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AMIR ISSUES GENEROUS PARDON

Cabinet: Amnesty paves way for national reconciliation, development of Kuwait

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: An Amiri decree was issued on Tuesday to pardon a number of political dissidents who are either in Kuwaiti jails serving years of imprisonment or have been living in exile outside the country, a statement by the Cabinet said. The statement did not say how many people were granted amnesty by HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, but it said that some of those pardoned are in jail while others are outside of the country.

But a copy of the decree published on some social media sites said as many as 34 people are

included in the amnesty. They include a number of ruling family members who have been living abroad for several years, several dissidents who have been convicted to dozens of years in jail and political opposition members either in Kuwaiti jails or living abroad.

The Cabinet statement said the amnesty comes as part of a "national reconciliation" that will turn a new page to correct the path and achieve stability. It added the amnesty covers a "large section" of some Kuwaiti citizens serving jail terms and others who are living abroad in voluntary exile. The Cabinet expressed confidence that the move will result in fruitful cooperation between the govern-

ment and the National Assembly based on constitutional principles. It will also remove obstacles obstructing development, it said.

The amnesty decree comes at a time when the relations between the government and the National Assembly are experiencing some problems after the government rejected a draft law asking the government to purchase billions of dinars in bank loans of Kuwaiti citizens. This is the second time that HH the Amir has issued an amnesty for a number of political opposition members. Last year, about a dozen leading opposition figures were pardoned and allowed to return from Turkey, where they had lived for over three years.

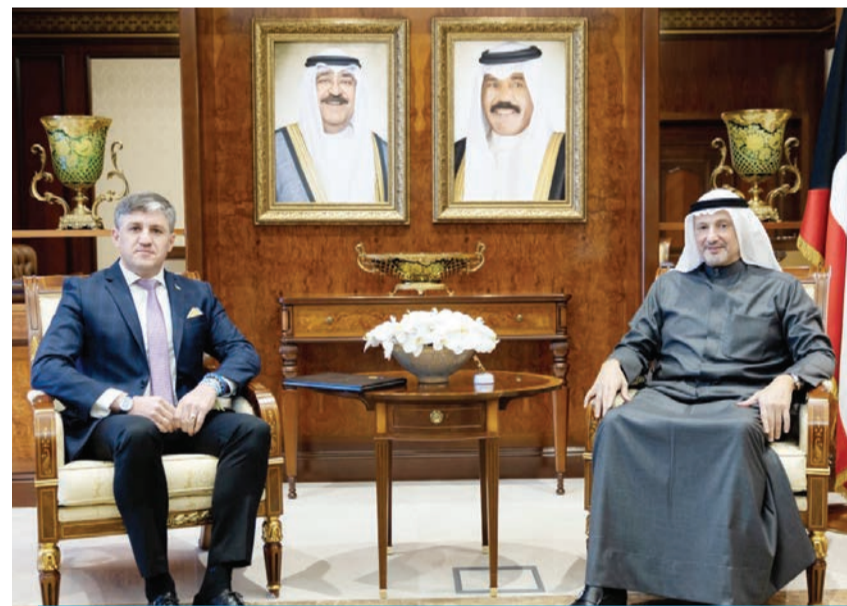
A majority of those pardoned had been convicted for publishing statements deemed offensive to HH the Amir and for criticizing some Arab countries. Among those believed to have been pardoned are former head of the secret service Sheikh Athbi Al-Fahad Al-Sabah, son of former oil minister Sheikh Khalifa Al-Ali Al-Sabah, opposition activist Abdulaziz Al-Jarallah and others. They also include Abdullah Al-Saleh, a dissident living in London, and former MP Abdulhameed Dashti, who both had been sentenced to over 70 years in jail each for criticizing HH the Amir or Arab countries. It was not immediately known if another decree will be issued to grant amnesty to the remaining dissidents.

Kuwait reaffirms stand on Ukraine; NATO hails Kuwait

KUWAIT/ BRUSSELS: Kuwait on Tuesday reaffirmed its stance toward the Ukrainian crisis, asserting in this respect the principle of safeguarding states' sovereignty. The ministry of foreign affairs said in a statement the Kuwaiti stand was manifested by Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah during a reception of Ukrainian Ambassador Oleksandr Balanutsa to discuss latest developments concerning the Ukrainian crisis.

Sheikh Salem, during the meeting with the envoy, affirmed Kuwait's stance toward this crisis that calls for adherence to principles of international law, the United Nations Charter and states' sovereignty, independence and territorial sanctity with internationally recognized borders.

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KUWAIT: Ukrainian Ambassador Oleksandr Balanutsa (left) meets Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. — KUNA photos



BRUSSELS: Kuwaiti Ambassador Nawaf Al-Enezi (left) presents his credentials to NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg.

MPs back grillings; five acquitted in Eurofighters case

KUWAIT: MPs Faisal Al-Kandari and Thamer Al-Suwait on Tuesday announced their backing of the grilling of two Cabinet ministers, saying the government has so far failed to address the concerns of Kuwaiti people. MP Mubarak Al-Hajraf last week filed to grill Finance Minister Abdulwahab Al-Rushaid on alleged charges of failing to properly manage huge assets of Kuwait abroad and for opposing a draft law to purchase loans of Kuwaiti citizens.

Also, MP Jenan Bushehri on Monday filed to grill Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Barrak Al-Sheetan over alleged violations including a Cabinet decision to raise the salaries of members and its decisions to appoint senior officials who do not fulfil conditions. Kandari said that he will back the two grillings because the government has failed to cooperate with the National Assembly and respond to the demands of the Kuwaiti people. The two interpellations are expected to be debated during the next Assembly session on Jan 24.

The rapporteur of the Assembly's financial and economic affairs committee MP Saleh Ashour

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Heavy rainfall deluges Kuwait

KUWAIT: Kuwait witnessed heavy rainfall on Tuesday, swamping the capacity of the rainwater drainage system. Weather stations recorded 51.3 mm of rainfall in Subiya, 48.8 mm in Khairan, 34.4 mm in Kuwait City, 30.6 mm in Wafra, 29.5 mm at Kuwait airport and 17.4 mm in Jahra. The ministry of public works said its teams are working around the clock to clear waterlogged roads and bring traffic flow to normal.

The meteorological department expects a gradual improvement in the weather situation. "The country will be affected by atmospheric pressure elevation accompanied by cold air mass. The climate will be cold during the day and cold to very cold at night, especially in open areas with the possibility of fog," meteorologist Abdulaziz Al-Qarawi said. — Agencies (See Page 4)



KUWAIT: Wide swaths of Sulaibiya are submerged on Tuesday following heavy rains. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Egypt middle class squeezed by economy

CAIRO: With Egypt's economy in crisis, the currency in freefall and inflation skyrocketing, the poor have been hit hard but the middle class is also teetering on the brink. "It's like we were hit by an earthquake, suddenly you have to let go of everything," said Manar, a 38-year-old mother of two. "Now whatever semi-humane life people had

has been reduced to thinking about how much bread and eggs cost," she told AFP, asking to be identified only by her first name.

The Egyptian pound has lost half its value against the dollar since March, following a devaluation demanded as part of a \$3 billion International Monetary Fund loan agreement. Official annual headline inflation hit 21.9 percent in December, and food prices surged 37.9 percent in the Arab world's most populous nation.

But Steve Hanke, an economist at Johns Hopkins University who measures inflation based on purchasing power parity and factoring in black market

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CAIRO: People walk past a hawker selling tangerines along a street in the Azhar district of Egypt's capital on Jan 16, 2023. — AFP



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US Army in Arifjan marks Martin Luther King Jr Day



KUWAIT: Guest speaker CSM Ricardo M Saunders delivers his speech.



KUWAIT: Charge d'Affaires of the US Embassy James Holtsnider with US Army's high-ranking personnel.

By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: Under the theme of "Together, we can be the dream" the Arifjan community of the US Army celebrated Martin Luther King Jr Day on Monday in the presence of Charge d'Affaires of the US Embassy to Kuwait James Holtsnider, Command Sergeant Maj Ricardo Saunders as guest speaker and a number of high-ranking US Army personnel.

Saunders said Dr Martin Luther King Jr is best known for his central role in the American civil rights movement as a main spokesperson for non-violent activism, as he dedicated the latter half of his short life advocating for quality, social justice and opportunity for all Americans. He said obser-

vance of MLK Day provides the army not only the opportunity to celebrate Dr King's contributions to the country, but to reflect on Americans' strength, commitment to service the army and each other.

"It's a privilege to be at Camp Arifjan with our US military partners, while across the US and the world we celebrate Martin Luther King Jr Day as a holiday. It is a time to reflect on important contributions of the man's work in civil rights efforts as well as thinking about his important speeches like 'I Have a Dream'," Holtsnider told Kuwait Times. "United States is a country of hope, opportunity and thinking about how we can better develop into a more perfect society, as we come here to this celebration to gather, remember and honor his

legacy," he said.

"One of the things that we always think as we reflect on Martin Luther King Jr's legacy and work is that there is always more to do. We are always trying to get better, while giving everyone the opportunity to fulfil their potential," Holtsnider added.

Regarding the Kuwait and US relationship, Holtsnider said: "We have had a long partnership with Kuwait and continue to become extremely strong, but we always find ways to strengthen our partnership through our annual strategic dialogue with the Kuwaiti Army and working on political and economic issues to improve trade and business with each other. In the cultural aspect, we are try-

ing to increase the number of Kuwaiti students who are studying in the United States, not to mention defense cooperation."

CSM Leon C Black III told Kuwait Times: "This day is very important because it helps us reflect on the time Martin Luther King Jr stood for America, as we are still struggling today with social equality in the matter of civil rights. Therefore, this event was held at Arifjan camp to translate his vision everywhere across the globe, despite it being a piece of American history." Regarding King's legacy, he said: "I would say that his work is not done yet. Every year we celebrate the same themes and messages and it's not complete yet - we still have work to strive toward equality for everyone."

King of Bhutan visits Salam Palace Museum



KUWAIT: King of Bhutan Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck visited on Monday Al-Salam Palace Museum where he was briefed by museum officials about historical documents and artifacts it houses. — KUNA photos



Greek minister visits Sabah Al-Salem University City

KUWAIT: Greek minister for development and investment Adonis Georgiadis and his delegation visited Kuwait University's Sabah Al-Salem University City and its colleges on Monday for a detailed explanation about new buildings in the university. Dean of the College of Literature Dr Abdulhadi Al-Ajmi said: "This visit is important for the university's administration, which reflects its

interest in visitors from abroad, as foreign visits are important for academic, scientific and cultural understanding."

Dr Ajmi showed the Greek delegation part of the archaeological holdings of the Department of History at Kuwait University. Georgiadis praised the university complex. "This complex is a very elegant educational model," he said, noting the great organization of the buildings and ease of movement between the buildings of the faculties, departments and classrooms.

"The interest of the Kuwaiti authorities in the education system is the best guarantee for the future of the Kuwaiti society and its children," he said. Dr Ajmi presented mementos to Georgiadis and his delegation.



KUWAIT: Dr Abdulhadi Al-Ajmi with Adonis Georgiadis and his delegation at Kuwait University's Sabah Al-Salem University City.



KFAED hosts honor students before trip

KUWAIT: Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) organized on Tuesday at its headquarters an educational meeting to honor students who are expected to participate in "Be an honor student" journey in cooperation with the education ministry.

Head of the media department at the Fund, Muna Al-Ayyaf said: "The Fund has organized two trips this year from January 21 to 28, for male students to visit Rwanda and the second for female students to visit Tajikistan."

"About 264 students participated in the trips

until now in which they visited more than 15 countries, including Egypt, Jordan, Uzbekistan, China, Turkey, Lebanon, Sri Lanka, Morocco, Senegal, and others," she clarified.

"This initiative comes as part of the Fund's desire to enhance its social responsibility by contributing to many local social and economic activities to support development efforts in Kuwait without a prejudice to the Fund's mission," she added.

It is noteworthy that the Fund launched this initiative in 2010 to motivate high school students to succeed and excel. The Fund, in cooperation with the education ministry, selects a group of outstanding students and organizes annual cultural trips for them to visit the countries that the Fund cooperates with so that they can benefit from its projects.

The initiative also aims to introduce new generations to the size and status of Kuwait in the eyes of brotherly and friendly countries, and to reward them for their distinction and competence.

13 building violations notified

KUWAIT: A triple inspection panel from the Iqama affairs, manpower and municipality has issued 13 warnings for illegal construction and overstepping public property. They also confiscated many unused cars and issued 21 citations for residency law violations. Vice director of municipality for Farwaniya and Mubarak Al-Kabeer, Nawaf Al-Kanderi, said: "The municipality's emergency team has launched an inspection campaign in south Khaitan in front of the Amiri airport."

The head of the emergency team, Muhammed Al-Jallawy, said: "The inspections are going on particularly near Khaitan and Farwaniya areas. There are about seven sites that are going to be inspected during the next days." "The higher administration of the municipality is reviewing the matter. We are doing our duty by submitting reports on every campaign that includes a detailed explanation about the situation on the ground, especially when there is an insistence on the part of the municipality authorities to report on all violations," he added.

In other related news, six 'Mobile Baqalas' have been removed in residential areas in Ahmadi governorate. This came during an inspection by the general hygiene and public works department at the Ahmadi municipality. Director of the department, Nawaf Al-Mutairi, said "the removal of these mobile baqalas has been done to avoid any traffic obstruction inside residential areas." The public relations department at the municipality urges people to report any violations if they notice to @kuwmmun along with a photograph.



Local

Zain announces strategic partnership with V-THRU

To offer internship program that prepares youth for future careers

KUWAIT: Zain, Kuwait's leading digital service provider, announced a strategic partnership with V-THRU, the leading Kuwait-based online platform for virtual drive-thru services. Through this partnership, both companies present a new professional internship program for students and fresh graduates, giving them the opportunity to prepare for their future careers by gaining and developing invaluable skills within the catering and technology industries.

The announcement was made during an event at the Zain Innovation Campus (ZINC) in the company's headquarters in Shuwaikh, attended by Zain Kuwait's Corporate Relations Department Manager Hamad Al-Musaibeeh, V-THRU co-founder and CEO Abdullah Al-Shalabi, and executives from both companies.

The partnership comes in line with Zain's comprehensive corporate sustainability and social responsibility strategy, which closely focuses on contributing to the nation's education and youth sectors. The program aims at upskilling the youth by allowing them to experience a hands-on approach while working within the catering and technology industries, which are two of the most vibrant sectors in the local market. The new three-month program offers a unique opportunity for students, fresh graduates, and youth who are about to start their new careers to join a paid part-time job at the projects and sites V-THRU

operates. The trainees will take part in tracking, coordinating, and operational management tasks on the ground, in addition to dealing with staff and customers and receiving/delivering orders to some of the biggest and most notable business towers in Kuwait, as well as to Kuwait University facilities.

Zain and V-THRU's new internship program seeks to empower ambitious Kuwaiti youth and support them with the proper training resources so they may gain invaluable skills in technology, catering, operations management, and more. The program also features a number of training courses and workshops that cover some of the most essential business topics like marketing, branding and designing, operations, technology, and others. Each participant will receive a certificate after successfully completing the program.

The internship program complements Zain's Future University Network (FUN) program, a youth-tailored social program for students that bridges the gap between studying and a unique work experience at Zain by recruiting youth as the brand's ambassadors.

FUN is considered one of the largest sustainable projects that Zain has been actively investing in since its first edition back in 2008. It offers university students with a valuable opportunity to benefit from an actual work experience to develop many skills and gain expertise for the job market



KUWAIT: Hamad Al-Musaibeeh and Abdullah Al-Shalabi announcing the partnership.

on both professional and personal levels. Zain is committed to exerting more efforts into offering similar programs that enrich human resources development in all areas. The company spares no

efforts in making its capabilities and resources available as well as reinforce its collaboration with entities and organizations that provide such initiatives and actively develop Kuwaiti talents.

Kuwait Medica conference to open Wednesday

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Medica Conference & Exhibition, better known as (Kuwait Medica), will kick-start on Wednesday, focusing on cutting-edge medical products and services, said the coordinator on Tuesday. Held under the patronage of Health Minister Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi, the two-day event will attract representatives from more than 50 public and private bodies, along with local and global hospitals to get familiar with new healthcare products in the medical domain, said Eman Khalaf, the conference's general coordinator, in a press release.



