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Govt boycotts Assembly session

Cabinet later holds extraordinary session to discuss options

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The government boycotted the National Assembly session on Wednesday, a day after ministers walked out of the Assembly chamber, saying it was not allowed to express its opinions regarding bills that have financial costs. Assembly Speaker Ahmad Al-Saadoun said he was informed by the government that it will not attend Wednesday's session and adjourned the Assembly until Jan 24. Instead, the Cabinet held an extraordinary meeting to discuss other alternatives, but did not reveal what they are.

Only two ministers attended Tuesday's regular Assembly session but left the chamber when MPs

insisted to debate a number of legislations that have substantial financial costs, including a draft law calling for the purchase of billions of dinars of bank loans owed by half a million citizens. The ministers called on the Assembly to send the draft laws back to parliamentary committees so it can provide its constitutional and financial opinions, but the Assembly rejected this and was about to start debating them when the ministers left. Under Kuwaiti law, the presence of at least one minister is essential to convene Assembly sessions.

Following the Cabinet meeting on Wednesday, Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Barrak Al-Sheetan said in a statement the government's walkout and boycott of the Assembly sessions came "because it was

not allowed to complete its constitutional and financial opinions" in those bills. He added the government asked reports of the draft laws be sent back to the committees "in order to reach solutions to achieve goals which the government included in its program".

"The government was not allowed to do that, which forced it to leave the session (on Tuesday) and boycott the session today (Wednesday). It held an extraordinary meeting to discuss available options," Sheetan said. Around 44 MPs issued a statement on Tuesday in which they strongly criticized the government, saying by doing so, it has become like old cabinets that contributed to political crises.

MP Khaled Al-Otaibi said on Wednesday that if the

Cabinet stays on, lawmakers will continue with their demands, and if the Cabinet resigns, "it will be a good opportunity to form a rescue government" with strong ministers. He added the government should not have boycotted the Assembly and should have accepted negotiations as a means of resolving problems. Otaibi said if the government is keen to cooperate with the Assembly, "it should have attended the sessions and explained its opinions".

MP Adel Al-Damkhi also said that any dispute between the government and the Assembly should be resolved within the constitutional framework, adding the government should abandon the policies of old cabinets.

XBB.1.5 COVID variant detected in Kuwait: MoH

KUWAIT: The ministry of health announced Wednesday that genetic tests have detected the XBB.1.5 subvariant of the Omicron variant of COVID-19. In a statement, the ministry said indicators of the epidemiological situation in the country are witnessing stability, renewing calls for adherence to prevention guidelines, especially in light of preliminary information regarding the ease of transmission of this variant, which was discovered according to genetic analyses in more than 30 countries around the world. The ministry also pointed out the emergence of such variants is expected and does not cause concern, adding there is close follow-up of the epidemiological situation by the advisory team on coronavirus developments. — KUNA

Grounded US flights resume after outage

NEW YORK: US air authorities ordered an hours-long grounding of flight departures nationwide Wednesday following an outage affecting a key system used by pilots before takeoff. Near 1400 GMT, the Federal Aviation Administration said that normal operations were resuming gradually as airlines warned of lingering delays. "Normal air traffic operations are resuming gradually across the US," the FAA said on Twitter near 1400 GMT. "The ground stop has been lifted. We continue to look into the cause of the initial problem."

The agency had identified a problem with the Notice to Air Missions system (NOTAM), which provides information to flight crews about hazards, changes to airport facilities and other essential information. The system is used by pilots before they take off, meaning that there was no risk to

Continued on Page 6

FLIGHT INFORMATION

AIRLINE / FLIGHT	TIME	GATE	STATUS
American 983	10:06 AM	B55	Delayed 12:38 PM
American 985	1:52 PM	B50	Delayed 9:11 PM
Delta 418	7:25 AM	A9	Delayed 9:48 AM
Delta 418	8:00 AM	B20	Delayed 10:08 AM
American 987	9:00 AM	B52	Delayed 11:02 AM
Delta 907	9:05 AM	B19	Delayed 12:19 PM
Delta 907	10:05 AM	B36	On Time
American 119	11:59 AM	D34	On Time
Delta 919	12:15 PM	A8	Cancelled
American 180	11:57 AM	B53	On Time
American 180	8:47 AM	D44B	Delayed 11:49 AM
American 987	6:15 AM	B15	Delayed 10:08 AM
American 1104	7:30 AM	C26	Delayed 9:50 AM
American 214	8:00 AM	C27	Delayed 10:45 AM
American 184	8:30 AM	C28	Delayed 10:19 AM
Delta 119	9:00 AM	B19	Delayed 10:08 AM
American 214	9:00 AM	C29	Delayed 10:54 AM

ARLINGTON, Virginia: A traveler looks at a flight information board at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport on Jan 11, 2023. — AFP

Egypt currency halves in value since March



CAIRO: The Egyptian pound traded Wednesday at half its value from March after the central bank intervened for a third time as part of an International Monetary Fund loan agreement. The devaluation, representing a drop of around 50 percent against the dollar over the 10-month period, comes as the price of imported food and other goods soars in the Arab world's most populous country.

The currency plunged to 31.95 pounds to the dollar in state banks on Wednesday, before settling at 29.7 in the afternoon, according to the central bank. It had been trading Wednesday at around 35 pounds to the dollar on the parallel market. In Kuwait, one dinar bought more than 100 pounds as

Continued on Page 6

Alarm as ocean temperatures hit new record

PARIS: The world's oceans, which have absorbed most of the excess heat caused by humanity's carbon pollution, continued to see record-breaking temperatures last year, according to research published Wednesday. Climate change has increased surface temperatures across the planet, leading to atmospheric instability and amplifying extreme weather events such as storms. Oceans absorb about 90 percent of the excess heat from greenhouse gas emissions, shielding land surfaces but generating huge, long-

lasting marine heatwaves that are already having devastating effects on underwater life.

The study, by researchers in China, the US, Italy and New Zealand, said that 2022 was "the hottest year ever recorded in the world's oceans". Heat content in the oceans exceeded the previous year's levels by around 10 Zetta joules - equivalent to 100 times the electricity generation worldwide in 2021, according to the authors.

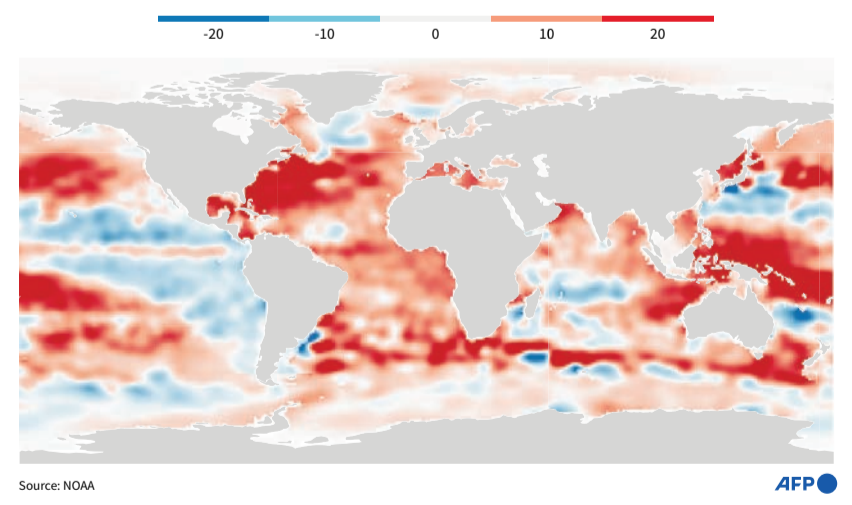
"The oceans are absorbing most of the heating from human carbon emissions," said co-author Michael Mann, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania. "Until we reach net zero emissions, that heating will continue, and we'll continue to break ocean heat content records, as we did this year," he said. "Better awareness and understanding of the oceans are a

Continued on Page 6

Ocean temperatures hit new record in 2022

2022 ocean heat content (OHC) hottest in historical record, exceeding previous 2021 maximum levels

OHC anomaly, from surface to -2,000 m, in 10¹⁸ joules



Super-resistant mosquitoes pose growing threat

TOKYO: Mosquitoes that transmit dengue and other viruses have evolved growing resistance to insecticides in parts of Asia, and novel ways to control them are desperately needed, new research warns. Health authorities commonly fog mosquito-infested areas with clouds of insecticide, and resistance has long been a concern, but the scale of the problem was not well understood.

Japanese scientist Shinji Kasai and his team examined mosquitos from several countries in Asia

as well as Ghana and found a series of mutations had made some virtually impervious to popular pyrethroid-based chemicals like permethrin. "In Cambodia, more than 90 percent of Aedes aegypti mosquitoes have the combination of mutations that results in an extremely high level of resistance," Kasai told AFP.

He found some mosquito strains had 1,000-fold resistance, compared to the 100-fold seen previously. That meant insecticide levels that would normally kill almost 100 percent of mosquitoes in a sample killed only around seven percent of the insects. Even a dose 10 times stronger killed just 30 percent of the super-resistant mosquitoes.

"The resistance level that we found in mosquitos in Cambodia and Vietnam is totally different," said Kasai, director of the Department of Medical

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TOKYO: This handout photo shows an Aedes aegypti mosquito at the National Institute of Infectious Diseases laboratory. — AFP

Local

Experts stress necessity of concerted efforts to combat the scourge of drugs

Family forms the cornerstone of de-addiction treatment

KUWAIT: Participants in a dialogue session organized by KUNA on Tuesday under the title 'Drugs Are Your Doom', emphasized the importance of concerted efforts by the competent authorities to combat and reduce drugs by spreading a societal culture to prevent the danger of addiction. The speakers in the session, which was moderated by the Director General of KUNA, Dr Fatima Al-Salem, said that the media has an important role in highlighting the dangers of drug addiction and its impact on psychological, health and family behavior.

The CEO of the National Project for Drug Prevention (Ghiras), Dr Ahmed Al-Shatti, said in his intervention at the session that there are signs of addiction, including whispering during communication, the loss of some belongings from the home, the low-level of education, lack of care for personal hygiene, and other things that the family notices.

Al-Shatti added that the family is the cornerstone of addiction treatment. He pointed out that during the days of the total ban during the COVID-19 pandemic, many families discovered their children's addiction after closely observing their condition and the change in their behavior, indicating that the necessary assistance was provided to some of these families to address these cases.

He explained that there are physical manifestations represented in clear signs on the body of the drug user, including the presence of signs of drug abuse on the arms, a change in appetite and weight loss, in addition to stress and insomnia on an ongoing basis. He mentioned that there are also behavioral manifestations represented in the person's dealing patterns after drug use, which is isolation and introversion, as the isolation is in two stages at the beginning of the addiction stage and is caused by fear of the family.

In the second stage the family environment is no longer the appropriate environment for this person. He stated that the isolation in the second stage is due to his companion with a group of addicts, as he communicates directly with those who support him in the behavior of abuse and the promoters, and the consequent negligence in the outward appearance, failure to perform duties and making excuses. He indicated that the national project Ghiras has worked in organizing many courses, including the smart parenting course, which is related to how to deal with addiction and confront it, and increase the family's awareness of dealing with the addict and how to pressure him to receive treatment to get rid of this scourge that kills.

Head of the Psychological Service Unit at the Addiction Treatment Center of the Ministry of Health, Yacoub Al-Shatti, said in his speech at the session that there are signs that precede addiction phase, clear signs, and a general deterioration in all aspects of the addict's life at the academic, practical, intellectual and behavioral levels, stressing that these are warnings that precede a drug disaster. Al-Shatti mentioned that the issue of addiction is a shared responsibility for all members of society,



Dr Amthal Al-Huwaila

pointing out that the state provides its services through addiction treatment centers and awareness-raising through mosques and lectures, in addition to the role of addiction centers in providing real treatment for addicts.

Professor of Psychology at Kuwait University, Dr Amthal Al-Huwaila, said in her speech at the session that addiction is one of the thorny, old and constantly renewed issues, stressing the importance of recognizing the existence of the problem of addiction and knowing its limits and real statistics. Al-Huwaila called for the need to unite the efforts of governmental and private institutions and to develop general and innovative policies and strategies for ways to prevent addiction, noting the danger of social media and its role in addiction and promotion, and its ability to reach different age groups more quickly than traditional media.

She pointed out that preventive campaigns need a societal culture among individuals in order to pay attention to the seriousness of this problem and to detect symptoms of addiction in a family member at an early stage, in addition to the importance of appropriateness of the campaign method and its information to the targeted age groups.

She stressed that the harm of the addict does not only fall on the person and his family, but extends to the society and the state and its social security, explaining the importance of supporting the role of the family and building it to confront external influences that target young people everywhere, in addition to supporting the state agencies and institutions to play their assigned role in this regard. She reported that the spread of drugs in recent years has taken many innovative forms in ways of promoting and delivering them, indicating the ability of many types of modern drugs to damage brain cells and merge with its components.

The representative of the General Department for Drug Control at the Ministry of Interior, Lieutenant Colonel Muhammad Al-Ardhi, said in his speech that the scourge of drugs is a war that crosses continents and must be addressed through plans and strategies to dry up its sources and limit



KUWAIT: Participants attend a dialogue session organized by KUNA on Tuesday under the title 'Drugs Are Your Doom.' — KUNA photos

its spread in the country. Al-Ardhi explained that the administration has intensified field operations in recent years to control drug dealers and promoters, as well as expanding international coordination and cooperation with countries and establishing offices at the land, sea and air borders to control smugglers through coordination and cooperation with the General Administration of Customs. He stated that the administration has launched a number of programs targeting school, institute and university students and the rest of the community to raise awareness of the harmful effects of drugs, through community development centers spread across the country.

He added that the administration recently developed a program that touches the segment arrested by the administration on charges of drug abuse, benefiting from their presence to understand the reasons and factors that led them to drug abuse and help them in treatment and prevention from its danger. Al-Ardhi indicated that the substances that are used in drug abuse are diverse and different, as some of them are natural and others are chemical, in addition to medical drugs that are used without a prescription, pointing out that the two substances—shabu and lyrica—are the most seized substances with drug users.

He praised the efforts of the Ministry of Interior and other government agencies that contributed to seizing a large number of drugs and their dealers, in addition to bringing down the number of overdose deaths and thwarting attempts to smuggle large quantities into the country.

On the sidelines of the session, a mini-exhibition was held on the tools used in drug abuse, in addition to presenting some narcotic chemicals to see and know to avoid and beware of them. It is noteworthy that KUNA launched last December its awareness media campaign to combat the scourge of drugs under the title 'Drugs Are Your Destruction' through all its news services through specialized and varied materials and different types of media, reaching various segments of public opinion, especially youth. —KUNA

Videogames might lead to drug addiction: Experts

KUWAIT: Unsupervised videogames sessions might lead individuals into drug addiction, especially if such medium was dedicated to adult content and audiences, said Kuwaiti experts on Wednesday. Speaking to KUNA, the experts affirmed that with the development of video-gaming technologies in recent years, it was important to set certain standards to avoid leading individuals into drug use and addiction.

Children, youth and adults spend nowadays a tremendous amount of time playing videogames whether individually or online and this requires some sort of supervision from others, said acting head of the psychological department at Kuwait University (KU) Dr Huda Jaafar. She indicated that spending much of our free-time playing videogames might coheres people's minds and filling that gap with false ideals one of them being that drugs were okay to use as long as they were not strong narcotics.

This case is very true when it came to children who, with the advance videogame graphics and virtual reality services, would not know the difference between right and wrong without guidance. Dr Jaafar affirmed that some would focus on imitating whatever the characters in videogames were doing whether it was some bombastic actions or taking drugs. Similarly, head of the cybercrime committee at the federation of electronic media Mohammad Al-Rashidi warned against online videogames, saying that they were a danger especially if children were involved. —KUNA

Once in 50,000 years comet to be visible on February 1

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti astronomer Adel Al-Saadoun said on Wednesday that the comet, C/2022 E3 (ZTF), will approach the Earth and is forecast to be seen on February 1. He told KUNA that people will be able to view it with the naked eye—the first comet to be seen without equipment for the first time in two decades. The bright green comet will pass by Earth for the first time in 50,000 years and will first pass by the Sun, arriving from the outer parts of the solar system, which is why it's taken thousands of years to return. The comet, discovered by the Zwicky Transient Facility on March 2, 2022, will reach its perihelion on January 12, 2023. —KUNA



The comet, C/2022 E3 (ZTF).

Kuwait participates in Future Minerals Forum in Riyadh

RIYADH: The second edition of the Future Minerals Forum was launched Wednesday under the patronage of King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud. Representative of Kuwait's Minister of Commerce and Industry and Minister of State for Communications and Information Technology Mazen Al-Nahedh, Acting Director General of the Public Authority for Industry Mohammad Al-Adwani headed the Kuwaiti delegation to the meeting.

Speaking to KUNA and Kuwait TV in a statement, Al-Adwani stressed the importance of the meeting attended by more than 60 countries represented by 40 ministers and officials concerned with mining industry in the region from Africa to West central Asia. He affirmed that this industry is imperative for future as the world is seeking to turn to clean energy and zero carbon neutrality by 2035, indicating that minerals contribute to reaching this goal by reducing carbon emissions. There are some investment opportunities offered during the round-table meeting and will be presented in Wednesday's conference, he said. The Saudi opportunities include exploration for minerals, topped with gold, iron and zinc among others in the region, he said.

In his inaugural speech, Saudi Minister of



RIYADH: Saudi Minister of Industry and Mineral Resources, Bandar Al-Khorayef delivers the inaugural speech. —KUNA photos

Industry and Mineral Resources, Bandar Al-Khorayef, noted that the first edition of the forum, held in January 2022, aimed at highlighting the mining potential of Saudi Arabia and emerging regional countries. The second edition, he expounded, will handle a set of urgent topics, including increasing the region's contribution to value chains and supply of critical metals and promoting responsible and sustainable mining. Additionally, the conference aims at ensuring maximum utilization of mineral wealth in the emerging mining area extending between Africa and West and Central Asia, and developing this area to become a comprehensive hub for producing green minerals. The big turnout of about 12,000 attendees from 130 countries and the participation of 200 speakers, verifies that the mining community is well aware of the challenges ahead, Minister Al-Khorayef stated.

Al-Khorayef also referred to Saudi efforts in the



RIYADH: The second edition of the Future Minerals Forum.

sector, saying that the Saudi Vision 2030 includes programs aiming to develop the sector to become the third pillar of the industry. The forum aims at developing dialogue on the future of minerals and investment in mining, as well as cooperation in the field across the area extending between Africa and West and Central Asia. Taking part in the forum, set to last until Thursday, is a host of ministers, government representatives and lead investors as well as experts and specialists in the field. The forum allocated an area to showcase the latest mining technologies, an outdoor exhibition area, and a dedicated area to display investment opportunities in Africa, and West and Central Asia, as well as a zone for signing partnership agreements and cooperation memorandums. —KUNA

News in brief

Egypt minister denies talk of laying off labor

CAIRO: Egyptian Minister of Manpower Hasan Shahata addressed moves to reduce the number of Egyptian workers in the GCC, more specifically, those working in Kuwait. During a TV program, he denied talks about laying off Egyptian workers in the GCC, as the ministry responsible in Kuwait will still accredit work contracts. "I do not think GCC countries can completely get rid of Egyptian workers, as some countries have a system to organize the procedures regarding workers, such as the electronic connection between Egypt, Jordan and Libya," he added. He pointed out the ministry has nine representative offices abroad, which aim to resolve problems regarding Egyptians living abroad, as a guide will be distributed to these offices to review contracts with companies, as some contracts were found to be fake.

13 kg of marijuana seized at airport

KUWAIT: Customs officers at the airport arrested an Asian traveler with 13 kg of marijuana upon his arrival at Kuwait International Airport T-1. "An Asian traveler was found, while inspecting his luggage, with 13 kilos of marijuana," Osama Al-Shami, head of airport customs administration, said.

