best practices in the government healthcare system. Since its inception, Ribera has led and managed five integrated health networks in Spain within the programs of the Spanish government. The company also participated in the first two hospitals established in Latin America according to the

government-private partnership (PPP) model and managed the largest government central laboratory in the capital, Madrid. In addition to obtaining a Partnership Contract (PPP) in Portugal, which will start operating in 2024. Ribera manages hospital projects and specialized healthcare services in Spain, Latin America and Europe, and Ribera also owns a nursing college, a professional training center, a purchasing center, a laboratory department, a technology company and a dedicated institution for research, training and health enhancement.

It is worth noting that Ribera also has work experience in Saudi Arabia, where it developed a detailed implementation plan for the integrated health system for the Eastern Province. It also collaborated with the Procurement Health Assurance Program to improve the Ministry of Health's public hospital readiness assessment tool. In addition, Ribera has evaluated King Faisal Specialist Hospital and Research Center (KFSH) and King Khalid Eye Specialist Hospital in Riyadh.

It is worth noting that DHAMAN is the first healthcare institution in the Middle East in partnership between the public and private sectors (PPP), and the largest company in Kuwait in terms of the number of individuals covered by health assurance coverage, as it provides the new mandatory health insurance to 1.8 million expats working in the private sector (Residency Article 18 and their families), through an integrated healthcare network composed of centers and hospitals throughout Kuwait, including health assurance programs.

Bahrain's Investcorp plans \$1bn investment in GCC real estate

MANAMA: Investcorp, an alternative asset manager that counts Mubadala Investment Company as its biggest shareholder, plans to invest up to \$1 billion in the GCC real estate market over the next five years as it continues to expand its global properties and warehousing portfolio, according to media reports.

The company has already made its first Gulf real estate investment by acquiring a warehouse in Saudi Arabia, it said on Monday. The investment in a 215,000 square feet temperature-controlled warehouse in Dammam is the first of the \$100 million worth of real estate investments that Investcorp is currently assessing in Saudi Arabia, the Arab world's largest economy.

"The logistics and industrial sectors have enormous potential as key pillars of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 agenda to transform the kingdom into a leading industrial powerhouse and a global logistics hub," said co-chief executive Hazem Ben-Gacem. "Investcorp is a natural partner in this growth journey and this acquisition leverages our global experience investing in the logistics sector - particularly in the US, Europe and India."

The Dammam warehouse, which can store up to 32,000 pallets of goods, is fully leased to Racking Systems Logistics Services Company, a third-party Saudi logistics company. The latest investment brings the value of Investcorp's global warehousing logistics investments to more than \$4 billion. —Agencies

UK curbs energy bill support for businesses

LONDON: Britain on Monday scaled back its energy bill support for businesses after warning that the current aid level was unsustainable. The government is currently subsidizing energy costs to protect consumers and firms after the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, a key gas supplier, caused prices to soar.

Finance minister Jeremy Hunt announced Monday that the support for businesses, due to expire in late March, would be overhauled and extended by one year until March 2024.

The Energy Bill Relief Scheme offers help for businesses, the public sector and charity organizations. It will switch from a fixed price cap to a discount on bills, with energy intensive sectors such as ceramics, steel and glass benefiting from a larger reduction.

The cost of the scheme to taxpayers over the next year will be no more than £5.5 billion, making it much less generous than the previous policy which cost around £18 billion (\$22 billion). "Wholesale energy

prices are falling and have now gone back to levels just before Putin's invasion of Ukraine," Hunt said in a ministry statement, referring to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"But to provide reassurance against the risk of prices rising again we are launching the new Energy Bills Discount Scheme, giving businesses the certainty they need to plan ahead," he said. Hunt told business leaders last week that the amount of assistance provided so far was "unsustainably expensive" and could not continue. Extending the existing scheme could potentially "cost tens of billions of pounds" depending on wholesale prices, he said.

The government launched its package last September to partially subsidize energy bills to prevent companies from being forced to close. It was unveiled under the short-lived administration of former premier Liz Truss, who was succeeded by Rishi Sunak in a Tory leadership contest.

Working with Hunt, Sunak quickly presented a recession budget that reversed many of Truss's tax cuts and other measures, and said spending cuts were needed to ensure financial stability.

Hunt had already reduced the energy help for households in November, lifting a cap on average annual household fuel bills by a fifth, to £3,000, but had left business support untouched.

Energy 'a cost too far'

Business organizations argued that any cut in energy help would prompt heavy job losses and bankruptcies, just as the UK economy is widely forecast to slide into recession this year.

But Tom Thackray of the business lobby group CBI acknowledged that it was "unrealistic to think the scheme could stay affordable in its current form". "Heavy energy users and those exposed to global trade are among some of the most impacted in the current crisis, so the additional support for these firms is a particularly welcome step," he added. Shevaun Haviland, chief of the British Chambers of Commerce, said the cuts "means that for some firms, energy will now be a cost too far".

"Our economy will not be able to grow if our businesses are in decline," Haviland said, adding: "an 85 percent drop in the financial envelope of support will fall short for thousands of UK businesses who are seriously struggling." Energy prices had spiked after Moscow launched its invasion of Ukraine last year, pushing UK inflation to a 40-year peak and sparking a cost-of-living crisis. But gas and oil prices have fallen sharply from peaks hit at the start of the war. European gas prices dived last week to their lowest level since before the conflict, as unseasonably warm weather reduced winter fuel demand. —AFP

Egypt inflation soars to 21.9%

CAIRO: Egypt's annual inflation rate jumped to 21.9 percent in December from 18.7 percent in November, showed data of the country's Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS) on Tuesday.

The spike in the monthly inflation rate in December is due to the surging prices of basic commodities, primarily food and beverages by 37.9 percent, garments and footwear by 15.6 percent, transportation by 17.3 percent, the CAPMAS said in a press statement.

The prices of fruit, grains and bread, and meat and poultry also went up by 7.6 percent, five percent and 2.8 percent respectively, it added. In October 2022, Egypt and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) reached a final agreement on comprehensive economic policies and reforms to be supported by a 46-month Extended Fund Facility (EFF) Arrangement of \$3 billion. —KUNA



LuLu Hypermarket launches 'LuLu Go Green' promotion

KUWAIT: LuLu Hypermarket, the leading retailer in the region and the destination of choice for discerning shoppers, launched the 'LuLu Go Green' promotion at all outlets of the hypermarket.

As part of the promotion, which ran from 4 to 10 January, a special promotional campaign, 'Explore your Garden Collections' was held on 7 January from 10.30 am to 4.30 pm at the Al-Qurain outlet of the hypermarket. The event was

jointly inaugurated by the CEO of Gulf Palms Company, Muhallal J E Mudhaf, and the owners of Zalzalah Nurseries, Fawaz Jawad Hasan Allanqawi and Jawad Hasan Allanqawi, in the presence of top level management of LuLu Hypermarket and a large gathering of well-wishers of the brand.

Nearly a dozen leading plant nurseries in the country participated in the promotion, with their respective stalls presenting an array of products, including fresh flowers, ornamental and vegetable plants, as well as a variety of garden accessories, all made available at amazing price discounts. Among the major suppliers of the promotion were Zalzalah Nurseries, Gulf Palms Company, Makita and, Black and Decker.

Adding to the excitement of the week-long promotion, two online garden competitions as well as

a kite-flying display were held on the occasion. A special kids play area had been erected near the event area to keep young children entertained, while food and beverage sampling counters provide nourishment to visitors. The online Best Balcony Garden contest and Best Garden contest offers winners and participants exciting prizes, with winners of the first, second and third prizes being awarded gift vouchers worth KD 100, KD 75, and KD 50 respectively, while consolation prizes awaited all other participants in the contest.

The LuLu Go Green promotion took all nature lovers on an exciting journey of discovering nature. The campaign also reflected the hypermarket's continued commitment to offer customers the best shopping experience with the widest range of products from all over the world at highly competitive prices.





Alpine tourists ski amid brown hillsides

A kid skis down a slope where snow remains at Adelboden Swiss alpine resort.