Eman Khalaf

The conference will draw participants from Britain, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Jordan and Thailand, she added. The conferees, including experts and specialists, will highlight government bodies' plans for revamping health services and deliver lectures, she pointed out. Kuwait Medica offers a dedicated platform for global hospitals, medical facilities, equipment and technology suppliers, pharmaceutical companies and hospital management consultancies to present a complete spectrum of healthcare services and processes for use in medical field and to identify potential business opportunities in Kuwaiti and GCC consumer markets. — KUNA

Govt returns Afya law for housewives

KUWAIT: Government sources revealed the government on Tuesday told the National Assembly that the reason for returning the law regarding adding housewives to the Afya health insurance card is due to a legal typing error that included the phrase 'women' instead of 'Kuwaiti women'.

"Housing Minister Ammar Al-Ajmi informed Assembly Speaker Ahmad Al-Saadoun that the reason for returning the law is because the law did not specify the nationality of the housewife in question.

The government asked to add the Kuwaiti nationality to the law, after which it will immediately execute the law," sources told Kuwait Times. The sources added the government has not rejected the law due to any political reason, but only because it did not explicitly state the nationality of the housewives in question.

Fire erupts in Fintas building and hotel store in Farwaniya

KUWAIT: Two incidents of fire were reported on Tuesday, one occurred in a building in Fintas and the second in a store in Farwaniya. The Kuwait Fire Force teams rushed to the scenes and brought the blazes under control.

"The central command received information on Tuesday morning that a fire broke out in a building in



KUWAIT: KIPIC CEO and Vice-CEO open Al-Zour Refinery labs.— KUNA photos



KUWAIT: KIPIC CEO and Vice-CEO listen to Al-Zour Refinery's lab workers.



Al-Zour refinery labs to boost Kuwait's oil sector: KIPIC

KUWAIT: Kuwait Integrated Petroleum Industries Company (KIPIC) stated on Tuesday that the launching of the Al-Zour refinery's laboratories would boost the performance and competitiveness of the Kuwaiti oil sector. In a press statement celebrating the opening of the laboratories, KIPIC affirmed that the facility, run by national cadres, was one of its kind in the Middle East region.

Fintas. Firefighters from Qurain and Mangaf stations were dispatched to the scene and on arrival, the team found that the fire erupted on the sixth floor of the building. Four people were trapped inside the building who were rescued and sent to medical emergency. The fire did not result in any casualties," the KFF public relations department said.

On receiving a tip regarding the fire in Farwaniya, fire squads from Farwaniya and Ardhiya and search and rescue units were sent to the scene. The team evacuated the building immediately. The fire appeared to have erupted on the ground floor of the building inside a hotel. The blaze was successfully extinguished and one person was sent to the medical emergency who suffered from suffocation," the KFF explained.

KIPIC's CEO Waleed Al-Bader said that the opening of these laboratories was another milestone for the company, adding that it was part of its strategic plans for the oil sector. Equipping the facility with the latest lab facility is an integral part of the company's operational vision concerning high quality and environment-friendly oil, petrochemical products, and natural gas projects.

On his part, Deputy CEO Khaled Al-Awadhi revealed that the laboratories were a valuable addition to Al-Zour refinery, one of the largest refineries in the world. He indicated that the labs would be involved in the process and tools used in refining oil, noting that documents and certificates produced by the laboratories would be of high value. —KUNA



In my view

Don't study abroad



By Fadia Alrefai

Local@kuwaittimes.com

In the late 30s, 1939 specifically, the Kuwait government decided to start sending Kuwaiti students abroad on scholarships to get degrees in different fields, whether to then flourishing Cairo or Baghdad or even London. Since then a status quo has been built in the mentality of many that if I want to fit into that upper class or middle upper class, I have to study abroad as well, not knowing the many negative effects this could have, not only on the student as an individual, but on the Kuwaiti work field as a whole.

To start off, according to KUNA, 82 percent of Kuwaiti students study in government schools. The issue with this is because of the brittle government syllabus and educational system, students who graduate from these schools and go off abroad are more likely to face larger obstacles because of the conflict between the Kuwaiti syllabi and the syllabi abroad.

Therefore, if the Kuwaiti society as a whole, including the ministry of education, is keen to continue scholarships abroad, it must reform the educational system to one that matches global standards, so these students are built in a way that enables them to succeed in these international educational systems. In addition to the conflict between educational systems, the larger issue is in the conflict of work fields one faces when studying abroad. In a young adult's life, the years of 18 until 22 are pivotal years during which one's idea of culture and tradition are shaped, that build the social ties one has with other members of society and that help paint the raw picture of the society around one, including the work field.

Thus, it is very important that in these years, the young adult absorbs all that is around them in their country; the positives, the negatives, the culture, the tradition, the public opinion, internal issues - the list is endless. The reason behind the importance of absorbing national surroundings lies in the fact that the main idea of studying any major is studying a problem, then finding a solution for this problem.

But every educational system is shaped around problems that are in the country in which this system is born. So, for example, what is the point in studying the British marital law which allows same sex marriage, then coming back to a country with respected Islamic boundaries and sharia marital law? Isn't it a fortiori to study national problems and try to put forth national and international solutions?

Therefore, in my humble point of view, the way to solve this conflict is to obtain a bachelor's degree in Kuwait, the country that needs its youth the most, and to absorb all the problems we are facing here that have ties to one's major, and then continue studying abroad to borrow international solutions for our national problems. This way, a well-rounded, mostly developed young adult is being sent to come back with what we really need, what will really develop our country, what will actually be worth the budget paid for scholarships - that is international solutions for national problems from a Kuwait loving young adult.

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News in brief

Kuwait, Greece boost relations

KUWAIT: Means to boost ties between Kuwait and Greece featured high on a meeting on Monday between Undersecretary of Kuwait's Ministry of Finance Aseel Al-Munifi, and Greek Minister of Development and Investment Adonis Georgiadis and Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs for Economic Diplomacy and Openness Kostas Fragogiannis. The Greek delegation made an offer on investment opportunities in Greece and the common desire of holding the joint Kuwaiti-Greek committee to discuss the opportunities of renewable energy, education, health and commercial exchange, the Kuwaiti Ministry of Finance said in a news statement. The Greek side expressed readiness to offer its experience in developing Failaka Island project to make it a tourist and entertaining destination, it added. The meeting was attended by Managing Director of the General Authority for Investment Ghanem Al-Ghenaiman and the Ministry's assistant undersecretary for economic affairs Talal Al-Nemesh. — KUNA

Kuwait oil price up to \$83.93 pb

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti oil prices rose by 76 cents to \$83.93 pb in Monday's trading sessions, compared to \$83.17 pb Friday, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said Tuesday. Brent crude oil futures fell by \$1.08 to \$84.20 pb and the West Texas Intermediate crude oil also dropped by \$1.01 to \$78.85 pb. —KUNA

US dollar stabilizes against dinar

KUWAIT: The exchange rate of the US dollar against the Kuwaiti dinar stabilized Tuesday at 0.305, while the euro's exchange rate edged lower by 0.24 percent to the level of 0.330 dinars, compared to yesterday's prices, Monday. The Central Bank of Kuwait stated in its daily bulletin on its website that the exchange rate of the pound sterling decreased by 0.52 percent to the level of 0.372 dinars, and the Swiss franc by 0.18 percent to the level of 0.329 dinars, while the Japanese yen settled at 0.002 dinars. It is noteworthy that the exchange rates announced by the Central Bank of Kuwait are the average currency prices for the day and do not reflect the actual buying and selling prices. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Inundated desert camps in Sulaibiya area on Tuesday following incessant rains. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Heavy rain wreaks havoc on roads and drainage system

MPW works around-the-clock to clear water-logging, repair roads

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Public Works said on Tuesday that the country has suffered from heavy rain within a short span of time as the rainfall exceeded the capacity of the rainwater drainage system. The ministry's teams are working around-the-clock to clear water-logged roads and bring the traffic flow to normal.

Acting assistant undersecretary of the Planning and Development department and spokesperson of the ministry, Ahmad Al-Saleh said: "The emergency teams of the maintenance engineering sector at the ministry and the Public Authority for Roads and Land Transport were able to bring the situation under control without closing any of the internal or main roads except for some lanes on the right side of roads. They managed to clear water-logging on roads so that traffic could move on without any hassle," he said.

Al-Saleh referred to the vigorous follow-up actions taken by the Minister of Public Works and the Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy, Dr Amani Bougammaz, the Undersecretary of the Ministry, Mai Al-Massad, and all leaders in the concerned sectors of the ministry, to prevent any damage that may result from the rainy situation, in cooperation and coordination with all concerned authorities.

Meanwhile, rainwater indicators have recorded 51.3mm in Sabiya, 48.8mm in Khairan, 34.4 in Kuwait City, 30.6mm in Wafra, 29.5 at Kuwait airport and 17.4mm in Jahra.

Climate expert, Fahad Al-Otaibi said: "The percentage of precipitation during the rainy season, which began on Monday evening, varied from one region to another. Sabiya region recorded the highest amount of rainfall with 51.3 mm, while the Jahra region recorded the least amount of rainfall with 17.4 mm," he said. In other rain related news, the Public Works ministry has dealt with a road collapse that took place in a separating road between Abdullah Port and Shuaiba. The site of the incident has been cordoned off and officials are currently dealing with the problem.

The Kuwait Meteorological Department expects a gradual improvement in the weather situation after Tuesday afternoon as chances of more rain receded with clouds beginning to wither. Weather forecast supervisor, Abdulaziz Al-Qarawi told KUNA: "The country will be affected by atmospheric pressure elevation accompanied by cold air mass as the weather will be cold during the day and cold to very cold at night, especially in open areas with the possibilities of fog to form."

"The country was affected since Monday afternoon by rainy weather condition that started with light rains but gradually developed into heavy rainfall as a result of the extension of a surface depression accompanied by a moist air mass that coincided with the presence of a deep depression in the upper layers of the atmosphere. This led to the multiplication of low and medium clouds, interspersed with some cumulus clouds, accompanied by moderate to heavy thunderstorms in some areas, especially the southern ones, during the night and dawn of the day, and wind activity with a decrease in horizontal visibility in some areas, and sea waves rising to more than 7 feet," he added. — KUNA and Agencies



Dark rain clouds hover buildings.



Completely flooded desert area in Sulaibiya.



Vehicles wading through rain-soaked road on Tuesday.



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Alarming rise in Rohingya lost at sea in 2022: UN

Belarus begins trial in absentia of protest leader Tikhanovskaya

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HANOVER: Boris Pistorius (center) and supporters react after exit polls were announced on ZDF public broadcaster TV at the parliament in this Oct 9, 2022 file photo. Chancellor Olaf Scholz on Tuesday picked Pistorius to be Germany's new defense minister. —AFP

Pistorius, new German defence minister

'Right person' to steer armed forces through an era of momentous change

BERLIN: Chancellor Olaf Scholz on Tuesday picked little-known Boris Pistorius to be Germany's new defence minister, saying he is the "right person" to steer the armed forces through an era of momentous change. The appointment follows the resignation of Christine Lambrecht at a crucial time for the ministry, with Germany under intense pressure to send battle tanks to Ukraine.

Pistorius, 62, who is a member of Scholz's Social Democrats (SPD) and interior minister of Lower Saxony state, is a surprise choice for the post.

Much better known politicians had been thought to be in the running, such as Eva Hoegl, the parliamentary commissioner on armed forces, and Employment Minister Hubertus Heil. But the chancellor insisted Pistorius was the right man for the job at a time when Germany is looking to overhaul and revive its armed forces in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"Pistorius is an extremely experienced politician who has administrative experience, has been involved in security policy for years and, with his competence, assertiveness and big heart, is exactly the right person to lead the Bundeswehr (armed forces) through this era of change," Scholz said.

'Well connected'

The appointment ends a streak of three female ministers, as well as upending a promise by Scholz to keep his cabinet gender-balanced when he became chancellor

in 2021. Born in Osnabrueck, Pistorius studied law and worked as a lawyer before entering politics in the 1990s, eventually becoming mayor of his native town.

In Lower Saxony, Pistorius has gained a reputation for his work in renewing the police force and boosting it to combat extremism. Der Spiegel magazine noted he is "the most visible" of the state interior ministers, and is "well connected with the security authorities".

He had previously been rumoured to be in the running for the post of federal interior minister, which looks set to be vacated later this year by current postholder Nancy Faeser. The appointment will see him follow in the footsteps of other high-profile politicians who graduated to national politics from Lower Saxony, such as Sigmar Gabriel and Gerhard Schroeder.

Pistorius has a huge task on his hands, taking up the new post at a time of sweeping change for the Bundeswehr and days ahead of a crucial meeting of defence ministers from Ukraine's allies. The Ukraine Defence Contact Group, which coordinates arms supplies to Kyiv, is due to meet at the Ramstein Air Base in Germany on Friday.

Military revival

Germany has repeatedly come under fire since the start of the war for dithering over which weapons to send to Ukraine, and is currently under pressure from Kyiv to agree to supply battle tanks. Russia's invasion prompted Scholz to announce a drastic overhaul of the military in

Germany after years of chronic underinvestment—something that Pistorius would now have to oversee.

The chancellor pledged to raise military spending to two percent of GDP and to revive the ailing army with a special fund of 100 billion euros (\$108 billion). But Lambrecht, appointed as defence minister in the chancellor's first cabinet, had increasingly looked as though she was not up to the task.

As early as January 2022, Lambrecht had been mocked for an announcement that Germany would send 5,000 helmets to Kyiv, when the Ukrainian government was seeking weapons to ward off Moscow. A series of personal gaffes also added fuel to fire at a time when defence had become not just a national but a European priority.

Patience for Lambrecht finally ran out when she posted a New Year's video on social media in which she lauded her "special experiences" as defence minister in 2022 against a backdrop of loud fireworks. The resulting media uproar finally led Lambrecht to announce her resignation on Monday.

Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann, who heads the parliamentary defence commission said Pistorius was someone who "knows the issue of security and how to work with those who are committed to our security".

"He will be judged in Berlin on whether he understands the needs of the troops and is assertive in representing them at the chancellery and the defence ministry," she told Rheinische Post. —AFP



French president Emmanuel Macron

Far-right militants go on trial for Macron attack plot

PARIS: A dozen people with links to a French far-right group were going on trial Tuesday, accused of plotting to assassinate President Emmanuel Macron and commit a string of other attacks. Prosecutors say the 13 members of the Barjols group conspired to engineer a putsch, which involved a plan for an attack on Macron during a public appearance in 2018.

The trial of the 11 men and two women, aged between 26 and 66, was scheduled to begin at 01:30 pm (12:30 GMT). Citing evidence collected online, from telephone conversations and meetings, prosecutors say the suspects also planned to kill migrants and attack mosques.

None of the plots allegedly prepared by the suspects ever came to anything. As a result, prosecutors downgraded some of the initial charges over the course of their four-year investigation. The main remaining accusation is a charge of conspiring to commit a terrorist act, which carries a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison.

A lawyer for the defence, Lucile Collot, said the prosecution's case was based "on the fiction that a violent act was going to happen". She said the accusation of a planned terrorist act was "misplaced". In 2018, France's domestic intelligence services received a tip-off saying that a far-right militant based in the French Alps was planning to attack Macron during a World War I commemoration in November of that year.

French anti-terror prosecutors began investigating on October 31, against a backdrop of boiling social anger in France over rising fuel prices, which was later to result in the creation of the Yellow Vest protest movement.

'Sometimes extreme'

On November 6, police arrested the far-right militant-Jean-Pierre Bouyer, then 62 — and three others suspected of far-right links in the eastern Moselle region. Searching Bouyer's car, they found a commando-style fighting knife and an army vest. In his home, they discovered firearms and ammunition.

Police went on to arrest other members of the Barjols movement, an extreme-right nationalist and anti-immigration group that formed on Facebook in 2017 and held secret meetings. Its presumed leader, Denis Collinet, was arrested in 2020. According to prosecutors, a meeting held in the Moselle region marked the beginning of the conspiracy.

Members made plans to blow up mosques and kill Macron as well as kidnap members of parliament and overthrow the government, they said. During some meetings, group members allegedly conducted target practice and trained in first aid techniques. —AFP

Three foreign NGOs partially resume aid in Afghanistan

KABUL: At least three leading international aid agencies have partially resumed life-saving work in Afghanistan, after assurances from the Taliban authorities that Afghan women can continue to work in the health sector. Hundreds of NGOs have been instrumental in trying to address one of the world's worst humanitarian crises, with half of Afghanistan's 38 million population hungry and three million children at risk of malnutrition.

CARE, Save the Children, and International Rescue Committee (IRC) suspended their operations in late December in protest at a government order banning Afghan women from aid work, the latest rollback of women's rights in the country.