Court orders to reopen dance and music academy

KUWAIT: The criminal court ordered to reopen a dance, music and art academy that was shut down by the commerce ministry for allegedly violating public order. The court set Nov 1, 2023 to reconsider the case. The academy's lawyer Osama Al-Sanad said: "The court, as usual, ruled fairly, and we will take the necessary procedures to reopen the academy soon."

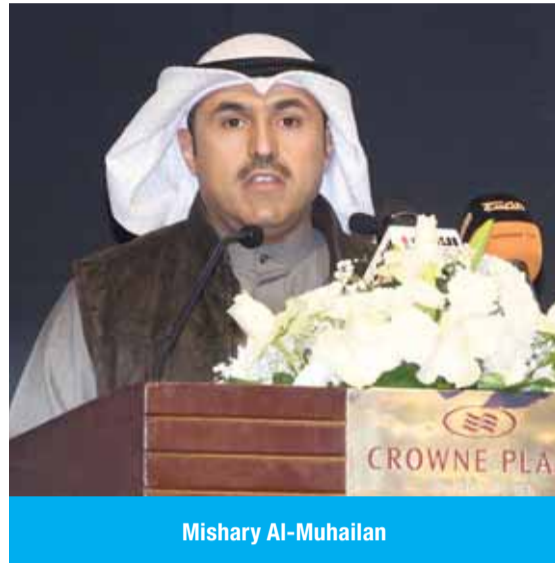
Local



KUWAIT: Participants being honored at ENCON3 forum. — Photos Yasser Al-Zayyat



Bader Al-Salman



Mishary Al-Muhailan



ENCON3 kicks off, addresses Kuwait's building and housing sector challenges

Forum seeks to develop a unified permits system portal for licensing

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Under the patronage of Minister of State for Municipal Affairs Abdulaziz Al-Mojel, the 3rd Consulting Services for the Development Plan Forum (ENCON3) kicked off on Tuesday at Crowne Plaza Hotel under the slogan "Completing the plans of the electronic portal for permits and addressing the challenges of building and housing plans".

The event is organized by the Federation of Kuwait Engineering Offices and Consultant Houses (KFEOCH) from Jan 10 to 12 to discuss plans for digitizing the permits system and automated integration between concerned institutions in the public and private sectors.

In his opening remarks, Assistant Undersecretary for Affairs of the Capital and Jahra Governorates at the Municipality Ministry Thamer Al-Mutairi affirmed the construction and housing sector in Kuwait faces real challenges, especially private housing, such as a shortage of skilled manpower and paucity of building materials and equipment. He said the ENCON3 forum aims to present all challenges that construction and housing are facing locally and globally, along with security problems.

Mutairi indicated one of the problems facing this sector is global logistical services, which negatively affect the plans set for the completion of construction of private and national housing projects, pointing out these projects of various types and sizes constitute an important part of the ongoing vital economic cycle.

Bader Al-Salman, President of KFEOCH, said the



Thamer Al-Mutairi

forum aims to study the best ways to achieve developing a unified permits system portal for licensing related to construction projects of all kinds, as well as studying the challenges and solutions for the overall status of development and housing projects in Kuwait. "The forum also aims to identify the required solutions to remove obstacles that face planning and implementing projects, including creating a framework for following up implementation and applying effective governance procedures during the implementation stages," he said.

Salman revealed the forum shed light on needed actions in terms of reviewing legislation, procedures and regulations related to projects to enhance the



role of engineering offices and the advisory role in development of plans. "The forum will host several panel discussions and lectures in which specialized experts from the public and private sectors will participate to contribute to developing a roadmap to achieve the goals," he said.

Mishary Al-Muhailan, Chief Development Officer, said this forum is one-of-its-kind, as it addresses an important issue related to construction and housing that affects many citizens, adding the panel discussions bring together experts with successful knowledge backgrounds, capable of combining their efforts with government agencies to cooperate in addressing more than 90,000 existing housing

requests so far, with more than 140,000 Kuwaiti families on the waiting list.

"The private sector is able if given the appropriate opportunity to contribute effectively to resolving the housing crisis that the country has been suffering for decades by contributing to development processes, as most countries have done regionally and internationally," Muhailan noted. He indicated Kuwaiti real estate companies are pioneers in this field and have a proven record of success in completing housing projects inside and outside Kuwait, affirming the Hessah Al-Mubarak District is one of the largest housing projects of the United Real Estate Company in Kuwait, and has won multiple awards.



KUWAIT: Under the sponsorship of Interior Minister Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Sabah and Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences, Kuwait University has opened its 43rd architecture exhibition at the conference center at Sabah Al-Salem University City.

KU holds 43rd architecture exhibition

KUWAIT: Under the sponsorship of Interior Minister Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Sabah and Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences, Kuwait University has opened its 43rd architecture exhibition at the conference center at Sabah Al-Salem University City.

The opening was attended by a number of officials including Education Minister Hamad Al-Adwani, Public Works Minister Amani Bugammaz, Housing Minister Ammar Al-Ajmi and Acting Director of Kuwait University Dr Suad Al-Fadhli, among others.

Sheikh Talal expressed pride in the opening of the exhibition, which has produced exceptional national staff and excellent achievements. "The past 20 years of the exhibition produced many great engineers who have presented over 3,000 architectural projects," he said. "The exhibition is considered a beacon and an encouraging environment for the culture of creativity

and invention, which showcases students' abilities," Adwani said.

Dr Fadhli said the exhibition embodies the insistence of the university to showcase students' talents in belief of their capabilities to be the architects of the future. "The university aims to be a leader in graduating architects that are capable of joining the workforce in line with the New Kuwait 2035 vision, as their participation is appreciated by all the sponsors of this event," she added.

"The foundation is adamant in supporting this exceptional event, as it is a part of the Kuwaiti scientific community. It is a chance to meet and accredit a new list of innovators from the exceptional Kuwaiti youth who are able to develop their projects to be of great economic value," KFAS Director Dr Khaled Al-Fadhel said. "The future necessitates the adoption of science and knowledge as foundations for the sustainability of development and the development of society by encouraging talented people, supporting researchers, stimulating knowledge giving and sponsoring scientific research," he added.

The event included a visual presentation of the visions of the architectural exhibition and the announcement of the awards presented by the sponsoring companies. The aim of this exhibition is to dis-



play projects created by college students for the final year of the engineering design course. It includes scientific projects from various scientific disciplines of the college, namely civil engineering, mechanical engineering, industrial engineering, chemical engineering, electrical engineering, computer engineering and petroleum engineering. The College of Sciences, College of Life Sciences and College of Architecture participated with 296 male and female students and 78 projects.

Traffic dept issues 45 citations

KUWAIT: The traffic department in Farwaniya governorate concluded a traffic campaign against truck drivers and public transport buses on Wednesday, which resulted in more than 45 traffic citations issued. "These heavy vehicles violated rules regarding parking locations and caused traffic jams in the area. Most of these vehicles have also violated safety and environmental regulations," an MoI source told Kuwait Times.

"The campaign found iqama violations by people related to heavy vehicles, as they are awaiting fixing their legal status. Some have exceeded months of their permitted stay, while others exceeded a year of violation, which will lead to deportation without being allowed into the country again," the source said.



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PIC completes polypropylene unit maintenance

KUWAIT: Petrochemical Industries Company (PIC) completed on Wednesday the annual necessary preparations for the polypropylene factory maintenance, which is owned and managed by Kuwait, valued at KD 2.5 million (\$8.1 million).

In a press release, Deputy CEO for Manufacturing and Marketing at PIC, Hamad Al-Subaie said that this is the second factory maintenance, pointing out that the maintenance process will take a month, starting from January 20th. Al-Subaie added that the company will use new techniques during the maintenance process, with a clear action plan to reduce costs and raise the operational and technical capacity of manufacturing cadres.

He also added that the polypropylene factory achieved an operational efficiency at 97 percent and 101 percent of the approved production budget until last December, at a cost less than the approved budget. He added that the company sold approximately 637,000 tons of urea and 37,000 tons of ammonia during 2022, adding that it entered the European and Central America's markets. —KUNA

Kuwait oil price down to \$78.21

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwaiti oil went down by \$1.03 to \$78.21 per barrel on Tuesday after being at \$79.24 pb the day before, said the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) on Wednesday. Globally, the prices of the Brent crude and the West Texas Intermediate rose by 45 cents and 49 cents respectively, settling both at \$80.10 pb and 75.12 pb. — KUNA

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: In freezing cold, a herd of dromedary camels are seen together in the desert of northern Kuwait on Wednesday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

WHO: Kuwait needs to build a climate-resilient health system

Workshop calls for identifying climate sensitive health risks now and in future

KUWAIT: The World Health Organization (WHO) stressed the importance of building a climate-flexible health system in Kuwait in order to achieve sustainable development targets and determine the health critical risks of climate, shedding light on requirements of adaption, WHO Representative in Kuwait Dr Asad Hafeez said Wednesday.

At the national workshop, Dr Hafeez added that "It is critical to build a climate resilient health system in Kuwait, towards this end, identifying climate sensitive health risks now and in the future, understanding groups of people that are the most vulnerable, and highlighting the adaptation needs to inform policy and programs are all pressing outcomes of this workshop."

Climate change is an internationally urgent issue that requires treatment, regarding its negative impact on human health, as it is capable of

undermining decades of progress in global health, and presents achievement of sustainable development, he affirmed.

WHO in Kuwait carried out a national training workshop regarding the health impacts of air pollution in the year 2022, to build critical capabilities with the utilization of a programming tool related to WHO, allowing to measure calculations of the health impacts resulting from exposure to air pollution, called (AirQ+), he said.

The latest reports indicated the increasing threats climate change is forming in the current world, especially in the region located in the eastern Mediterranean Sea, including the increase of severe high temperatures, and sand storms, that has a direct and indirect effect on humans and their health.

This workshop was developed in cooperation with the Environmental Health Unit of the Public Health Directorate and its objective was to work with the core national technical group on identifying priority vulnerabilities and adaptation measures associated with climate change and health.

Recently, multiple reports have indicated the increased threat posed by climate change on the



WHO Representative in Kuwait Dr Asad Hafeez.

world and specifically in the Eastern Mediterranean region, including increased prevalence of extreme heat and dust storms which have a direct and indirect impact on human health and well-being.



KUWAIT: The World Health Organization, Kuwait holds workshop. —KUNA photos

Five million people benefited from Najat charity in 2022

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Al-Najat Charity Society announced Wednesday that 5.5 million people benefited from its projects in and outside Kuwait during 2022. In a statement to KUNA, Chairman Faisal Al-Zamil said Al-Najat Charity is keen to implement humanitarian projects that keep pace with the vision of the wise leadership and the concerned authorities in the country.

"Achieving the sustainable development goals that promote a decent life for the beneficiaries is implemented through a clear strategy that aims at combating poverty, hunger and disease", Al-Zamil added.

In this regard, he referred to some projects in Kuwait, including payment tuition fees for insolvent students, which has benefited more than 50,000 students of different nationalities in the country since 1993, in addition to the provision of educational programs, courses and lectures. As for the projects abroad, Al-Zamil referred to the urgent relief in times of disasters and calamities, building hospitals and medical centers, developing projects, well drilling, construction of homes for the poor, building schools and sponsoring of students. — KUNA



Kuwait's Al-Najat Charity distributes supplies to Palestinian families. —KUNA



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Cardinal Pell, divisive Church leader dies

Turkey frees medic who sought chemical arms probe



MERCED: This aerial view shows a flooded neighborhood in Merced, California. A massive storm called a bomb "cyclone" by meteorologists has arrived and is expected to cause widespread flooding throughout the state. —AFP

Major cyclone to hit California

Tens of thousands placed under evacuation orders as misery continues

MONTECITO: A major cyclone was set to hit the US state of California with up to seven inches (18 centimeters) of rain on Wednesday, the National Weather Service said, after tens of thousands of people were placed under evacuation orders due to a barrage of storms that killed at least 17 people.

On Tuesday, torrential downpours caused flash flooding, closed key highways, toppled trees and swept away drivers and passengers — including a five-year-old boy who remains missing in central California. Around 66,000 homes and businesses in the most populous US state were without power early on Wednesday, according to tracking site Poweroutage.us.

The new storm will hit northern California and is forecast to bring several more feet of snow to the Sierra Nevada mountains, the NWS said. The NWS described an "unrelenting series of atmospheric river events" that is the most powerful storm system since 2005.

"An enormous cyclone rotating well off the West Coast will bring the next round of heavy precipitation and gusty winds (on Wednesday), this time targeting northern California," the service's latest advisory

said. California Governor Gavin Newsom said at least 34,000 people had been told to flee the storms, with more danger expected.

"The fact is that we're not out of the woods; we expect these storms to continue at least through the 18th of this month," he told reporters on Tuesday.

"We now have 17 confirmed — and I underscore 'confirmed' tragically — just confirmed deaths." The town of Montecito, home to Britain's Prince Harry and his wife Meghan Markle, was pounded by rain, threatening dangerous mudslides on hills already sodden by weeks of downpours and sparking an evacuation order. "Because the mountains are right there, when it really rains, it comes down at a really high rate... it's pretty dangerous pretty quickly," resident Daniel DeMuyer told AFP.

"That's the price of living in such a beautiful place, when it rains like this, it causes a lot of destruction." Montecito, where multi-million dollar properties are surrounded by 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 miles were scorched, stripping the hillsides of the vegetation that normally keeps soil in place.

But an evacuation order for the town — home to stars including Ellen DeGeneres, Gwyneth Paltrow, Katy Perry, and Rob Lowe — was lifted on Tuesday.

Boy swept away

There were tragedies across the state. Authorities in San Luis Obispo County called off a search for a five-year-old boy because 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. His mother was rescued.

Two motorists died in a crash north of Bakersfield after a tree crashed onto a road. Destruction was widespread, with whole communities flooded in some areas.

Dominick King said his restaurant in Capitola had been wrecked. "It's a lot worse than expected," he told AFP.

"All my windows in the back are completely blown out. All my tables are kind of strewn around my floors... and our floors

had warped, so I guess the waves came up from under the building. "It's not just me, the whole block has been decimated."

Swaths of the Golden State were under flood warnings and forecasters said the misery would continue. The extreme weather will not be limited to California, the NWS said, with the system that caused Tuesday's rainfall working its way through the country and likely to cause thunderstorms over central and southern areas.

Downpours in drought

Heavy rain is not unusual for California during winter but these downpours are testing the state.

They come as much of the western United States is more than two decades into a punishing drought that has seen major increases in the frequency and intensity of wildfires. Scientists say human-caused climate change, brought about by the unchecked burning of fossil fuels, has supercharged such wild swings in weather.

But even the recent rains are not enough to comprehensively reverse the drought. Scientists say several years of above-average rainfall are needed to get reservoirs back to healthy levels. —AFP

Russia to send rocket to rescue crew from ISS

MOSCOW: Russia said Wednesday it would send a rescue capsule next month for three crew members of the International Space Station, after a meteorite damaged the spacecraft that was due to return them to Earth. The Russian space agency, Roscosmos, made the announcement after examining the flight worthiness of the Soyuz MS-22 crew capsule docked with the ISS that sprang a leak in December.

On Wednesday, Roscosmos said the spacecraft that was originally set to bring Russian cosmonauts Sergei Prokopyev and Dmitry Petelin and NASA astronaut Frank Rubio back to Earth was damaged by a small meteorite strike.

Roscosmos said it had ruled out a technical problem as being the cause of the leak. Their space capsule will now need to return crewless and a new spaceship, the Soyuz MS-23, will be sent to the ISS on February 20 to retrieve the trio. "Soyuz MS-22" must descend to Earth without a crew," Roscosmos said, announcing the conclusion of a state commission that weighed how to handle the problem.

There are currently seven people aboard the ISS. With the MS-22 rocket now deemed unfit, it means that the ISS has just one "lifeboat" capable of carrying four people, in case it needs to be evacuated. Roscosmos said any such scenario will be considered separately.

"In the event of particularly critical situations on the ISS, the possibility of using the Soyuz MS-22 to rescue the crew will be determined by a separate decision of the state commission," Roscosmos added.

MS-22 flew Russia's Petelin and Prokopyev, as well as NASA astronaut Rubio, to the ISS in September. Due to the damage to the space capsule their mission is being extended and they will now return to Earth on board the MS-23, Roscosmos said without providing more details. They had been set to come home in March.

The vehicle began spraying its coolant on December 14, with dramatic NASA TV images showing white particles resembling snowflakes streaming out of the rear. Roscosmos and NASA initially said the leak did not pose any danger to those on board although it caused temperature spikes. Russian cosmonauts had to postpone a spacewalk because of the leak.

Dispatching a rescue ship to retrieve the three crew members means that another three astronauts will not go to space as scheduled. Initially the Soyuz MS-23 had been expected to take to the ISS Russian cosmonauts Oleg Kononenko and Nikolai Chub and NASA's Loral O'Hara on March 16.

Space expert Vitaly Egorov praised the Roscosmos decision. "This is an optimal solution for the safety of people and minimising damage to the space programme," he said on Facebook. Space has remained a rare venue of cooperation between Moscow and Washington since the start of the Russian offensive in Ukraine and ensuing Western sanctions on Russia.

The head of the Russian space agency, Yuri Borisov, in December praised Russia-US cooperation at the ISS following the leak. NASA, which has closely monitored the Soyuz systems, is set to brief reporters later on Wednesday.

"NASA and Roscosmos are concluding their work together to develop a course of action following the analysis," the US space agency said. The ISS was launched in 1998 at a time of increased US-Russia cooperation following their Space Race competition during the Cold War. Russia has been using the ageing but reliable Soyuz capsules to ferry astronauts into space since the 1960s. —AFP

Fate of Ukraine's Soledar unclear

KRAMATORSK: The fate of Soledar in east Ukraine was unclear on Wednesday, with Russian mercenary group Wagner claiming to control the gateway town while the Kremlin cautioned against declaring victory prematurely.

The Russian defence ministry poured cold water on Wagner's claims saying fighting in the war-battered salt mining city was ongoing and Kyiv denied any Russian takeover. Both Moscow and Kyiv have said the battle for Soledar has been long and bloody, and its fall to Moscow's forces would mark Russia's first significant territorial gain in Ukraine in months.

The town in the eastern Donetsk region lies 15 kilometres (nine miles) from Bakhmut, a larger urban hub that Russia has been trying to seize for months. The head of Wagner Yevgeny Prigozhin claimed in the early hours of Wednesday that his forces had "taken control of the whole territory of Soledar". "Urban battles are being fought in the city centre," he added.

Peru president under probe after dozens killed in protests

PUNO: Peru's prosecutor's office on Tuesday said it was opening an inquiry against President Dina Boluarte and others for their role in the repression of anti-government protests that have seen at least 40 killed since December. The government announced a curfew on Tuesday in the southern Puno region in a bid to suppress the violent protests, a day after 18 people were killed there in clashes between demonstrators and security forces.

The inquiry is into whether the alleged crimes of "genocide, aggravated homicide and serious injuries" took place during anti-government demonstrations in the Apurimac, La Libertad, Puno, Junin, Arequipa and Ayacucho regions.

Puno, which borders Bolivia and is home to many Aymara Indigenous people, has become the epicenter of the protest movement against Boluarte by supporters of former president Pedro Castillo, who was ousted and arrested on December 7. Prime Minister Alberto Otrola — who is among those being investigated for

'Exclusively' Wagner
Russian state news agency RIA Novosti meanwhile published a photo of Prigozhin with armed fighters, saying it was taken in the salt mines of Soledar. But the Ukrainian military said the pictures were taken elsewhere and that: "Soledar was, is and will be Ukrainian."

The Kremlin urged caution on Wagner's claim with spokesman Dmitry Peskov telling reporters it was better to "not rush". "Let's wait for official announcements," he said. "Our guys are sparing no thought for their lives to give these tactical successes," he added.