Europe ski resorts struggle to stay open in warm winter

Brown hillsides and slivers of snow—a common sight across Europe's Alps, and a far cry from the winter wonderland tourists had banked on. While some snow started to fall again early this week, Europe has seen "extreme" warm winter weather in recent days, experts say, with 2023 already posting record January temperatures across the region.

From Austria to France, Italy and Switzerland, slopes have melted away with temperatures too high even to

had not dropped below minus three degrees Celsius (27 degrees Fahrenheit) in days, meaning it has not been economically viable to make artificial snow, according to Nydza. About a third of the slopes were closed in the small resort, which still held a World Cup race at the end of December and lies less than 100 kilometers (60 miles) south of Vienna.

"It's a shame. It would have been nice to come to Austria in the middle of winter and see it all snowy," said Gregor



This photograph shows the "Chuenisbargli" slope amid snowless landscape on the eve of the FIS Alpine ski World Cup events in the Swiss alpine resort of Adelboden. — AFP photos

make artificial snow. Many lower-lying resorts have had to close, while others are offering reduced services. "In the last days it's not been cold or wintery... so winter holidaymakers probably don't really feel like skiing," Nazar Nydza, managing director of the Semmering Hirschenkogel Bergbahnen told AFP.

'Anxiety'

Until Monday, it had not snowed for weeks in Semmering, and temperatures

Macara, 34, a climate scientist from New Zealand who was visiting a friend. Further west, in Switzerland's Leysin, near the border with France, student Alexis Boteron, 19, said that with artificial snow, "it's not the best conditions for skiing."

But he said it is "always a pleasure, we're with our friends, we have fun." Many expressed worries about the ever hotter temperatures and lack of snow. Jean-Marc Gross, a hiker from Lausanne, said he felt "a little bit of anxiety about... what is happening to our climate and the future."



A staff member works on a slope as snow cannons operate due to lack of snow at the Peyragudes ski resort, southwestern France.



A few ski tourists slide down a ski slope with artificial snow on the Semmering Pass in the wintersport resort Zauberberg im Semmering, Lower Austria.

etly about... what is happening to our climate and the future."

Fatal accidents

Besides the lack of snow in Austria, an increase in the number of deadly ski accidents has also made headlines. So far this season 13 people have died in ski accidents, compared to a 10-year average of seven for the same period, the Austrian Alpine Safety Board said in a statement last week. Though investigations are ongoing, some have said the lack of natural snow is making conditions tougher.

Amid such negative headlines, ski resorts and tourism officials across the Alpine regions are putting on a brave face after two years of coronavirus-related restrictions. They say the final visitor numbers at the end of the season will matter—so if it snows again, numbers could still be positive. "The pre-season (before the holidays) was better than expected that means people want to ski, people want to come back and do winter holidays," said Walter Veit, president of the Austrian Hotelier Association,

which represents mostly high-end hotels.

Yoga instead of skiing

Some ski stations have already moved to offer alternative activities, seeking to make up for the lack of snow. The Swiss resort of Flumserberg, near Zurich, where just around a third of the length of slopes were open late last week, has organized special offers, including dance and yoga courses for those holding ski passes. Torgon, a small family resort in the Valais Alps between 1,200 and 1,900 meters (3,900 and 6,200 feet) above sea level, has had to close for skiing, and hiking has taken its place on the slopes.

Anna Reiner, visiting from Zurich, said it was "worrying when you always have temperatures getting higher and higher". "Of course I'm sad, I like to ski, but what can we do?" "Today we went hiking, which was fun, but it's not the same," she said. —AFP



Skiers prepare to ski despite the lack of snow at the ski resort of Peyragudes, southwestern France.



A panorama of the Rax mountain massif is photographed from the mountain station in the wintersport resort Zauberberg in Semmering, Lower Austria.



A skier carries his equipment despite the lack of snow at the ski resort of Peyragudes, southwestern France.

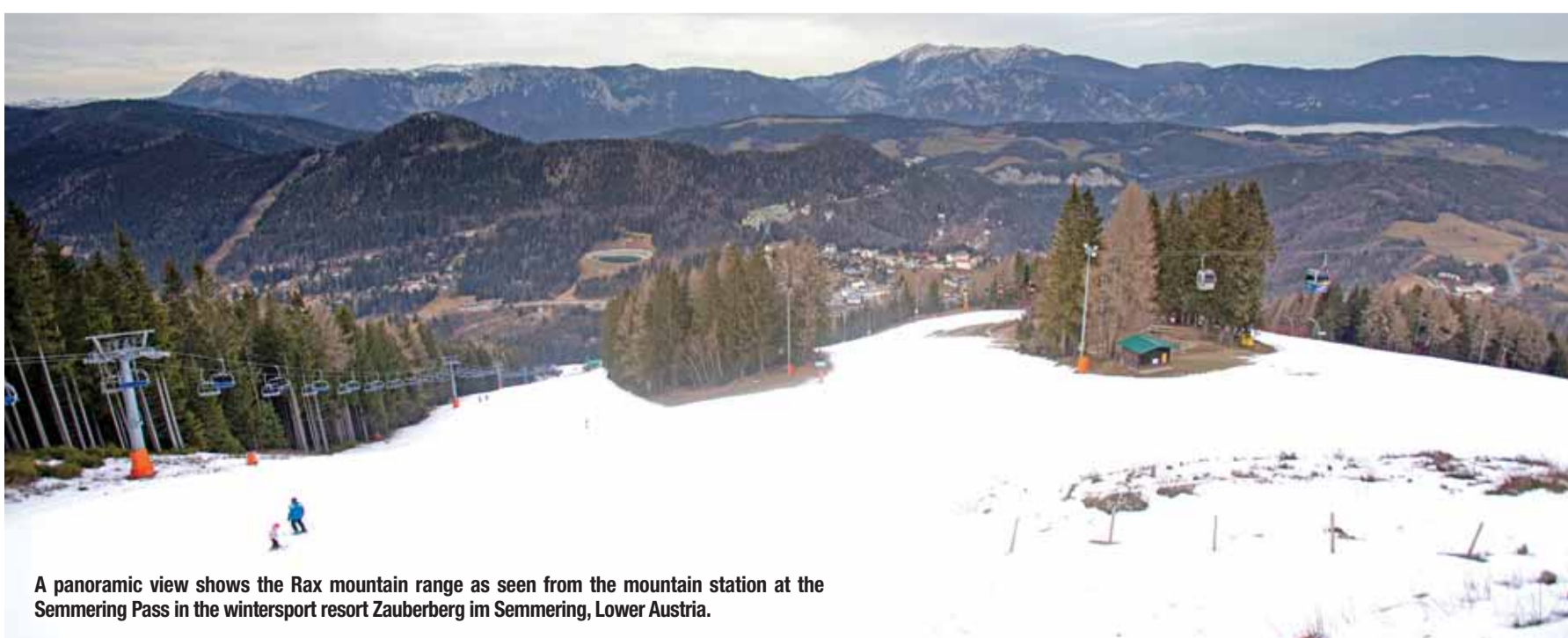
France
Less than half of all slopes were open as of last week, according to Domaines Skiabiles de France, a professional body which groups 250 ski lift operators across the country. Several winter sport events have also been cancelled, postponed or moved because abnormally warm temperatures have stripped mountain slopes of their snow covering. In the Alps, the Tignes resort has been forced to cancel the Andros Trophy, a car and motorbike race on ice, on January 13 and 14. In Contamines, further north along the Swiss border, the Telemark World Cup due to be held this month has been postponed to February. In Chatillon-de-Michaille, a dog sled race called the Retordica due to be held this weekend has been cancelled.

Italy

In central Italy, ski resorts have closed with tourist operators from affected regions appealing to the government to find a solution. They have called for help with ski instructors out of work and cancelled hotel reservations.

Switzerland

In Switzerland, about half of ski stations had to close fully or partially, especially smaller ones at lower and medium altitudes, as of last week. Tourism officials said bookings in the mountains were the same as during the festive season last year, though day trips to the mountains were down eight percent. Turnover of ski lift companies dropped nine percent year-on-year because of the mild weather, according to the organization which represents 350 of the 500 ski lift operators in Switzerland. — AFP



A panoramic view shows the Rax mountain range as seen from the mountain station at the Semmering Pass in the wintersport resort Zauberberg im Semmering, Lower Austria.