"We have received clear, reliable assurances from relevant authorities that our female staff will be safe and can work without obstruction," Save the Children said in a statement, confirming they have resumed work in the health sector in the past few days.

"However, with the overarching ban still in place, our other activities where we do not have reliable assurances that our female colleagues can work, remain on hold." The IRC and CARE also confirmed they have resumed work with women staff in the health sector.

The international community has been urging the government in a series of high-level meetings to reverse the order banning women in the aid sector, which was expected to have heavy consequences on aid flows coming into the country. Abdul Rahman Habib, spokesman for the ministry of economy that ordered the ban, told AFP that it was "a need for our society" that women were allowed to work in the health sector. "We need them to support the malnourished children and other women who need health services. They (women staff) are working in line with our religious and cultural values."

'New guidelines'

Two aid officials said negotiations were ongoing with the authorities to allow women to work



KABUL: An Afghan labourer arranges food aid bags provided by a non-governmental organisation (NGO) for distribution among the needy people, at a gymnasium in Kabul on January 17, 2023. —AFP

in other sectors, including education, water, sanitation, and food distribution. "We are hopeful that there will be new guidelines soon," said an aid official with a foreign NGO, who asked not to be named.

The authorities might "selectively open" other sectors for women, another aid worker said, also speaking on condition of anonymity. "They are expected to ask NGOs which specific departments within their organisations and work sectors they need women staff for, and accordingly, permissions could be given," he said.

A senior Taliban official who spoke to AFP on condition of anonymity said NGOs will have to provide reasons for employing women. "The ministry of economy will look into these reasons and if an understanding is reached then the NGOs will be asked to provide a good working atmosphere for women employees," the Taliban official said.

The ban was imposed because women were not observing the rules issued by the ultra-conserva-

tive authorities on wearing the hijab or being accompanied by a male relative while travelling, Taliban officials say.

Aid officials have dismissed those charges, insisting their organisations had already segregated men and women employees and that women were wearing hijabs. Women workers are vital for on-the-ground aid operations in Afghanistan, particularly in identifying other women in need.

The ban was one of two crushing orders made in rapid succession last month, after authorities had first barred women from university education. Since the Taliban returned to power in August 2021 they have imposed a slew of restrictions on Afghan women, effectively squeezing them out of public life.

Secondary school education is already banned for girls, and many women have lost government jobs. Women have also been barred from going to parks, gyms and public baths. —AFP

International

Belarus begins trial in absentia of protest leader Tikhanovskaya

Viasna rights group says there are more than 1,400 political prisoners in Belarus

MOSCOW: The trial in absentia of Belarus opposition leader Svetlana Tikhanovskaya opened in Minsk on Tuesday, state news agency Belta reported, as strongman Alexander Lukashenko pursues critics that challenged his last election. Tikhanovskaya, who claimed victory in 2020 presidential elections, faces a litany of charges including high treason, "conspiracy to seize power" and creating and leading an extremist organisation, Belta said.

The 40-year-old activist, who was forced after the vote amid protests to leave Belarus for neighbouring EU member state Lithuania, has become the face of Belarusian democratic forces. In an interview with AFP at Davos this week, Tikhanovskaya described the trial as a "farce" and said she had not been given access to court documents ahead of the proceedings.

"I don't know how long this trial will take place, how many days, but I'm sure they will sentence me to many, many years in jail," she said Monday. Tikhanovskaya's political allies Maria Moroz, Pavel Latushko, Olga Kovalkova and Sergei Dylevsky are also being tried in absentia.

The high-profile trial comes after Belarusian authorities put in the dock a number of other critics including jailed Nobel Prize winner Ales Bialiatski. The 60-year-old Bialiatski, who founded Viasna (Spring), the country's top rights group, and two of his associates have been in detention since July 2021. The rights campaigners stand accused of smuggling a "large amount of cash" into Belarus to allegedly fund opposition activities,

and face between seven and 12 years in prison.

Jailed husband sees new charges

Ahead of the start of Tikhanovskaya's trial, investigators announced new charges against her husband Sergei Tikhanovsky, who in 2021 was found guilty of organising riots and inciting social hatred. He was sentenced to 18 years in prison. "I know that whatever they come up with, it won't break him and it won't break my will to fight for the freedom of all political prisoners," Tikhanovskaya tweeted recently.

The 44-year-old charismatic YouTube blogger galvanised Belarusians when he ran for president in 2020 and coined a new insult for the strongman when he called him a "cockroach." Tikhanovsky was not allowed to run, and his wife ran in his place, claiming victory. On Monday, the Investigative Committee said the activist faced new charges of disobeying prison officials because he allegedly provoked conflicts with cellmates and flouted prison authorities' orders. Belarus witnessed a historic protest movement denouncing the controversial re-election of Lukashenko who has been in power for nearly 30 years.

Backed by Russian leader Vladimir Putin, Lukashenko unleashed a massive crackdown, throwing critics into prison or forcing them into exile. The Viasna rights group says there are more than 1,400 political prisoners in Belarus. On Monday, a Polish-Belarusian journalist went on trial in the western city of Grodno.



MINSK: Presidential candidate Svetlana Tikhanovskaya gestures to supporters during her campaign rally in Minsk. The trial in absentia of Belarus opposition leader Svetlana Tikhanovskaya opened in Minsk on January 17, 2023. —AFP

Andrzej Poczobut, a correspondent for top Polish daily Gazeta Wyborcza and a representative of the Polish minority in Belarus, was arrested

in March 2021. He faces up to 12 years in prison for criticising Lukashenko's regime, if convicted. —AFP

UK vows action against Iran after execution

LONDON: Britain on Monday vowed more reprisals against what it said was Tehran's "weakened and isolated regime" after it executed a UK-Iranian dual national. Following the killing of Alireza Akbari on Saturday, the UK summoned Iran's most senior diplomat and recalled its own ambassador.

But despite slapping sanctions on Iran's prosecutor general Mohammad Jafar Montazeri it stopped short of opposition demands to ban the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). Faced with more such demands in parliament, Foreign Secretary James Cleverly said he could not comment on future proscriptions.

He however said: "We do not limit ourselves to the steps that I have already announced." Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's spokesman told reporters: "We are reviewing further action with our international partners." British MPs voted last week in favour of adding the IRGC to a list of banned terrorist organisations in the UK.

But the government is wrestling with the fate of other dual nationals held by the Islamic regime, and with the strategic aim of restoring an international nuclear pact with Iran. Cleverly was outspoken in denouncing Iran's leadership after Akbari, 61, was hanged allegedly for spying on Britain's behalf.

He told MPs that "we are witnessing the vengeful actions of a weakened and isolated regime, obsessed with suppressing its own people, debilitated by its own fear of losing power and wrecking its international reputation".

"Our message to that regime is clear: the world is watching you and you will be held to account, particularly by the brave Iranian people, so many



LONDON: UK Parliament's Parliamentary Recording Unit (PRU) shows Britain's Foreign Secretary James Cleverly making a statement on Iran's execution of British-Iranian dual national Alireza Akbari. —AFP

of whom you are oppressing and killing." Iran's foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani said on Twitter that the execution was Tehran's response to "the United Kingdom's action in violating the national security of the Islamic Republic of Iran".

He added that the "noise of the British regime and the support of some human rights claimants in Europe from London show their lawlessness and illegality". British MP James Slaughter said he had "extensive contact for the past few difficult days" with Akbari's family.

"Earlier today I spoke to Mr Akbari's daughter in the UK, and she asked me to raise a further distressing matter with the Foreign Secretary. The regime refuses to release Mr Akbari's body or to allow burial in the place chosen by him, and have made threats to destroy his body unless the family co-operates with their instructions," he said.

Cleverly replied to Slaughter, saying: "The points that he just raised, I am sure, fill us all with revulsion. "We will continue to support the family whatever way we can, and he is absolutely right to call upon the regime to treat Mr Akbari in death with the deference and respect that is legitimate." —AFP

Serial rapist sacked from police force

LONDON: A British police officer who admitted 24 counts of rape against 12 women and a string of sex offences over two decades was formally sacked on Tuesday. Metropolitan Police Assistant Commissioner Louisa Rolfe said David Carrick's case was "sickening and horrific" and had "far-reaching consequences" for policing.

"I truly hope to never see its like again," she told an internal disciplinary hearing, which was brought forward after Carrick's admissions in court. Carrick, 48, had been suspended from his job in an armed unit protecting MPs and foreign diplomats since the allegations came to light in late 2021.

Police misconduct hearings are typically held after the conclusion of criminal proceedings against an officer. But Carrick's was fast-tracked after his guilty pleas on Monday and, unusually, opened to the media given the widespread concern about his crimes.

Lawyer Hywel Jenkins, representing Met Police Commissioner Mark Rowley, called Carrick's crimes "heinous, targeted and deliberate". They have had a "catastrophic" impact on his victims and their families, while also undermining confidence in the police service, he added.

"The public of Greater London expect police officers to uphold the law and protect women from violence," said Rolfe. "PC (police constable) Carrick did the opposite." Carrick, a former soldier who did not attend the hearing and had no legal representation, was sacked for gross misconduct.

He will be sentenced in court over two days from February 6. His offending has heaped pres-



LONDON: File photo shows the Met Police sign outside New Scotland Yard in central London. Britain's largest police force was facing fresh scrutiny about its vetting procedures after an officer admitted 24 counts of rape and a string of sexual assaults over nearly two decades. —AFP

sure on Rowley, who only took over as head of Britain's biggest police force, in September last year. Public trust in the Met had already suffered from the conviction of another officer for the kidnap, rape and murder of a young woman two years ago.

Wayne Couzens, who killed Sarah Everard in 2021 and is currently serving a whole-life sentence, also served in the same unit as Carrick. But in both cases, vetting procedures that could have identified their offending earlier were found wanting.

No action was taken either against Couzens over allegations in 2015 that he exposed himself or Carrick, who had a string of claims against him. Two official reports into the Met and other forces in England and Wales concluded background checks were lax and there was a culture of impunity. Rowley has pledged to "go after the racists and misogynists who are undermining us", leading to a wave of disciplinary action against officers. More than 1,600 claims of sex offences and domestic violence against just over 1,000 Met Police officers and staff are currently under review. —AFP

Kuwait reaffirms stand on...

Continued from Page 1

He emphasized the necessity of supporting international efforts aimed at ceasing fire, lowering escalation and finding a peaceful solution to the crisis in line with the principle of resolving disputes and strife with peaceful means through dialogue and in line with the international law and the UN charter.

The ambassador conveyed greetings from the Ukrainian president and people to Kuwait's leadership, government and people, praising its support for the Ukrainian nation, particularly at the humanitarian level. He also lauded Kuwait's support for international efforts designed to end humanitarian suffering in Ukraine and its goodwill efforts for solidifying international peace and security.

Meanwhile, NATO Secretary General Jens

Stoltenberg expressed NATO's appreciation for Kuwait's role and efforts in maintaining security and stability in the region, and his gratitude for all aspects of the support provided by Kuwait to NATO. Stoltenberg made the remark during a ceremony held on Monday, where Kuwaiti Ambassador Nawaf Al-Enezi presented his credentials as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the State of Kuwait to NATO.

The NATO chief recalled the efforts of Kuwait in hosting and operating the NATO regional center for the countries of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative. Kuwait's mission to NATO said in a press statement to KUNA. Enezi conveyed the greetings of the political leadership in Kuwait and the greetings of Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem to Stoltenberg.

Enezi also expressed his aspiration to work with NATO to enhance bilateral relations at various levels to serve the interests of both sides. During the credential presentation ceremony, Enezi was accompanied by Maj Gen Dakheel Bani Al-Mutairi, Defense Attache in Brussels, and First Secretary Imad Abdullah Al-Kandari. — KUNA

meeting on Monday to stop the renewal of contracts of dozens of expat legal advisors working at the Assembly. The move means that the Assembly will hire only nationals to work as legal advisors as part of its policy to replace dozens of foreign advisors with Kuwaitis.

Meanwhile, the special tribunal for trying ministers acquitted on Tuesday a former defense minister and four senior ministry officials of charges of committing financial violations and profiting from a multibillion-dollar deal to purchase Eurofighter warplanes. The five defendants faced charges of profiting from the \$8.7 billion deal to buy 28 Eurofighter jets some six years ago. Some of the fighter jets have already been delivered to Kuwait.

Egypt middle class squeezed...

Continued from Page 1

exchange rates, estimated Egypt's real inflation rate at 101 percent. The economy, dominated by state and military-owned enterprises, had already struggled after successive blows, from years of political unrest to the COVID pandemic.

But it was Russia's invasion of Ukraine - with both countries key exporters of wheat and sources of mass tourism to Egypt - that set off the latest painful crisis. The war also unsettled global investors who pulled billions out of the North African country. According to the World Bank, nearly one-third of Egypt's 104 million people already live below the poverty line, and almost as many are "vulnerable to falling into poverty".

It's not the first time Egyptians have shouldered hardships that come with IMF-backed reforms. In 2016, a \$12 billion bailout saw the government enact a slate of measures, including a sharp currency devaluation and wide-ranging subsidy cuts. Since prices began spiraling again last year, social media users have scrambled for cost-saving tips, suggesting grocery list substitutions and personal finance maneuvers.

But for a 41-year-old translator who is the mother of a six-year-old son, and who asked not to be named, even "military-grade discipline" in the super-market is no longer enough. With her husband's salary "losing 40 percent of its value in six months", she also worries about expenses "like mortgages and car payments and tuition".

The new reality has driven families that were considered part of the middle class to seek help. Ahmed Hesham of the Abwab El Kheir charity said more and more middle-class Egyptians - "private sector employees making 4,000-6,000 pounds" (\$135-202) per

month - have been coming in for donations. "A lot of people had life savings they were keeping aside... Now they're using them for healthcare or daily costs," Hesham told AFP. "They used to make a good living, now they can't make ends meet. They've never been in this position before, and they're mortified to come to us," he added. "One man told us he can either feed his kids or put them through school, but not both."

In a country marked by sharp inequality, the urban middle class is judged to include tens of millions. According to Soha Abdelaty, deputy director of the Alternative Policy Solutions research project at the American University in Cairo, "it's difficult to define what the middle class is". "The concern is that those who were not near the poverty line... could find themselves getting closer and closer," she said. "These are people for whom life is no longer affordable - but they're still not eligible for social assistance from the government."

For educated Egyptians, said the translator, "the only solution is to find a job abroad. I can't see another way out". Many young Egyptians have flocked to online sites advising them on job opportunities in wealthy Gulf countries, or on how to have their degrees recognized in Europe. Those who can try to join the millions of Egyptians already abroad, who sent back \$31.9 billion in remittances in the 2021-2022 financial year.

Many families who can't move away, like Manar's, focus on education to improve their opportunities. With Egypt's public school system marked by notoriously overcrowded classes and outdated curricula, private education is a priority for families who can afford it. "The schools are a disaster," Manar said, forcing families to pay 20,000-40,000 pounds (\$675-1,350) per year for basic elementary schooling. "You have to be ready to sell everything you have to give your kids an education, in hopes that tomorrow things will be better for them." But, she said, "the problem is that we don't know if this is as bad as it gets. The way things are, all you can do is take it one day at a time." — AFP

MPs back grillings; five acquitted in...

Continued from Page 1

said on Tuesday the panel had a fruitful meeting with Head of the Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry Mohammad Al-Sager and other representatives. The talks centered on a draft law filed by MPs and approved by the committee calling to transfer the chamber, which enjoys extensive powers, into a trade union of merchants by withdrawing those powers.

The National Assembly office decided at a

International

Nepali hospitals return bodies from air crash to grieving families

‘Forty-eight bodies have been sent to Kathmandu for DNA tests’

POKHARA: Nepali hospital staff began the grim task of handing over bodies to grieving families on Tuesday after a plane with 72 people on board crashed, the country's worst aviation disaster in three decades. The Yeti Airlines flight with 68 passengers and four crew plummeted into a steep gorge, smashed into pieces and burst into flames as it approached the central city of Pokhara on Sunday.

All those on board, including six children and 15 foreigners, are believed to have died. Rescuers have been working almost around the clock extracting human remains from the gorge strewn with twisted plane seats and chunks of fuselage and wing. Seventy bodies had been retrieved by early Tuesday, police official AK Chhetri told AFP. Another senior official said the day before that the hope of finding anyone alive was “nil”.