The Russian defence ministry said the fierce battle was ongoing and Russian "assault squads are fighting in the city". The competing statements point to a fractious Russian force that has been trying to capture the whole of the Ukraine's eastern Donbas region since failing to capture Kyiv last year.

Prigozhin this week claimed Soledar had been stormed "exclusively" by Wagner units and even praised Ukrainian forces for fiercely defending their territory. President Volodymyr Zelensky said there was a "difficult situation" in the Donetsk region in his daily night address on Tuesday. He praised the "bravery" of Ukrainian soldiers defending Soledar.

Earlier this week he said Soledar had been flat-

alleged "genocide", alongside the interior minister and defense minister — said the three-day nighttime curfew would run from 8:00 pm to 4:00 am.

Otarola's cabinet obtained a vote of confidence from Peru's parliament on Tuesday night, with 73 votes in favor, 43 against and six abstentions. Overnight on Monday, protesters looted shops and attacked police vehicles in Puno.

Most of the bloodshed there took place when protesters tried to storm the airport in the city of Juliaca, which was being guarded by security forces. Fourteen people were killed, many having suffered gunshot wounds, according to an official at a Juliaca hospital.

Three more people died during the ransacking of a shopping center in the city, while the last victim was a police officer who the United Nations said died after his vehicle was set on fire. The government has defended the actions of security forces in Juliaca, claiming those guarding the airport faced down an organized attempted "coup" by thousands of demonstrators.

But UN Human Rights Office spokesperson Marta Hurtado called on authorities "to carry out prompt, impartial and effective investigations into the deaths and injuries, holding those responsible to account and ensuring victims receive access to justice and redress."

Protests erupted a month ago when leftist Castillo — who was facing several graft investigations — was



KYIV: Relatives of Ukrainian servicemen (POWs) and civilians said to have been captured by Russian forces hold a banner with portraits that reads, "Return home the prisoners of the 12th Brigade" during a rally on Independence Square in Kyiv on January 11, 2023. —AFP

tened by fighting: "Everything is completely destroyed." "Even after suffering colossal losses, Russia is still maniacally trying to seize Soledar," Kyiv's defence ministry said late on Tuesday. The UK said Tuesday that Moscow's forces were "likely in control" of Soledar. —AFP



JULIACA: Relatives of 18 people killed in clashes with security forces wait with empty coffins outside the morgue of the Carlos Monge Medrano hospital in Juliaca, southern Peru. —AFP

forced from office and arrested on charges of rebellion after attempting to dissolve parliament and rule by decree.

Tension had since been mounting in the cities of Puno and Juliaca, where a week-long general strike has forced businesses to close. Demonstrators have set up roadblocks in six of the country's 25 departments. Officials say there are 53 separate roadblocks. —AFP

International

Six wounded in Paris train station stabbing attack

Entire incident was over within two minutes: Interior Minister

PARIS: An attacker stabbed six people on Wednesday at the busy Gare du Nord station in Paris before being shot and apprehended by police, authorities said. The Gare du Nord is a busy commuter hub which also serves as a departure point for trains to northern France, London and northern Europe.

Police were treating the stabbings as attempted murder, not as a terrorist attack, a source close to the case said. The attacker's motive was not immediately clear. One of the six people was seriously wounded in the attack at 6:42 am (05:42 GMT), while the other five sustained light injuries, prosecutors said.

The entire incident was over within two minutes, Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin told reporters at the scene. It was not immediately clear what type of weapon the attacker had used. Police ini-

tially described it as a bladed weapon. Darmanin later said it was not actually a knife, but a "threatening weapon".

Le Parisien newspaper said it was believed to be a sharp pointed tool, "a kind of awl". The attacker sustained injuries to the chest after police fired three rounds. He was taken to hospital where he was fighting for his life, Darmanin said.

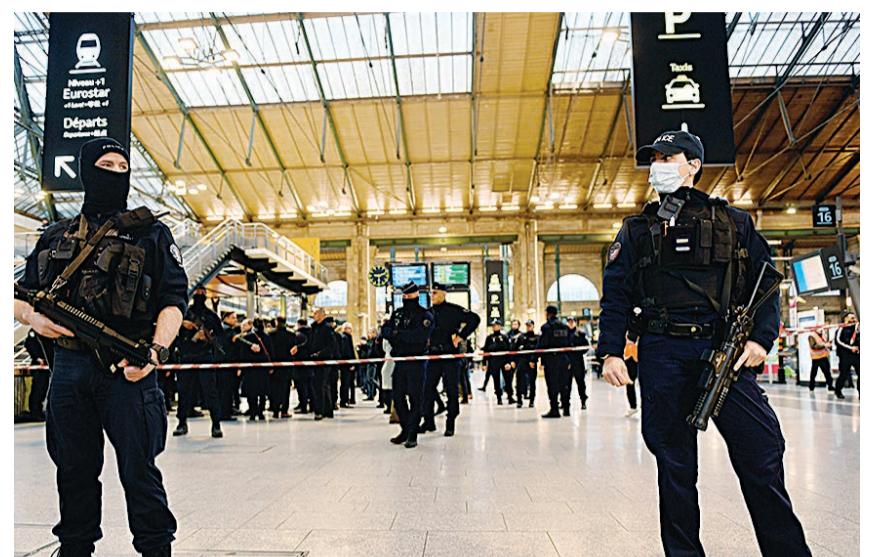
The police who intervened were off-duty officers in plain clothes who used their service weapons to stop the attack, he said. The police officers "were returning from duty at police headquarters to take their train and go home, but they were armed", Darmanin said.

They were authorised to make use of their weapons although not on duty, he said. One member of the border police deployed at the station was lightly

injured. "An individual injured several people this morning at the Gare du Nord," Darmanin had tweeted earlier. "He was quickly neutralised. Thank you to the police for their effective and courageous response".

The incident caused delays to trains at the station in the early morning rush as police cordoned off the station, and set up large white curtains around the attack scene. But no services were cancelled, a spokesman for rail operator SNCF told AFP.

The Gare du Nord is one of the world's busiest train stations with 700,000 travellers per day. It is the departure point for Eurostar and Thalys services to the UK, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany. France remains on a state of heightened security alert after a spate of deadly attacks by Islamist radicals, and others,



PARIS: French police stand guard in a hall of Paris' Gare du Nord train station, after several people were lightly wounded by a man wielding a knife on January 11, 2023. —AFP

IS wives jailed after arriving back in Spain

MADRID: Two Spanish women who married Islamic State fighters were remanded in custody Wednesday on terror-related charges by a Madrid court after being flown home from Syrian detention camps with 13 children, legal sources said.

They arrived at Torrejon de Ardoz military airbase near Madrid late Monday nearly two months after the Spanish government agreed to fly them home from the notorious Roj detention camp in Kurdish-controlled north-eastern Syria.

Yolanda Martinez Cobos and Luna Fernandez Grande were detained on arrival and brought before a judge at the Audiencia Nacional, Spain's top criminal court, on Wednesday. After hearing their statements, the judge ordered that they be held in pre-trial detention without bail on charges of "joining a terror organisation".

It was not immediately clear whether the judge agreed to the prosecution's request to suspend their parental rights. Since their arrival, the children have been under the care of Madrid's regional social services, the foreign ministry said.

El Pais newspaper said Martinez was 37 and had four children, while Fernandez, 34, has five but was looking after four other orphaned children who had grandparents in Madrid and were also flown back with the families.

El Mundo said Martinez's husband was currently jailed in Syria while Fernandez was widowed. The United Nations welcomed their repatriation from Roj camp, a spokesman describing conditions in the Syrian detention camps as "almost inhuman and extremely challenging". —AFP

Turkey frees medic who sought chemical arms probe

ISTANBUL: A Turkish court on Wednesday released an internationally-respected medic who had called for a probe into the army's alleged use of chemical arms against Kurdish militants in Iraq. Turkish Medical Association head Sebnem Korur Fincanci was detained and jailed in October for using a television interview to highlight claims that first surfaced in media close to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

The militia alleged that 17 of its fighters had died in Turkish chemical weapons attacks in the mountains of northern Iraq that month. The group is considered a terrorist organisation by Ankara and its Western allies for waging a bloody insurgency since 1984. Its media outlets are banned in Turkey and its claims are uniformly rejected by Ankara. An Istanbul criminal court on Wednesday found Fincanci guilty of disseminating "terrorist propaganda"—a charge that could have seen her jailed for 7.5 years.

But it sentenced her to less than three years in prison and ordered her immediate release. In Turkey, people who get sentenced to less than four years are usually put under court supervision but allowed to go free.

The verdict delivered a rare setback for prosecutors in a country where thousands of the government's political opponents—many of them Kurds—are languishing behind bars. Fincanci is a veteran forensic medicine expert who has collaborated with international organisations on past investigations into possible military crimes.

Her television interview infuriated the Turkish army and was personally condemned by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The Turkish leader accused Fincanci of "speaking the language of terrorism"



ISTANBUL: Medical personnel chant slogans as they hold placard bearing the portrait of Turkish Medical Association head Sebnem Korur Fincanci outside Istanbul's courthouse during Fincanci's trial for "terror" charges, in Istanbul, on January 11, 2023. —AFP

while the defence ministry called her comments "slander".

Work with UN

The trial has been accompanied by stepped up security measures and a heavy riot police presence both inside and outside the Istanbul courthouse. Fincanci told the court on Wednesday that she did not expect a fair trial.

She cited a Turkish poll showing that "one out of every two people believes that people are in prison based on what they think". Fincanci's medical association has a history of supporting opposition causes and sparring with Erdogan's government.

It criticised the health ministry's handling of the

coronavirus pandemic and staged protests demanding better pay. The union says that all 11 of its executive committee members are now under investigation for potential "membership of a terrorist organisation".

Fincanci herself was briefly detained in 2016 for appearing as a guest editor for a small newspaper read by Turkey's Kurdish community. But her collaborations with forensic experts working with the United Nations in places such as Bosnia has drawn international attention to the trial.

German human rights commissioner Luise Amsberg called Fincanci "one of Turkey's bravest voices" and top global rights groups have demanded her release. —AFP

Grounded US flights resume...

Continued from Page 1

flights that had left before the outage, the FAA said. Airlines and airports had been left scrambling with news of the nationwide pause, as the White House said there was no immediate evidence of a cyberattack.

Near 1430 GMT, a screen at Reagan National Airport was overwhelmingly red with flight delays and just a handful of departures. "Customers may continue to see some delays and cancellations as we work to restore our schedule," United Airlines said shortly after the FAA stop order was lifted, adding it would refund customers who no longer wish to travel.

Speaking to reporters, President Joe Biden said that he had been briefed by the transportation secretary and that "aircraft can still land safely, just not take off right now". "They don't know what the cause of it is, they expect in a couple of hours they'll have a good sense of what caused it and will respond at that time," Biden said. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg directed "an after-action process to determine root

causes and recommend next steps", he said on Twitter.

Senator Maria Cantwell, the Democratic Chair of the Senate Commerce Committee, also plans follow up. "The number one priority is safety," Cantwell said. "As the Committee prepares for FAA reauthorization legislation, we will be looking into what caused this outage and how redundancy plays a role in preventing future outages. The public needs a resilient air transportation system."

The NOTAM system is checked by pilots before they fly, the FAA said. "A Notice to Air Missions alerts pilots about closed runways, equipment outages, and other potential hazards along a flight route or at a location that could affect the flight," the agency tweeted earlier Wednesday. The FAA had halted flights until 9:00 am (1400 GMT), but began resuming takeoffs at Newark and Atlanta airports before the nationwide order was lifted due to air traffic congestion.

White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre tweeted that "there is no evidence of a cyberattack at this point". "The President directed DOT to conduct a full investigation into the causes. The FAA will provide regular updates," she said, referring to the Department of Transportation. There were more than 5,400 flights delayed in the United States by 10:00 am US Eastern time (1500 GMT), flight tracking website Flight Aware data showed. —AFP

health is deteriorating.

Increasing water temperatures and ocean salinity - also at an all-time high - directly contribute to a process of "stratification", where water separates into layers that no longer mix. This has wide-ranging implications because it affects the exchange of heat, oxygen and carbon between the ocean and atmosphere, with effects including a loss of oxygen in the ocean. "Deoxygenation itself is a nightmare for not only marine life and ecosystems but also for humans and our terrestrial ecosystems," the researchers said in a statement.

Updated data released this week showed that average global atmospheric temperatures across 2022 made it the fifth warmest year since records began in the 19th century, according to Europe's Copernicus Climate Change Service. Countries across the world have faced a cascade of unprecedented natural disasters made more likely and deadly by climate change. —AFP

Alarm as ocean temperatures...

Continued from Page 1

basis for the actions to combat climate change."

Records going back to the late 1950s show a relentless rise in ocean temperatures with almost continuous increases going back to around 1985. Scientists have warned that climbing temperatures have wrought major changes to ocean stability faster than previously thought. The research, published in the journal *Advances in Atmospheric Sciences*, was based on observations from 24 scientists across 16 institutes worldwide. It also found other indications suggesting that ocean

Egypt currency halves in value...

Continued from Page 1

the exchange rate for 1,000 pounds fell to KD 9.9. Egypt's economy was hit hard after Russia's invasion of Ukraine last February unsettled global investors and led them to pull billions out of the North African country. The war sent wheat prices spiraling - heavily affecting Egypt, one of the world's largest grain importers, and piling pressure on its foreign currency reserves. With costs driven up further by higher global energy prices, official inflation hit 21.9 percent in December, and food prices rose 37.9 percent year-on-year, piling further hardship onto households.

In a low-income neighborhood of central Cairo, Shaimaa al-Abed said the economic crunch has left her feeling "hopeless". "Even the cheapest food has doubled and tripled. What are we supposed to eat?" asked Abed, who has a four-year-old son, holding back tears. She said she was looking for work, adding: "We were doing alright, but now we're in the gutter."

Super-resistant mosquitoes pose...

Continued from Page 1

Entomology at Japan's National Institute of Infectious Diseases. Dengue can cause hemorrhagic fever and infects an estimated 100 to 400 million people a year, although over 80 percent of cases are mild or asymptomatic, according to the World Health Organization.

Several dengue vaccines have been developed, and researchers have also used a bacterium that sterilizes mosquitoes to tackle the virus. But neither option is yet close to eradicating dengue, and Aedes aegypti mosquitoes carry other diseases, including zika and yellow fever. Resistance was also detected

The IMF late last year approved a \$3 billion loan program for Egypt, conditioned on "a permanent shift to a flexible exchange rate regime" and a "monetary policy aimed at gradually reducing inflation". Egypt also needs to carry out "wide-ranging structural reforms to reduce the state footprint", the IMF said at the time, with the economy dominated by powerful state and military-led enterprises.

The hashtag TheDollar was trending on Twitter in Arabic on Wednesday, with comments ranging from anger to fear. Ashraf Kamal, who runs a small building supplies store in central Cairo, expressed frustration at the price fluctuations. "Before, I knew how much my products would cost for the next eight months. But now, we sell at one price in the morning, another in the afternoon, and a third at night," he told AFP.

The IMF loan program, worth \$3 billion over 46 months, is but a fraction of Cairo's debt service which in 2022-2023 alone amounts to \$42 billion. Egypt has only \$34 billion in foreign currency reserves compared to \$41 billion last February, while its foreign debt has more than tripled in the past decade to \$157 billion. Many banks have limited foreign currency withdrawals and increased credit card charges. —AFP

in another type of mosquito, *Aedes albopictus*, though at lower levels - possibly because it tends to feed outdoors, often on animals, and may be exposed to insecticides less than its human-loving *Aedes aegypti* counterparts.

The research found several genetic changes were linked with resistance, including two that occur close to the part of mosquitoes targeted by pyrethroid and several other insecticides. Resistance levels differed, with mosquitos from Ghana as well as parts of Indonesia and Taiwan still relatively susceptible to existing chemicals, particularly at higher doses.

But the research shows "commonly employed strategies may no longer be effective," said Cameron Webb, an associate professor and mosquito researcher at NSW Health Pathology and the University of Sydney. "There is growing evidence that there may not be a place for current insecticide formulations in controlling populations of key mosquito pests," Webb told AFP. —AFP

International

Bangladesh opposition protests demand premier's resignation

Public anger mounting over rising food and fuel costs

DHAKA: Huge crowds swarmed the streets of Bangladeshi cities Wednesday to demand Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's resignation and fresh elections, with public anger mounting over rising food and fuel costs. Opposition allies staged rallies in Dhaka and nine other cities—the latest of several demonstrations in recent months that have occasionally been quelled by violence. Bangladesh is one of the fastest-growing economies in Asia, but rising global food and fuel costs linked to the war in Ukraine forced Hasina's government last year to impose lengthy power cuts and expand food handouts to the poor.

Several people were injured in the central city of Faridpur when supporters of the ruling Awami League attacked protesters while brandishing sticks and hurling Molotov cocktails. "The time to cling to power by force is over," senior Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) leader Mirza Abbas said at a sit-in outside party headquarters in the capital. "Let a neutral government hold an election."

Police estimated up to 50,000 people were present in the crowd addressed by Abbas, who was released from prison on Monday a month after a sweeping crackdown on opposition activists. BNP officials said hundreds of thousands had turned up in Dhaka alone, with thousands more joining sister rallies around the country. "Living costs have always been a headache," university student Abu Nayem told AFP in Dhaka. "The government might not have a problem with this, but people like me are dying. I came to protest this careless apathy." The Bangladeshi taka has depreciated by up to 25 percent, driving up the cost of food imports and making life harder for the country's poorest citizens.

'Extremists are gathering'

Police said at least four people were wounded in the Faridpur clashes. "We fired rubber bullets to bring the situation under control," a senior city police officer told AFP, speaking on the condition of anonymity. Shama Obaed, a BNP leader at the Faridpur rally, told



DHAKA: Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) activists shout slogans during an anti-government rally in Dhaka on January 11, 2023. — AFP

AFP that at least 100 people were wounded and more than 30 had been detained.

The Awami League held a much smaller counter-protest in Dhaka to support Hasina, who has rejected calls for her departure. "Extremists are gathering in one place to topple us from power," she told supporters at a small gathering on Tuesday.

"Don't think that the party will fall down if it is shaken. Things are not that easy," Western governments and the United Nations have expressed concerns over the political climate in Bangladesh, where Hasina's party dominates the legislature and runs it vir-

tually as a rubber stamp. Two-time premier Khaleda Zia, the BNP chairperson and Hasina's long-term rival for power, is effectively under house arrest after a conviction on graft charges. Washington levelled sanctions against top security officers in December 2021 over their roles in hundreds of enforced disappearances and thousands of extrajudicial killings.

Hasina's government denies it was behind any enforced disappearance of opposition supporters and leaders, and says many criminals were killed during gunfights with officers. — AFP

Suicide blast near Afghan ministry, over 20 casualties

KABUL: A suicide bomber blew himself up near Afghanistan's foreign ministry where a Chinese delegation had been due to meet on Wednesday, causing more than 20 casualties, Taliban officials and witnesses said. The Taliban claim to have improved security since storming back to power in 2021 but there have been scores of bomb blasts and attacks, many claimed by the local chapter of the Islamic State (IS) group. An AFP team was conducting an interview inside the information ministry next door when Wednesday's blast took place.

A company driver waiting outside saw a man with a backpack and rifle slung over his shoulder walk past before the man blew himself up. "He passed by my car and after a few seconds there was a loud blast," Jamshed Karimi said. "I saw the man blowing himself up."

Kabul police spokesman Khalid Zadran confirmed the blast "which unfortunately resulted in casualties". "Security teams have reached the area," he tweeted. In the aftermath, bodies lay strewn on the road outside the high-walled compound of the ministry, marked with the Taliban flag, a video verified by AFP showed.

Some injured people writhed on the ground, screaming for help, and a handful of onlookers scram-

bled to offer assistance. The ministry itself did not appear to be badly damaged. "There was supposed to be a Chinese delegation at the Foreign Ministry today, but we don't know if they were present at the time of the blast," deputy minister of information and culture Muhajjer Farahi told AFP.