Lifestyle | Features

After hype and controversy, Prince Harry's memoir goes on sale

After months of anticipation and a blanket publicity blitz, Prince Harry's autobiography "Spare" went on sale Tuesday as royal insiders hit back at his scorching revelations. The royal family led by King Charles III and his heir, Harry's elder brother William, have maintained a studied silence as painful details from the book and a round of pre-publication TV interviews have piled up. But palace insiders quoted in the UK press said the Duke of Sussex had crossed a line in attacking Queen Consort Camilla, Charles's second wife following the death of Princess Diana, William and Harry's mother.

score-settling with his family and hatred of the British media. Some UK bookshops staged Harry Potter-style midnight openings for the biggest royal publication since the late princess of Wales collaborated with Andrew Morton for "Diana: Her True Story" in 1992.

One-person queue

But there was none of the initial clamor and crowds that greeted the sales of J.K. Rowling's popular adventures of the boy wizard. At the head of a small queue outside one shop at London's Victoria train station was Chris Imafidon, chair of an education charity, who said he wanted to

nied by four television interviews in the UK and the United States, where Harry now lives with Meghan. In one with US network CBS, Harry described Camilla as "the villain" who waged a "dangerous" campaign to win over the press herself after Diana's death in a Paris car crash which he blames on the press. The contents of the memoir, which will be available in 16 languages as well as the audiobook, have already been widely leaked after copies mistakenly went on sale early in Spain.

Popularity plunge

As well as giving insights into palace life, the book contains an explosive claim from Harry that William physically attacked him as they argued about Meghan. It also gives an account of how he lost his virginity, an admission of teenage drug use and a claim he killed 25 Taliban fighters while serving in Afghanistan with the British military-which earned him a rebuke from both the Taliban and UK veterans. The book comes on the back of the six-hour Netflix docuseries "Harry & Meghan", in which the couple again aired their grievances with the royal family and the British media. If the couple hope to elicit sympathy, recent polls appear to show that they are having the opposite effect-at least in the UK.

A YouGov poll on Monday found that 64 percent now have a negative view of the once-popular prince-his lowest-ever rating-and that Meghan also scores dismally. They may also be straining public interest in Meghan's homeland, after resettling in California, according to the New York Times. "Even in the United States, which has a soft spot for royals in exile and a generally higher tolerance than Britain does for redemption stories about overcoming trauma and family dysfunction, there is a sense that there are only so many revelations the public can stomach," its former London correspondent Sarah Lyall wrote. Harry maintains he wants a rapprochement with his father and brother, despite a lack of contact with them, but said the onus was on them, refusing to confirm whether he would attend Charles's coronation in May. — AFP

hear about Harry's life "from the horse's mouth".

Staunch royalist Caroline Lennon, 59, was the only person in line outside another London bookshop before it opened on Tuesday-outnumbered by a scrum of reporters. "I love the royal family, all of them, but I like Harry too," the Londoner said. "I don't like this war thing going on between them and I want to hear what he has to say. "I also bought the audiobook so I will be able to listen to his voice," she added, as both the print and audio versions topped Amazon UK's sales chart.

The publication has been accompa-



Copies of "Spare" by Britain's Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex, are displayed at Waterstones' flagship Piccadilly bookshop on the day of its release in London. — AFP photos

"He has been kidnapped by a cult of psychotherapy and (wife) Meghan," one royal source told The Independent newspaper. "It is impossible for him to return (to Britain) in these circumstances," it said, as other sources accused Harry of betraying both his father and brother. The book opens with an epigraph drawn from US author William Faulkner-which Harry writes he found on the website BrainyQuote.com.

"The past is never dead. It's not even past," it says, setting the stage for 416 pages of ghost-written prose dominated by Harry's trauma over Diana's death,



This file photo shows an aerial view of the Piazza del Pantheon in Rome. — AFP

Researchers dig up secrets of 'self-healing' Roman concrete

How have Rome's ancient aqueducts and architectural marvels such as the Pantheon, which features the world's largest unreinforced concrete dome, endured the test of time? Researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and other institutions believe they have uncovered the mystery of the durability of the 2,000-year-old structures-self-healing concrete. The secret lies in an ingredient of the ancient concrete used by the Romans that the researchers, whose findings are published in the latest edition of the journal Science Advances, said has been overlooked in previous studies.

The durability of the concrete used by the Romans has most frequently been attributed to the use of volcanic ash from Pozzuoli on the Bay of Naples, which was shipped across the Roman empire for construction. But the researchers focused their attention on another component of the ancient concrete mix, small white chunks called "lime clasts." "Ever since I first began working with ancient Roman concrete, I've always been fascinated by these features," said MIT professor of civil and environmental engineering Admir Masic, an author of the study.

"These are not found in modern concrete formulations, so why are they present in these ancient materials?" The researchers said the lime clasts had been thought to be the result of "sloppy mixing practices" or poor-quality raw materials.

But they are in fact what gives the ancient concrete a "previously unrecognized self-healing capability." "The idea that the presence of these lime clasts was simply attributed to low quality control always bothered me," said Masic.

"If the Romans put so much effort into making an outstanding construction material... why would they put so little effort into ensuring the production of a well-mixed final product?" For the study, the researchers examined 2,000-year-old Roman concrete samples from the masonry mortar of a city wall in Privernum, Italy. They found that a process known as "hot mixing" is what gave the concrete its "super-durable nature" in which the Romans mixed quicklime with water and the volcanic ash at high temperatures.

"The benefits of hot mixing are twofold," Masic said. "First, when the overall concrete is heated to high temperatures, it allows chemistries that are not possible if you only used slaked lime, producing high-temperature-associated compounds that would not otherwise form. "Second, this increased temperature significantly reduces curing and setting times since all the reactions are accelerated, allowing for much faster construction," he said.

It is the lime clasts that give the ancient concrete its "self-healing functionality," according to the research team, which also included scientists from Switzerland and Italy. Tiny cracks in the concrete would tend to travel through the high-surface-area lime clasts and, when exposed to water, would recrystallize as calcium carbonate, filling the crack almost like glue. "These reactions take place spontaneously and therefore automatically heal the cracks before they spread," said the researchers, who conducted tests using modern concrete and the ancient formula. — AFP

2023 fashion trends, what to shop now?

Thanks 2022, that was a bundle of laughs - onto the next! As ever, the style cognoscenti has already trekked from New York to Paris to decipher what has the potential to make it big this year. Trend forecaster WGSN's year-ahead report declares the cost of living bite will be the greatest shaper. Their advice to designers? "Versatility says value to today's cash-strapped shoppers."

With clothes, this doesn't have to mean depressing. From smart garments offering new tech to keep you warm, clever colors set to stay in style, and investment pieces you can sell on for profit - there are new ways to get more from your garments. Elsewhere, toughening up is in - think ultra-protective bombers and bulky jewelry. Here is what to bet on for the year ahead:

Go-go gradient

Infra-red, zingy shade jumpers are rapidly rising to It-knit status. You may



have seen Kylie Jenner reclining head-toe in Y/Project's ombre blue, red and yellow mixed knit dress and balaclava on Instagram. The likes of London label AGR, Acne Studios and even Desigual are making electric, multi-colored sweaters that are refreshingly wearable. LA labels Madhappy and ERL are front runners too, with co-ord tracksuits in Venice Beach sunset palettes. Think summery but snug.

High-flying tech

2023 is the year to demand more from our clothes - as frugality rises, multi-functional, smart garments offer more for your buck. AlphaTauri released their second, updated heated capsule collection in October. Start with their self-heating vest, which is temperature controlled from your phone or using the dial in the inner jacket. Another tempting invention is LabFresh's odour-preventing, stain-proof white shirts (see TikTok for customers hurling red wine over themselves as proof). Mother Oxford make similarly mess-proof shirts and dresses for women. Every wash cycle counts.

The return of skinny jeans

Don't scream. Celine's SS23 show notes opened ominously: "The Saint-Tropez collection marks the return of the 'the original skinny jeans.'" It may be a tough pill to swallow, but if the runways

are anything to go by, spray paint denim of the Noughties Topshop variety is making a return. "We have seen a big comeback as Nineties and Noughties references continue to influence the runways," says Matches' Liane Wiggins.