“We retrieved one body last night. But it was three pieces. We are not sure whether it's three bodies or one body. It will be confirmed only after a DNA test,” Chhetri said. Drones were being used and the search for the two remaining bodies had been expanded to a radius of two to three kilometres (one to two miles), he added. The black boxes from the plane, made by France-based ATR, were handed over to authorities on Monday, said Bikram Raj Gautam, chief of Pokhara International Airport. Hospital workers in blue and white protective suits and masks loaded bodies wrapped in plastic onto army trucks on Tuesday as distraught relatives wept and hugged outside.

The trucks then left for the airport, where the bodies would be airlifted back to the capital Kathmandu. The body of one victim, journalist



POKHARA: Nepal's army and volunteers carry the body of a victim who died in a Yeti Airlines plane crash in Pokhara on January 17, 2023. The Yeti Airlines ATR 72 plummeted into a steep gorge, smashed into pieces and burst into flames as it approached the central city of Pokhara. — AFP

Tribhuban Poudel, was laid out on a bier covered with orange marigold flowers outside his home as mourners filed past offering prayers in the winter sunshine.

“Eight bodies have been handed to families. We will hand over another 14 bodies after completing autopsies here in Pokhara. Forty-eight bodies have been sent to Kathmandu for DNA tests and handover to the families,” Chhetri said.

Explosion

The ATR 72 was flying from Kathmandu to Pokhara, a gateway for religious pilgrims and trekkers, when it crashed shortly before 11:00 am (0515 GMT). “I was walking when I heard a loud blast, like a bomb went off,” said witness Arun Tamu, 44, who was around 500 metres (545 yards) away and live-streamed video of the blazing wreckage on social media. The cause of the crash was not yet known, but a video on social

media showed the twin-propeller aircraft banking suddenly and sharply to the left as it neared Pokhara airport. A loud explosion followed.

media showed the twin-propeller aircraft banking suddenly and sharply to the left as it neared Pokhara airport. A loud explosion followed.

Experts told AFP it was unclear from the clip whether human error or a mechanical malfunction was to blame. Experts from the French accident investigation agency were due to arrive in Nepal on Tuesday, the body told AFP. “We don't know whether (the crash) was due to any technical fault or reason,” local official Tek Bahadur KC told AFP.

‘In pain’

Raj Dhungana, the uncle of one of the passengers, 23-year-old Sangita Shahi, told AFP outside a hospital in Pokhara that his whole family “is in pain”. “God has taken away such a nice person,” he said. According to the Press Trust of India news agency, the pilot Anju Khatiwada joined Nepal's aviation sector after her husband was killed flying a small passenger plane in 2006.

Poor record

Nepal's aviation industry has boomed in recent years, carrying goods and people between hard-to-reach areas, as well as ferrying foreign mountain climbers. The sector has been plagued by poor safety due to insufficient training and maintenance.

The European Union has banned all Nepali carriers from its airspace over safety concerns. Nepal also has some of the world's trickiest and most remote runways, flanked by snow-capped peaks with difficult approaches and capricious weather. Its deadliest aviation accident was in 1992, when all 167 people on a Pakistan International Airlines jet were killed when it crashed on approach to Kathmandu. — AFP

Vietnam president resigns amid major anti-graft purge

HANOI: Vietnam President Nguyen Xuan Phuc has resigned, state media said Tuesday, after days of rumours he was about to be sacked as part of a major anti-corruption drive that has seen several ministers fired. The sudden departure is a highly unusual move in communist Vietnam, where political changes are normally carefully orchestrated, with an emphasis on cautious stability.

Only one other Communist Party president has ever stepped down, and that was for health reasons. “The resignation of President Nguyen Xuan Phuc is an unprecedented move in the history of the party,” said Nguyen Khac Giang, research fellow at the Vietnam Centre for Economic and Strategic Studies (VESS). State media said the Communist Party had ruled he was responsible for wrongdoing by senior ministers under him during his 2016-2021 stint as prime minister, before he became president.

Two deputy prime ministers were sacked this month in an anti-corruption purge that has led to the arrest of dozens of officials, with many of the graft allegations relating to deals done as part of Vietnam's COVID pandemic response.

Phuc “took political responsibility as leader when several officials, including two deputy prime ministers and three ministers committed violations and shortcomings, causing very serious consequences”, state news agency VNA said, quoting the party central committee's official statement.

Earlier this month, the country's rubber stamp National Assembly removed Pham Binh Minh and Vu Duc Dam from their positions as deputy prime ministers. Minh was a minister of foreign affairs while Dam was in charge of the country's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic.

At least 100 officials and businesspeople, including Dam's assistant, have been arrested in connection with a scandal involving the distribution of COVID-19 testing kits. Thirty-seven people — many of them senior diplomats and police — have also been arrested in an investigation over the repatriation of Vietnamese during the pandemic.

Corruption, infighting

After closing its borders to slow the spread of the coronavirus, Vietnam organised nearly 800 charter flights to bring citizens home from 60 countries and territories.

But travellers faced complicated procedures while paying exorbitant airfares and quarantine fees to get back to Vietnam. Phuc, 68, was elevated to the largely ceremonial role of president in April 2021 after winning plaudits for the country's broadly successful handling of the pandemic. Authoritarian Vietnam is run by the Communist Party and officially led by the party general secretary, president and prime minister, with key decisions made by the politburo, which now numbers 16. Le Hong Hiep, a fellow at the ISEAS-Yusuf Ishak Institute in Singapore, said Phuc's resignation may also be linked to political infighting.

“It's mainly related to corruption investigations but we cannot rule out the possibility that his political rivals also wanted to remove him from his position for political reasons,” he told AFP.

Communist Party leader Nguyen Phu Trong, the architect of what is Vietnam's largest-ever anti-corruption drive, is due to step down in 2026.

“Some politicians will try to get the (top) prize, and because of the competition from their rivals — in this case Mr Phuc is one of them — they may want to remove him to clear the way for the other candidate to get the top job.” Among the candidates to replace Phuc is To Lam, the current minister of public security, said Hiep, adding that the change would likely not have significant consequences for the direction of the country. — AFP

Alarming rise in Rohingya lost at sea in 2022: UN

GENEVA: The UN decried Tuesday the “alarming” rise in the number of Rohingya refugees lost at sea fleeing their Myanmar homeland or Bangladesh last year, warning more would die without concerted action. More than 3,500 Rohingya attempted sea crossings in 2022, representing a huge increase on the year before, when some 700 people made similar journeys, said UNHCR, the United Nations' refugee agency. “UNHCR has recorded an alarming rise in the death toll. At least 348 individuals died or went missing at sea in 2022, making it one of the deadliest years since 2014,” spokeswoman Shabia Mantoo told reporters in Geneva. She said that 3,040 Rohingya who attempted to flee by sea disembarked last year, primarily in Myanmar, Malaysia, Indonesia and Bangladesh. Nearly 45 percent of those who did so were women and children.

“Most boats departed from Myanmar and Bangladesh, highlighting the growing sense of desperation amongst Rohingya in those two countries,” Mantoo said. “Those who have disembarked report that they undertook these dangerous sea journeys in an effort to find protection, security, family reunification, and livelihoods in other countries,” she said. “Among them are victims of trafficking, unaccompanied and separated children, and survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.”

A military crackdown in Myanmar in 2017 sent hundreds of thousands of Muslim-minority Rohingya fleeing into neighbouring Bangladesh with harrowing stories of murder, rape and arson. Myanmar is facing genocide accusations at the UN's top court following the mass exodus.

Mantoo said calls by UNHCR to maritime authorities to rescue and disembark people in distress have gone unheeded, with many boats adrift for weeks. “The current crisis in the Bay of Bengal and the

Andaman Sea is a crisis of solidarity,” she said.

UNHCR is calling for a full regional response, addressing human trafficking, search and rescue efforts and support in countries where Rohingya refugees disembark. It also wants to see efforts to address the root causes of why Rohingya are fleeing Myanmar. Mantoo said that without such a response, “more people will die on the high seas” as people undertake dangerous journeys in search of safety.

An elite Bangladesh police unit is engaged in the rampant extortion, harassment and wrongful arrests of the Rohingya refugees it has been tasked with pro-

tecting, Human Rights Watch said Tuesday. The Armed Police Battalion (APBn) operates in camps housing nearly one million members of the stateless minority, most of whom fled neighbouring Myanmar after a military crackdown that is now the subject of a UN genocide investigation. But refugees and humanitarian workers told the New York-based watchdog that safety had deteriorated after the unit took charge of camp security in 2020, with some Rohingya telling AFP abuses had become “a regular occurrence”.

“Abuses by police in the Cox's Bazar camps have left Rohingya refugees suffering at the hands of the

very forces who are supposed to protect them,” said HRW Asia researcher Shayna Baugher. The rights group said it had spoken to dozens of Rohingya refugees living in the sprawling and overcrowded camp network in the country's southeast, documenting at least 16 cases of serious abuse by APBn officers.

Police demanded hefty bribes of refugees under threat of arrest. HRW's report said, adding that families were often forced to sell gold jewellery or borrow money to free unjustly detained relatives. Baugher called on authorities to investigate the claims and hold responsible officers to account. Battalion commander



LANCOK: File photograph shows evacuated Rohingya from Myanmar sit on the shorelines of Lancok village, in Indonesia's North Aceh Regency, after some 100 including 30 children were rescued from a wooden boat off the coast of Indonesian island of Sumatra. The UN decried on January 17, 2023, the “alarming” rise in the number of Rohingya refugees lost at sea. — AFP

ting, Human Rights Watch said Tuesday. The Armed Police Battalion (APBn) operates in camps housing nearly one million members of the stateless minority, most of whom fled neighbouring Myanmar after a military crackdown that is now the subject of a UN genocide investigation. But refugees and humanitarian workers told the New York-based watchdog that safety had deteriorated after the unit took charge of camp security in 2020, with some Rohingya telling AFP abuses had become “a regular occurrence”.

“Abuses by police in the Cox's Bazar camps have left Rohingya refugees suffering at the hands of the

Syed Harunor Rashid said the report was “questionable”.

“Criminals are telling them false facts, and (Human Rights Watch) are reporting them. This is like giving comfort to criminals,” he told AFP, adding that the unit would investigate if it “receives specific complaints”. Police acknowledge that violence has spiked in the camps, which are home to armed groups and are used as staging posts for regional drug trafficking networks. At least 20 refugees, including top community leaders, were murdered by armed groups last year as part of a turf war in the settlements. — AFP

Al-Shabaab launches deadly attack on Somali military base

NAIROBI: Al-Shabaab launched a deadly attack on a Somali military base on Tuesday, just a day after the government claimed a “historic victory” over the jihadists with the capture of a strategic coastal town. There were conflicting reports about the death toll after the Islamist fighters stormed the camp in the town of Hawadley north of the capital Mogadishu.

Army chief Odowaa Yusuf Rage said on national radio that five soldiers including a senior officer had died in the attack claimed by the Al-Qaeda-allied militant group. A clan militia commander near Hawadley, which lies in the central Hirshabelle state, said 11 soldiers had died. The Islamists detonated a car packed with explosives outside the camp 60 kilometres (37 miles) north of Mogadishu before gunmen stormed the compound, witnesses and security officials said. Al-Shabaab, which controls swathes of countryside in Somalia, claimed responsibility for the attack via its communication channels.

In recent months, the army and local clan militias have retaken chunks of territory from the militants in Galmudug and Hirshabelle states in an operation backed by US air strikes and an African Union force. But despite the gains, Al-Shabaab has demonstrated the ability to strike back with lethal force against civilian and military targets.

The Hawadley base had only been recaptured from Al-Shabaab in October last year by the Somali National Army (SNA) and allied militias. Prime Minister Hamza Abdi Barre on Monday proclaimed a “historic victory” over Al-Shabaab after the army took control of the strategic city of Haradhere in central



MOGADISHU: Somalia's President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud (C) gestures as he attends a rally against the Al-Shabaab jihadist group in Mogadishu. Hassan Sheikh Mohamud has declared “all-out war” against Al-Shabaab, which has been waging a bloody insurgency against the frail internationally-backed federal government for 15 years. — AFP

Galmudug state without a fight. “The brave members of the national armed forces... have destroyed the enemy of the nation and liberated the strategic port town of Haradhere,” he said in a statement. Haradhere had been a key supply route for Al-Shabaab for both people and goods after it seized the port in 2010, dislodging local militias and pirates.

Tuesday's attack “demonstrates Al-Shabaab's continued ability to produce explosive devices and deploy them within Hirshabelle state, where the offensive originally began”, said International Crisis Group's senior analyst for eastern Africa, Omar Mahmood. “The group has mounted a number of similar assaults recently, likely an attempt to distract the government by attacking multiple locations,” he told AFP in a message. — AFP

Taiwan to include women into reservist training for first time

TAIPEI: Taiwan's military announced plans Tuesday to include women in its reservist training for the first time this year, as the island tries to bolster its forces against threats from China. Self-ruled, democratic Taiwan lives under the constant fear of a Chinese invasion, as Beijing claims the island a part of its territory to be taken one day, by force if necessary. China's sabre-rattling has intensified in recent years under President Xi Jinping, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine has further deepened worries in Taiwan that Beijing might move similarly. Taipei's defence ministry said it would allow around 200 discharged female soldiers to enrol in voluntary reservist trainings from the second quarter of this year, as part of efforts to boost the overall back-up force.

“This is the first year to include women in the reservists training so this year will be a trial programme,” said Major General Yu Wen-cheng from the ministry's All-Out Defence Mobilisation Agency. “We will plan the training capacities according to the number of applicants.” The voluntary programmes aim to “strengthen the effectiveness of the retraining of reserve troops in combat skills to help improve the combat capabilities of reservists,” he told reporters. Currently, only Taiwanese men are required to do mandatory military service and reservist training, although women can volunteer to serve in the armed forces. Many military analysts have urged Taiwan to do more to boost its reserves and prepare its civilian population for defence, including allowing more women to train. Last month, Taiwan announced it was increasing mandatory military service for men to one year-up from four months-citing the threat from an increasingly hostile China. — AFP

Business

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 18, 2023



DAVOS: (From L) Swiss President Alain Berset, Ukraine's First Lady Olena Zelenska, President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen and World Economic Forum founder Klaus Schwab pose at the Congress centre during the World Economic Forum (WEF) annual meeting in Davos on January 17, 2023. —AFP

EU takes on US, China over clean tech

Tensions between world powers still emerged at meetings in Davos

DAVOS: The EU's chief announced ambitious plans Tuesday to challenge China and the United States in the race for clean-tech industries, as a battle over green trade emerged at the World Economic Forum. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen slammed what she described as "aggressive attempts" to lure Europe's clean-tech industrial capacities to China and other countries.

"China heavily subsidizes its industry and restricts access to its market for EU companies," she told the world's global political and business elite at the annual meeting in the Swiss Alpine village of Davos.

"We will not hesitate to open investigations if we consider that our procurement or other markets are being distorted by such subsidies." She also renewed European concerns over the US Inflation Reduction Act, a climate subsidy package worth around \$370 billion, though she said both sides have been working to find "solutions" that could include allowing EU-made electric cars to benefit from the act.

"Our aim should be to avoid disruptions in transatlantic trade and investment. We should work towards ensuring that our respective incentive pro-

grammes are fair and mutually reinforcing," she said. The week-long forum is taking place under the theme of "cooperation in a fragmented world" as the planet faces a perfect storm of crises—Russia's invasion of Ukraine, soaring inflation, the spectre of recession and climate catastrophes. But tensions between world powers still emerged at the meetings in Davos.

'Cold War mentality'

Speaking after von der Leyen, Chinese Vice Premier Liu He called for an end to "Cold War mentality" and repeated Beijing's opposition to "unilateralism and protectionism". At a separate panel discussion, US climate envoy John Kerry said countries complaining about the Inflation Reduction Act should instead try to imitate the United States.

"The reaction of other countries shouldn't be, 'oh my god, you shouldn't be doing that, that's putting us in an unfair position'. Do it, too," he said. "Everybody's got to do the same thing to accelerate this process even more," Kerry added. Von der Leyen announced projects to step up European efforts to build clean energies key to the world's

aspirational goal of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

The plans include a "sovereignty fund" to boost research, innovation and strategic industrial projects in efforts to achieve net-zero emissions. She also said a "Net Zero Industry Act" would be proposed to focus investment on strategic projects along the entire supply chain.

"Those who develop and manufacture the technology that will be the foundation of tomorrow's economy will have the greatest competitive edge," she said. "To get ahead of the competition we need to keep investing in strengthening our industrial base and making Europe more investment and innovation friendly," the EU chief added.

But she also called for cooperation between "like-minded partners", from the United States to Ukraine, to form a "critical raw materials club" in order to slash Europe's dependence on China for the rare earths that are needed to make clean technology such as electric car batteries.