At least five Chinese nationals were wounded last month when gunmen stormed a hotel popular with Chinese business people in Kabul. That raid was claimed by IS, who also took responsibility for an attack on Pakistan's embassy in Kabul in December that Islamabad denounced as an "assassination attempt" against their ambassador.

Four people were killed and 25 wounded in an attack on a mosque in the grounds of the interior ministry in Kabul in October, with survivors reporting it was a suicide bombing. And two Russian embassy staff members were killed in a suicide bombing outside their mission in September in another attack claimed by IS.

Hundreds of people, including members of Afghanistan's minority communities, have been killed and wounded in other attacks since the Taliban regained power. Afghanistan's regional chapter of the Islamic State group is known as Islamic State-Khorasan (IS-K), a historical term describing the vast territory they hope to rule spanning India, Iran and Central Asia. The Taliban and IS-K share an austere Sunni Islamist ideology but the latter are crusading to establish a global "caliphate" instead of the Taliban's more modest and inward-looking goal of ruling an independent Afghanistan. — AFP



KABUL: Taliban security forces block a road after a suicide blast near Afghanistan's foreign ministry at the Zanbaq Square in Kabul on January 11, 2023. — AFP

Germany needs China 'rebalance'

TAIPEI: Russia's invasion of Ukraine has shown Berlin that it should become less economically dependent on China, a German lawmaker said Wednesday during a high-profile visit to Taiwan. A delegation of German parliamentarians arrived in Taipei this week ahead of an anticipated ministerial visit later this year, sparking condemnation from Beijing. China's leaders claim the self-ruled democratic island as part of its territory to be seized one day, by force if necessary.

Russia's war in Ukraine has deepened fears among Western powers that Chinese President Xi Jinping might try something similar. Johannes Vogel, vice chairman of the pro-business Free Democratic Party (FDP), said during his Taiwan visit Germany's economy was overly reliant on China.

"We should think about how can we rebalance dependence on the Chinese market for example," he told reporters in Taipei. "In Germany, we have been too dependent on Russian gas, and we cannot be that dependent in whatever area or in whatever way on an authoritarian regime."

He said some companies have started to realise how dangerous such heavy dependence can be and that "diversification is a good idea". China was Germany's largest trading partner in 2021. Vogel declined to directly answer whether Germany had a "moral obligation" to provide Taipei with weapons to defend itself in the event of a Chinese attack.

"It is a moral obligation I think of everybody to avoid military aggressions in the Taiwan Strait," he replied. "We think the economic dimension of avoiding a horrible scenario is something we can effectively bring on the table."

The trip is set to be followed by a visit from German Education Minister Bettina Stark-Watzinger, also of the FDP, in the next few months, sources told AFP. It would be the first by a member of the German cabinet in 26 years. Germany's diplomatic overtures to Taiwan have riled China.

Beijing invoked Germany's "painful" history while slamming the visit on Monday, in an apparent reference to the country's wartime record. "The root cause of the Taiwan problem is precisely that the law of the jungle, hegemonism, colonialism, militarism and nationalism were rampant in the world, and China suffered deeply from them," foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told reporters. — AFP

Myanmar hits ethnic rebels with strikes near India border

YANGON: Myanmar's junta has carried out air strikes on an ethnic armed group's base near the border with India, the rebels and media said Wednesday, with one bomb landing close to the international boundary. The military coup almost two years ago has sparked renewed fighting with long-established ethnic rebel groups, as well as with dozens of "People's Defence Force" groups that have sprung up to oppose the junta.

The bombing by five jets on Tuesday evening killed five fighters at the headquarters of the Chin National Front (CNF), which claims to represent the mainly Christian Chin minority in western Myanmar, spokesman Salai Htet Ni told AFP.

"They dropped seven bombs... Some of our houses were destroyed from their air strike... One bomb landed on the Indian side," he said. Local media also reported five fighters had been killed and that one bomb landed in Champai district, in India's Mizoram state.

But Indian police said the bomb had actually landed directly in the dry riverbed that marks the international boundary. "Our initial investigation has revealed that there is no damage to any (Indian) life or property," Lalrinpuia Varte, police superintendent of Champai district, told AFP. "Farkawn village, which is about eight to nine kilometres (five to six miles) from the international border, is the closest to where the incident happened." The CNF's fighters have dwindled in recent years, and it signed a ceasefire with the military in 2015.

But in May last year it signed an agreement with a shadow government dominated by lawmakers from Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) that is working to overturn the coup. Coup leader Min Aung Hlaing has justified his power grab by claiming electoral fraud in November 2020 elections won by Suu Kyi's NLD. International observers said at the time the polls were largely free and fair. — AFP

New Indonesia capital imperils ancient Eden

BALIKPAPAN: The twisting road that leads to Indonesia's future capital is lined with dense rainforest and pockets of plantations, punctuated every so often with monkeys enjoying a laze out on the tarmac. Located in eastern Borneo—the world's third-largest island—Nusantara is set to replace sinking and polluted Jakarta as Indonesia's political centre by late 2024.

But the two-hour drive from Balikpapan city to the sweeping green expanse of Nusantara's "Point Zero" reveals the scale of the new capital's potential impact on a biodiverse area that is home to thousands of animal and plant species. With construction set to ramp up this year, environmentalists warn building a metropolis will speed up deforestation in one of the world's largest and oldest stretches of tropical rainforest, estimated to be more than 100 million years old.

"It's going to be a massive ecological disaster," Uli Arta Siagian, forest campaigner for environmental group Walhi, told AFP. The island that Indonesians call the "lungs of the world"—shared with Malaysia and Brunei—is home to long-nosed monkeys, clouded leopards, pig-tailed macaques, flying fox-bats and the smallest rhinos on the planet.

Cardinal Pell, divisive Church leader, dies

SYDNEY: Cardinal George Pell, a giant of the Catholic Church who was convicted and later cleared of sexual abuse in Australia, has died in Rome aged 81, a church official confirmed Wednesday. From humble beginnings in regional Australia, Pell climbed the ranks to become one of Pope Francis's most trusted advisers inside the Vatican. He was also the highest-ranking Catholic to be imprisoned for child sexual abuse, before his convictions were quashed on appeal. While supporters praised Pell on Wednesday as a modern-day "saint", victims of Church abuse said his death dredged up painful memories.

Archbishop of Sydney Anthony Fisher confirmed Pell died in Rome in the early hours of Wednesday. Former conservative Australian prime minister Tony Abbott said his friend's name had been tainted by a "monstrous allegation".

"His incarceration on charges that the High Court ultimately scathingly dismissed was a modern form of crucifixion," Abbott said Wednesday. "He strikes me as a saint for our times."



MELBOURNE: A framed photograph showing Cardinal George Pell (L) with Pope Benedict XVI is seen on display at St Patrick's Cathedral in Melbourne on January 11, 2023, as people pay their respects following Pell's death. — AFP

'Coldness'

But Donald McLeish, from the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, said Pell embodied the Church's neglect of sexual abuse victims. "His name is known (by) survivors across the world," he told AFP. "Not just for his inaction, but the coldness that he put towards victims and survivors. 'He's gone but the battle continues.'" Pell's body will be returned to Australia and buried in the crypt of St Mary's Cathedral in Sydney, church officials said. Australian lawyers, meanwhile, confirmed Wednesday they would plough ahead with a civil case listing Pell as a co-defendant.

The case had been brought by the father of a former altar boy who alleged he was sexually abused by Pell. "The claim will continue against the church and whatever estate Pell has left behind," Shine Lawyers said in a statement. Pell died of heart complications related to a hip surgery he had undergone in a Rome hospital on Tuesday, according to the Vatican's official news website.

12 months in prison

Allegations of sexual abuse started swirling around Pell in 2002, when he was the Archbishop of Sydney. He was accused of sexually abusing a teenage boy at a camp in the early 1960s, but an investigation launched by the church eventually dismissed the claims.

One year later, in 2003, Pope John Paul appointed Pell to the powerful position of cardinal. Pell continued to rise and in 2014 he was tasked with rooting out church corruption as the head of the Secretariat for the Economy. He was widely seen at the time as the right-hand man of Pope Francis and the third most powerful figure in the church. — AFP

But by 2045, the Indonesian government says Nusantara will host 1.9 million residents, more than twice Balikpapan's population, importing a wave of human and industrial activity into the heart of Borneo. The relocation to the 2,560-square-kilometre (990-square-mile) area follows capital moves by Brazil to Brasilia—considered an urban utopia failure—and Myanmar to the ghost town of Naypyidaw.

Drastic changes to the land's topography and the man-made disasters that could follow "will be severe and far more difficult to mitigate compared to natural disasters", said Siagian. Indonesia also has one of the world's highest rates of deforestation linked to mining, farming and logging, and is accused of allowing firms to operate in Borneo with little oversight.

The government, however, says it wants to spread economic development—long centred on densely populated Java—around the vast archipelago nation, and to move away from Jakarta before the city sinks due to excessive groundwater extraction.

Indonesian President Joko Widodo has pitched a utopian vision of a "green" city four times the size of Jakarta where residents would commute on electric buses. His city authority chief, Bambang Susantono, presented the initial plan to journalists in mid-December, pledging carbon neutrality by 2045 in what he dubbed the world's first-ever sustainable forest city. Architect Sofian Sibarani is in charge of creating a master plan for the new city, outlining everything from road maps to a transit system. He insisted that his plan envisaged "minimum changes to the environment". — AFP

THURSDAY, JANUARY 12, 2023

Business

North American leaders see bright future in clean energy

Three countries working to strengthen cooperation on supply chains, minerals

MEXICO CITY: The leaders of the United States, Mexico and Canada pledged Tuesday to deepen regional economic integration and boost cooperation in clean energy, setting aside simmering trade tensions. Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador welcomed his US counterpart Joe Biden and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau at the National Palace in Mexico City for what is known as the "Three Amigos" summit.

The three countries were working "to strengthen our cooperation on supply chains and critical minerals ... to build the technologies of tomorrow right here in North America," Biden said afterward. North America could become a "clean energy powerhouse" and a "global leader in addressing the climate crisis" through cooperation in areas such as electric vehicles, he added.

Trudeau said that the region had an "enormous opportunity" to boost its economic resilience by building a "clean economy." Biden revived the "Three Amigos" talks in 2021, seeking to restore normalcy to the three-way partnership after his predecessor Donald Trump shelved the regional summit.

But relations between Lopez Obrador and Biden have not been entirely smooth. Mexico faces a formal trade complaint from the United States and Canada under a North American trade deal. Washington and Ottawa say Lopez Obrador's push to boost the state's role in the energy industry hurts foreign investors and hinders the development of clean energy.

At their talks on Tuesday, however, the leaders put on a united front, emphasizing the potential for cooperation. Lopez Obrador said the countries had agreed to work on becoming "increasingly self-sufficient" by boosting regional trade to reduce their reliance on imports from other parts of the world.

Electric cars, semiconductors

The White House announced ahead of the summit that the three countries would organize "the first-ever trilateral semiconductor forum" to shape government policies and increase investment in supply chains. They will also expand resource mapping to gather details on minerals vital for clean energy technologies.

Biden said that strengthening regional supply chains would mean "that no one can arbitrarily hold us up or a pandemic in Asia cause us to not have access to critical elements that we need to do everything from build automobiles to so many other things."

Other steps include drawing up a plan for operating standards and the installation of electric vehicle chargers along international borders and developing a North American clean hydrogen market.

On Monday signs of discord emerged between the United States and Mexico in their approaches to dealing with surging migrant arrivals at their shared border. At the start of bilateral talks, Lopez Obrador called for increased US investment, which should help stem migration.

"It is time to end this oblivion, this abandonment, this disdain for Latin America and the Caribbean," Lopez Obrador said. Biden defended Washington's record, saying it had spent "tens of billions of dollars" in the past 15 years alone that had benefited the region. "Unfortunately, our responsibility just doesn't end in the Western Hemisphere," he added.

Protest scuffles

Near the summit venue, police scuffled with protesters holding placards with slogans including "Migration is a human right" and "No more mass deportations." Amnesty International urged the North American leaders to make the rights of refugees and migrants a "top priority" at their talks



MEXICO CITY: Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (R) and Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (C) shake hands as US President Joe Biden looks on after speaking to the press at the end of the 10th North American Leaders' Summit at the National Palace in Mexico City. —AFP

and to "stop implementing inhuman shared migration policies."

"As the number of people fleeing violence and persecution continues to grow, protecting the human rights of migrants and refugees is of critical importance," said Erika Guevara-Rosas, Amnesty's Americas director.

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

Another priority for Biden is tackling what he called "the plague of fentanyl," referring to the often-deadly opioid smuggled across the border by Mexican drug cartels. Biden and Trudeau also discussed the situation in Haiti, whose government has appealed for an international intervention force as armed gangs take over large swaths of the poverty-stricken Caribbean nation.

"The two leaders committed to continue coordination with partners on the UN Security Council on next steps to support stability to Haiti, including support to the Haitian National Police," a White House statement said. —AFP

French govt plays down strike threat over pension reform

PARIS: The French government on Wednesday played down the prospect of mass strikes and protests over pension reform which are expected to start next week. All of France's main unions have called the first stoppages and rallies next Thursday to protest against the government's plan to raise the retirement age to 64 from its current level of 62, a change that is widely unpopular among the public.

Many observers expect a bitter battle over the next month that could lead to disruption to transport and public services. "We're not focusing on the possibility of massive protests or the impact of these protests," spokesman Olivier Veran told reporters at a briefing. "We've finished the phase of consultations and we are entering into the phase of explaining and informing." Asked whether he was "scared" about the looming battle earlier in the day, he replied: "It doesn't scare me."

"In the modern history of our country, every time that people have needed to work a bit longer, every time we've needed to reform the pension system...

there have been protests," he told the Franceinfo radio station.

President Emmanuel Macron, whose credibility is on the line with a reform he has championed since coming to power in 2017, called on his ministers on Wednesday to help sell the "essential and vital" change to a highly sceptical electorate.

He urged ministers to stress the "social progress" in the changes, such as a higher minimum pension of 1,200 euros (\$1,287) a month and allowances for people in ill health or physically demanding jobs. Veran said that "those that started work early will be able to retire at 58" and four out of 10 workers would not need to reach the new limit of 64 for a pension.

'Sadistic'

Polls suggested that around two thirds of French people are currently against the changes and a majority support the call for protests. Draft legislation is expected to be presented in the hung national parliament in early February, with Macron's minority MPs banking on support from the rightwing Republicans opposition group to pass it.

The far-right National Rally party of Marine Le Pen has announced its intention to be "the leader of opposition to the reform"—a role also coveted by the hard-left France Unbowed party. Le Pen called the reform "unfair and very brutal" on Wednesday, say-



PARIS: French MP and French Communist Party (PCF) First Secretary Fabien Roussel delivers a speech as a unity rally of left-wing personalities on the theme of France's pension reform, in Paris. —AFP

ing she thought Macron was being pressured by the European Union or was "sadistic" given the cost-of-living crisis caused by high inflation.

"I told the prime minister this, there's a sadistic side, like the child that pulls the wings off a fly," Le Pen told parliamentary journalists. "At a time when French people are facing serious difficulties... with their household budgets collapsing, you're carrying out a reform of the pension system with extreme haste," she added. —AFP

UK, Japan to sign major defence deal

LONDON: The British and Japanese prime ministers will sign a "hugely significant" new defence deal allowing UK troops to deploy in Japan when the pair meet in London on Wednesday, Downing Street said. The agreement is the latest sign of London's growing interest in the Asia-Pacific region, and Tokyo's efforts to strengthen its alliances to face the challenges posed by China.

The deal creates a legal basis for the deployment of British and Japanese troops on each others' territory for training and other operations. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's office called it "the most significant defence agreement between the two countries in more than a century".

"In the past 12 months, we have written the next chapter of the relationship between the UK and Japan — accelerating, building and deepening our ties," said Sunak. "This Reciprocal Access Agreement is hugely significant for both our nations — it cements our commitment to the Indo-Pacific and underlines our joint efforts to bolster

economic security."

Negotiations on the deal, to be signed at the historic Tower of London, began in 2021. Japan last January signed a similar accord with Australia, and Tokyo has recently overhauled its defence and security policy to address growing pressure from China.

Euan Graham, a senior fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, described the deal as "quite a significant step up for both countries in terms of their bilateral defence relationship". British ships and aircraft can visit Japan and vice-versa, but it's "diplomatically complicated" and requires foreign ministry clearance each time.

The new agreement will create a "standing framework" instead. That will make it easier to "bring a destroyer to visit Yokosuka, or to bring in an army group, or to bring in some Royal Marines who want to train with the Japanese amphibious forces," Graham told AFP.

China 'challenge'

Japan has a pacifist post-war constitution, which limits its military capacity to ostensibly defensive measures. But last month, the government approved plans to hike defence spending to two percent of GDP by 2027, up from the traditional one-percent level, and warned that China poses the "greatest strategic challenge ever" to



LONDON: Britain's Prime Minister Rishi Sunak (L) and Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida (2L) view a display of Samurai armour in the White Tower after signing a defence agreement. —AFP

its security.

Britain has also become increasingly forceful in its approach to China, with Sunak warning in November that Beijing poses a "systemic challenge" to UK values and interests. The UK, Italy and Japan said last month that they will jointly develop a future fighter jet. The new "Global Combat Air Programme" is slated to produce its first jets by 2035, merging the three nations' costly existing research into new aerial war technology, from stealth capacity to high-tech sensors.

A British patrol ship also last year took part for the first time in "Exercise Keen Sword", the regular Pacific training operation carried out by the Japanese and US navies. Kishida is on a tour of G7 allies for security-focused talks, culminating in a meeting with US President Joe Biden on Friday.

In Paris, he and Emmanuel Macron pledged deeper ties, with the French president promising to maintain "joint actions in the Pacific" and France's "unfailing support" against North Korean aggression. —AFP

Cost-of-living crisis biggest global risk

LONDON: The cost-of-living crisis is the biggest global risk over the next two years, the World Economic Forum warned Wednesday in a survey preceding its annual Davos meetings of global elites. The WEF report described the cost-of-living crisis as the "biggest short-term risk" between now and 2025, followed by natural disasters, extreme weather events and "geo-economic confrontation".

Global inflation remains at sky-high levels after energy and food costs rocketed last year, largely owing to the invasion of agricultural powerhouse Ukraine by major oil and gas producer Russia. Supply constraints caused by the Covid pandemic have also contributed to decades-high prices for consumers.

"Conflict and geo-economic tensions have triggered a series of deeply interconnected global risks," said the annual study ahead of next week's gathering in the Swiss Alpine village of Davos. "These include energy and food supply crunches, which are likely to persist for the next two years, and strong increases in the cost-of-living and debt servicing," it added.

The report said such "crises risk undermining efforts to tackle longer-term risks, notably those related to climate change, biodiversity and investment in human capital". The survey, produced with the consulting firm Marsh McLennan and Zurich Insurance Group, took into account the views of more than 1,200 global risk experts, policymakers and industry leaders.

"The short-term risk landscape is dominated by energy, food, debt and disasters," said Saadia Zahidi, a managing director at WEF. "Those that are already the most vulnerable are suffering — and in the face of multiple crises, those who qualify as vulnerable are rapidly expanding, in rich and poor countries," she wrote in the report.

At a London press conference on Wednesday, Zahidi highlighted the fact that respondents to the survey were placing traditional warfare as less of a risk than geo-economic conflict — such as sanctions, punitive tariffs and other forms of trade war — or cyber warfare.