Japanese style authorities Comme Des Garcons Homme Plus and Junya Watanabe both had skin tight treads take their recent catwalks, while at September's London Fashion Week, cool-girl label KNWLS acid washed hers and upcomer Stefan Cooke's came ribbon embellished. Here's hoping you kept your old ones.

Vivienne Westwood

The grande dame of punk fashion's death on December 29 shook the industry. The floods of articles and Instagram posts that followed were a refresher on the indelible stamp she left on style. Many dug through wardrobes to share their archive orb-marked garments online; now resurfaced, they'll be worn as a badge of honor. Tributes will certainly come during February's fashion month, and Westwood's signature corsets and tartans are sure to flood red carpets in remembrance.

Heavy hardware

The sun has set on the stacked, dainty chains that tangle in the time taken to unlock a phone. This year, necklaces you can lock up your bike with are preferable -everyone from Isabel Marant to COS are on board. Libby Page, market director at NET-A-PORTER, has noticed the uptake in bulky, gold styles specifically. Padlocks and keys are the micro-trend to know in this field, kicked off by Givenchy when Matthew Williams took over in AW20, and championed by Dua Lipa this festive period. Mulberry make more dainty locks, while Tom Ford is putting them on his shoe straps. WGSN suggests "this detail becomes an option for upcycling, where old pieces of metal can be repurposed as charms." To the garage!

Light Ginger everything

Pantone's color of 2023 is garish Viva Magenta, while WGSN have picked a tepid Digital Lavender. I'd be wary of both - pick a one to last the year, and plenty more. "Light ginger pairs well with creams and whites, a strategic option as black loses favor to neutral colors year-on-year," reports WGSN. Parisian-chic pale brown overcoats, wide-legged slacks and cashmere cardis are the rage. Elle UK's fashion editor Georgia Medley agrees. "Beige and camel are the colors of the season for SS23."

— www.standard.co.uk



Lifestyle | Features

**Former Sex Pistol
Johnny Rotten in
Ireland Eurovision bid**

Former Sex Pistols frontman John Lydon, better known by his stage name Johnny Rotten, is among musicians competing to represent Ireland at this year's Eurovision, broadcaster RTE announced Monday. The punk frontman's band Public Image Ltd will be among six acts in the running to represent Ireland at the Eurovision Song Contest in Liverpool in May. Lydon's group, first formed in the aftermath of his split from the Sex Pistols in 1978, will battle it out in a TV special with acts including Dublin four-piece Wild Youth.



Former Sex Pistols frontman John Lydon

The national competition in February will be decided by a combination of Irish and international experts as well as a public vote. Lydon, 66, was born in London but his parents both hailed from Ireland. His mother was originally from Cork in the country's southwest and his father from Galway on the west coast. Eurovision is to be held in Liverpool in 2023 after the UK came in second to Ukraine last year.

Typically, the winner of the competition holds the following year's event but organizers decided Ukraine would be unable to host because of Russia's invasion in February. Public Image Ltd have said they will perform an emotional tribute penned by Lydon to his wife of nearly 50 years, Nora, who has Alzheimer's disease. The other acts taking part in the RTE TV special against Public Image Ltd and Wild Youth are singer-songwriter ADGY, hip-hop and rap duo K Muni & ND, songwriter Connolly and indie pop singer-songwriter Leila Jane. — AFP

**Novelist Paul
Auster addresses
US gun violence
in new book**

The popular US novelist Paul Auster is turning his sights on America's epidemic of gun violence in a hard-hitting, 100-page essay that features photos from mass shootings. "Bloodbath Nation" (Grove Press) is due to be published on Tuesday in the United States. The writing in this new work by Auster, 75, is terse and somber and is accompanied by pictures taken by photographer Spencer Ostrander. Auster says one of the reasons he is writing it is a family secret that was kept from him until he was a young man.

"The truth comes down to this: on January 23, 1919," he writes in the book, "my grandmother shot and killed my grandfather." Auster says his father was only six years old then and his uncle, who witnessed the killing, nine. The grandmother went on trial in Wisconsin but was found innocent for reasons of temporary insanity. She and her five children ended up settling in New Jersey, "where my father grew up in a wrecked family." "The Gun had caused all this, and not only did the children have no father, they lived with the knowledge that their mother had killed him," Auster wrote.



Like gun control advocates and victims associations before him, Auster recites the horrifying numbers associated with gun violence in America: more than 40,000 people die by gunfire each year, half of them suicides. And guns outnumber people, by 393 million to 338 million. The book features dozens of black and white photos by Ostrander of the scenes of mass shootings, such as the LGBTQ nightclub Pulse in Orlando, Florida in 2016. More than 50 people died in that massacre. They also show a supermarket, a temple, a parking lot, or other places but never a human being. "I chose to focus on the site of the shooting as a symbol.

Whether it's rebuilt, whether it's razed, whether it's left to decay, that's a symbol of how Americans value this issue," Ostrander said in October in an interview with Publishers Weekly. — AFP



Indian artist Subodh Gupta poses in one of his installations, a hanging hut made with cooking pots collected from markets during his exhibition entitled "Samgan" at the department store Le Bon Marche in Paris hosting every January a contemporary artist. — AFP photos



A general view shows monumental installations by Indian artist Subodh Gupta made with kitchen utensils collected from markets during his exhibition entitled "Samgan" at the department store Le Bon Marche in Paris.



A general view shows monumental installations by Indian artist Subodh Gupta made with kitchen utensils collected from markets during his exhibition entitled "Samgan" at the department store Le Bon Marche in Paris.



A photograph shows part of an installation by Indian artist Subodh Gupta made with kitchen utensils collected from markets during his exhibition entitled "Samgan" at the department store Le Bon Marche in Paris.

**Gupta's giant utensils
take over glitzy Paris store**

For the next few weeks, well-heeled shoppers at Le Bon Marche store in Paris will sniff perfumes and peruse designer dresses in the shadow of vast, three-storey sculptures made from pots and pans. The unexpected intrusion into one of the city's fanciest department stores-owned by luxury conglomerate LVMH-is the work of India's Subodh Gupta, one of the world's leading contemporary artists.

Among the works from Gupta, who often uses reclaimed utensils and other bits of second-hand furniture in his work, is a 12-metre (40-foot) high sculpture of a bucket (made from aluminum pots) pouring water (made from large mirrors) into its perfume department. The everyday objects-which reflect Gupta's upbringing in Bihar, one of India's poorest states-make a striking contrast with the ultra-expensive items around it.

"The things I use are not very luxurious," Gupta told AFP. "I told them I would not compromise my style, but what is good about the Bon Marche is they gave me total freedom to do my work. "And this way, people who don't normally go to museums and galleries can see it." Gupta has exhibited around the world, including



Indian artist Subodh Gupta poses in one of his installations, a hanging hut made with cooking pots collected from markets during his exhibition entitled "Samgan" at the department store Le Bon Marche in Paris.

at the Tate in London and Pompidou in Paris. Le Bon Marche invites a top artist each year to exhibit in their store and take over their window displays.

On one floor, Gupta has created a traditional Indian hut from dangling, recycled kitchenware. "I like the idea that all these utensils were used by all these

people, that so many people ate food prepared in them. So many people are represented here that it almost reaches into infinity," he said.

Raised in a small village in Bihar, Gupta began his career as an actor in a small theatre troupe before becoming an illustrator. Moving to Delhi to try his hand at more abstract art, he struggled for several years until a breakthrough when French fashion magnate and art collector Francois Pinault bought one of his sculptures. Now in his late 50s, Gupta commands millions for his works.

Given the risks of building such vast sculptures in public places, they are painstakingly designed with engineers. The artworks in the Bon Marche were transported in pieces and assembled "like a puzzle by 30 or 40 people", he said. "More and more I like these unconventional settings," Gupta said. "Coming from the theatre, I like the performance aspect, as if these artworks are performing for the public." The exhibition runs at the Bon Marche until February 19. — AFP

**Paul Auster:
American
fiction's Mr Cool**

American author Paul Auster made his name with pacy, noirish novels about lonely writers, outsiders and down-and-outers. Now he's tackling America's epidemic of gun violence in an impassioned account of the slaughter of innocents in schools, malls, clubs and churches. The 75-year-old author with the soulful, sunken eyes gained cult status in the 1980s and 1990s with his "New York Trilogy" of metaphysical mysteries and his hip film "Smoke", about the lost souls who patronize a Brooklyn tobacco shop.