'Steadfast support to Ukraine'

The war in Ukraine remained a key topic of

discussion at the WEF. Ukrainian ministers, military leaders, mayors and soldiers form one of the largest national delegations as Kyiv lobbies for more weapons and financial support from the West.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, who is set to appear in person on Wednesday in Davos, faced public pressure from his EU partners to authorise the export of German-made Leopard tanks to Ukraine. "I like to play chess. You have to take the move and others will follow," Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda told delegates.

"Someone has to take this leadership and take this decision to support Ukraine because the tanks become a very strategic factor of this war, especially now," he added. The WEF has returned to its traditional wintry date after three years of COVID disruptions that forced the Swiss foundation to hold virtual meetings and delay its in-person meeting last year until May.

Liu's visit marked a high-profile return for China after Beijing lifted travel curbs last week following three years of COVID restrictions, which limited the country's attendance at last year's WEF. —AFP

China economy grows 3% in 2022

BEIJING: China's economy grew last year at its slowest pace in four decades as it was hammered by COVID lockdowns and a property crisis but the forecast-beating reading raised hopes for a strong recovery as it reopens.

Beijing's rigid adherence to its zero-COVID strategy of strict containment that effectively shut the country off from the world hammered business activity last year and threw supply chains offline, rattling the global economy. The measures meant the growth came in at just three percent last year, the worst reading since a 1.6 percent contraction in 1976 — when Mao Zedong died — excluding pandemic-hit 2020.

National Bureau of Statistics official Kang Yi told reporters on Tuesday the world's number-two economy had in 2022 "faced storms and rough waters in the global environment", and warned "the foundation of domestic economic recovery is not solid as the international situation is still complicated and severe". The figure missed the government's 5.5 percent target and was well down from the previous year but it was better than the 2.7 percent predicted in an AFP survey of analysts. The fourth-quarter reading also topped forecasts, providing some optimism for 2023.

Retail sales shrank just 1.8 percent in December, compared with the 9.0 percent estimated, as the lifting of restrictions allowed consumers to go back to the high street.

Industrial output and fixed-asset investment also beat expectations, while unemployment fell last month from November. "The good news is that there are now signs of stabilisation, as policy support doled out towards the end of 2022 is showing up in the relative resilience of infrastructure investment and credit growth," Louise Loo, Senior Economist at Oxford Economics, said in a note.

'Zero-COVID' scrapped

China's economic woes last year sent reverberations across a global supply chain already struggling



RUILI: Clients browse through jade jewelry at a shop in Ruili in Dehong prefecture, west Yunnan Province. —AFP

with waning demand caused by surging inflation and central bank interest rate hikes. Strict lockdowns, quarantines and compulsory mass testing prompted the abrupt closures of manufacturing facilities and businesses in major hubs — including Zhengzhou, home of the world's biggest iPhone factory.

Beijing abruptly loosened pandemic restrictions in December in the wake of some of the biggest protests in years but the move has sent infections soaring across the country, sparking concerns about the near-term effects on the economy.

The World Bank has forecast China's GDP will rebound to 4.3 percent in 2023 — still below expectations. Problems in the property industry are also still weighing on growth.

The sector, which along with construction accounts for more than a quarter of China's GDP, has been hit hard since Beijing started cracking down on excessive borrowing and rampant speculation in 2020.

The regulatory tightening marked the beginning of financial worries for Evergrande, the former

Chinese number one in real estate that is now struggling with a mountain of debt.

Real estate sales have since fallen in many cities and many developers are struggling to survive. But the government appears to be taking a more conciliatory approach to reviving the sector. Measures to promote "stable and healthy" development were announced in November, including credit support for indebted developers and assistance for deferred-payment loans for homebuyers.

Jing Liu, chief economist for Greater China at HSBC, said the "normalisation path is likely to be bumpy", warning of a "big setback in the near term" followed by a strong rebound. "The roll-out of a series of measures to ensure sufficient funding support to developers and revive housing demand will also help to stabilise the property sector," she said.

But Chaoping Zhu, of JP Morgan Asset Management, sounded a note of optimism, saying in a note: "Looking forward, we expect to see a sustained economic recovery in 2023 as a result of reopening and policy stimulus. —AFP

Saudi launches fund to support new projects

RIYADH: Saudi Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammad bin Salman Al-Saud announced Tuesday the launch of the Events Investment Fund (EIF), aiming to develop a sustainable infrastructure for the culture, tourism, entertainment and sports sectors across the Kingdom.

The fund, according to the state-run news agency (SPA), also aims to create strategic partnerships to boost local industry, increase foreign investment and contribute to Saudi Vision 2030's aim of a vibrant society. EIF is meant to position the Kingdom as a global hub in these various event sectors, to provide sustainable infrastructure and support Saudi's economic diversification efforts.

Its assets include indoor arenas, art galleries, theaters and conference centers, horseracing tracks, auto racing tracks and other event facilities. The fund is committed to upholding the highest environmental, social, and governance (ESG) standards, as EIF's strategy consists of three main pillars: enhancing the environment, invigorating societies and maintaining strong governance.

Aligning with the Kingdom's quality of life program, the fund will focus on nurturing partnerships between the private and public sectors, securing a supportive environment for strategic partnership in the events industry and increasing the number of job opportunities for citizens. The agency added that the fund's aims go accordingly to the National Investment Fund strategy, launched by the Crown Prince, to face existing developmental challenges in line with global practices and stimulating an increase in the private sector's impact on the Kingdom's economy by 2030. —KUNA

Business

EU vows to protect European industry to counter US subsidies

Washington passed the landmark IRA that contains \$370 billion in subsidies for green energy

BRUSSELS: The EU on Monday said it would take "decisive steps" to protect Europe in the face of massive US subsidies that have left the bloc scrambling to find a way to keep businesses on the continent. Last year, Washington passed the landmark Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) that contains around \$370 billion in subsidies for green energy, as well as tax cuts for US-made electric cars and batteries, to speed up the transition to a low-carbon economy.

EU countries have poured criticism on the IRA, seeing the "Buy American" domestic production requirement as a threat to European jobs, especially in the energy and auto sectors. But the bloc's members are divided over how to respond, with some, including France, calling for Europe to bring in its own substantial subsidy scheme.

The EU would take "decisive steps to safeguard European competitiveness, streamlining our state aid rules while avoiding fragmentation in the single market, including through the establishment of a European sovereignty fund" to support members, the bloc's economy commissioner, Paolo Gentiloni, said during a press conference. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has previously proposed a new EU fund to support Europe's green transition. But Gentiloni made it clear a common fund would take time, it "will not be tomorrow".

EU nations hope to agree on a way forward before a summit next month in a bid to avoid European businesses rushing to invest in the United States where energy is cheaper. Europe has been hit hard by high energy prices after Russia's war in Ukraine.

"There is no time to lose in establishing a new European industrial policy to support green industry and encourage industries to relocate to European territory," French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire said before talks between the EU's finance ministers. He called for a "simplification shock" to the state aid framework in Europe as well as larger subsidies for sectors including hydrogen, electric batteries, solar panels and semiconductors.

Some EU members fear a hardline response by the EU to the IRA could provoke a trade war, while others



BRUSSELS: (L to R) President of the Eurogroup Paschal Donohoe, European Central Bank President Christine Lagarde and Spanish Finance Minister Nadia Calvino pose for a family photo during a Eurogroup meeting at the EU headquarters in Brussels. — AFP

worry a subsidy race within the bloc would benefit wealthier nations. "I think it's important we respect the single market in all aspects," Irish Finance Minister Michael McGrath said earlier on Monday. "The state aid rules... are there to ensure that there is a level playing field."

Calls for new fund

Talks began late last year between the United States and the EU to resolve tensions. But Brussels has failed to persuade US President Joe Biden to alter contentious parts of the act, with Washington only promising to make tweaks.

In a letter sent to EU ministers dated January 13, European Commission vice president Margrethe

Vestager warned that not all EU countries "have the same fiscal space for state aid. That's a fact. And a risk for the integrity of Europe".

According to Vestager, Germany accounted for 53 percent of state subsidies approved under a "temporary" mechanism, while France represented around 24 percent and Italy over seven percent. European Council President Charles Michel threw his support for a sovereignty fund and state aid reform in an opinion piece for Politico published on Sunday.

"Shoring up support for strategic industrial companies and small and medium-sized enterprises means reforming, or at least making our state aid rules fit for today's economic and geopolitical realities," he wrote. — AFP

China warns of 'spillover' from Western rate hikes

DAVOS: China's vice premier warned Tuesday about the impact of "spillover effects" of Western interest rate hikes on emerging economies.

"We call for more attention to the spillover effects of major countries' rate hikes on emerging market and developing countries so as not to add to more debt or financial risks," Liu He told the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. The US Federal Reserve has hiked its benchmark lending rate at a pace unheard of since the 1980s over the last year to tame soaring inflation, while the European Central Bank has also raised borrowing costs.

The US moves have strengthened the value of the dollar, raising the cost of borrowing for countries with debt priced in greenbacks. They also encourage capital flight from emerging countries and dampen economic growth there. Liu also called for an end "to Cold War mentality" as he spoke in favour of more global cooperation amid soaring tensions between Washington and Beijing over economic policy as well as Taiwan. "We need to uphold the right principles and uphold the effective international economic order," he said, before adding: "We have to abandon the Cold War mentality." China's export-oriented economy is seen as being particularly threatened by changes to the global trading system, with the United States in particular looking to shore up its domestic industry and limit trade with Beijing in key strategic sectors. The theme of this year's meeting in Davos is "Cooperation in a fragmented world," a nod to international tensions caused by the war in Ukraine and increased rivalry between the United States and China.—AFP



TOKYO: File photo shows the logo of Japan's Nissan Motor displayed on a vehicle at the company's car showroom in Tokyo. — AFP

Nissan, Renault near historic rebalancing of alliance: Source

TOKYO: Nissan and Renault are nearing a "historic" rebalancing of their auto alliance, with a deal likely to be announced in the coming weeks, a source close to the talks said Tuesday. The Japanese and French giants have been wrestling with a reshaping of their partnership for months, with discussions including a reduction of Renault's hefty 43.7 percent stake in Nissan.

The pair joined forces in 1999, and were later joined by Mitsubishi Motors, but the union has been contentious, particularly in recent years. The source, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Nissan's independent directors had "given their green light" to a deal, paving the way for a "historic" agreement.

Final details are expected to be ironed out at a meeting in Japan on January 26, with the signing and an announcement the following week, the source added. A Nissan spokeswoman declined to comment on "speculation", but Japan's Yomiuri Shimbun daily also reported the deal was close to completion, and Jiji

news agency said Renault's CEO would be in Japan over the weekend. Renault is expected to reduce its stake in Nissan to 15 percent, matching the size of the Japanese firm's stake in its French partner. Nissan is also likely to invest in Renault's new electric vehicle business Ampera, though the size of the stake is not yet clear.

If a deal is agreed, it would mark a new chapter in a sometimes rocky union that began when Renault rescued Nissan from bankruptcy in 1999. The relationship was destabilised by the 2018 arrest of Nissan boss Carlos Ghosn, who claimed the charges against him were intended to prevent him from bringing the Japanese and French automakers closer together.

Mitsubishi Motors joined the alliance in 2016 when Nissan took a 34 percent stake in its struggling Japanese rival. Analysts see a rebalancing of the deal as a way to build confidence between Nissan and Renault. There is also scope for the firms to cooperate on electric vehicles, given Nissan's existing technologies and Renault's greater access to the European market. After the deal, the French automaker is not expected to sell the outstanding 28 percent of its Nissan shares immediately because the current market value is lower than that registered in Renault's accounts. Instead, the shares will be placed in a trust for sale when prices improve. — AFP

storage in times of increased demand or lower supply, either by setting up "vehicle-to-grid" or "second use" schemes. "Harnessing this potential will have critical implications for the energy transition," said the study published in Nature Communications. A "vehicle-to-grid" approach would allow drivers to connect car batteries to the grid for short term-storage when needed, the authors said. For example, commercial fleets could inject power into the grid when at a depot.

"Second-use" schemes would allow drivers to sell or donate car batteries once they can no longer be used to power vehicles, which is generally when their capacity falls below 70 to 80 percent.

Micro-payments

Even a low level of participation from drivers could make a big difference, the researchers said. "Low participation rates of 12 to 43 percent are needed to provide short-term grid storage demand globally," study co-author Chengjian Xu, of Leiden University in The Netherlands, told AFP.

UK unemployment stable, inflation slams wages: Data

LONDON: UK unemployment has steadied but wages continue to lag sky-high inflation, official data showed Tuesday, fuelling a cost-of-living crisis and mass strike action. The unemployment rate was unchanged at 3.7 percent in the three months to the end of November compared with the three months to the end of October, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said in a statement.

Wages jumped 6.4 percent over the same period but sank by 2.6 percent in real terms, with British inflation stuck at the highest level in decades. "The real value of people's pay continues to fall, with prices still rising faster than earnings," said Darren Morgan, ONS director of economic statistics.

"This remains amongst the fastest drops in regular earnings since records began" in 2001. With pay failing to keep pace with rampant prices, Britain is witnessing strikes across the public and private sectors.

A total 467,000 working days were lost to walk-outs in November, the highest level since 2011, the ONS said Tuesday. Key affected areas included communication, transport and education. Industrial action looks set to intensify after Britain's largest teaching and nursing unions on Monday announced further stoppages, while the government seeks to limit strikes with controversial legislation.

The ONS will publish crucial December inflation data on Wednesday. Inflation slowed in November but remains at around the highest level in 40 years, at 10.7 percent. Prices last year soared on supply constraints caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the lifting of pandemic lockdowns and Brexit fallout.

The UK government argues that lifting pay risks worsening the inflation situation. "We must not do anything that risks permanently embedding high prices into our economy, which will only prolong the pain for everyone," repeated finance minister Jeremy Hunt in response to Tuesday's data.

That has sparked fury from trade unions. "Workers have been losing hundreds of pounds from their annual pay over the last year," said Paul Nowak, head of the Trades Union Congress umbrella group. "The Conservative government will not resolve pay disputes by rushing in new laws that attack the right to strike. "The best way to settle disputes is around the negotiating table-and with credible pay offers that protect workers from rising prices," Nowak added. — AFP

"Short-term grid storage demand could be met as early as 2030 across most regions", he added, saying this was a conservative estimate. By 2050, it would exceed the storage capacity required to help limit global warming to well below 2C, as outlined by the International Renewable Energy Agency.

The work examined global data-including from the main electric car battery markets in China, India, the European Union and the United States-taking into consideration average driving distances, driver behaviour and temperature, all of which can affect car battery health. The authors said governments should introduce incentives and regulations to ensure vehicle-to-grid and second use schemes can take off.

"This can include market-based efforts such as micro-payments for services to the grid," Chengjian said, adding that vehicle-to-grid use would have little harm on battery life. Some car firms such as Hyundai and Renault are already testing vehicles equipped with vehicle-to-grid technology, while some Teslas are already compatible.—AFP



Deliveroo surprises students at 'Brands League event'

KUWAIT: Deliveroo surprised attendees of Brands League event, that was organized by Hype Trend and hosted by the AUM, with their favorite foods and drinks, in partnership with several local restaurants, from Rock House Sliders, Cinnabon, and Dhahia Juice. Deliveroo's latest initiative came as part of the brand's long-standing tradition of surprising the local community and giving foodies access to the best food and drinks in town.

The Brands League event included a football tournament and outdoor winter festival that was hosted by the American University of the Middle East (AUM). The event, which took place from January 7-16 at the AUM campus, consisted of a football tournament in which participants, including a Deliveroo team, competed for the chance to take home the Brands League Cup. Students, friends, and participants enjoyed their pick of snacks and drinks from Deliveroo's restaurant partners while watching the tournament and checking out the outdoor winter festival.

"We are very happy to have wrapped up yet another successful event that has brought together some of our favorite restaurant partners all under one roof," said Seham AlHusaini, the General Manager of Deliveroo. "As always, we are excited to connect with the community we love and provide them with a chance to create new memories while sharing great moments and delicious food."

Deliveroo has delivered hundreds of thousands of meals to hungry customers around the country since its launch in Kuwait four years ago. Since its launch, Deliveroo has set itself apart with its unbeatable customer service, wide selection of global & local restaurants, and consistently reliable delivery.



E-car batteries could vastly boost grid storage: Study

PARIS: Electric car batteries could significantly boost the storage capacity of electricity grids and accelerate the transition away from planet-harming greenhouse gases, a new study found Tuesday. Renewable energy is essential for the Paris Agreement goal of limiting global warming to well below two degrees Celsius, but the need to scale up quickly and the intermittency of wind and solar have raised concerns about meeting electricity demand.