"The nature of how conflict happens is changing," she said. "That doesn't mean that we shouldn't be concerned, because for the first time in a fairly long time, military spending has seen a small but pronounced uptake in many large economies." —AFP

Business

UK govt accused of wanting strikes to 'sabotage' workers' rights

'Conscripting workers to go to work against their will is an outrage'

LONDON: Britain's government stood accused Wednesday of actively undermining talks with union leaders in a bid to encourage strike action and depress workers' wages across the economy. The government was hoping for a public backlash, to justify newly introduced legislation that would force unions to provide a "minimum service" in public sectors, railway union leaders said.

The allegation came as ambulance drivers and paramedics staged another walkout, prompting warnings of serious risk to the public-part of a wave of industrial action amid double-digit inflation. Mick Lynch, who leads the main RMT rail workers' union, said the minimum service legislation was a "stage-managed" climax to the Conservative government's anti-union agenda.

"If they were doing that in (Vladimir) Putin's Russia, or in Iran, or China, they would rightly be condemned. Conscripting workers to go to work against their will is an outrage," he told a committee of MPs.

"That is a deliberate policy of the government of this country, to lower the wages of working people right across the spectrum-especially where they have an influence-to make them poorer than they used to be," he added.

"To me it's sabotage. And they wanted these strikes to go ahead." Lynch and Mick Whelan of the train drivers' union ASLEF ruled out one key demand of government-backed rail operators, to eliminate guards on trains, and said both sides remained far apart on pay. They said they were willing to consider one reported offer from the government, for a one-off cash bonus to deal with the surge in inflation seen since Russia invaded Ukraine. But Whelan agreed that the government had a broader agenda in play.

"It does appear ideological," he said, insisting that his union could afford to keep the strikes going "for a long time". "We're in it for the long haul. Our members will do this-because it's their futures-for as long as it takes." — AFP



LONDON: Ambulance workers hold cardboard signs and flags of the UK's trade union UNISON as they take part in a rally at a picket line outside the Docklands Emergency Operating Centre, Newham Dockside, in London on January 11, 2023. — AFP



Meta bans ads targeted at teens based on gender

SAN FRANCISCO: Meta, owner of Instagram and Facebook, on Tuesday said it will stop allowing advertisers to target ads at teens based on gender, as it fights accusations that its platforms are harmful to young users.

Beginning in February, the social media giant said advertisers, the source of the company's massive revenues, would only be able to use age and location when targeting ads at teens globally. In another break with practice, a teen's previous activity on Meta-owned apps will no longer inform the ads they see, the company said.

In a blog post, Meta said that the changes came because it recognizes "that teens aren't necessarily as equipped as adults to make decisions about how their online data is used for advertising." Meta said that the changes reflected feedback from parents and experts and would comply with new rules in several countries on content geared at young people.

The company formerly known as Facebook is facing increasing pressure and fines to curb its practice of delivering narrowly targeted ads to its users, a practice that brings in billions of dollars in revenue from advertisers every year.

After a long legal tussle, the Silicon Valley titan was handed a 390-million-euro (\$413-million) fine last week as part of a years-long tussle with the European Union over advertising. More worryingly for the firm founded by Mark Zuckerberg, European regulators also rejected the legal basis Meta used to justify gathering users' personal data for use in targeted advertising.

Google and Apple have also faced investigations and fines by regulators for breaching privacy laws through targeted ads. In the US, Meta and other social media giants have mostly faced scrutiny from local authorities, with nationwide laws blocked due to intense lobbying by tech giants and a politically divided Congress in Washington.

The public school district in the US city of Seattle last week filed a lawsuit against tech giants, including Meta, for allegedly causing mental harm, depression and anxiety among students. Public school officials said they are "holding social media companies accountable for the harm they have wreaked on the social, emotional, and mental health" of teenage students. — AFP



Electric cars and major challenges for auto manufacturers to promote green technology.

EU planning new subsidies to promote green technology

MADRID: The European Union is planning new subsidies to promote inhouse green technology and counter a US measure that the continent's carmakers see as protectionist, the bloc's internal market commissioner said Tuesday.

The US Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) contains around \$370 billion in subsidies for green energy, as well as tax cuts for US-made electric cars and batteries. European countries have been unsettled by the policy, which lavishes benefits on buyers of US-made electric cars, saying it is discriminatory.

"We need to react, we cannot stay still," European Internal Market Commissioner Thierry Breton told a business forum in Madrid. The former French economy minister said he was "working hard to propose to our industrial ecosystem something which could be comparable" to the US plan.

"We will propose something very quickly," he said. Among IRA's provisions are tax credits for electric vehicles-up to \$7,500 for new purchases-that will only apply if the product is assembled in the US and the majority of components are sourced domestically or from a free trade partner.

Breton said this would create a "barrier" to trade which was "unacceptable" and violated World Trade Organization rules. US President Joe Biden said last month the Inflation Reduction Act was never intended to disadvantage US allies. While negotiations are underway between Brussels and Washington for a solution, calls for a tough line from some in the EU have stoked fears of a trade war. — AFP

France plans to speed up renewables

PARIS: French MPs on Tuesday moved ahead with a law to accelerate the deployment of renewable energy, as the country's nuclear plants suffer a maintenance crisis and Russia's invasion of Ukraine drives up energy costs. Having secured rare support from the left, President Emmanuel Macron's minority administration is now a step closer to lowering hurdles to building new solar and wind plants-including massive offshore wind farms.

Macron has set a target of building 50 offshore plants by 2050, up from one today, to generate 40 gigawatts of electricity. And he wants to multiply solar capacity by 10, to top 100 gigawatts. Taking part in the bill's first reading with paper slips after a technical error affected the electronic voting system, 286 MPs backed the draft law with 238 against.

Agnes Pannier-Runacher, minister for energy transition in Macron's government, told AFP she welcomed the "responsible positions" taken by the Socialists and a small independent party who supported the move.

Just 19.3 percent of France's energy consumption is sourced from renewables, short of the 23-percent objective Macron's government set in 2020 and only slightly ahead of coal- and gas-intensive neighbour Germany.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine at the same time as the nuclear power crisis has upped the pressure to boost alternative sources of energy. Scheduled maintenance and corrosion problems have left 14 of

France's 56 reactors still offline.

Tuesday's draft law will now be subject to compromise talks between MPs and senators-with the upper chamber fiercely defensive of mayors' rights to have a say in local projects. In an initial compromise with the Senate, the government has promised to allow mayors to define "acceleration zones" where renewables can be built more easily.

But the left fears that too many concessions could let local officials veto projects. "No one will be able to jam up the system," a source close to Pannier-Runacher told AFP ahead of the vote. The draft law includes provisions allowing projects to be forced through based on "pressing needs of major public interest".

With no majority in parliament, the government wooed the Greens and Socialists in advance of Tuesday's vote to move the bill closer to becoming law. They secured an abstention from the ecologists and reluctant backing from the centre-left to get over the line.

"Sometimes you have to cooperate in the name of the public interest and the environmental crisis," Socialist MP Dominique Potier said, hailing "major advances" from his party's amendments. Meanwhile Greens chief Marine Tondelier said "this isn't a definitive abstention" but "we're expecting better" from the final bill.

Their partners in the broad left-wing NUPES coalition against Macron, the Communists and hard-left France Unbowed (LFI) party, opposed the new law for its market focus. On parliament's right, the conservative Republicans and far-right National Rally (RN) both oppose easing the construction of renewables.

Wind turbines "destroy our landscapes" and "set your eyes and your brain spinning", RN lawmaker Pierre Meurin said ahead of the vote. — AFP

Canadian mining giant nearing deal on huge Panama pit

MONTREAL: The Canadian mining giant First Quantum Minerals said Tuesday it is close to an agreement with Panama to avert the closure of Central America's largest copper mine. But the government of Panama denied that the two sides were on the verge of reaching a deal, saying key issues remain unresolved.

The Cobre Panama mine is considered the largest private investment in Panama's history, making up four percent of its GDP and accounting for 75 percent of its export revenues. Panama had given the company until mid-December to agree to a new contract under which the amount it pays annually for its mining concession would rise by a factor of 10, to at least \$375 million.

"I don't think we're very far away," First Quantum Minerals CEO Tristan Pascall said during an analyst call about the ongoing talks with the Panamanian government. The company added in a statement that it is willing to accept and in some cases surpass Panama's demands on money, environmental protection and workplace standards.

But the Panamanian government later said Pascall's remarks "do not reflect the reality of the situation" because the two sides "disagree on certain fundamental issues." It said the company had made proposals that will boost its profits when copper prices are high and protect itself when prices are low.

Negotiations on a new contract at the huge open pit mine have been underway for more than a year but have deadlocked on the issue of how much the company would pay to Panama. On December 15 Panamanian President Laurentino Cortizo increased pressure on the company by ordering the closure of the mine, except for maintenance work.

However, First Quantum Minerals said Tuesday that operations had actually never stopped but that it was preparing for such an eventuality, which it said would put thousands of people out of work. "There has been progress and movements since December 14 and final items do need to be resolved, but they do need to be resolved fairly for us to close this out," Pascall said.

The huge copper deposit was discovered in 1968 and lies on Panama's Caribbean coast, 240 kilometers (150 miles) by road from the capital Panama City. First Quantum, one of the largest copper miners in the world, began commercial copper production at the site in 2019, through its local affiliate, Minera Panama.

It has spent \$10 billion on earthworks, construction of buildings to house more than 7,000 employees, the purchase of heavy machinery, a power plant, a port for deep-draft merchant ships, access roads, and reforestation plans. — AFP



German watchdog raps Google over users' data practices

BERLIN: Germany's antitrust regulator on Wednesday criticised the way Google handles users' data and threatened action against the US tech giant. Data collected by Google was used to "create very detailed user profiles which the company can exploit for advertising and other purposes", the Federal Cartel Authority said.

Based on a preliminary assessment, the watchdog determined that users were not given sufficient clarity on the "far-reaching processing of their data across services" by the tech company.

"General and indiscriminate data retention... is not permissible" without giving users choice, the watchdog said. The Federal Cartel Authority was therefore "currently planning to oblige the company to change the choices offered", it said, adding that it expected to issue its final decision this year. "Google's business model relies heavily on the processing of user data," said the authority's chief Andreas Mundt. The digital giant had "access to relevant data gathered from a large number of different services" which meant it enjoyed "a strategic advantage over other companies", Mundt said in a statement.

The warning comes after Google was classified as a company of "paramount significance across markets" in 2021. The designation gives Germany's regulators the option to intervene earlier against potentially uncompetitive practices by huge digital companies.

Wielding the new legislation, the watchdog has also opened probes into US tech giants such as Amazon and Facebook. At the end of last year, the regulator shelved a separate investigation into Google's News Showcase service, after the firm made "important adjustments" to ease competition concerns.

Big tech companies have been facing increasing scrutiny around the globe over their dominant positions as well as their tax practices. In July 2022, the European Parliament adopted the Digital Markets Act to curb the market dominance of Big Tech, with violators facing fines of up to 10 percent of their annual global sales. — AFP

Business

LVMH shakes up leadership at Louis Vuitton and Dior

Arnault's family fortune soars to new heights

PARIS: French luxury group LVMH announced a leadership shuffle on Wednesday, naming a new CEO at flagship brand Louis Vuitton and appointing the daughter of billionaire boss Bernard Arnault atop Christian Dior Couture.

The shake-up at the LVMH's two leading fashion houses comes as Arnault's family fortune has soared to new heights, overtaking Tesla and Twitter chief Elon Musk as the world's top billionaires late last year.

Bernard Arnault said the appointment of his daughter Delphine, a top executive at Louis Vuitton, as head of Dior is the "continuation of a career of excellence in fashion and leather goods". Under her direction, Louis Vuitton was able to "fly from record to record" and her "sharp eye and incomparable experience will be decisive assets in the continued development of Christian Dior", Arnault said in a statement.

She will succeed Pietro Beccari, who will replace Michael Burke as head of Louis Vuitton, the world's leading luxury brand in terms of sales and famous for its handbags bedecked with the initials "LV". Bernard Arnault praised Beccari for his "exceptional work" as head of Dior over the past five years.

"Nobody doubts that he will lead Louis Vuitton towards even greater desirability and success," he said. Arnault also congratulated Burke for his "great job" during 10 years at the helm of Vuitton, which helped to "widen the gap with our competition".

Burke will take up a new position alongside Bernard Arnault. Arnaud Cadart, portfolio manager at asset management firm Flornoy, said the appointments of Beccari and Delphine Arnault are "clear signs of trust" and a "desire to keep a bal-

ance between outside people and Arnault family members".

Beccari, who joined LVMH in 2006, is taking over a "strategic house" while Delphine Arnault is heading "another jewel of the group", Cadart said. Delphine Arnault has "proven herself by doing a big and good job at Vuitton", he said, calling the move a "major appointment". The management changes will be effective on February 1.

Family business

Arnault, 73, and his family overtook Musk on the Forbes and Bloomberg lists of the world's top billionaires late last year, with Forbes putting the clan's net worth at \$200 billion. Arnault's five children have top jobs at LVMH.

Delphine Arnault has been executive vice president at Louis Vuitton since 2013, supervising all of the brand's product-related activities. Previously, she served as deputy managing director at Christian Dior Couture.

His eldest son, Antoine Arnault, was named CEO of holding company Christian Dior SE, which controls LVMH, in December, and also holds other positions within the group. Alexandre Arnault is an executive vice president at jewelry brand Tiffany, while his brother Frederic is CEO of watchmaker Tag Heuer. Another son, Jean Arnault, is watch development and marketing director at Louis Vuitton.

'Positive' changes

LVMH boasts more than 75 brands, including fashion firm Kenzo and champagne maker Moët & Chandon. The group reported a net profit of 6.5 billion euros (\$7 billion) for the first half of 2022, a



SEVILLE: File photo shows Chairman and CEO of Christian Dior Couture Pietro Beccari posing after an AFP interview, before the Dior Cruise 2023 fashion show at the Plaza de Espana in Seville. —AFP

23 percent jump from record earnings in the period a year earlier.

Sales rose 28 percent to 36.7 billion euros. Full-year results for 2022 will be published in the coming weeks but are expected to show growth after generating 64 billion euros in sales in 2021, up by

20 billion euros from the previous year.

In a note, analysts at RBC Capital Markets said the reshuffle was "positive for both the Louis Vuitton and Dior brands" and it "also reflects ongoing leadership transition within the Arnault family". —AFP

IKEA announces recall of certain LETTAN mirrors

KUWAIT: IKEA urges all customers who own an affected LETTAN mirror to stop using it, and to order replacement wall fittings free of charge. Customer safety is the starting point for IKEA. Therefore, we are announcing a recall for repair action on LETTAN mirrors with a date stamp before and including 2105 (YYWW), due to risk of breaking wall fittings.

IKEA develops its products using a rigorous risk assessment and testing program, to make sure that the products live up to all applicable laws and standards on the markets where they are sold. Despite this it has come to our attention that some of the fittings that attach LETTAN mirrors to the wall, have been breaking. This has in turn led to some mirrors unexpectedly falling. Therefore, we urge all customers who own an affected LETTAN mirror to stop using it, and to contact IKEA to request replacement wall fittings free of charge. IKEA apologizes for any inconvenience this recall for repair action may cause.

Greenpeace sues VW in Germany over CO2 emissions

BRAUNSCHWEIG: A German court on Tuesday began hearing a case against Volkswagen brought by climate group Greenpeace to try to compel the giant group to stop selling petrol and diesel cars from 2030. The plaintiffs, the two heads of Greenpeace Germany and climate activist Clara Meyer, also want to force the world's second-largest carmaker to reduce emissions by 65 percent by 2030 as compared to 2018.

Greenpeace's case is based on a landmark verdict by Germany's constitutional court in April, 2021, which found government plans to curb CO2 emissions insufficient to meet Paris climate agreement targets and placed an unfair burden on future generations. In a major win for activists, former chancellor Angela Merkel's government then brought forward its date for carbon neutrality by five years to 2045, and raised its 2030 target for greenhouse gas reductions. The environmental group contends that the same obligation extends to private companies.

'Right track'

In preliminary remarks, judges at the court in Braunschweig found the case admissible but did not necessarily support the plaintiffs' arguments. "The chamber expressed its preliminary view of the law and clarified that the applications are admissible and that the complaint is admissible in its entirety," said a spokesman for the court.

"Separate from this however is the question of substantive merits—that is, the question of whether the complaint will be successful in the end. The preliminary legal assessment of the court as presented today



Volkswagen assembly plant.

by the chamber is that this might not be the case," he added.

A final ruling will be given on January 31. The initial opinion was "not a defeat", said Roda Verheyen, the lawyer representing the three plaintiffs. "We're on the right track and we won't let this rest, no matter how it turns out," Verheyen said, promising to appeal if necessary.

"The court essentially confirmed our assessment that legislators have responsibility for the implementation of climate protection," Volkswagen lawyer Wolf Spieth said. The auto group said it stood by its "responsibility to reduce CO2 emissions in all of its areas of activity as quickly as commercially possible". Germany's biggest carmakers have been

embroiled in several cases in the last years brought by climate activists. Greenpeace is also backing a court case being heard in Detmold against Volkswagen brought by a farmer who claims the pollution caused by the automotive giant is infringing on his rights.

Another climate group, Deutsche Umwelthilfe, has brought similar cases against fellow German car giants Mercedes-Benz (formerly Daimler) and BMW, as well as the energy company Wintershall Dea.

In May 2021, a court in the Netherlands ordered oil giant Shell to slash carbon emissions by 2030, the first time a company had been made to align its policy with the 2015 Paris climate accords. Shell has appealed the ruling. —AFP

KAMCO Invest Report

Natural Gas Market: 2022 - a volatile year for natural gas

KUWAIT: Global natural gas prices reached record highs during 2022 as a result of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war that continues to have severe ramifications on global energy prices and China's strict controls to battle the COVID-19 pandemic. China, which has now relaxed its COVID-19 containment measures, is expected to have higher natural gas demand in 2023 than it had in 2022.

According to S&P Global, China is forecasted to register a 1.4% y-o-y natural gas demand decline in 2022 to reach 363.1 billion cubic meters, its first ever natural gas demand decline as compared to its demand of 369 billion cubic meters in 2021. On the European front, the EU/US response to the Russia-Ukraine conflict which included putting sanctions on Russian energy exports including natural gas exports to EU countries, has severely disrupted the EU as well as global gas prices. According to ACER, natural gas consumption comprises 21.5% of the EU's total primary energy consumption and around 40% of the bloc's households are connected to a gas network.

The European Union states import roughly 80% of their total gas needs of which roughly 50% of the supplies comes from Russia. The EU has had a tough year in finding replacement for Russian natural gas as they seek to isolate and punish Russia for the Russia-Ukraine conflict. The pivot to forego cheap natural gas from Russia and to import higher priced LNG from distant locations such as the USA and Qatar has driven global natural gas demand as well as global natural gas prices upwards all throughout 2022.

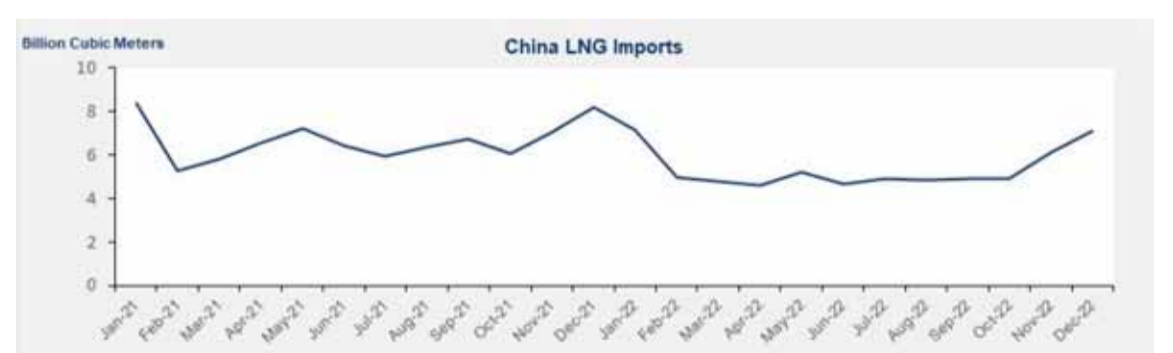
According to the World Bank, US natural gas prices for Dec-2022 increased by 47.4% y-o-y to reach \$5.5/MMBtu. In context, US natural gas prices reached an all-time monthly average high of \$8.79/MMBtu in August-2022 as soaring global LNG prices supported demand for

US LNG exports that resulted in higher prices. However, European natural gas prices for December 2022 declined by 5.2% y-o-y ending the year with an average of \$36/MMBtu, while monthly Japanese LNG price for December-2022 witnessed 27.1% y-o-y rise at \$19.47/MMBtu.