His more than 30 books are as likely to be found in airports as on university reading lists and have been translated into more than 40 languages. In recent years his life was marred by tragedy, his 10-month-old granddaughter dying after ingesting heroin and his son Daniel dying of an overdose 10 months later.

Lost father

Neither of Auster's Polish immigrant parents went to university and there were few books in his home growing up in Newark, New Jersey. But he discovered the power of the pen-and found his vocation-after composing a poem about the arrival of spring. It was a "horrible" poem, he admitted later, but the act of

writing changed his way of seeing the world. He moved to New York to attend Columbia University and after graduating spent four years in France, where he lived from translations while struggling to hone his craft.

He went through particularly dark times in the 1970s when he married, then four years later divorced, US short story writer Lydia Davis, with whom he had Daniel. "I had run into a wall with my work. I was blocked and miserable, my marriage was falling apart, I had no money. I was finished," he told The New York Times in 1992.

The turning point came with the sudden death of his father, which spurred Auster to write "The Invention of Solitude", a haunting memoir of his dad and reflection on father-son relationships, a recurring theme in Auster's work. Published in 1982 it was a critical success and set Auster free with his writing. The same

year he married fellow author Siri Hustvedt.

New York modernist

His big breakthrough came with "The New York Trilogy", a philosophical twist on the detective genre featuring a shady quartet of private investigators named Blue, Brown, Black and White. That period also brought a downbeat dog tasked with getting his dead owner's unpublished manuscript out of a bus station's luggage locker in "Timbuktu" (1999) and a series of existential capers: "Moon Palace" (1989), "The Music of Chance" (1990) and "Leviathan" (1992).

His gift for sharp dialogue-Auster mercilessly edits himself for sentence rhythm-was key to the success of "Smoke", which he wrote and co-directed, about a Brooklyn smoke shop owner played by Harvey Keitel. He also co-directed the follow-up, "Blue in the Face" that featured

Keitel again, alongside Jim Jarmusch, Michael J. Fox, Madonna and Lou Reed.

'American pride'

In 2017 he broke with his concise style to deliver a 866-page tome, "4 3 2 1", charting American society through the life of an everyman, Archie Ferguson. Auster presented it as his masterwork.

But while America's National Public Radio found it "dazzling", others were less positive, with Britain's The Guardian calling it a "poorly-edited disaster" and The Irish Times deeming it "the last fat novel of a collapsed American pride".

Public and private tragedies

"Bloodbath Nation" takes him into new terrain. Deeply moved by US photographer Spencer Ostrander's haunting black-and-white pictures from the sites of more than 30 mass shootings, Auster penned an accompanying text about the massacre of innocents in schools, clubs, churches and malls across America. Guns are "the central metaphor for everything that continues to divide us", says Auster, calling for Americans to engage in a "gut-wrenching examination of who we are and who we want to be".

While tackling a very public tragedy, Auster has also faced private anguish. In 2021, his son Daniel was found guilty of negligent homicide in the death of his 10-month-old daughter Ruby. In 2022, Daniel himself died of an overdose at the age of 44. Auster has never publicly discussed their deaths. He and Hustvedt have a daughter, singer Sophie Auster. — AFP



Paul Auster

Sports

Argentina: A lesson for 2023

By Ricardo Guerra

The hysteria in the streets was so intense that the victorious Argentinian World Cup team had to suddenly abort their tour to greet the crowds. For security reasons, instead of traveling around the city by bus, the players boarded a few helicopters and flew over the astounding number of people who awaited them in the streets. It has been reported that more than 4 million people inundated the busy streets of the beautiful and historic city of Buenos Aires. Many locals argued that Argentina had never before seen the depth of collective fervor, passion and admiration displayed for the national team.

Not even the transition from dictatorship to democracy in 1983 engendered such a commotion as the one witnessed on the streets of Argentina following the World Cup victory. Nor did the lifting of the cup in 1986, despite all the ingenious plays of the legendary Diego Armando Maradona, lead to such a frenzy as the one witnessed recently in Argentina.

Perhaps the current situation is so special to Argentinians simply due to the fact that it's been more than 35 years since their team last won the cup. But maybe there's a deeper reason for the massive scale of the festivities that followed the victory. As frustrated and divided as our society can at times be - and as certain countries find themselves today - human beings have the need to be part of a pack. In our hunter-gatherer days, survival demanded that humans be part of a group, and this craving to belong has lasted until the present.

It is precisely here that the Argentinian team stands out. The unique unity of this winning team provides a sparkle of hope for 2023. What people saw in this squad was the kinship that has become more difficult to find in our fractured postmodern world. The cohesion of the Argentinian team provided a marked contrast to a society pervaded by greed, materialism and a pathological obsession with self. Their unity is a breath of fresh air within this lunacy. It almost seemed as if the people craved for themselves a dose of the unique social dynamic that permeated the family-like Argentinian squad. Through the team, they could immerse themselves in the feeling of togetherness so lacking in modern society - and perhaps be inspired to rekindle that feeling in ordinary life.

Credit for this victory is due not only to the players themselves, but also to Scaloni, Argentina's head coach, who helped instill this level of camaraderie through his expert managing skills. Scaloni himself is selfless, the embodiment of moderation and modesty. He directs all accolades and praise away from himself and onto his players. Most fans cannot even name his assistants. Members of this coaching staff are not looking for a pat on the shoulder.

In contrast to the cohesive Argentinian unit, we have other squads who float aimlessly through a banal celebrity world full of money and nefarious temptations of all sorts. How an individual athlete or an entire squad conducts itself behind the scenes can provide important information about character. A team's behavior off the field can be indicative of its priorities and even predict its strength on the field. Muhammad Ali once said: "The fight is won or lost far away from witnesses, behind the lines, in the gym and out there on the road, long before I dance under those lights."

While the low-profile, high-spirited Argentinian squad remained focused on their trajectory toward winning the cup, behind the scenes, elements of other squads were chomping on steak sprinkled with gold at a local Qatari barbecue shop, an act whose absurdity would be hard to match. The golden steak has a deeper meaning. It symbolizes neglect and a lack of guidance, a lack of leadership and coaching. It shows the priorities of the group, indicating an astounding level of spiritual shallowness. Would these same players eat a steak sprinkled in excrement, if it were in fashion? Their preposterous behavior leaves one to wonder.

Just as the Argentinian team's cohesion derives from expert coaching, other teams' self-indulgence results from rudderless leadership. Such lost, spoiled children desperately need to be schooled, and they need a teacher with wisdom, one they can look up to and who can lead by example, showing them how to prioritize what is worthy. They don't need a warden who will give the keys of the penitentiary to the inmates just to keep them happy. Unfortunately, these players are led by individuals who know nothing about cultivating the spirit or setting dignified priorities. Such leaders may be more concerned with self-preservation than anything else, leading them to appease rather than direct their misguided pupils. With teachers like that, one is better off never going to school.

The great middleweight boxer Marvin Hagler once said: "It's tough to get out of bed to do roadwork at 5 am when you've been sleeping in silk pajamas." Given the temptations of wealth and fame, the guidance of a Yoda-like Jedi character who can help a group of men discern right from wrong becomes even more necessary. Although this sort of guidance has nothing to do with the tactical and technical elements of the game, many times, it's the most important form of leadership a coach can provide.

It's here that the young and humble sage Scaloni, endowed with wisdom beyond his years, left his mark by instilling in a group of men concepts such as comradeship and a selfless spiritual mentality, leading them to prioritize goals of a greater magnitude than those of any single individual.

Rodrigo de Paul, the Argentinian player, is just one symbol of the squad's grit and determination. He is tough as nails, embodying the warrior-like spirit that characterizes the entire squad. Following the victory, he wrote on one of his social media platforms: "Don't search for money, search for glory, be champions of the world and all the people will remember and they will have gratitude for all their lives." That says it all. The lifting of the cup is bigger than oneself. It's bigger than any individual. And it's more valuable than all the gold sprinkled on a piece of meat devoured by some poorly managed souls who should have been hungry for glory instead.