One way to help solve this problem is boosting the storage capacity of electricity grids, so that even when there is no sun or wind energy supply won't be interrupted. New research published Tuesday found that electric car batteries could help boost short-term grid

Business

UK strikes to intensify as teachers and nurses announce walkouts

'We've all been affected by draconian strike laws since the 1980s'

LONDON: Industrial action looked set to intensify Monday as Britain's largest teaching and nursing unions announced further walkouts over pay, while the government seeks to limit strikes with a controversial bill. The National Education Union (NEU) said its members voted overwhelmingly to walk out from February 1, calling for an above-inflation pay rise to counteract soaring prices and energy bills.

This week nurses in England, Wales and Northern Ireland are due to resume strike action on Wednesday and Thursday after holding their first ever strikes in December. The Royal College of Nursing announced that "if political inaction continues" it will follow this with further strikes on February 6 and 7, "in our most intense protest against unfair pay and unsafe staffing yet". The Conservative government has presented MPs with a bill that would require unionised professions to provide a minimum level of service during strikes.

'Lives at risk'

Business minister Grant Shapps told MPs during a second reading Monday evening that the bill was needed because "we have seen in recent months a flare-up of strikes that are putting people's lives and livelihoods at risk". MPs from the opposition Labour Party spoke against the bill. Several hundred trade union members including firefighters and rail workers braved chilly temperatures to demonstrate against the bill opposite 10 Downing Street in central London.

Slogans included "The right to strike is the right to hope". "They want to stop all protest, it feels like," Liz James, a housing cooperative representative of

Unison, a trade union that mainly represents public service workers, told AFP. "The only thing, as a worker, we have our right to is to withhold our labour."

"We've all been affected by draconian strike laws since the 1980s. This is a different attack on a different group of workers but you're foolish to think that you're not the next ones in line," said Paul Fleming, general secretary of acting union Equity. Public sector workers since last summer have been holding a wave of walkouts for salaries to take into account double-digit inflation.

'We mean business'

The NEU announced a national strike day on February 1, followed by a series of more regional strikes over six days in February and March. It said each school will only be affected for four days. But it will cause immediate concern among parents, who have seen their children's education severely disrupted in recent years by the coronavirus pandemic. "We believe the government knows there needs to be a correction on teacher pay," NEU joint general secretary Kevin Courtney said in a live-streamed meeting with members. "We really do hope we don't have to take any of these proposed strike days."

"They know that we mean business. They know that you are prepared to take action to protect your jobs, to protect your pay and costs and to protect your ability to remain in the profession," added fellow joint general secretary Mary Boustead. The teaching union leaders are set to meet the education minister Gillian Keegan on Wednesday.

The minister told Sky News that the planned strike action "is deeply disappointing for parents



LONDON: File photo shows a healthcare worker holding a placard at a picket line during a strike, outside St Thomas' Hospital in London. Industrial action looked set to intensify Monday as Britain's largest teaching and nursing unions announced further walkouts over pay, while the government sought to clamp down on strikes. —AFP

and for children and it will have an impact on children". Members of the Educational Institute of Scotland union on Monday began 16 days of rolling stoppages until February 6. There have been previous strikes in December and earlier this month.

Paramedics and ambulance workers are set to decide this week on further strike action, heaping pressure on the state-run National Health Service as it battles to recover from COVID delays to treatment and a staffing crisis. —AFP

NGOs denounce banks financing oil, gas projects

PARIS: Despite joining industry groups committed to reaching carbon neutrality the world's top banks are continuing to finance new oil and gas projects incompatible with that objective, environmental activist groups warned Tuesday.

The environmental groups took aim at the Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero (GFANZ), which has emerged as the key climate alliance for finance industry firms committed to reaching carbon neutrality by 2050 and aligning with a 1.5 degrees Celsius increase in global temperatures this century.

But a study by Reclaim Finance, 350.org, BankTrack, Rainforest Action Network, Remcom, Urgewald, Les Amis de la Terre, Sierra Club and Stand Earth found that many lenders in GFANZ's Net Zero Banking Alliance sub-group are continuing to finance new oil projects, which experts believe to be incompatible with limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

"Between their date of joining and August 2022, the 56 top banks in the NZBA provided at least US\$269 billion to 102 of the major fossil fuel expanders," said the groups. At the top of the list were two US lenders: Citigroup, with \$30.5 billion in financing to groups expanding oil and gas production, followed by Bank of America with \$22.8 billion. In third place was Japan's MUFG at \$22.7 billion.

The climate groups also pointed to asset managers continuing to hold stocks of oil and gas firms that are developing new projects. They found the top 58 asset managers in alliance held \$847 billion in shares and bonds of companies developing new fossil fuel projects. "There is now broad agreement... that there is no room in a 1.5-degree carbon budget for the carbon that would be brought into the atmosphere from new fossil fuel supply," said Paddy McCully, author of the report and an analyst for Reclaim Finance.

Banks and asset managers are regularly scolded for financing the fossil fuel sector, but say they work to finance the energy transition. —AFP

Stocks struggle on China data, gas extend losses

LONDON: Global stock markets struggled Tuesday on news of China's slowing economy, but European gas prices hit another 16-month low on fading fears of a winter supply crunch. Asia's equities mostly fell as data showed the Chinese economy grew at its slowest pace in four decades last year, sparking talk of an uneven recovery as the nation emerges from debilitating zero-COVID measures.

Europe also pushed lower with investors digesting the Chinese data in a busy day for US earnings, with profits slumping at banking giant Goldman Sachs. Europe's gas market meanwhile returned to a low not seen since September 2021, as unusually warm weather dampened winter demand expectations, but oil prices advanced.

Chinese GDP slowed sharply to three percent in 2022, the worst year since 1976 excluding pandemic-hit 2020, as lockdowns and other containment policies hammered activity, data showed Tuesday. That beat the 2.7 percent forecast and the fourth-quarter reading also topped estimates, but the outlook remains unclear.

Uneven recovery?

"The decision to drop the zero-COVID policy in the face of rising opposition, while welcome, is likely to prompt an uneven recovery for the Chinese economy in the coming months," said CMC Markets UK analyst Michael Hewson. "This is because of the unwelcome side effects of the inevitable explosion in infection rates and mortality in a largely unvaccinated population, which we've already seen in the

Chip supply, Russia exit pull brakes on Renault sales

PARIS: Renault said Tuesday it saw sales slide 14.6 percent in 2022, hampered by supply problems for electronic chips, leaving Russia and switching its focus to more profitable models. The French auto group sold 1,466,729 vehicles last year, down from 1,751,000 in 2021.

Excluding its withdrawal from operations in Russia owing to the war in Ukraine, annual sales



TOKYO: An electronic quotation board displays the Japanese yen's rate against the US dollar at a foreign exchange brokerage in Tokyo. —AFP

aftermath of this relaxation last month."

Other analysts remain hopeful, however, that China's reopening will fuel its strong rebound and help support the global economy, which is buckling in the face of interest rate hikes and soaring inflation. "Looking forward, we expect to see a sustained economic recovery in 2023 as a result of reopening and policy stimulus," said Chaoping Zhu, of JP Morgan Asset Management.

Traders are now awaiting a key policy decision

dropped 9.4 percent, notably in Europe, where Renault said it had prioritised "segments generating the most value," such as higher margin electric and hybrid as well as utility vehicles.

Despite seeing overall sales volume drop at an above market average rate, Renault remained on the podium for electric sales in Europe behind Tesla and Volkswagen. "We sold all that we produced," while order books remain full, chief operating officer Fabrice Cambolive told a conference call.

The second half of the year saw production improve on the first semester despite transportation problems. In May, Renault sold its 100-percent stake in Renault Russia and its 68-percent stake in AVTOVAZ—the manufacturer of the popular Lada brand—three months after Moscow's invasion of

Ukraine as the West imposed the first of waves of sanctions.

Sales beyond Europe were stable over 2021, reaching 43.2 percent of total sales. Latin American sales were a bright spot, rising eight percent year on year, helped by strong sales of the Kwid, the group's crossover city hatchback. Turkey, Renault's fourth-largest market, saw sales rise 22.6 percent to surpass 100,000 units.

The coupe-style crossover, South Korean-built Arkana, developed initially for Russia, almost doubled sales in Europe to 80,000 units, while the new electric Megane, launched in the second half of 2022, saw 33,000 sales. In Europe, Renault reached a market share of 6.4 percent but its global share dipped slightly to four percent. —AFP

Japan firm defends Van Gogh ownership after lawsuit

TOKYO: A Japanese company has defended its ownership of Van Gogh's "Sunflowers", obtained at auction in 1987, after the family of its former owner filed a US lawsuit demanding its return. The artwork—one of five original versions of the famous still life—was purchased by the predecessor of insurance firm Sompo Holdings at Christie's in London for \$40 million, making it briefly the world's most expensive painting.

It has been on display in Tokyo at Sompo's art museum for 35 years, but recently became the subject of a legal battle centred on a previous sale in Germany prior to World War II. The family of the painting's former owner, Jewish banker Paul von Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, filed a lawsuit in Illinois last month demanding the return of the artwork and hundreds of millions of dollars in damages.



PARIS: A visitor looks at Vincent Van Gogh's painting "Bedroom in Arles" (third version) at the exhibition 'Things, a history of still life' during "La Nuit des Choses" (The Night of Things) in the Louvre Museum in Paris on January 13, 2023. —AFP

They say Sompo's predecessor, Yasuda Fire & Marine Insurance, acquired the painting "in reckless disregard of its provenance, including Mendelssohn-Bartholdy's forced sale of the painting in Nazi Germany in 1934". —AFP

German investor morale soars as outlook brightens

FRANKFURT: German investor confidence soared in January to its highest level since the start of the war in Ukraine, a key survey said Tuesday, as lower energy prices and cooling inflation boost the economic outlook.

The ZEW institute's economic expectations jumped by 40.2 points to 16.9 points in January, taking the monthly indicator back into positive territory for the first time since February 2022. The increase—which dwarfed analyst predictions—is the latest signal that an expected slowdown in Europe's top economy will be less painful than initially feared.

Falling energy prices and support measures unveiled by the German government have eased concerns about a cost-of-living squeeze, while China's relaxation of Covid restrictions has lifted

German exporters.

"The earnings expectations of the export-oriented and energy-intensive sectors have gone up significantly," said ZEW president Achim Wambach. A recent drop in German inflation has added to the upbeat mood, he said.

Consumer price growth slowed to 8.6 percent in December, down from 10 percent in November as government interventions to bring down gas and electricity prices started to take effect. Germany's economy grew by a better than expected 1.9 percent in 2022, in part thanks to mild weather that helped keep gas storage sites filled.

The country is nevertheless forecast to fall into recession this year, although the government's prediction in October of a 0.4-percent contraction now looks overly pessimistic. Investors' "worry lines are disappearing", said DZ Bank economist Christoph Swonke. But "the economic situation remains challenging," he warned.

Germany's BDI industry association said Tuesday it expected the country's economy to shrink by 0.3 percent in 2023. —AFP



This photo shows a chef carrying a dish with prepared Dong Tao chicken legs at a restaurant in Hanoi.



Dong Tao chickens standing in a doorway at a poultry farm in Hung Yen province.— AFP photos

Giant legs of Vietnam's 'dragon chicken' a Lunar New Year delicacy



A chef preparing Dong Tao chicken feet at a restaurant in Hanoi.

On a farm close to Hanoi, Le Van Hien picks out the best bird among his flock of "dragon chickens"—a breed with legs as thick as a brick that can fetch up to \$2,000 a head. The lumpy legs of the Dong Tao chicken—named after the commune where it is bred in northern Vietnam—are considered a delicacy, and are particularly popular among the wealthy during the Vietnamese Lunar New Year, known as Tet.

Hien's prized four-kilogram bird, whose enormous legs make up around a fifth of its body weight, was sold for about \$150 — but especially large pedigree chickens have been valued at more than 10 times that. Some are even entered into beauty contests. The key to the bird's taste is its diet of corn and rice and the freedom it has to roam, Hien told AFP. Although the laying hens are kept in battery cages,

which have been banned in some countries across the world, the chickens bred for meat are let loose in a small garden.

"The more the chicken walks, the stronger and bigger their muscles are," said Hien, who has been breeding chickens for more than 15 years. The meat of the Dong Tao chicken—which can reach up to 10 kg—is prized for its tough and chewy texture and is also low in fat. It is sometimes served boiled, but also fried, stewed or served with lemongrass.

Le Van Luan, who picked Hien's chicken meat as a year-end gift for his business partners and elderly relatives, is a regular customer in Dong Tao. "The best part of the Dong Tao chicken is the skin of their legs. The bigger the legs are, the tastier," he said. — AFP



Poultry farmer Le Van Hien putting a Dong Tao chicken into a cage at his farm in Hung Yen province.



A cooked Dong Tao chicken foot being held up with chopsticks at a restaurant in Hanoi.



Photo shows Dong Tao chicken feet being cooked at a restaurant in Hanoi.



Photo shows Dong Tao chickens in the yard of a poultry farm in Hung Yen province.



A worker carrying water to Dong Tao chickens in the yard of a poultry farm in Hung Yen province.



A woman feeding Dong Tao chickens in a poultry farm in Hung Yen province.

New species of lizard discovered in Peru national park

Scientists have discovered a new species of lizard in a protected natural area in Cusco, southeastern Peru, national park officials said Monday. "Otishi National Park reveals a new species of lizard to science," the National Service of State-Protected

Natural Areas said in a statement.

The new species, named "Proctoporus titans," was found high in the Andes mountains at an altitude of 3,241 meters (10,600 feet). The lizard is dark gray with yellow and gold flecks on its sides and head. It has a tail that is longer than its body, and grooved dorsal scales and prefrontal scales. The Otishi National Park is a protected area in the Cusco and Junin region, covering almost 306,000 hectares (756,000 acres) of mountainous forests. — AFP



This undated handout picture shows a new species of lizard called "Proctoporus titans" at the Otishi National Park in Cusco, Peru. — AFP

Nobel-winning Swiss physicist Muller dies at 95

Swiss physicist Karl Alex Muller, who won the Nobel Physics Prize in 1987 along with his German colleague Georg Bednorz for their discovery of the first high-temperature superconductor, has died. Muller, who was 95, died on January 9, according to a death notice published in the Tages-Anzeiger newspaper by his family and the IBM Research laboratory. The scientist died peacefully in his sleep, after facing the final chapter of life with "perseverance and optimism", they wrote.

Muller and Bednorz were researchers at the IBM Zurich Research Laboratory when they jointly won the world's top physics prize more than 35 years ago. They were honored "for their important breakthrough in the discovery of superconductivity in ceramic materials."

Their findings made superconductivity more accessible and opened the way to a broad range of applications, from levitat-

ing trains to MRI imaging. Superconductivity—the phenomenon by which electricity flows through a material without experiencing any resistance or losing energy as heat—was discovered in 1911, when Dutch physicist Heike Kamerlingh Onnes cooled mercury to minus 270 degrees Celsius (minus 454 degrees Fahrenheit) and saw electric resistance disappear.

After that, superconductivity for decades appeared possible only in metallic compounds at similarly super-low temperatures. While small advances were made in 1973 when an alloy was produced that could become a superconductor at slightly higher temperatures, it still required cooling to -250C. But in 1986,

Muller and Bednorz ditched the traditional alloys and instead sought superconductivity in oxide materials—lanthan-barium-copper oxides—which brought the required temperature up to -238C.

Their discovery of a new class of superconductors, so-called high-temperature superconductors (HTS), earned them the Nobel nod the following year. Zurich University described Muller as "swimming against the current", adding: "1986 was an exciting year for science in Zurich. It all began with a seemingly far-fetched idea".

The fact that they found a higher critical temperature made it possible for superconductivity to be achieved by cooling with liquid nitrogen rather than far more expensive liquid helium, making it simpler and cheaper to use. Since Muller and Bednorz's discovery in 1986, scientists have searched for even higher temperature superconductors. Today, the highest critical temperature discovered for copper oxide superconductors is -140C.—AFP



In this file photo taken on December 7, 1987 in Stockholm shows Swiss physicist Karl Alexander Muller, 1987 Nobel Prize winner for Physics.—AFP

Islam Mansori: The model catwalking Kuwait's streets

By Faten Omar

With millions of views on TikTok, a 32-year-old content creator is taking over the Internet by storm with the "catwalk" trend, turning the streets of Kuwait into a fashion runway and making citizens and residents wonder: "Who is he? Why does he dress like this?"