Countries in the EU block bought 139.3 billion cubic meters of LNG during the year, a growth of 58% when compared to imports during 2021. Total imports of LNG into the EU accounted for 24% of global LNG imports. The Russia-Ukraine conflict severely disrupted the European natural gas imports supply infrastructure from Russia during the year. In February-2022, Germany cancelled the Nord Stream 2 certification process. The Nord Stream 2 natural gas pipeline was expected to deliver about 65% of Russia's natural gas supplies to the EU bypassing Ukraine and certain eastern EU member states. As the conflict dragged on to the second part of the year, Russia's natural gas supply infrastructure to the EU faced more than sanctions. The Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines which supply Russian natural gas to Germany through the Baltic Sea witnessed forced disruptions at the end of September-2022. The Nord Stream 1 pipeline has a capacity to deliver around 55 billion cubic meters or around 14% of the EU's total gas consumption in 2021. However, the disruption has not worsened the European energy crisis very much or caused a supply shock despite the importance of the compromised pipelines as Russia has been gradually reducing natural gas supplies going through Nord Stream 1. In its quest to wean itself from cheap Russian natural gas, some EU states have already started building LNG regasification terminals during the year.

Germany, which receives around 40% of its natural gas from Russia making it one of the heavily impacted countries in the repercussions of the Russia-Ukraine conflict is currently building five new FSRU's (floating storage and regasification units). Overall, according to S&P Global, currently there are 25 new FSRU's which are planned to be installed across the EU in the near future, Russia's natural gas exports to the EU witnessed a decline during the year.

According to Gazprom, natural gas exports to outside the former Soviet states have declined by nearly 46% this



year to 100.9 billion cubic meters witnessing its lowest export levels since the year 2000 according to Oilprice.com. The severe fall of exports has been attributed to a combination of issues such as the US/EU sanctions to Russian energy exports as a retaliation to the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict. Other major reasons for Gazprom's gas exports decline included: The EU countries pivot to LNG imports to reduce their dependence on Russian gas despite the higher LNG price tag, and the overall drop in global natural gas consumption by 65 billion cubic meters during 2022 where 55 billion cubic meters came from Europe alone.

The EU's decision to reduce Russian natural gas imports has also prompted Russia to look to the east in order to find new export destinations for its energy stock especially natural gas. Asia is set to become Russia's primary energy export destination as China is set to comprise 40% of global natural gas growth in 2022. In the Asia-Pacific region, as Russia seeks to compensate for lost gas market share in Europe throughout South Asia, China has become one of its main targets for natural gas export destinations.

Currently Russia is constructing the Power of Siberia 2 pipeline which will deliver gas from Russia to China and is expected to be completed by 2030 enabling China to overtake the EU as the biggest consumer of Russian natural gas. However, China's 2022 natural gas demand is forecasted to have dipped for the first time in 20 years due to

weak demand from sectors which have been disrupted by the pandemic measures driving China's LNG imports down during the year. Japan overtook China as the world's largest LNG importer in 2022. On the other hand, as China eases pandemic measures in 2023, natural gas demand is expected to recover in 2023 in the country.

The German utility company RWE has declared that it will receive the first LNG shipment of 137,000 cubic meters from Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) by the end of 2022. In November-2022, Qatar and China signed one of the largest ever LNG deals inking a \$60 Bn LNG supply deal for 27 years. The deal entails state owned Qatar Energy to supply China Petroleum and Chemical Corporation with four million tonnes of LNG for 27 years starting from 2026. Qatar has signed major agreements to expand its natural gas production by 70% in 2027 with major oil and gas companies in 2022. Qatar Energy and Total Energies have inked around five separate major partnerships worth up to \$29 bn for the construction and expansion of the North Field gas expansion. The North Field expansion project comprises of two distinct parts, namely Northfield East and Northfield South project. The Northfield East project is intended to increase Qatar's LNG production capacity from 77 to 110 million tons per year. Comparatively, the North Field South Projects is planned to further increase Qatar's LNG production capacity from 110 to 126 million tons per year.



BASRA MUSEUM: HAVEN TO 300 BC ARTIFACTS FROM VARIOUS CIVILIZATIONS

The Basra cultural museum is home to some 2,500 artifacts of various sizes and shapes dating back to 300 BC. The facility, opened in 2016, has four halls featuring the Sumerian, Babylonian, and Assyrian civilizations. — KUNA



Bad Bunny, Blackpink, Frank Ocean to headline historic Coachella

Bad Bunny, Frank Ocean and Blackpink will headline this April's Coachella, the California desert festival that kicks off the summer concert circuit, organizers announced Tuesday. It's set to be a history-making weekend, with Bad Bunny—the world's most-streamed artist—as the first Spanish-language and first Latin American artist to headline. And K-pop group Blackpink of South Korea is the first Asian act to receive a top billing at the festival. Both acts debuted at Coachella in 2019 to great fanfare, teeing up an eventual headlining slot.

Ocean was originally booked as a headliner for the 2020 edition, which organizers postponed and eventually



Frank Ocean



Blackpink

scrapped due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Coachella returned in 2022 after a three-year hiatus. The reclusive R&B singer Ocean, who hasn't released an album since 2016's "Blonde," is anticipated to debut new work at this year's festival.

Also slated to play sets are Spanish phenomenon Rosalia, Iceland's Bjork and Nigeria's Burna Boy. English virtual band Gorillaz will also perform, as will New Wave pioneers Blondie and the American indie rock supergroup boygenius, which includes Phoebe Bridgers, Lucy Dacus and Julien Baker. France's Christine and the Queens, who has been performing under the name Redcar, will also return for the mammoth event, after wowing audiences there in 2019.

Dom and JD Beck, the rising jazz duo comprised of a French keyboardist and American drummer, will also take the stage, months after they're slated to compete for a prestigious Best New Artist Grammy in early February. Coachella will take place over two three-day weekends,

from April 14-16 and 21-23. Organizers of Bonnaroo, a June festival in rural Tennessee, also announced their lineup Tuesday, with headliners including Kendrick Lamar and Foo Fighters. — AFP



Bad Bunny

Iranian filmmaker Rasoulof temporarily released

Award-winning Iranian filmmaker Mohammad Rasoulof, jailed half a year ago over protests related to a building collapse, has been released for two weeks because of health concerns, his lawyer said Wednesday. Rasoulof, 50, was arrested on July 8 after being accused of encouraging demonstrations that erupted after the deadly collapse of a building in May in the southwestern city of Abadan.

After the tragedy, a group of Iranian filmmakers led by Rasoulof published an open letter decrying "corruption, theft, inefficiency and repression" and urging the security forces to "lay down their arms." "My client's incarceration has been suspended for two weeks for health reasons," the director's lawyer Maryam Kianersi told AFP, adding that he had been "released on Saturday". The lawyer added that her client "is now discharged from hospital and is recovering at home".

The release comes as Iran has been gripped by nearly four months of protests triggered by the death in custody of 22-year-old Iranian Kurd Mahsa Amini following her arrest for allegedly violating Iran's strict dress code for women. Iranian authorities say hundreds of people, including members of the security forces, have been killed and thousands arrested during the protests which they mostly describe as "riots".



Iranian filmmaker Mohammad Rasoulof

Rasoulof won the Golden Bear at the 2020 Berlin International Film Festival with his anti-death penalty film "There Is No Evil" but was unable to accept the award in person as he was barred from leaving Iran. His passport had been confiscated after his 2017 film "A Man of Integrity" premiered at Cannes, where it won the top prize in the Un Certain Regard section of the festival. On July 11, authorities arrested the internationally renowned dissident filmmaker Jafar Panahi upon his arrival at the Tehran prosecutor's office to follow up on Rasoulof's case.—AFP

Lifestyle | Awards



(From left) Tony Kushner, Seth Rogen, Judd Hirsch, Gabriel LaBelle, Steven Spielberg, Michelle Williams, Paul Dano, and Kristie Macosko Krieger, winners of Best Picture - Drama for "The Fabelmans", pose in the press room during the 80th Annual Golden Globe Awards at The Beverly Hilton on January 10, 2023 in Beverly Hills, California. — AFP photos



US director Steven Spielberg poses with the awards for Best Director - Motion Picture and Best Picture - Drama for "The Fabelmans" in the press room during the 80th annual Golden Globe Awards at The Beverly Hilton hotel in Beverly Hills, California.



Irish actor Colin Farrell (left) and British-Irish director Martin McDonagh pose with the award for Best Musical/Comedy Series for "The Banshees of Inisherin".

SPIELBERG WINS BIG AS GOLDEN GLOBES MAKE COMEBACK



US-Vietnamese actor Ke Huy Quan poses with the award for Best Supporting Actor - Motion Picture for "Everything Everywhere All at Once".



Malaysian actress Michelle Yeoh poses with the award for Best Actress - Motion Picture - Musical/Comedy for "Everything Everywhere All at Once" in the press room.



Angela Bassett, winner of the Best Supporting Actress in a Motion Picture award for "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever," poses in the press room.

Steven Spielberg claimed top honors including best drama at the Golden Globes on Tuesday for his deeply personal film "The Fabelmans," as Hollywood's A-list stars flocked to the first major awards show of 2023 despite a series of scandals swirling around its organizers. The other top film award, best comedy or musical, went to "The Banshees of Inisherin"—a tragicomedy about a shattered friendship on a remote Irish island that ended the night with the most movie prizes.

Spielberg, who also took home the award for best director, thanked his family including his late mother, who he said would be "up there kvelling about this right now." "The Fabelmans" covers the troubled marriage of Spielberg's parents, anti-Semitic bullying, and the director's early efforts making zero-budget movies with his teenage friends.

"Everybody sees me as a success story... but nobody really knows who we are until we're courageous enough to tell everyone who we are," he told the A-list audience at the Beverly Hilton. Spielberg said films like "E.T." and "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" had used elements from his real life, but he had "never had the courage to hit this story head on" until now.

Despite faring poorly at the box office, the film saw off last year's two biggest commercial hits—James Cameron's sci-fi film "Avatar: The Way of Water," and mega-sequel "Top Gun: Maverick"—to win the night's final prize. "Banshees" also earned a win for Colin Farrell for best comedy actor, boosting his Oscar hopes, and for writer-director Martin McDonagh with best screenplay.

A-listers attend

The Globes, which kick off the annual film prize-giving season, have not had their usual glitz for the past two years, due to the pandemic and revelations about their organizers' lack of diversity and allegations of ethical lapses. In particular, the Hollywood Foreign Press Association, which organizes the awards, was criticized for not having a single Black member, although it has recently expanded its ranks. All eyes were on which A-listers would show up Tuesday, as NBC—which scrapped its



(From left) Peter Czernin, Irish actor Colin Farrell, British-Irish director Martin McDonagh, Irish actress Kerry Condon, Irish actor Brendan Gleeson, Graham Broadbent, and Irish actor Barry Keoghan poses with the award for Best Musical/Comedy Series for "The Banshees of Inisherin" in the press room.

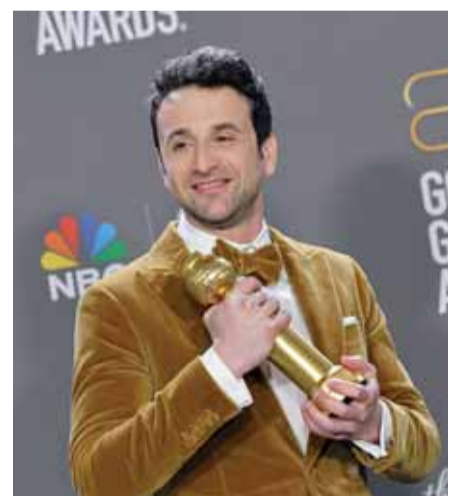
broadcast of the show last year—brought back the 80th Golden Globe Awards on a one-off basis.

As it turned out, many heavy hitters were in attendance, including Spielberg, Rihanna and Brad Pitt, though some skipped questions from journalists on the red carpet—which was in fact gray. Austin Butler, stepping into Elvis Presley's blue suede shoes for rock-and-roll biopic "Elvis," won best actor in a drama. "You were an icon and a rebel and I love you so much," Butler said to the legendary late singer in an emotional speech in which he also praised Presley's family for their support. Eddie Murphy accepted a career achievement award at the Beverly Hills gala, while Angela Bassett won best supporting actress for Marvel blockbuster "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever."

No shows

But Cate Blanchett, who won best drama actress for "Tar," in which she plays a ruthless conductor navigating the cutthroat world of classical music, did not attend the gala. Other prominent winners who didn't show included Kevin Costner ("Yellowstone"), Zendaya ("Euphoria") and Amanda Seyfried ("The Dropout").

Michelle Yeoh was on hand to collect her best comedy actress for the surreal "Everything Everywhere All At Once." Her co-star in the multiverse-hopping sci-fi film, Ke Huy Quan—who shot to fame as a child star in "Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom" almost four decades ago—offered an emotional speech as he accepted the prize for best



Justin Hurwitz poses with the Best Original Score award for "Babylon" in the press room.

Carmichael, who struck a daring and edgy tone throughout the night, kicked the gala off with a monologue poking fun at the HFPA.

"I won't say they were a racist organization—but they didn't have a single Black member until George Floyd died. So do with that information what you will," he said. Most of the Globes' usual swanky after-parties did not take place this year. Nominee Brendan Fraser and Tom Cruise, the star and producer of "Top Gun: Maverick," notably did not attend. Despite the uproar surrounding the Globes, "Avatar" director Cameron told AFP he believed the HFPA had been "responsive to the protests," adding: "I think we should celebrate the fact that an organization does such radical changes."

Early reviews for the show were positive, with Variety praising "acid-tongued" host Carmichael. But The New York Times said Hollywood's readiness to again embrace the HFPA as a useful marketing tool showed it has "dropped any pretense that the Globes are meaningful as markers of artistic excellence." The ceremony's television ratings, expected Wednesday, will be closely watched by the industry. — AFP



Irish actor Colin Farrell (left), British-Irish director Martin McDonagh (center) and Irish actor Barry Keoghan (right) pose with the award for Best Musical/Comedy Series for "The Banshees of Inisherin" in the press room.

supporting actor.

Action-packed Indian blockbuster "RRR," which has become a huge word-of-mouth hit in Hollywood, added momentum to its awards season campaign by winning best song. "Guillermo del Toro's Pinocchio" won best animated feature, while "Argentina, 1985" won best non-English language film. On the television side, "Game of Thrones" prequel "House of the Dragon" won best drama, and "Abbott Elementary" claimed best comedy series.

Edgy host

Success at the Globes is often seen as a potential bellwether for films hoping to win Oscars, which take place this year on March 12. Academy voters will begin casting ballots for Oscar nominations on Thursday, just days after the Globes gala. But recent controversies have muddied the waters. Host Jerrod



US actor Austin Butler poses with the award for Best Actor - Motion Picture - Drama for "Elvis" in the press room.

Lifestyle | Awards



(From left) US actor Tyler James Williams, US actor Chris Perfetti, US actress Janelle James, US actress Quinta Brunson, US actress Lisa Ann Walter, US actress Sheryl Lee Ralph and US actor William Stanford Davis pose with the award for Best Television Actress - Musical/Comedy Series for "Abbott Elementary", in the press room.



Mexican director Guillermo del Toro (left) and director Mark Gustafson pose with the award for Best Picture - Animated for "Guillermo del Toro's Pinocchio" in the press room.



Argentine filmmaker Santiago Mitre (right) and Argentine actor Ricardo Darin pose with the award for Best Picture - Non-English Language (formerly Foreign Language) for "Argentina, 1985" in the press room.



Jeremy Allen White poses with the Best Actor in a Television Series - Musical or Comedy award for "The Bear" in the press room.



(From left) English actor Emma D'Arcy, English filmmaker Miguel Sapochnik and Australian actress Milly Alcock pose with the award for Best Drama Series for "House of the Dragon" in the press room.



Quinta Brunson poses with the award for Best Actress in a Television Series - Musical or Comedy award for "Abbott Elementary" in the press room.



Julia Garner poses with the Best Supporting Actress in a Television Series - Musical-Comedy or Drama award for "Ozark" in the press room.



Jennifer Coolidge poses with the award for Best Supporting Actress - Television Limited Series/Motion Picture for "The White Lotus" in the press room.

India celebrates 'RRR' triumph at Golden Globes

India celebrated a rare Hollywood award triumph after local film "RRR" won a Golden Globe for best song on Wednesday, seeing off competition from US superstars Taylor Swift and Rihanna. Prime Minister Narendra Modi hailed the "very special accomplishment" after the win by the action movie's barnstorming, high-octane number "Naatu Naatu". "This prestigious honor has made every Indian very proud," Modi said on Twitter. Local media reports said it was the first time an Indian film has won an award at the competition. Produced by southern India's Telugu-language film industry last March, "RRR" has seen huge audience numbers for a local film-both at home and abroad. "RRR" was also nominated in the best non-English language film category, but lost to "Argentina, 1985". A scene featuring the song was shot outside Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's official residence in 2021 — before Russia's

invasion-according to director SS Rajamouli.

The critically acclaimed Rajamouli, who has produced some of India's biggest blockbusters in the last few years, said that it was a "special" award. "SPEECHLESS Music truly knows no boundaries. I thank each and every fan across the globe for shaking their leg and making it popular ever since the release. #GoldenGlobes," he tweeted. In the song, co-stars Ram Charan and



M. M. Keeravani poses with the Best Original Song award for "Naatu Naatu" for "RRR" in the press room during the 80th Annual Golden Globe Awards at The Beverly Hilton. — AFP

Nandamuri Taraka Rama Rao Jr stomp across the floor in a vigorous routine that blends multiple dance styles and has sparked viral imitations online.

"It took me two months to choreograph it. We shot for 20 days and did 43 retakes," choreographer Prem Rakshit told Indian media. Bollywood star Shah Rukh Khan joined others to celebrate the win. "Sir just woke up and started dancing to Naatu Naatu celebrating your win at Golden Globes," Khan told Rajamouli on Twitter. "Here's to many more awards & making India so proud!" he added. Khan's fellow Bollywood superstar Akshay Kumar said it was a "proud moment".

Led by the Hindi-language Bollywood, India has the world's most prolific film industry. It churns out thousands of movies each year in multiple Indian languages, which are also dubbed and consumed by audiences across South Asia, Central Asia, Africa and beyond. Rajamouli told The Hollywood Reporter before his win that global recognition was "really important". "If this buzz really puts a spotlight on our industry and helps me and my filmmakers in the future to take our stories outside the world. So it is really important to us." — AFP

GOLDEN GLOBE WINNERS

Here are the winners in key categories for the 80th Golden Globe Awards, which were handed out on Tuesday. "The Fabelmans" won for best drama film and best director, putting Steven Spielberg's semi-autobiographical movie in good position ahead of the Oscars on March 12. "The Banshees of Inisherin" won for best comedy film.