NOTE: Ricardo Guerra is an exercise physiologist working with professional soccer teams.

Georgia win second straight US collegiate title with historic rout

LOS ANGELES: The University of Georgia Bulldogs won a second straight US collegiate football crown in crushing style on Monday, routing Texas Christian University 65-7 in the championship game. The historic rout marked the first time in school history that Georgia repeated as national champions and they are the first team to repeat in the College Football Playoff era. The last team to win back-to-back titles was the Alabama Crimson Tide in 2011 and 2012.

The 58-point victory at SoFi Stadium, home of the NFL's Los Angeles Rams and Chargers, shattered the previous record for largest margin of victory in a national championship game-Nebraska's 38-point triumph over Florida to cap the 1995 season. TCU's Horned Frogs were seeking to cap an unlikely season with a first national title since 1938.

The team from the Fort Worth, Texas, university were 12-0 in the regular season and knocked out the second-seeded Michigan Wolverines in the Fiesta Bowl. But TCU were no match for the Bulldogs, who scored on all six of their first-half possessions to take a 38-7 halftime lead. Quarterback Stetson Bennett launched Georgia's offensive outburst with a 21-yard touchdown run on his team's opening drive. Georgia then parlayed a fumble from TCU receiver Derius Davis into a field goal from Jack Podlesny.

On their next possession, Horned Frogs quarterback Max Duggan hit Davis with a 60-yard pass, then ran two yards for a touchdown. But Georgia



INGLEWOOD, California: Head coach Kirby Smart of the Georgia Bulldogs hands the National Championship trophy to his team after they beat the TCU Horned Frogs at SoFi Stadium on Jan 9, 2023. — AFP

closed the first half with four more touchdowns - on a 37-yard Bennett pass to Ladd McConkey, a six-yard run by Bennett, a one-yard TD plunge by Kendall Milton and a 22-yard pass from Bennett to Adonai Mitchell.

The Bulldogs continued to run riot in the second

half. They led 52-7 with 13:25 remaining when Bennett departed the contest to a massive ovation. He connected on 18 of 25 passes for 304 yards, rushed for 39 yards on three carries. After he left, second-year quarterback Carson Beck led Georgia on one last scoring drive. —AFP



Group photo of athletes and officials.

Kuwaiti triathletes honored

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait Triathlon Club and Federation held an honoring ceremony Monday evening at Kuwait Olympic Committee premises for athletes of the 2022-2023 season in the presence of Sheikh Fahad Al-Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah, Chairman of the Triathlon Federation Rashid Al-Kandari, board members and athletes. All triathlon athletes who participated in the current season's tournaments were recognized, along with those who contributed to the success of the game in Kuwait.

"Kuwait produces champions, as is the case at the Triathlon Federation at the Asian level, and there are players who qualified for world championships," Sheikh Fahad Al-Jaber Al-Ali said. "I will be behind the athletes who will have several duties to represent Kuwait," he added.

Kandari said the ceremony is in appreciation of the athletes and technical and administrative departments due to their efforts during the season so far, adding that the board is keen on having Sheikh Fahad present because he established the game in Kuwait and Gulf, in addition to founding the Arab and West Asia Federations. He said the Triathlon Club and Federation insists on continuing the success of the game and care for athletes locally and abroad. Meanwhile, athlete Huda Al-Saleh said she is happy with the honoring, which comes as an appreciation of players' efforts.



Sheikh Fahad Al-Jaber is honored by Rashid Al-Kandari.

"We had many achievements due to the support of the club, with training camps for championships," she said.

Celtics hold off Bulls, Nuggets and Grizzlies win

LOS ANGELES: Jayson Tatum scored 32 points to help the Boston Celtics hold off the determined Chicago Bulls on Monday and reach the midway point of their NBA season with the best record in the league. Grant Williams added 20 points, Jaylen Brown scored 19 and Al Horford's eight included a crucial three-pointer with 25.5 seconds remaining in Boston's 107-99 home victory. The Celtics pushed their record to 29-12 after their first 41 games of the 82-game campaign.

Meanwhile Denver and Memphis remained neck and neck atop the West, the Nuggets beating the short-handed Los Angeles Lakers 122-109 and the Grizzlies downing the San Antonio Spurs 121-113. Boston, who were stunned by the Oklahoma City Thunder and had to fight to hold off the rebuilding Spurs on their recent road trip, again let a big lead slip but managed to hold on.

After Chicago star DeMar DeRozan departed with a thigh injury in the third quarter the Celtics stretched their lead to as many as 16 thanks to a strong offensive showing from Tatum. But the Bulls, with Zach LaVine scoring 15 of his 27 points in the fourth quarter, sliced the deficit to two points in the closing minutes.

Horford's three-pointer, off a feed from Tatum, pushed the lead back to five points with 25.5 seconds left and after LaVine missed a three-pointer Tatum threw down a two-handed dunk, drawing a foul and making the free-throw as Boston clinched the win. "It's all about trusting your teammates," Tatum said of the pass to Horford as he himself was double-teamed. "Al made a big-time shot." Tatum said that despite Chicago's modest 19-22 record it was a good win. "That's a tough team," he said. "Well coached, they play hard, they're long, athletic. So that's a big win."

In Memphis, the Grizzlies were without top scorer Ja Morant for a second straight game because of a sore right thigh. But with 24 points from stand-in Tyus Jones and 16 from Jaren Jackson they snuffed out a late Spurs charge. Tre Jones, Tyus's brother, led San Antonio with 18 points and Josh Richardson scored 16 for the Spurs, who trailed by as many as



BOSTON: Ayo Dosunmu of the Chicago Bulls defends Jayson Tatum of the Boston Celtics at TD Garden on Jan 9, 2023. — AFP

16 in the first half. After trimming the deficit in the third quarter the Spurs twice took the lead early in the fourth. They were up by five on Richardson's tip-in with 9:19 to play but the Grizzlies managed to turn the tide and pull away, improving to 27-13 for the season. — AFP

Naseem takes five as Pakistan thump N Zealand in ODI

KARACHI: Pakistan strolled to a six-wicket victory over New Zealand in the first one-day international on Monday after fast bowler Naseem Shah took five wickets in Karachi. The 19-year-old grabbed 5-57 for his second five-wicket haul in just four ODI appearances as New Zealand, sent in to bat, managed 255-9 in their 50 overs at the National Stadium. Mohammad Rizwan (77 not out), skipper Babar Azam (66) and Fakhar Zaman (56) then helped Pakistan cruise to victory with 11 balls to spare.

The home team took a 1-0 lead in the three-match series. The remaining matches are on Wednesday and Friday, also in Karachi. Azam and Zaman put on 78 runs for the second wicket after Imam-ul-Haq (11) fell in the sixth over. Zaman hit seven boundaries in his 74-ball knock before he was bowled by Michael Bracewell, while Azam was stumped off Glenn Phillips after facing 82 deliveries.

Rizwan, who added 60 with Azam, put on another 64 with Haris Sohail who made a quick-fire 32. Off-spinner Bracewell was the best New Zealand bowler with 2-44. Naseem was delighted with his role in Pakistan's win. "You get the best fun out of your performance when the team wins," said Naseem. "I was getting reverse swing so I bowled on my strength and got wickets."

New Zealand skipper Kane Williamson admitted his side was short of runs. "We would have liked a few runs," said Williamson. "Pakistan were clinical with the ball and we had a number of mid-partnerships, but no one going on to score big." Earlier, it was Naseem's fiery bowling that kept New Zealand in check. The teenager dismissed opener Devon Conway in the first over of the match for nought to kickstart Pakistan.