Islam Mansori stepped into the modeling career five years ago. Other than TikTok, he has appeared in various fashion shows and modeled for local and international brands. Kuwait Times spoke to Mansori to learn more about his modeling career, lifestyle and future plans.

Kuwait Times: Tell us more about yourself.
Mansori: I am from Egypt, but was born and raised in Kuwait. I have always had this dream about being famous and getting noticed. My friends introduced me to the fashion industry five years ago. My family is strict and did not accept at the beginning the idea of me being a fashion model and dressing in a certain way, but they have accepted it now.

KT: Tell us more about your "catwalk" trend on TikTok.

Mansori: It started as a social experiment - the way people react gives me a push to expand more, and not only in Kuwait. The



— Photos by Yasser Al-Zayatt

KT: How did you decide to be a professional model? Who or what inspired you?

Mansori: My friends encouraged me. I met some photographers and videographers, who urged me to pose for pictures. I posted the images online and started to gain followers, and people liked what they saw. I didn't expect to become a model. Luxury brands then reached out to me like Gucci, Kenzo, Farfetch, Harvey Nichols and many more, along with many local brands.

trend is to walk everywhere until a modeling agency recognizes you. My friend Faisal suggested doing it and getting the reaction of people in Kuwait's to our fashion style. We acted like we are walking down the runway, striking poses and showing off our fashion sense. This has also led to a rise in the popularity of fashion-related content, in addition to promoting body positivity and getting good energy from people's reactions.

KT: What was your first job? How did it feel?

Mansori: My first job was with a local fashion brand. I felt very shy and nervous in front of the cameras at first, but controlled and hid my emotions. Later, I felt like a kind of hero, believing I am doing something big. My poker face played a big role in modeling.

KT: What is your dream modeling job?

Mansori: My dream job was working with Gucci, and I was lucky and got that chance last year. They invited me to their show in Dubai - I thought it was a scam and did not believe it. But they confirmed I was invited to their event in Dubai with a chance to collaborate.

KT: What do you enjoy most about modeling?

Mansori: The attention I get from it, although I am not an attention seeker.

KT: If you were not a model, what would you do?

Mansori: Police officer. I love to protect and achieve peace for everyone. Maybe this is

also a part of my message through fashion in an indirect way. I respect the culture and laws of Kuwait, but the style reflects the personality. When you refuse to show people what you want to wear, you will lose yourself. My style is a message to people that you can do whatever you want if there is no infringement on others' freedoms.

KT: What advice would you give someone starting out?

Mansori: Be yourself, do whatever you believe in and do not let people control you.



Getty Images targets AI firm for 'copying' photos

US firm Getty Images on Tuesday threatened to sue a tech company it accuses of illegally copying millions of photos for use in an artificial intelligence (AI) art tool. Getty, which distributes stock images and news photos including those of AFP, accused Stability AI of profiting from its pictures and those of its partners. Stability AI runs a tool called Stable Diffusion that allows users to generate mash-up images from a few words of text, but the firm uses material it scrapes from the web often without permission. The question of copyright is still in dispute, with creators and artists arguing that the tools infringe their intellectual property and AI firms claiming they are protected under

"fair use" rules. Tools like Stable Diffusion and Dall-E 2 exploded in popularity last year, quickly becoming a global sensation with absurd images in the style of famous artists flooding social media. But the increased visibility also attracted the attention of artists, photographers, other creators and their lawyers.

Stability AI is already facing a class action lawsuit in the United States, launched last week by three artists who claim their copyright has been infringed. Getty said it had started legal proceedings at the High Court in London. "It is Getty Images' position that Stability AI unlawfully copied and processed millions of images protected by copyright," the firm said in a statement. The photo firm said it had provided licenses tailored to firms that wanted to train AI models.

"Stability AI did not seek any such license from Getty Images and instead, we believe, chose to ignore viable licensing options and long-standing legal protections in pursuit of their stand-alone commercial interests." —AFP

Iran releases celebrity chef held in crackdown

Iran has released a prominent chef and Instagram influencer who was detained earlier this month in its crackdown on nationwide protests, a human rights groups and supporters said. Navab Ebrahimi, known for his videos promoting Persian cooking, was arrested in Tehran on January 4 and taken to the city's Evin prison. Nik Yousefi, an Iranian filmmaker and photographer who was himself arrested in October as part of the crackdown and then freed, wrote on Twitter that Ebrahimi had been released on bail on Wednesday.

He posted a picture of Ebrahimi smiling with his partner. The Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA) also

said Ebrahimi had been released on bail, adding there was still no word on the charges leveled against him. Iran has arrested at least 14,000 people in the wave of protests sparked by the September 16 death in custody of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old Iranian Kurdish woman who had been arrested for allegedly breaching the strict dress code

for women, according to the UN.

Prominent journalists, filmmakers, lawyers and activists have been arrested. Some have been released on bail, including star actor Taraneh Alidoosti, but others remain in prison. No reason has been given for the arrest of Ebrahimi, who had some 2.7 million followers on Instagram enjoying his slickly produced videos showing how to produce classic Persian dishes without pain.

But social media users said the arrest coincided with him posting a recipe to make Persian cutlets on the day the Iranian authorities marked the third anniversary of the killing by the United States of Revolutionary Guards General Qassem Soleimani. Some Iranians opposed to the regime have made a habit of posting images of cutlets on the anniversary of his death, in reference to the manner of his killing in a US drone strike in Iraq. — AFP



Navab Ebrahimi

Lifestyle | Features

Free tattoos give hope for Dutch breast cancer survivors

Flowers and butterflies surround the scars left by the removal of Jacqueline van Schaik's breasts, thanks to a new tattoo the cancer survivor says she treasures. "It's magnificent," exclaims an emotional Van Schaik, 56, looking at herself in the mirror at the end of the session at a tattoo parlor in the central Dutch city of Lelystad. "I don't see the scars anymore. I only see this gem," added the mother-of-one, who underwent a double mastectomy after being diagnosed with cancer in October 2020, followed by extensive chemo- and radiotherapy.

Her tattooist, Darryl Veer, is part of a growing group of ink artists ready to help women love their bodies again after the traumatic experience of a mastectomy. Around one in seven women in the Netherlands develops breast cancer during their lifetime, Dutch health authority figures said. Breast removal is necessary in a third of these cases, according to a Dutch website specializing in cancer.

Myriam Scheffer, 44, suffered the same fate. She too wanted a tattoo on her chest—"most probably a large bird spreading its wings"—but her scars have not yet healed enough. In the meantime, she decided to help others like her by setting up a foundation last year to offer free tattoos to women in the same situation. Van Schaik is the first-ever recipient.



Darryl Veer, owner of tattoo shop "Tradtoo" poses in front of pictures of previous tattoos made in Lelystad, Netherlands.

'Beautiful thing'

The idea of tattoos for breast cancer survivors already exists in the United States and France, but Scheffer, who has an eight-year-old daughter, hopes to develop the initiative across Europe. Interested women can contact her from June on her foundation's website, tittoo.org. There, they can meet the tattoo artists, plan the artwork and sessions, set for October to raise awareness for breast cancer screening.

Thanks to her foundation, Italian and

Swedish women will be able to do the same later this year, most likely in Florence and in Stockholm, where there are active groups of so-called "flatties" or "flat women", Scheffer said. She hopes to expand the scheme to Belgium and Germany in 2024. Scheffer's foundation only works with tattoo artists who, like the 36-year-old Veer, already have experience of covering up scars.

After three sessions with Van Schaik, each lasting several hours, the tattoo artist looked visibly relieved. "I was under pressure, because the last thing I wanted to do as an artist in a case like this is to mess up," Veer laughed. "Making somebody happy really is the most beautiful thing you can do with a tattoo."

'Precious feeling'

Schaik's chest is now covered up to the shoulders with two red flowers, whose stems seem to take root at the bottom of the scars, and blue butterflies. The tattoo artists work around the scars but do not ink them directly. "To see yourself as beautiful and to like yourself again: it's such a precious feeling and I had lost it," Schaik told AFP.

The operation "took something essential away, a part of what makes you what you are, and that made me very sad," said Van Schaik, who suffered "every side effect imaginable" during her two-



Darryl Veer, owner of tattoo shop "Tradtoo" and who has done dozens of scar covering tattoos over his fifteen years of experience as a tattooist, works on an artistic tattoo around mastectomy scars of Jacqueline van Schaik, breast cancer survivor.

year treatment. When hormone therapy didn't work, Van Schaik, who has a 17-year-old son, opted for a mastectomy in April 2021.

But losing her breasts meant she "suffered a lot, physically and mentally." "Every day I stood in front of a big mirror when I got out of the shower. I looked at

the scars and I saw what had been removed from me," said Van Schaik. "I thought of taking down the mirrors at home. But now, they can stay."— AFP



US model and activist Sabrina Dhowre Elba (left) looks on next to her husband British actor Idris Elba during the "Crystal Award" ceremony at the World Economic Forum (WEF) annual meeting in Davos. — AFP

After a Davos DJ gig, Idris Elba has new role: Advocate for small farmers

The last time British actor Idris Elba was in Davos during the World Economic Forum, it was to perform as a DJ at a party with R&B superstar Mary J. Blige. Almost a decade later, the versatile artist is back in the Swiss Alpine village with his wife, Sabrina Dhowre Elba, in a very different role: as an advocate for food security and efforts to combat climate change. During his previous gig in 2014, "messaging was, you know, 'have a good time guys,'" Elba, who has been spinning discs since age 14, told AFP in an interview on the sidelines of this year's WEF.

"There were some very, very interesting people as my audience, but it's nothing compared to being here this time," said Elba, as there is "way more" responsibility. "There's no comparison," said the artist, whose talents range from spinning discs at the Coachella festival to playing South African anti-apartheid hero and president Nelson Mandela in "Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom".

The Elbas, who are goodwill ambassadors for the UN's International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), are in Davos to urge the world's corporate and political elite to do more to help small farmers in Africa. "We have specific goals and specific targeting and messaging to do while we're here," Elba said, adding that "it has been a very different experience from the first time" he was in Davos.

'Bad guys and good guys'

The couple was awarded the WEF's Crystal Award for their advocacy work on Monday at an event where Elba told the audience that the poor of this world are looking for investments, not just aid and handouts. "People are listening, governments are stepping up, but not enough," Sabrina Dhowre Elba, a Somali-Canadian model, told AFP. "That's why we're here and continue banging doors... because we need to step up twice, three times, four times, five times as much because the need is there," she said.

"We need to have long-term solutions that help people step themselves up in an entrepreneurial way, get them out of poverty, give them a sense of pride and work," she said. Her husband said: "I think the next challenge for us is to get private sector to participate."

The man who played a ruthless drug gang leader in the TV show "The Wire" or an African warlord in "Beasts of No Nation" cuts a different image from those fearsome characters in Davos. "What drives me is the injustice of half the world eating and half the world not eating, and half the world causing considerable damage to our planet and the other half not contributing (to climate change) but starving and suffering from that damage the most," Elba told AFP.—AFP

Lollobrigida, Italy's wickedly witty screen goddess

One of the last icons of the Golden Age of Hollywood, Italian actress Gina Lollobrigida, whose death at the age of 95 was announced Monday, was famed for her biting wit and sensual beauty. Bringing much-needed glamour and pizzazz to the post-war period, she stirred hearts whether as an onscreen gypsy, queen or single mother. Humphrey Bogart, who she starred opposite in her breakthrough movie "Beat the Devil" in 1953, said Lollobrigida made "Marilyn Monroe look like Shirley Temple."

Best known for Luigi Comencini's 1953 classic "Bread, Love and Dreams", and Jean Delannoy's 1956 "The Hunchback of Notre Dame", Lollobrigida starred with many of the leading men of the time, including Errol Flynn and Burt Lancaster. While she had a "crazy good time" with a playful Bogart, not all the shoots were as fun. Her co-star in wartime romancer "Never So Few", Frank Sinatra, had "zero sense of humor", she told Variety in 2018, when she received a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

Actress by accident

Luigia "Gina" Lollobrigida was born on July 4, 1927 in Subiaco, a mountain village 50 kilometers (30 miles) east of Rome. She began to study sculpture after her family moved to the capital, supporting herself by singing and modeling before attracting the attention of Italian film producers. She said her entry into acting was an accident.

"I refused when they offered me my first role. They insisted again... So I told them my price was one million lire, thinking that would put a stop to the whole thing. But they said yes!" she told Vanity Fair. Italians then dubbed her their answer to Elizabeth Taylor after her signature movie "La Donna Piu Bella del Mondo" ("The Most Beautiful Woman in the World") in 1955.

Rivals

She had an infamous long-standing rivalry with fellow Italian diva Sophia Loren. When Loren claimed she was the "bustier" one, Lollobrigida hit back, saying Loren could play a peasant, but never a lady, according to the Hollywood Reporter. Affectionately dubbed "La Lollo" by fans, she played the queen in "Solomon and Sheba" in 1959 and a single mother in "Buona Sera, Mrs. Campbell", garnering a



Actress Gina Lollobrigida arrives on the red carpet at the National Italian American Foundation's 33rd Anniversary Awards Gala on October 18, 2008 in Washington, DC.

Golden Globe nomination for her performance. A cinema sex symbol, she was pursued for years by US tycoon Howard Hughes, who brought her to Hollywood, and by Prince Rainier of Monaco, at the time still married to Princess Grace.

"I've had many lovers and still have

that, when I have found the right person, he has run away from me," she told Vanity Fair magazine in 2015. "I am too strong, too popular." The marriage was annulled by a Vatican court in 2019.

Photojournalism

Lollobrigida won seven David di Donatello awards during her career, Italy's Oscar equivalent. But by the 1970s she had turned from acting to sculpture and photojournalism, including getting a scoop interview and photo shoot with Cuban leader Fidel Castro. She travelled the world, snapping celebrities from Henry Kissinger to Indira Gandhi, Maria Callas, Liza Minnelli, Salvador Dali, Audrey Hepburn and Ella Fitzgerald.

She also nurtured political ambitions: in 1999 she ran, unsuccessfully, for a seat in the European Parliament. She was back in the spotlight in 2021, amid a bitter legal battle with her son over



Italian actress Gina Lollobrigida (center), whose career has spanned more than six decades starting in the 1950s, attends the opening of her exhibition in the Qatari capital Doha on March 9, 2010.

romances," she was quoted by several British newspapers as saying in 2000. "I am very spoiled." She was married in her early 20s to Slovenian doctor Milko Skofic, with whom she had a son before they divorced in 1971. In 2006, aged 79, she announced plans to marry Spanish long-time partner Javier Rigau Rafols, 34 years her junior, but they split up a year later.

Lollobrigida accused him in 2013 of having tricked her into signing documents allowing him to marry her by proxy, with a stand-in, in a civil ceremony in Spain. "My experience has been

her fortune. Italy's Supreme Court ruled that she needed a legal guardian to stop people preying on her wealth, because of a "weakening" in her perception of reality.

Despite that, in 2022 she attempted once more to enter politics, with a failed bid for a seat in the Italian parliament. In a 2019 interview with AGI news agency, Lollobrigida said she wanted to be remembered for more than just her work in cinema. "For my sculptures and above all for my photography."— AFP



Italian actress Gina Lollobrigida poses during the shooting of film "Venus imperiale" directed by Jean Delannoy in 1963.—AFP photos



Italian actress Gina Lollobrigida attends the ceremony honoring her with a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

Gina Lollobrigida in five films:

'Bread, Love and Dreams' (1953)

Lollobrigida shot to stardom in this neo-realist comedy as a feisty, knockout peasant girl who attracts the attentions of a womanizing older police chief (Vittorio De Sica) while herself holding a torch for one of his young officers. Lollobrigida's star was born the minute she entered the action, riding side saddle on a donkey with a coquettish smile. Of all her films it was her favorite. "It fits me like a glove, the character," she told The New York Times in an interview years later. "It's very full of fire. Was like me."

'Beat the Devil' (1953)

In 1953, Lollobrigida made her Hollywood breakthrough in John Huston's enjoyable caper about a bunch of crooks waiting in an Italian port town to board a steamer to east Africa, where they hope to make a fortune in uranium. She plays the temptress wife of an American soldier of fortune played by Humphrey Bogart in the film, which was shot on the Amalfi Coast. Truman Capote wrote the screenplay for the feature, which Huston turned into a spoof of "The Maltese Falcon", his earlier noirish flick starring Bogart.