FILM

- Best film, drama: "The Fabelmans"
- Best film, musical or comedy: "The Banshees of Inisherin"
- Best director: Steven Spielberg, "The Fabelmans"
- Best actor, drama: Austin Butler, "Elvis"
- Best actress, drama: Cate Blanchett, "Tar"
- Best actor, musical or comedy: Colin Farrell, "The Banshees of Inisherin"
- Best actress, musical or comedy: Michelle Yeoh, "Everything Everywhere All at Once"
- Best supporting actor: Ke Huy Quan, "Everything Everywhere All at Once"
- Best supporting actress: Angela Bassett, "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever"
- Best screenplay: Martin McDonagh, "The Banshees of Inisherin"
- Best music, original score: Justin Hurwitz, "Babylon"
- Best music, original song: "Naatu Naatu" from "RRR"
- Best non-English language film: "Argentina, 1985"
- Best animated feature: "Guillermo del Toro's Pinocchio"

TELEVISION

- Best drama series: "House of the Dragon"
- Best drama actor: Kevin Costner, "Yellowstone"
- Best drama actress: Zendaya, "Euphoria"
- Best musical or comedy series: "Abbott Elementary"
- Best musical or comedy actor: Jeremy Allen White, "The Bear"
- Best musical or comedy actress: Quinta Brunson, "Abbott Elementary"
- Best supporting actor, television: Tyler James Williams, "Abbott Elementary"
- Best supporting actress, television: Julia Garner, "Ozark"
- Best limited series or TV movie: "The White Lotus"
- Best limited series or TV movie actor: Evan Peters, "Dahmer - Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story"
- Best limited series or TV movie actress: Amanda Seyfried, "The Dropout"
- Best limited series supporting actor: Paul Walter Hauser, "Black Bird"
- Best limited series supporting actress: Jennifer Coolidge, "The White Lotus"

— AFP



(From left) Tracy Morgan poses with Eddie Murphy, winner of the Cecil B. DeMille Award, in the press room during the 80th Annual Golden Globe Awards at The Beverly Hilton. — AFP

Golden Globes: Five memorable moments

The Golden Globes were back with a bang on Tuesday, as champagne flowed and A-list celebrities broke out the profanities in an evening where backslapping and earnestness was balanced with edgy humor. Here are some of the more memorable moments from the 80th edition of the awards, held at the Beverly Hilton.

Taking on racism

After a torrid couple of years for the Hollywood Foreign Press Association over allegations of racism and corruption, the organizers of the Golden Globes were hoping to redeem themselves this year. But their chosen host, comedian Jerrod Carmichael, wasn't going to give them an easy ride, coming out swinging at the HFPA's longtime lack of diversity. "I'll tell you why I'm here. I'm here because I'm Black," he said.

Carmichael said he was taken aback when he was offered the hosting gig by producer Stephen Hill, who is also Black. "One minute you're making mint tea at home; the next, you're invited to be the Black face of an embattled white organization. Life comes at you fast."

But the paycheck made it hard to turn down, he joked, recounting a conversation with a friend. "She said, 'Jerrod, enough of all that. How much are they paying you?' I said, '\$500,000.' She said, 'Boy, if you don't put on a nice suit and take them white people's money...'"

Don't play it again

As ever, the celebs demonstrated that there are few things they like more than the sound of their own voices, with almost every speech testing its allotted time limit. The whole show, which was supposed to be a tight three hours, over-ran by 20 minutes, thanks in no small part to award recipients who just wouldn't take the hint. Producers tried to play them off with piano music as they ran through their lists of thank yous to agents, managers, parents and assorted hangers-on.

While several just kept talking, Michelle Yeoh, who won for a star turn in "Everything Everywhere All At Once" that included her busting out some martial arts moves, was having none of it. "Shut up please," she said, feigning menace. "I can beat you up. That's serious."

Will Smith

He wasn't there, and probably won't be at any awards ceremony any time

soon after smacking Chris Rock at the Oscars last year, but Will Smith provided some of the biggest laughs of the night. Smith, who attacked Rock for a quip about his wife's shaved head in a foul-mouthed tirade, was the butt of one joke by Carmichael. "While we were on commercial, we actually presented Will Smith with the Rock Hudson award for best portrayal of masculinity on television," he said.

But Eddie Murphy, receiving the Cecil B. DeMille award for lifetime achievement, stole the show, with a wonderful slow wind-up that quoted Smith's outburst. "There is a definitive blueprint that you can follow to achieve success, prosperity, longevity, and peace of mind," he said. "There's three things: Pay your taxes, mind your business, and keep Will Smith's wife's name out of your fucking mouth."

'The invisible'

Producer Ryan Murphy, who was honored for his prolific output in television and film, used his acceptance speech to spotlight the marginalized in the entertainment industry. Murphy, the creative force behind "Nip/Tuck" and "Glee," began his speech with a tribute to MJ Rodriguez, the "Pose" star who won an Globe at last year's untelevised ceremony. "In doing so, MJ... became the first trans actress ever to win a Golden Globe," he said, calling on the audience to give her the standing ovation she missed in 2022. They happily obliged.

He also name-checked LGBTQ actors Billy Porter, Niecy Nash, Matt Bomer and Jeremy Pope, people he said represent "examples of possibility" for the marginalized in society. "My mission was to take the invisible, the unloved, and make them the heroes I long to see but never did in pop culture," he said of his career.

Tom Cruise

Will Smith wasn't the only absentee who got a roasting, with host Carmichael also taking aim at Tom Cruise, who publicly disowned the Golden Globes as the HFPA was put through the ringer, handing back his three gongs in 2021. Coming back from one commercial break, the comic arrived on stage clasp-ing three Globes.

"Hey guys, backstage I found these," he told the audience. "(The) three Golden Globe awards that Tom Cruise returned. "Maybe we take these three things and exchange them for the safe return of Shelly Miscavige." Shelly Miscavige, who allegedly has not been seen in public for several years, is the wife of David Miscavige, the leader of the church of Scientology, of which Cruise is a prominent member. — AFP

Sports

Butler stars as Heat break free throw record to down Thunder

LOS ANGELES: Jimmy Butler led a record-breaking shooting display from the free-throw line as the Miami Heat edged past the Oklahoma City Thunder 112-111 on Tuesday. Miami talisman Butler finished with a perfect 23-of-23 free throws - including a clutch game-winner with just under 13 seconds remaining - in a nail-biting victory at the FTX Arena.

Butler's haul was part of a remarkable 40-for-40 free throws made by Miami, breaking the old record of 39-for-39 made by Utah against Portland in 1982. Butler said afterwards he had been oblivious to Miami's record-breaking night from the foul line. "I had no idea," Butler told reporters. "I'm more excited that we won this game by one point."

Miami coach Erik Spoelstra was also unaware of his team's free-throw record. "I didn't realize we hadn't missed a free throw," Spoelstra said. "We've been a very good free-throw shooting team all year, but that's crazy." Miami trailed 111-106 with less than a minute remaining but fought back with a Victor Oladipo three-pointer and a Butler layup to tie the game.

Butler's 23rd free throw of the night edged Miami into a one-point lead with just under 13 seconds remaining before Shai Gilgeous-Alexander's attempted three-pointer to win it

for Oklahoma City bounced off the rim. "We had to make some plays and we did," Spoelstra said of his team's last-minute rally. Miami improved to 22-20 while the Thunder fell to 18-23.

Embiid returns

Elsewhere there were contrasting fortunes for Philadelphia's Joel Embiid and Golden State's Stephen Curry as they returned from injury. Sixers ace Embiid had missed three straight games with a minor foot injury heading into Tuesday's Eastern Conference clash against lowly Detroit. But the two-time MVP runner-up looked back to his dominant self with 36 points in just 23 minutes on court as Philadelphia romped to a 147-116 victory at the Wells Fargo Center.

Embiid's points tally came from 12-of-20 shooting, while the Sixers big man also chipped in with 11 rebounds and two blocks. James Harden and Tyrese Maxey added 16 points each while Tobias Harris had 14 points as Philadelphia led from start to finish to improve to 25-15. Harden's points tally was part of a second straight triple double. The 10-time All-Star added 12 rebounds and 15 assists.

After jumping out to a 65-43 half-time lead, the Sixers cut loose in a blizzard of scoring in the third quarter with 42 points before adding

40 more in the fourth. Philadelphia remain in fifth place in the East, 3.5 games adrift of leaders Boston. Detroit are rooted to the foot of the table with a dismal 11-33 record. But there was disappointment for Warriors star Curry in San Francisco as he returned from an 11-game absence to face a Phoenix Suns team decimated by injuries.

Curry scored 24 points - including five three-pointers - but was unable to stop the Warriors falling 125-113 to Phoenix. Mikal Bridges top-scored for Phoenix with 26 points. In Los Angeles, Kawhi Leonard's 33 points helped the Clippers complete a 113-101 win over the Dallas Mavericks. Luka Doncic led the game scoring with 43 points for Dallas, but the Mavs were chasing the game from the outset as the Clippers completed a wire-to-wire win.

In Salt Lake City, Jordan Clarkson's 32-point performance, including a crucial 9-0 run in the fourth quarter, helped the Utah Jazz upset the high-flying Cleveland Cavaliers 116-114. Lauri Markkanen added support with 25 points while Malik Beasley, Mike Conley and Nickeil Alexander-Walker all chipped in with 13 points each. Cleveland's Donovan Mitchell produced another high-scoring performance with 46 points but it was not enough to deny Utah victory. —AFP



MIAMI: Jimmy Butler of the Miami Heat drives to the basket during the game against the Oklahoma City Thunder on Jan 10, 2023 at FTX Arena. —AFP

Kvitova, Bencic, Collins reach quarterfinals

ADELAIDE: Petra Kvitova reached the Adelaide International quarterfinals on Wednesday after her opponent retired and was joined in the last eight by Olympic champion Belinda Bencic and Danielle Collins. Two-time Wimbledon champion Kvitova saved three set points before claiming the opening set 7-6 (8/6) against China's Zheng Qinwen, who then retired with a left thigh injury.

It was the fourth win from four matches so far this year for the 32-year-old Czech as she prepares for next week's Australian Open, where she made the final in 2019. "Of course this gives me some good confidence," said the world number 16, who will now play Daria Kasatkina after the fifth seed beat Barbora Krejickova in straight sets. "Still a few things to improve, of course, as always, but otherwise I'm happy."

American Collins, who lost to Ashleigh Barty in last year's Australian Open final, defeated Jil Teichmann 6-3, 7-6 (7/2) to also seal a berth in the final eight. But it took her seven match points to break down the Swiss qualifier and set up a clash with world number nine Veronika Kudermetova. Fellow Swiss Bencic progressed with a straight-sets win over Anna Kalinskaya.

Bencic is now 3-1 for the year, having split her matches at the United Cup before defeating Garbine Muguruza in the opening round at Adelaide. The world number 13 has dropped only two sets - both to world number one Iga Swiatek - in her last eight matches and is in buoyant mood ahead of the opening Grand Slam of the year.

"I'm absolutely ready," said Bencic, who won gold at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics. "I'm really strong in the most important matches and in tight moments, so I definitely feel very confident about that. The more you win in those moments, the more it helps." Spain's Paula Badosa and Brazil's Beatriz Haddad Maia also went through.

In the men's draw, British youngster Jack Draper advanced to the quarterfinals with a 6-4, 6-4 win against American Tommy Paul, while Spain's Alejandro Davidovich Fokina beat home favorite John Millman 6-3, 6-3. Another Spaniard, Roberto Bautista Agut, and South Korea's Kwon Soon-woo also won. —AFP

Djokovic, Jabeur on committee of tennis players body

MELBOURNE: Novak Djokovic and women's world number two Ons Jabeur were named Wednesday on the first executive committee of the controversial Professional Tennis Players Association (PTPA). Serbia's Djokovic, the former men's number one, was instrumental in the creation of the PTPA, having quit as president of the ATP Player Council in 2020 to launch the breakaway organisation.

The ATP runs men's tennis. The PTPA is independent of the ATP and its women's equivalent, the WTA, and says it wants to give players a greater voice in the sport. Six other play-

Kohli powers India to big win over Sri Lanka

GUWAHATI: Virat Kohli on Tuesday said playing "without any fear" remains key to success after his 45th one-day international century led India to a 67-run win over Sri Lanka in the opening match. Kohli hammered 113 off 87 balls to drive India to 373-7 after they were invited to bat first at the start of the three-match series in Guwahati. Skipper Rohit Sharma (83) and fellow opener Shubman Gill (70) put on 143 runs to lay the foundations of the mammoth total.

The bowlers, led by Mohammed Siraj, then restricted Sri Lanka to 306-8 to give India a 1-0 lead in the series. Skipper Dasun Shanaka top-scored with an unbeaten 108 after opening batsman Pathum Nissanka hit 72 but the knocks could only reduce the margin of loss for the tourists. Kohli, who survived two dropped catches on 52 and 81, stood out with his 73rd ton across all formats as he let out a roar and took off his helmet to bask in the stadium's applause.

"My preparation and intent always remain the same," man of the match Kohli said. "I thought I was hitting the ball nicely. It was close to the template I play with." The former captain has hit two successive ODI hundreds since coming out of an extended lean patch last year when he spoke about his mental struggles during the phase.

"The one thing I learnt was desperation doesn't get you anywhere," Kohli said on lessons learnt during his slump in form. "You go out there and play without any fear. You go out there playing for the right reasons and almost play every game like it's your last and just be happy about it. He added: "I can't hold on to things, the game is going to move on. I am not going to play forever. I am in a happy space and enjoying my game." He finally fell to third-time-lucky quick Kasun Rajitha, who was also bowling when wicketkeeper Kusal Mendis and Shanaka dropped the star batsman.

India's Pant to miss IPL after car crash: Ganguly

NEW DELHI: India's Rishabh Pant will miss the cash-rich Indian Premier League because of his injuries in a road accident last month, former national cricket board chief Sourav Ganguly has confirmed. The India star suffered multiple injuries when he crashed his Mercedes SUV north of New Delhi before dawn on December 30. The car burst into flames and he was rescued by a bus driver and conductor.

Pant is captain of the Delhi Capitals side in the annual two-month tournament, which is due to begin in late March or April with some of the biggest international stars of the game. "Rishabh Pant will not be available for the IPL," Ganguly, who is due to join Delhi Capitals as director of

cricket, was quoted as saying by broadcaster Sports Today. "It will be a great IPL (for the team), we will do well but Rishabh Pant's injury will affect the Delhi Capitals," Ganguly said Tuesday.

After the accident, the 25-year-old was rushed to hospital and admitted for a few days before being airlifted to Mumbai for further treatment and surgery. The Indian cricket board said that Pant suffered several injuries including a damaged ligament in his right knee, a hurt wrist and ankle, and abrasions on his back.

A wicketkeeper and flamboyant batter, Pant is a mainstay of the Test squad and has played a key role in some of India's most memorable wins in the last three years. But his white-ball form has been indifferent in the last few months and, days before the crash, he was left out of the squads for the ongoing one-day internationals and T20s against Sri Lanka. Pant is also expected to miss Australia's upcoming tour of India in February and March, when the archrivals will play four Tests. —AFP



GUWAHATI: India's Virat Kohli runs between the wickets as he celebrates scoring a century during the first ODI match between India and Sri Lanka at the Assam Cricket Association Stadium on Jan 10, 2023. —AFP

Shanaka's basics

Gill hit three successive boundaries off debutant left-arm quick Dilshan Madushanka in the fourth over and Rohit smashed two sixes and a four off Rajitha to begin the charge on a batting-friendly pitch. Rohit, who returned to captain the side after missing India's 2-1 T20I series win, reached his fifty with a four and Gill raised his half-century a short time later. Gill took on Dunith Wellalage with three successive fours in one over before he fell lbw in the next to Shanaka's medium-pace bowling.

Rohit attempted to keep up the attack with regular boundaries but Madushanka cut short his knock with a length ball that bowled the Indian skipper off an inside edge. The rest of the innings belonged to Kohli, who is

now four ODI tons away from batting icon Sachin Tendulkar's all-time record of 49. In reply, Sri Lanka were never in the chase after losing two early wickets including Mendis bowled for a duck off Siraj.

Nissanka attempted to give some life to the chase with his fighting knock and a 72-run fourth-wicket stand with Dhananjaya de Silva, who made 47. Sri Lanka slipped to 206-8 in the 38th over but Shanaka stretched the match till the final ball with an unbeaten 100-run stand with Rajitha. Shanaka reached his second ODI century with a four on the penultimate ball and ended the match with a six. The skipper said he is doing the "basics well". Umran Malik took three wickets with his express pace. —AFP



Rishabh Pant

Archer 'back in a big way' on opening day of new SA20 league

CAPE TOWN: Jofra Archer took his first wickets in almost 20 months as South Africa's new SA20 league got under way at Newlands in Cape Town on Tuesday. The England fast bowler took three for 27 to set up a comfortable eight-wicket, bonus point win for the MI Indians against Paarl Royals. The injury-hit Archer played only one match last year, sending down nine overs without taking a wicket for England Lions against England in Abu Dhabi in November.

Struggling with back and elbow injuries, he had not played in a representative fixture since turning out for Sussex in July 2021 and had not taken a wicket since playing for Sussex against Kent in May that year. Archer, bowling first change, struck with his third ball on Tuesday when Wihan Lubbe was caught off a wild slog. Bowling at more than 140kmh he claimed two more wickets off successive balls in his fourth and final over, dismissing David Miller and Ferisco Adams. "After that long, long break it

was great to see. He's back in a big way," said Cape Town captain Rashid Khan.

Losing captain Miller, who was dropped off Archer on 18 before being caught for 42, acknowledged Archer's impact. "It's great to have him back for world cricket," he said. A near-capacity crowd of about 20,000 watched the first match of a tournament which Cricket South Africa hopes will reignite local interest in the game and bring financial stability to an organization which has lost hundreds of millions of rands in recent years.

All six teams in the league are offshoots of Indian Premier League franchises. There was a strong IPL influence on Tuesday in the form of loud music, fireworks, flame machines and announcements which filled every available moment. MI Cape Town are owned by Mumbai Indians. In addition to a full playing and coaching complement, the Mumbai franchise sent an eight-person media and marketing team to promote the Cape Town team. The playing conditions included an allowance for teams to name 13 players before finalizing their elevens after the toss. Neither team made any changes to their first-choice side after Khan won the toss and decided to bowl. Two "strategic time-outs" of 2min 30sec were scheduled in each innings to "allow the teams to regroup tactically" - and for television companies to cram in some advertisements. —AFP

Sports

Man Utd, Newcastle ease into League Cup semifinals

MANCHESTER: Marcus Rashford came off the bench to score twice as Manchester United beat Charlton 3-0 to reach the League Cup semi-finals on Tuesday, while Newcastle saw off Leicester 2-0. A youthful United side featured eight changes as Erik ten Hag had one eye on Saturday's derby against Manchester City at Old Trafford. One of those retained in the starting line-up from Friday's 3-1 win over Everton, Antony, made the breakthrough with a sumptuous strike on 21 minutes.

Charlton were roared on by a travelling support of 9,000 and the third-tier side kept the tie alive despite Ten Hag introducing Casemiro, Rashford and Christian Eriksen off the bench for the final half hour. Rashford finally made the game safe for the hosts in the 90th minute, scoring for the eighth straight game at Old Trafford.

The England international then took his tally for the season to 15 with a thumping finish from Casemiro's pass deep into stoppage time. "We had to be in that semifinal and we did the job," said Ten Hag. "I think we had to finish this off early on but in the end the objective was to get through so compliments to the team."

Newcastle are into the semifinals of the League Cup for the first time since 1976 as Eddie Howe's

men moved one step closer to ending a 54-year wait for silverware on Tyneside. "It would mean everything to win a trophy but we just need to focus on the next game," said Newcastle right-back Kieran Trippier. "The supporters here are brilliant. They follow us in numbers and it's always a great atmosphere at home. We want to make them proud by giving everything on the pitch."

The Magpies swept Leicester aside in a recent 3-0 win at the King Power in the Premier League and only a lack of ruthlessness from the hosts kept the Foxes in the game for an hour at St James' Park. Bruno Guimaraes, Sean Longstaff and Callum Wilson were guilty of passing up big chances before half-time. Instead, it was the unlikely figure of Dan Burn who opened the scoring. The giant left-back slotted home coolly with his right foot.