Naseem returned for a second spell to account for Phillips (37), Bracewell (43) and Henry Shipley (nought). Naseem, whose first ODI five-wicket haul was against the Netherlands in August, rounded off his night by dismissing Mitchell Santner for 21 in the final over. Tom Latham (42) and Daryl Mitchell (36) stabilized the innings during a fourth-wicket stand of 56, while Phillips and Bracewell added 66 for the sixth - before Naseem dismissed both in successive overs. Williamson scored 26 before he was beautifully



KARACHI: New Zealand's wicketkeeper Tom Latham attempts a run out of Pakistan's Agha Salman at the National Stadium on Jan 9, 2023. —AFP

bowled by debutant leg-spinner Usama Mir, who finished with 2-42. Phillips hit a six and a four in his 53-ball knock, while Bracewell cracked four boundaries and a six. Opener Finn Allen smashed six boundaries in his 27-ball 29. — AFP

Sports

Nketiah double sends Arsenal into FA Cup clash with Man City

OXFORD: Eddie Nketiah scored twice as Arsenal set up an FA Cup fourth-round clash away to Manchester City after seeing off third-tier Oxford United 3-0 on Monday. Mohamed Elneny's header opened the floodgates at the Kassam Stadium after the Premier League leaders failed to make the breakthrough for over an hour.

Nketiah then sealed the win by taking his tally to four goals in as many games since the World Cup break. "We had to up the level as it wasn't good enough from us in the first half and I think we did that in the second," said Nketiah. "It's not the best draw but we're up for it."

Mikel Arteta named a strong side featuring his preferred front three in the absence of the injured Gabriel Jesus as Bukayo Saka and Gabriel Martinelli flanked Nketiah in attack. Arsenal were dominant in possession before the break but struggled to create any clear-cut chances and were further frustrated by the decision not to award a penalty for handball when Elliott Moore blocked Albert Sambi Lokonga's effort.

Fabio Vieira was one of those not commonly in Arteta's starting line-up given a chance to shine and the Portuguese made his mark after the break with two assists. The former Porto midfielder's inviting free-kick was headed in powerfully by Elneny for the Egyptian's first goal since 2021. Nketiah then continued to make the most of his prolonged run in the side following Jesus' injury.

The all-time top goalscorer for England's under-21s coolly rounded Edward McGinty from Vieira's through ball to roll into an empty net. "Every player wants to play," added Nketiah. "I'm grateful for the opportunities and just want to keep helping the team." Saka was then replaced after receiving treat-



OXFORD: Arsenal's Portuguese midfielder Fabio Vieira fights for the ball with Oxford United's English defender Sam Long at Kassam Stadium on Jan 9, 2023. — AFP

ment in concerning scenes for Arsenal, but there was some solace in the return of Emile Smith Rowe for the first time since September.

Nketiah added his second of the night with another cheeky finish as he dinked the ball over

McGinty from Martinelli's pass 14 minutes from time. A much tougher test awaits in the next round when the Premier League's top two will go head-to-head at the Etihad on the last weekend of January. — AFP

France captain Lloris retires from int'l football

PARIS: France captain Hugo Lloris has announced his retirement from international football at the age of 36, three weeks after his country lost the World Cup final on penalties to Argentina in Doha. "I have decided to stop my international career, with the feeling that I have given everything," Tottenham Hotspur goalkeeper Lloris said in an interview with French sports daily L'Equipe published on Monday. "I think it is important to announce this now, two and a half months before the start of Euro qualifying."

Lloris, who made his international debut as a 21-year-old in a friendly against Uruguay in November 2008, bows out after becoming France's most-capped player during the World Cup. He overtook previous record-holder Lilian Thuram's mark of 142 appearances and finished with his 145th cap in the final, which France lost 4-2 on penalties after an epic 3-3 draw at the end of extra time. "I have really been thinking about it since the end of the World

Cup, but there has been something deep inside of me for maybe six months now and which grew during the competition, leading me to make this decision," Lloris said.

Former Nice and Lyon goalkeeper Lloris captained France to victory at the 2018 World Cup in Russia. He played at seven major tournaments in total, including Euro 2016, when France lost in the final to Portugal as hosts. France's back-up goalkeepers at the World Cup were 37-year-old Rennes veteran Steve Mandanda and Alphonse Areola of West Ham United. However, the replacement for Lloris as France's starter is set to be the 27-year-old Mike Maignan of AC Milan, who missed the World Cup due to injury.

"There comes a time when you need to step aside. I have always said the French national team does not belong to any one person," Lloris said. "There is a goalkeeper who is ready (Maignan), and I need a bit more time for me, for my family and for my children. To have been the France goalkeeper for 14 and a half seasons is a big deal, but it is also mentally exhausting and I hope clearing some time for myself will allow me to keep playing at the highest level for a few more years." He added: "I prefer to go out at the top, having helped France get to a World Cup final." — AFP



Hugo Lloris

Bills ace Hamlin discharged from Cincinnati hospital

LOS ANGELES: Buffalo Bills player Damar Hamlin was discharged from hospital in Cincinnati on Monday, just a week after suffering a cardiac arrest during an NFL game, medical staff confirmed. Hamlin was released from the University of Cincinnati Medical Center and flew to Buffalo where he will continue his recovery at another hospital. "We are thrilled and proud to share that Damar Hamlin has been released from the hospital and returned to Buffalo," UC Medical Center said. "He is doing well and this is the next stage of his recovery."

In separate posts on Twitter, Hamlin thanked medical staff in Cincinnati while paying tribute to the outpouring of goodwill across the sporting

world. "Grateful for the awesome care I received at UCMC," Hamlin wrote, adding that staff at his new hospital, Buffalo General Medical Center, have "already made me feel at home!" "Watching the world come together around me on Sunday was truly an amazing feeling," Hamlin added in a separate tweet. "The same love you all have shown me is the same love that I plan to put back into the world 'n more."

The 24-year-old safety was left in critical condition last Monday after collapsing during the Bills' clash with the Cincinnati Bengals, forcing the abandonment of the game. The scary incident shocked the sports world and once again drew more scrutiny on the physically punishing nature of America's most popular sport. Hamlin had made steady progress since being admitted to hospital last week, regaining consciousness on Wednesday before addressing team-mates via a video call on Friday.

University of Cincinnati Medical Center physician William Knight, who accompanied Hamlin to the airport before his transfer to Buffalo on Monday, cau-

tioned it was still too early to say whether the Bills player would resurrect his NFL career.

"I think we're in the same place - it's entirely too premature to discuss not only his football, we're focused on his day-to-day recovery," Knight told reporters during a briefing. "He still has a ways to go in terms of his recovery. We're thrilled where he is today. He's up, he's walking around, he has an amazing sense of humor. But in terms of any kind of conjecture about his future, that's still significantly into the future. It's going to be up to Damar."

Knight said doctors in Cincinnati had already been in contact with Hamlin's medical carers in Buffalo. "I can confirm he is doing well and this is the beginning of the next stage of his recovery," he said. UCMC physician Timothy Pritts added that Hamlin would face ongoing monitoring and tests to determine what had caused his cardiac arrest last week. "We continue to be ecstatic about his recovery," Pritts said. "We anticipate that he will undergo an ongoing series of tests and evaluations to determine what caused the incident on Monday night." — AFP

4 NWSL coaches banned for life after abuse probe

LOS ANGELES: Four football coaches named in a National Women's Soccer League investigation into abuse and malpractice in women's football have been banned for life, the NWSL said in a statement on Monday. The punishments were part of a wide-ranging package of suspensions and fines against multiple individuals and organizations which followed publication of the NWSL's findings last month in its Joint Investigative Report.

The league last month said it had found "ongoing misconduct" at most league clubs after an earlier probe uncovered evidence of harassment and sexual abuse. The NWSL investigation spent 14 months examining complaints by NWSL players and uncovered systemic failures by the league. The coaches hit with life bans on Monday included Paul Riley, Christy Holly, Rory Dames and Richie Burke.

Former Portland Thorns coach Riley featured prominently in a separate US Soccer probe led by former US Attorney General Sally Yates. Former Chicago Red Stars coach Dames also came under scrutiny in the Yates report, which detailed allegations of verbal abuse and insults to players. Holly, a former Racing Louisville coach, was fired after being accused of sexually coercing and groping a player.

The Washington Spirit's Burke meanwhile was reported to have made remarks about race and ethnicity. Seven other individuals were also given suspensions or will be required to acknowledge wrongdoing and accept responsibility for inappropriate conduct before being considered for employment in the NWSL in future.

The NWSL meanwhile said its own league office would be fined at least \$1 million and would be required to undergo a sweeping overhaul. NWSL commissioner Jessica Berman said the league would "continue to prioritize implementing and enhancing the policies, programs and systems that put the health and safety of our players first". "Those actions are fundamental to the future of our league, especially as we build a league that strengthens our players' ability to succeed and prosper on and off the pitch," Berman added. The Chicago Red Stars will be fined \$1.5 million, the NWSL said, while the Portland Thorns would be forced to pay \$1 million. — AFP

Today's matches on TV

SPANISH SUPER CUP

Real Madrid CF v Valencia CF	22:00
BT Sport 1 HD	

ENGLISH LEAGUE CUP

Nottingham Forest FC v Wolverhampton Wanderers	22:45
beIN Sports HD 2 English	
beIN Sports 3 HD Premium	
Southampton v Manchester City	23:00
beIN Sports HD 1 English	
beIN Sports 2 HD Premium	

Classifieds

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



Mr. Abraham John, son of Mr. Johns Mathew, resident of G4 10, Boopathy Apartment, Ethiraj Street, Pallipattu Taramani, Titt Taramani, Chennai, Tamil Nadu - 600113 and Ms. Binoy Anna Varghese, daughter of Mr. Varghese Kallumpurathu Chacko, resident of Kallumpurathu Chiramel, Cherukole P O, Mavelikara, Alappuzha, Kerala - 690104 both Indian Nationals presently residing in Kuwait, have given notice of intended marriage between them under the Foreign Marriage Act, 1969. If anyone has any objection to the proposed marriage, he/she may file the same with the undersigned according to the procedure laid down under the Act/Rule within thirty days from the date of publication of this notice. Communications in this regard can be made by Email (cv2.kuwait@mea.gov.in) / letters / telephonic calls (00965 - 22550171, 00965 - 22533125).

(Kamal Singh Rathore)
First Secretary (Community Affairs)
and Marriage Officer,
Embassy of India, Kuwait,
Email: cv2.kuwait@mea.gov.in

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
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804

Industrial Shuwaikh	2481764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

Kuwait beat UAE to keep hopes alive



BASRA: Kuwaiti and UAE players vie for the ball during a Khaleeji Zain 25 match on Jan 10, 2023, supported by a large contingent of Kuwaiti fans.

BASRA: Kuwait national team achieved on Tuesday a "precious" 1-0 victory over UAE in a second group match of the Arabian Gulf Cup

(Khaleeji Zain 25) to remain in contention to advance to the next stage. Kuwaiti player Ahmed Al-Dhafiri snatched the winning goal in stoppage

time of the match in the 93rd minute through a direct free kick that surprised UAE goalkeeper Khaled Issa. The Blues compensated for losing in

the first round against Qatar to win their first three points in the tournament, while UAE remain without points in last place. — KUNA

Messi set for first PSG appearance

PARIS: Lionel Messi is expected to make his first appearance for Paris Saint-Germain since his World Cup triumph in a Ligue 1 clash at home against Angers on Wednesday, as the Qatar-owned club look to tie the Argentine down to a new contract. The 35-year-old took part in training with his teammates on Tuesday, a little over three weeks after inspiring Argentina to victory over France on penalties in an epic World Cup final in Qatar.

He was granted a two-week holiday back in his home country following the tournament, before returning to Paris and being given a guard of honor at PSG's training ground last Wednesday. The seven-time Ballon d'Or winner, who scored 12 goals in 19 games this season for his club prior to the World Cup, did not take part in PSG's win at third-tier side Chateauroux in the French Cup at the weekend.

But he could start as the Ligue 1 leaders play host to an Angers side who are bottom of the table and have lost their last nine league outings. How Messi approaches the second half of the campaign in France after a career-defining World Cup will be closely observed, with his initial two-year deal in Paris coming to an end. However, the Qatar-owned club are in talks to extend his contract with coach Christophe Galtier insisting the former Barcelona star is settled in the French capital.

"I know there are talks and that the club has spoken to Leo but I don't know where they are at," Galtier told reporters on Tuesday. "Leo seems to me to be happy in Paris and I think there is a real desire on behalf of the club to extend Leo's contract," added Galtier, who said that Luis Campos, PSG's football advisor, was in discussions with Messi's representatives along with president Nasser al-Khelaifi.

Kylian Mbappe, scorer of a hat-trick for France in the World Cup final, may again be rested for PSG's midweek game after missing their French Cup victory as he took a holiday in New York along with



SAINT-GERMAIN-EN-LAYE, France: Paris Saint-Germain's Argentine forward Lionel Messi attends a training session at PSG's training center Le Camp des Loges outside Paris on Jan 10, 2023. — AFP

teammate Achraf Hakimi. Neymar has been getting treatment on the ankle injury he suffered playing for Brazil at the World Cup, while Italy midfielder Marco Verratti is out for a PSG side who suffered their first defeat of the season in their last league outing at Lens on New Year's Day. — AFP

Attiyah plays it safe, stays on course for back-to-back wins

RIYADH: Qatari driver Nasser Al-Attiyah's strategy of playing it safe saw him move a step closer to retaining his Dakar Rally title and his fifth in all following Tuesday's ninth stage. The 52-year-old Toyota driver finished 11min 8sec adrift of the stage winner, nine-time world rally champion Sebastien Loeb. However, the pressure further eased on Attiyah as his closest pursuer overnight, the South driver African Henk Lategan, suffered a mechanical problem and lost 40 minutes.

Attiyah holds a lead of 1hr 21min over another Toyota driver, Brazil's Lucas Moraes, with Loeb a further 19min in arrears. "Today we did a really good job without any mistakes, without any problems," said Attiyah, bidding to become the first back to back winner since 'Mr Dakar' Stephane Peterhansel in 2016/17. "We need to take it day by day like this without any problems. We have a big gap now and I hope to finish and to win this Dakar."

Three-time Dakar Rally car champion Carlos Sainz showed gritty determination in ordering a helicopter ambulance to turn around and return him to his stricken car. The 60-year-old's Audi came to grief just six kilometers into the stage and as a precaution he and his co-pilot Lucas Cruz were airlifted to hospital. "The Spaniard wished to have a chance of resuming the race and demanded that the helicopter ambulance turn around and drop him back at his car," race organizers Amaury Sport Organization said in a statement.

The two-time world rally champion had lost all hope of a fourth title last Friday when a front wheel came off in an accident. Despite suffering from chest pain as a result of the mishap he insisted on carrying on and started Tuesday's stage languishing in 100th spot, over 29 hours in arrears of Attiyah.

'More and more challenges'

Earlier Argentinian rider Luciano Benavides, younger brother of title contender Kevin, won the stage in the motorcycling category. The 27-year-old



HARADH, Saudi Arabia: Audi's hybrid Spanish driver Carlos Sainz reacts by his car after a crash during Stage 9 of the Dakar 2023 rally between Riyadh and Haradh on Jan 10, 2023. — AFP

Husqvarna motorcyclist secured his second stage win of this year's race as he timed 1min 2sec faster over the 358-kilometre special than Australian Toby Price on a KTM. Overall leader Skyler Howes of the United States was third, 2min 57sec off the pace set by the stage winner.

Howes retains the overall lead for a fifth successive day but he enjoys a razor-thin advantage over Price of three seconds as the ultimate test of endurance enters its decisive stages with the climax on Sunday. "It was a demanding stage, for sure, with lots of water," said Howes. "It was super crazy. We were going through giant rivers in the middle of the desert. So now we head all the way down to the Empty Quarter and I assume it's going to be the same, with more and more challenges down there."

Kevin Benavides is not out of the mix either as he sits in third spot, 5min 9sec adrift. However, there were two big losers on Tuesday - Frenchman Adrien van Beveren and fourth stage winner Joan Barreda of Spain. Van Beveren finds himself over 15 minutes off Howes, having started the day under three minutes shy of the leader, due to getting lost on the first part of the stage. For Barreda, though, there is no coming back as the Spaniard was airlifted to hospital with back pain following a crash on his Honda. Howes said it was a "bummer" to see Barreda lying prone in the sand. — AFP