Joelinton quickly doubled Newcastle's lead with a calm finish from Miguel Almiron's pass to leave the home fans dreaming of a visit to Wembley next month. Manchester City remain favourites for the competition they have won four times in the last five years with Pep Guardiola's men in quarterfinal action away to Southampton on Wednesday. Nottingham Forest host Wolves in the other last eight tie. —AFP



NEWCASTLE: Newcastle United's Swedish striker Alexander Isak vies with Leicester City's Welsh goalkeeper Danny Ward at St James' Park on Jan 10, 2023. —AFP



Special Olympics carries out medical tests on athletes

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait Special Olympics carried out health examination of special needs athletes at Boulevard Mall. The program included 150 players representing schools, establishments and societies, as well as athletes of Tomooh Club. The tests included oral, dental, eye, hearing and psychology examinations by a selected group of consultants and specialists from various medical centers.

The event was carried out in the presence of Sheikha Sheikha Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah, Chairman of Commercial Real Estate Company Abdelmuntaleb Maarafi, Salmiya Group Company Chairman Adwan Al-Adwani, Sheikha Suhaila Al-Sabah, Chairwoman and members of Kuwait Special Olympics and Tomooh Sports Club as well as health program officials Dr Nadia Abul, Dr Yousuf Al-Awadhi, Dr Abdelwahab Mohammad and Dr Rowaida Arnous.

Chairwoman of Kuwait Special Olympics Hanaa Al-Zawawi said carrying out this program comes within the implementation of the Special Olympics health program which includes eight health programs that care for physical, psychological and mental health of athletes. She said the program is important in supporting the abilities of the players and prepare them for the world games to be held in



Berlin in June 2023. She said Special Olympics intends to expand the number of examination clinics to include all specialties of international Olympics.

National Director of Kuwait Special Olympics Rehab Buresli said the program aimed at finding out the health and physical efficiency of the players to provide them a healthy lifestyle that prepares them to perform effectively. She said a health passport was issued for each player that includes their health condition.

She said the players' examination program is one of the health program elements of the Special Olympics that includes family health gatherings, health societies and strengthening physical fitness, in addition to the program of qualifying specialists in the health program fields among doctors, nurses and volunteers. Parents of athletes Mohammad Al-Tarkait and Mariam Thiyab thanked the Special Olympics for its continued efforts presenting many programs to players, which in turn raised their levels in various aspects.

60 shooters to participate in Kuwait tourney

KUWAIT: Kuwait International Shooting Tournament, organized by Bayan Club at the Hunting and Equestrian Club ranges in Subhan, will be held Friday and Saturday with 60 shooters participating. Bayan Shooting Club Secretary Fahad Al-Shuaibi said this is

the third championship of the club this season, adding the board of directors under the chairmanship of Sheikh Sabah Ali Al-Jaber Al-Sabah said preparation was good for this tournament due to its importance. "We hope to see good performance by all shooters as the club attracts a large number of participants every year," he said.



Fahad Al-Shuaibi

Chelsea sign Atletico forward Felix on loan

LONDON: Atletico Madrid forward Joao Felix has joined Chelsea on loan for the rest of the season, the Premier League club announced on Wednesday. The 23-year-old will bolster the attacking options for manager Graham Potter, whose squad is currently hard-hit by injuries and languishing in 10th spot in the table. Chelsea tweeted "the artist has arrived", welcoming the Portugal international, who had also been linked with Arsenal and Manchester United.

"Chelsea is one of the great teams in the world and I hope to help the team reach their objectives, so I am very, very happy to be here and very excited to play at Stamford Bridge," Felix said in a club statement. Felix joined Atletico from Benfica in 2019 for 126 million euros (\$135 million), making him one of the biggest transfers of all time, and has scored 34 goals in 131 appearances for the club.



Joao Felix

He also featured in Portugal's run to the World Cup quarterfinals in Qatar last month, scoring in the 3-2 victory against Ghana in the group stage. Atletico confirmed on Wednesday that Felix had extended his contract with them for one more season, until June 2027. "From Atletico Madrid we wish Joao Felix every success in this new professional stage," the Spanish club said in a statement. Chelsea are 10 points adrift of a top-four spot in the Premier League season after a turbulent season and are also out of both domestic cup competitions. —AFP

Poor form puts Chelsea's faith in Potter to the test

LONDON: Four months into his reign as Chelsea manager, Graham Potter is under pressure for a run of form that would have seen many of his predecessors at Stamford Bridge fired during the Roman Abramovich era. A 4-0 thrashing at the hands of Manchester City on Sunday means the Blues are already out of both domestic cups. They sit 10th in the Premier League, 10 points adrift of even a place in the top four.

It is not the start the club's new American owners will have expected after spending over £300 million (\$365 million) on new players to improve a squad that finished third in the Premier League last season. Judging by the dissenting voices of the fans, it is the consortium led by chairman Todd Boehly that are responsible for the malaise on the field. As Chelsea chased City shadows at the weekend, the travelling support at the Etihad rebelled by chanting the names of former manager Thomas Tuchel and former owner Abramovich.

Tuchel was ruthlessly sacked by the new regime just seven games into the season in what appeared a sure sign that the hire-and-fire culture was set to stay at Stamford Bridge despite Abramovich's departure. The Russian had shown no mercy to even illustrious managers such as Jose Mourinho, Carlo Ancelotti and Antonio Conte, who won Premier League titles during their time at Chelsea.

Despite making his name as a Premier League manager in three impressive seasons with Brighton, Potter does not have the CV to match many of his predecessors. But Potter believes times have changed at Chelsea. He says a more patient approach promised by the new owners was one of the things that attracted him to leave Brighton in September.

'Massive transitional period'

"There's a completely different ownership," Potter said after also losing to City 1-0 in Chelsea's last league outing. "This is hard for people to get their head around as Chelsea for 20 years has been one thing and now all of a sudden it's different. The reason for me to take the job was because you've got a chance to shape a club that is in a massive transitional period."

One thing in Potter's favor is that Chelsea's £280 million



Graham Potter

transfer spend in the summer window took place before he arrived. It also took place after the club's transfer guru Marina Granovskaia and goalkeeper turned technical and performance advisor Petr Cech departed with Abramovich. Boehly stepped in to head up the recruitment as sporting director.

The result has been a scattergun approach to the transfer market. The signings of veterans past their peak, such as Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang and Kalidou Koulibaly, already looks like money wasted, while more than £50 million has been splashed on a number of promising youth prospects not yet ready for the first team. Boehly's approach has been compared to a fan playing the video game "Football Manager" by former Manchester United captain Gary Neville.

Injury crisis

Potter has also been hamstrung by a long injury list. N'Golo Kante has not played since August, England internationals Reece James and Ben Chilwell missed the World Cup and have suffered lengthy layoffs and Chelsea's most expensive summer signing, Wesley Fofana, has been restricted to four appearances. Raheem Sterling and Christian Pulisic have also been ruled out for the next few weeks and Armando Broja's season is over after he suffered anterior cruciate ligament damage.

"We've had a massive transition and problems in terms of injuries don't make it easy to be stable," added Potter. But with Chelsea in the unusual position of trailing neighbors Fulham heading into Thursday's west London derby, Potter needs to find answers rather than excuses to keep his job. —AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Hospitals

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

Qadsiya	24814764
Dasmah	22515088
Bneid Al-Gar	22532265
Shaab	22531908
Qibla	22518752
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22459381
Mirqab	22451082
Sharq	22456536
Salmiya	22465401
	25746401

Change of Name

I, SAIFUDDIN holder of Passport No. 24825362 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, 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)

Automated enquiry about the Civild card is 1889988

Dakar champ Attiyah eyes fifth title

Truck racer Loprais distraught after spectator's death



SHAYBAH, Saudi Arabia: Toyota's driver Nasser Al-Attiyah of Qatar and his co-driver Mathieu Baumel of France compete during the Stage 10 of the Dakar 2023 between Haradh and Shaybah on Jan 11, 2023. — AFP

SHAYBAH, Saudi Arabia: French driver Sebastien Loeb won his second successive stage and fourth in all of this year's Dakar Rally though Qatari defending champion Nasser Al-Attiyah remains firmly in charge. Attiyah holds a daunting one hour 21 minutes advantage over his Brazilian Toyota teammate Lucas Moraes with Loeb in third, a further 16 minutes in arrears.

Loeb - a record nine-time world rally champion - timed 3min 4sec quicker in his Prodrive than Sweden's Mattias Ekstrom with Moraes third on the 624 km 10th stage from Haradh to Shaybah. Attiyah may be looking comfortable for a fifth title but the 52-year-old knows there remain potential pitfalls as the race heads into the final four stages.

The next two are challenging even by the ultimate endurance race's standards as they are termed "marathons" and take place in the Empty Quarter. Adding to their challenges the competitors will not have assistance at camp following Thursday's stage. "We got to the Empty Quarter! It was a good day to test things for tomorrow, we know what we need," said Attiyah. "I'm pleased, I've got a good feeling with

the car, we didn't make any mistakes. I didn't push too hard today, I didn't want to take risks. The marathon stage is tomorrow."

The situation in the motorbike category is far tighter. Kevin Benavides took over as the overall leader after Botswana's Ross Branch won Wednesday's stage. Benavides, 34 and seeking his second Dakar title to add to his 2021 victory, now heads former leader Skyler Howes of the USA by 1min 29sec.

'Good job'

Australia's Toby Price is third, 2min 10sec off the pace. Benavides finished fourth in the stage, a minute slower than Branch - who recorded his second victory in this year's race and more than made up for the embarrassment of having run out of fuel on two previous stages. "I think I did a good job," said Benavides. "I attacked before crashing and losing a few minutes there, then I went back on the offensive."

Howes posted the 17th fastest time, over seven minutes off the winner. "I just wanted to make it through this stage today and get ready for the

marathon stage," said Howes. "On short stages like this, you can definitely lose it, but trying to win it is not necessary." Price was pleased too with his day's work ahead of Thursday's far more intimidating stage.

"We just played it safe today," said two-time champion who is yet to win since the race moved to Saudi Arabia in 2020. "There was a lot of broken dunes and the sand was really soft. All in all, I think so far the position was pretty good. Hopefully a few people will get in the mix of it. We'll try and get some gaps (Thursday) and see if it works."

The leader of the truck category Ales Loprais meanwhile said he was "terribly sorry" after his vehicle hit an Italian tourist who subsequently died on Tuesday. Loprais's Praga truck struck the 69-year-old Italian man who was taking pictures behind a sand dune during the ninth stage between Riyadh and Haradh.

He died in the helicopter taking him to hospital, organizers Amaury Sport Organization (AMO) said in a statement, adding it was investigating the accident. The Czech news agency CTK said later on Wednesday Loprais had quit the race. "I would like to

express my condolences to his family and friends. I'm terribly sorry and it will haunt me for the rest of my life," Loprais said in a video on his Facebook page.

Loprais, who turned 43 on the day of the accident, said he had had no idea what had happened at the time. "The entire crew learnt about it when we went to bed and the commissioners came and told us they had a video recording of the accident," he said. Loprais, whose uncle Karel Loprais won the Dakar Rally six times in the truck category, said the victim suffered a heart attack during the journey to hospital "two or three hours after" the accident.

"So a human life was wasted and I am to blame because I was driving," said Loprais. Loprais, who was seeking his maiden victory after racing at the Dakar Rally since 2006, published a video of the accident on his Facebook page. The rally ends on Sunday in the eastern Saudi city of Dammam. Held in Saudi Arabia for the fourth edition in a row, the rally is raced mostly in desert areas but nevertheless attracts spectators even if in far smaller numbers than when the race was held in Africa and Latin America. — AFP

Djokovic hot favorite for Australian Open 'revenge' mission

MELBOURNE: Novak Djokovic has won the Australian Open a record nine times but a 10th title in Melbourne this month will be the most satisfying of all after his humiliating ban a year ago. Twelve months ago the Serbian superstar, one of the finest men's tennis players of all time, was at the

field last week to win in Adelaide for the 92nd ATP title of his career - level with the Spaniard Nadal. "The support I have been getting in the last 10 days was something that I don't think I've experienced too many times in my life," Djokovic said after saving a match point in the final against Sebastian Korda on Sunday.

Last month, The Sydney Morning Herald reported that a survey showed 30 percent of Australians now supported him being allowed into the country, up from 14 percent in January last year. Along with his ominous form, the cards look to have fallen Djokovic's way this time. There are indications that age and injury are catching up with Nadal. The 36-year-old has lost six of his past seven matches stretching back to the US Open, where he went out in the last 16 to

Frances Tiafoe.

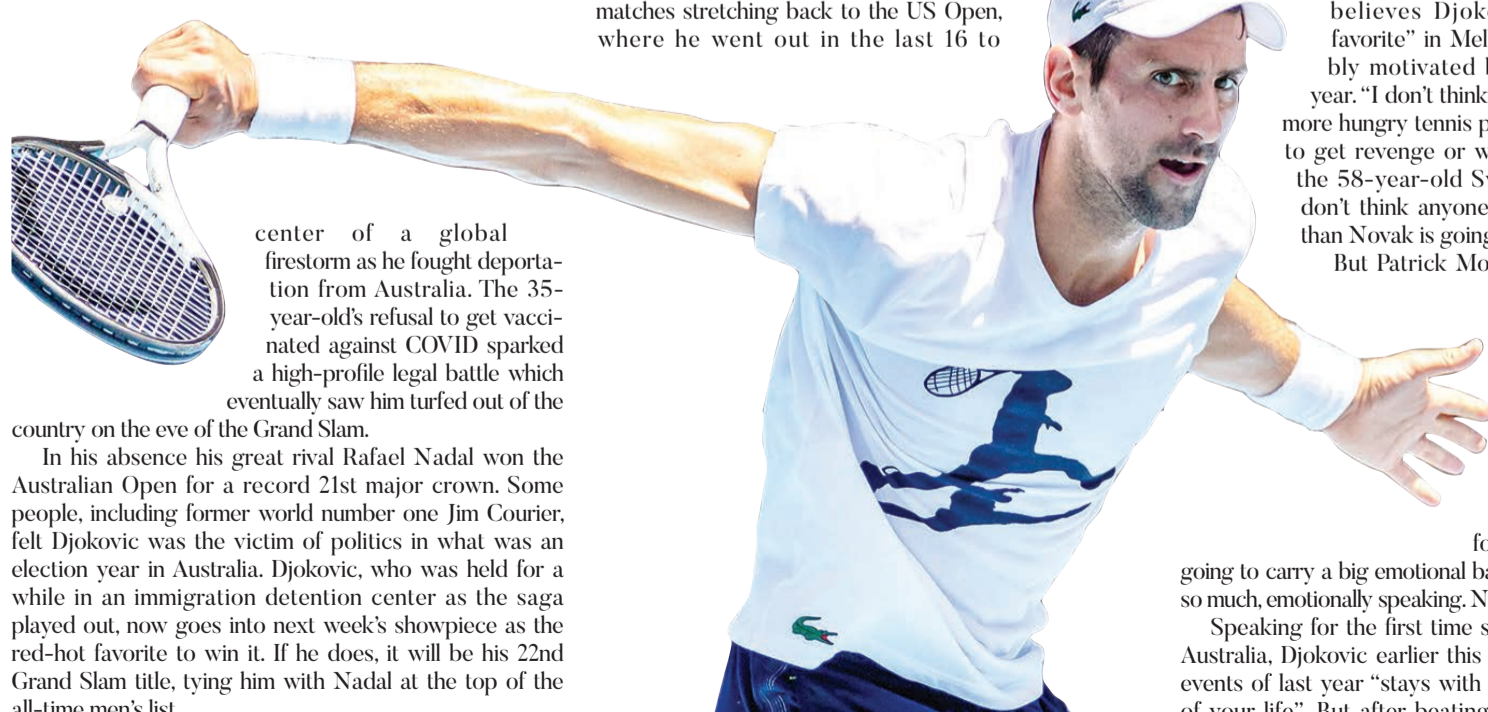
Roger Federer is no longer in the picture, having retired last year, and world number one Carlos Alcaraz - the new kid on the block - is out of Melbourne with injury. Daniil Medvedev, the losing finalist in 2021 and 2022, is the most obvious threat aside from Nadal, having beaten Djokovic in the 2021 US Open final to win his lone major. Djokovic though outclassed the Russian 6-3, 6-4 last week in the Adelaide semi-finals and Medvedev has dropped to eighth in the world.

'Emotional baggage'

Mats Wilander, a former world number one who won seven Grand Slam titles, believes Djokovic is "pretty heavy favorite" in Melbourne and will be doubly motivated by what happened last year. "I don't think that we have ever seen a more hungry tennis player in terms of wanting to get revenge or wanting to win matches," the 58-year-old Swede told Eurosport. "I don't think anyone has ever been hungrier than Novak is going to be."

But Patrick Mouratoglou, who was the long-time coach of the now-retired Serena Williams, warned that the emotions of his controversial deportation could catch up with Djokovic. "It's going to be tough for Novak in Australia, that's for sure," he said. "He (is) going to carry a big emotional baggage. He's been through so much, emotionally speaking. Nobody is immune."

Speaking for the first time since setting foot back in Australia, Djokovic earlier this month admitted that the events of last year "stays with you for, I guess, the rest of your life". But after beating Korda for the Adelaide crown, he said he held no grudges. "I couldn't ask for a better preparation and lead-up to the Australian Open," he said. "I love playing in Australia. My results are a testament to that." — AFP



center of a global firestorm as he fought deportation from Australia. The 35-year-old's refusal to get vaccinated against COVID sparked a high-profile legal battle which eventually saw him turfed out of the country on the eve of the Grand Slam.

In his absence his great rival Rafael Nadal won the Australian Open for a record 21st major crown. Some people, including former world number one Jim Courier, felt Djokovic was the victim of politics in what was an election year in Australia. Djokovic, who was held for a while in an immigration detention center as the saga played out, now goes into next week's showpiece as the red-hot favorite to win it. If he does, it will be his 22nd Grand Slam title, tying him with Nadal at the top of the all-time men's list.

Many in Australia were glad to see the back of Djokovic in January 2022, but there are indications that public sentiment has softened since. He enjoyed strong support from the crowd as he blew away the rest of the

MELBOURNE: Novak Djokovic attends a practice match with Russian player Daniil Medvedev ahead of the Australian Open in Melbourne Park on Jan 11, 2023. — AFP

Scandal-hit French FA boss Le Graet forced to step down

PARIS: French Football Federation president Noel Le Graet has been forced to stand down just weeks after France's defeat in the World Cup final following a series of controversies, the body said on Wednesday. The decision was taken following an emergency meeting of the FFF in Paris.

"Noel Le Graet, in agreement with the FFF executive committee gathered today in Paris, has chosen to step down from his role as president until the completion of the audit performed by the sports ministry," the federation said. Le Graet, whose mandate was due to run until 2024, had faced calls to resign after what he admitted were "clumsy remarks" about Zinedine Zidane's potential interest in coaching the French national team. The 81-year-old, who has been president of the FFF since 2011, had said in an interview with radio station RMC on Sunday that he "wouldn't even have taken his call" when asked whether Zidane, a World Cup winner as a player and an all-time France great, had rung him to express an interest in taking over as coach from Didier Deschamps.

Deschamps, who led France to World Cup glory in 2018 and oversaw their run to last month's final which they lost on penalties to Argentina, last week-end signed a new contract to stay as France coach until 2026. The storm around Zidane followed a series of accusations of mistreatment by employees at the FFF, which led to the French government launching an audit of the federation and Le Graet being summoned to attend a hearing.

Le Graet denied those accusations, but on Tuesday his behavior again came under the spotlight with a female football agent making further accusations of unwanted sexual advances by the veteran administrator in an interview with sports daily L'Equipe. — AFP