'Trapeze' (1956)

Lollobrigida joined Britain's Carol Reed for this circus romp with Tony Curtis and Burt Lancaster, which was a hit at the US box office. Shot in Paris, the film involving a troupe of competitive acrobats, with Lollobrigida as an ambitious but not-so-talented trapeze artist, scooped prizes at the Berlin film festival.

'The Hunchback of Notre Dame' (1956)

As Gypsy dancer Esmeralda in this lush color adaptation of Victor Hugo's classic novel, Lollobrigida starred opposite Anthony Quinn's hunchback Quasimodo. Directed by French director Jean Delannoy with a mostly French-speaking cast, Lollobrigida enchanted in a red flowing dress with a dagger in her belt. The film was a big hit among Paris crowds and in the United States. A keen sculptor, Lollobrigida studied the art in Rome and exhibited her work internationally, including in Paris where she unveiled a five-meter-high (16-foot-high) bronze Esmeralda in 2003.

'Buona Sera, Mrs. Campbell' (1968)

Picking up a Golden Globe film nomination for this comic role, Lollobrigida played a single mother attracting the interest of three soldiers vying to pay her child support. Veteran US critic Roger Ebert praised Lollobrigida's performance, "projecting the kind of innocence that is necessary if the situation isn't going to seem vulgar". For her performance she won Italy's top award, a David di Donatello.— AFP

Sports

Tatum scores 51 as Celtics pound Hornets, Curry saves Warriors

LOS ANGELES: Jayson Tatum produced an electrifying 51-point display as the Boston Celtics marked the NBA's Martin Luther King Day holiday schedule with a 130-118 win over the Charlotte Hornets on Monday. Two days after scoring 33 points against Charlotte on Saturday, Tatum once again took center stage with a commanding performance as the Eastern Conference leaders claimed a seventh straight victory.

Tatum's virtuoso display was one of several eye-catching individual performances around the NBA on Monday, with LeBron James erupting for 48 points in the Los Angeles Lakers' win over Houston and Golden State's Stephen Curry scoring 41 points against Washington. Tatum brought up his half century in the closing seconds, nervously draining a long-range three-pointer which drew roars of appreciation from the home crowd at Charlotte's Spectrum Center.

It was the final act of an 18-point fourth quarter from Tatum, who made 15-of-23 from the field with seven three-pointers, nine rebounds and five assists. It marked the fifth time in Tatum's career he has posted more than 50 points in a game. His career high remains a 60-point performance against San Antonio in 2021. Monday's tally also means the 24-year-old is the Celtics all-time leader in regular-season 50-point games, surpassing fran-

chise icon Larry Bird's total of four.

"It's been a while since I scored 50, so I needed that one," Tatum joked after the win, adding that scoring 51 points on the national holiday to honor civil rights hero King carried added meaning. "Without him I wouldn't be able to do what I do and live out my dream," Tatum said. Boston's victory saw them improve to 33-12 at the top of the East, 4.5 games clear of second-placed Brooklyn.

Curry, LeBron shine

Elsewhere on Monday, Warriors ace Curry bagged the 67th game of his career with 40 points or more to save the Golden State Warriors with a 127-118 road win over the Washington Wizards. The Warriors, who played in the nation's capital a day before a scheduled White House visit in recognition of last season's NBA championship win, looked to be sliding to defeat as Washington led 106-98 midway through the fourth quarter.

But two three-pointers from Draymond Green sparked a burst of Warriors scoring, with Curry finishing on 41 points after a closing 27-8 run. "It's whatever it takes at this point for us to try and right the ship, and get some good momentum, good energy around the team and an understanding of how to win games on the road," said Curry, paying tribute to the work of Green and Jordan Poole, who finished with 32 points.

"Draymond was unbelievable in the fourth quarter and Jordan kept us alive in the first half," said Curry. "Collectively we just had a little bit more composure down the stretch and a little bit more intelligence on how to finish the game and not get rattled in that fourth quarter."

In Los Angeles, LeBron James guided the Lakers to a 140-132 win over the Houston Rockets with 48 points, eight rebounds and nine assists. But James' heroics could not mask a shaky display from the Lakers against a Rockets side who are bottom of the Western Conference with the worst record in the NBA at 10-34. In other games, the Memphis Grizzlies extended their winning streak to 10 games with a 136-106 drubbing of the Phoenix Suns. Ja Morant finished with 29 points and Desmond Bane had 28 as Memphis improved to 30-13 to remain neck-and-neck with Denver at the top of the Western Conference.

Elsewhere, Milwaukee recovered from back-to-back defeats against Miami with a battling 132-119 victory over the Indiana Pacers. Once again without Giannis Antetokounmpo, the Bucks looked to be in trouble as Indiana led by double digits in the third quarter at Milwaukee's Fiserv Forum. But the Bucks rallied in the fourth to outscore Indiana 39-21 to claim the win. Jrue Holiday once again came up big for Milwaukee with a season-high 35 points. —AFP



CHARLOTTE: Jayson Tatum of the Boston Celtics dunks the ball during the game against the Charlotte Hornets on Jan 16, 2023 at Spectrum Center. —AFP

Four Olympics on free-to-air TV in Europe

GENEVA: The International Olympic Committee announced Monday that the four Olympic Games between 2026 and 2032 will be broadcast on free-to-air television in Europe. The IOC said that all media rights in Europe for the summer and winter Games for the period had been awarded to the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), an alliance of public service broadcasters, along with current rights holders Warner Bros. Discovery (WBD).

The move marks a change of approach from the current six-year deal that runs through to the Paris 2024 Olympics. In 2015, Discovery - now part of WBD - bought the European rights for 1.3 billion euros (\$1.37 billion). They then sublicensed rights to other broadcasters. "This new agreement guarantees free-to-air reach for the Games through the EBU's network of public service broadcasters," the IOC said in a statement.

The deal covers the Los Angeles 2028 and Brisbane 2032 summer Games, plus the winter Olympics in Milan Cortina 2026 and those in 2030, which have yet to be awarded to a host city. The EBU and WBD presented a joint bid to acquire all media rights across 48 countries in Europe. The IOC did not put a figure on the deal.

But its president Thomas Bach said it would give European sports fans wider access to the Olympics than ever before. "As the IOC redistributes 90 percent of the revenues it generates, this long-term agreement also provides critical financial stability to the wider sporting movement and ultimately supports the athletes themselves," he said.

The EBU - which includes Britain's BBC, France Televisions, Germany's ARD and ZDF, Italy's Rai and Spain's RTVE - will hold free-to-air rights on both television and digital platforms. EBU members will broadcast at least more than 200 hours of coverage of the summer Olympics and at least 100 hours of the winter Games on television, plus radio coverage, live streaming and reporting across online and social media platforms, the alliance said. —AFP

Shooters preparing for Sheikh Jaber Cup

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait Shooting Sport Club will organize the Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah Cup from Jan 19-21. Shooters from the club, National Guard and Kazakh federation will compete in the 25m pistol, 50m three position rifle and Olympic archery for men and women. Concerned committees are preparing for the event to bring out as best as possible from all aspects of the game.

President of Kuwait and Arab Shooting Federation Duajj Khalaf Al-Otaibi said the club is happy to organize the Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah Cup, adding he is exerting efforts for the sake of Kuwait's prosperity. Otaibi hoped Kuwait shooters excel and exert their best efforts during the tournament, especially as they are preparing for upcoming international tournaments to qualify for the Paris 2024 Olympics.



Duajj Al-Otaibi

Brady and Bucs outclassed as Cowboys advance

LOS ANGELES: Tom Brady and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers were sent crashing out of the NFL playoffs on Monday as the Dallas Cowboys ran rampant in a comprehensive 31-14 victory. Seven-time Super Bowl champion Brady - whose future remains shrouded in uncertainty - cut a miserable figure as his 23rd season came to an abrupt end.

The 45-year-old quarterback, who announced his retirement from the sport last year only to reverse the decision 40 days later, was never able to generate momentum for a lackluster Buccaneers offense. Instead, it was the Cowboys, led by quarterback Dak Prescott, who dominated throughout to set up a divisional-round playoff clash with the San Francisco 49ers in California next Sunday.

Brady had never lost to the Cowboys in seven previous meetings, but the chances of that record being extended on Monday always looked slim. Afterwards, Brady brushed off questions about his future and whether he could yet return for another season next year. "I'm going to go home and get a good night's sleep, as good as I can tonight," Brady said. "There's been a lot of focus on this game, so it's just going to be one

day at a time, truly."

Brady also declined to offer an assessment of his own form during the season. "We lost tonight, and it's a team sport," he said. "I've never considered individual things like that. We came up short as a team and that's all that matters and all I've cared about. Obviously, tonight wasn't one of our best nights."

Cowboys kicking woes

The only negative for the Cowboys was the form of kicker Brett Maher, who claimed an unwanted piece of NFL history by missing four straight extra point attempts. The 33-year-old is the first player in league history to miss four extra points in a single game. Maher made 50 of 53 extra points during the regular season, but his form collapsed bizarrely at Tampa's Raymond James Stadium.

Fortunately for the Cowboys, Maher's problems in front of the posts were moot, as Prescott and the Dallas offense set about dismantling the Buccaneers' defense. Prescott threw four touchdowns and finished with 305 passing yards on 25 of 33 completions. The 29-year-old connected with tight end Dalton Schultz for a 22-yard completion for the opening touchdown in the first quarter to cap a seven-play 80-yard drive.

Prescott then cleverly ran for the second Dallas touchdown, faking a hand-off before sprinting into the endzone unopposed in the second



TAMPA: Tom Brady of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers looks on during an injury timeout during the fourth quarter against the Dallas Cowboys at Raymond James Stadium on Jan 16, 2023. —AFP

quarter. Prescott found Schultz for the tight end's second touchdown of the night to make it 18-0 at half-time. Michael Gallup collected a two-yard pass from Prescott for Dallas's fourth touchdown to make it 24-0 in the third quarter, and despite Maher's problems with the boot, there was to be no way back for Brady and the Buccaneers.

Brady showed a flicker of his old self late in the third quarter with a superbly thrown 30-yard touchdown pass to Julio Jones that made it 24-6. But Dallas responded emphatically at the start of the fourth quarter with their fifth touchdown of the night.

Dallas coach Mike McCarthy spurned the chance to give Maher a field goal attempt on a 4th & 4 and Prescott instead tossed a touchdown pass to a wide-open CeeDee Lamb.

Maher finally drilled an extra point to make it 31-6. Play was interrupted late in the fourth quarter after an apparent neck injury to Bucs receiver Russell Gage before Brady connected with Cameron Brate for a second touchdown. A successful two-point conversion made it 31-14. Tampa Bay coach Todd Bowles later said Gage was being treated for a concussion and a possible neck injury at a local hospital. —AFP

Jones' second chance - can he deliver?

PARIS: The return of former England coach Eddie Jones to take the reins of the Wallabies represents a gamble by Australian rugby chiefs. They believe that later this year Jones can deliver the World Cup - which he came close to doing in his previous stint with Australia only for England fly-half Jonny Wilkinson's drop goal to deny the Wallabies in Sydney in 2003. AFP Sport highlights three key points surrounding Jones's appointment that was announced on Monday:

Yesterday's man?

"Coaching at the next World Cup will be difficult," Jones told the Sydney Morning Herald after he was dismissed in December, admitting the last three years of his tenure in charge of England had taken a toll. A month later the unpredictable Australian appears to have had a sudden change of mind. However, the main question is whether his fortunes as a coach enjoy as quick a turnaround after a miserable 2022 when his record was hardly any better than the man he is replacing, Dave Rennie.

In his favor he does - rather like Jose Mourinho in football - have a knack of hitting the ground running and securing results before the love affair sours. Nevertheless there was a feeling that the 62-year-old's time may have passed, his tactics outmoded and outshone by the younger generation of France's Fabien Galthie and Ireland's Andy Farrell.

Several are still believers in Jones's magic but for some like Clive Woodward - the coach who got the better of him at the 2003 World Cup - the England job exposed his weaknesses. "He will be remembered for the misguided rhetoric and unfulfilled promises," Woodward wrote in a Daily Mail column after his sacking.

Youngbloods offer hope

Rennie should be credited with bringing through young talent, notably the livewire 22-year-old wing Mark Nawaqanitawase, who was one of the few positives of Australia's northern hemisphere tour in November. He and Jordan Petaia, also 22 but with more Test experience, have shown the flair required to cause problems for any opponent. Jones is not averse to bringing in fresh faces as he did with England fly-half Marcus Smith and Maro Itoje but he was quick to dispense with many others. Jones has a more abrasive and no-nonsense style than Rennie and whether that proves a spark or inhibits the natural exuberance of the youngsters could be pivotal to the Wallabies' progress. Similarly in Jones's mind the young stars also have to assume certain responsibilities as he highlighted when pointing out the potential pitfalls to Smith. "The big thing for young players is distractions," Jones said in Nov 2021. "Distractions can be the exposure they get in the media, the praise and criticism they get, groups of agents who see this guy as the next big thing. No-one starts with their feet off the ground or they don't get in the team. But there's this flood of distractions that comes in that makes you ungrounded."

Lessons to be learned from Cheika approach

Australia's win and loss column from last year may make grim reading but they were just one try away from beating both Six Nations Grand Slam titleholders France and the world-ranked number one team Ireland in November. Add to that the character they showed to come back and beat Wales 39-34 after trailing 34-13 and there appears to be a solid base for Jones to build on. The example set by Michael Cheika - a larger-than-life, straight-talking character like Jones - in 2015 could prove a handy one. Cheika had a disappointing first campaign in charge in the northern hemisphere in 2014 but went away and molded a team of veterans like Matt Giteau with younger talents including Bernard Foley and Michael Hooper. —AFP



Eddie Jones

Pant thanks 'heroes' after horror crash

NEW DELHI: Indian cricket star Rishabh Pant has thanked "two heroes" who helped get him to hospital after his car crashed into a road divider and caught fire. In his first public comments since the accident, Pant said he would be "forever grateful and indebted" to Rajat Kumar and Nishu Kumar, posting a photo of the duo at his hospital bed.

"I may not have been able to thank everyone individually, but I must acknowledge these two heroes who helped me during my accident and ensured I got to the hospital safely," Pant said on Twitter late Monday. "Rajat Kumar & Nishu Kumar, Thank you. I'll be forever grateful and indebted."

The flamboyant wicketkeeper-batsman crashed his Mercedes SUV north of New Delhi before dawn on Dec 30. He suffered multiple injuries when the car rammed into a crash barrier, flipped over and caught fire. The 25-year-old was rushed to a local hospital in Dehradun 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. Pant tweeted Monday that his "road to recovery" had now begun and that an operation - reportedly on his knee - "was a success". "I am humbled and grateful for all the support and good wishes... The road to recovery has begun and I am ready for the challenges ahead," he tweeted.

He also thanked the Indian cricket board and government authorities for their "incredible support". "From the bottom of my heart, I also would like to thank all my fans, teammates, doctors and the physios for your kind words and encouragement. Looking forward to see you all on the field. #grateful #blessed." —AFP

Sports

Theerathorn strike seals AFF Cup triumph for Thailand

BANGKOK: Thailand secured their second successive AFF Cup trophy Monday, seeing off a poor Vietnam side 1-0 in the second leg of the final to cement their status as the leading force in Southeast Asian football. A fierce first-half drive from captain Theerathorn Bunmathan was enough to win in a scrappy encounter in Bangkok, played under the watchful eye of FIFA supremo Gianni Infantino.

Theerathorn and Peeradol Chamrasamee effortlessly controlled the center for Thailand, leaving 2018 winners Vietnam chasing shadows for much of the match. Without the full-throated support of the crowd they enjoyed in the first leg in Hanoi, Vietnam struggled to repeat the spirited performance that saw them scrape a 2-2 draw. The 3-2 aggregate win gave Thailand their seventh AFF trophy - a record - and means they have successfully defended the title on three separate occasions.

Theerathorn's 24th-minute goal was the fruit of patient build-up play through the midfield, as Vietnam hung ever further back. After a string of passes, lively number nine Adisak Kraisor - a thorn in Vietnam's side all evening - laid the ball off as Theerathorn arrived at pace, took a touch and unleashed a ferocious shot into the bottom corner from 25 m.

The goal rattled Vietnam, who shed what little cohesion they had shown and almost lost their heads, flying into rash tackles as the first half closed. But it was the defending champions who ended the match a man short as Peeradol received a second caution in injury time. Thai coach Mano Polking admitted it was not a "beautiful" performance but praised the professionalism shown by his team. "All credit to the players - they did a fantastic job," he said. Thailand have now won the AFF Cup seven times, well clear of their closest rivals Singapore, on four. —AFP



BANGKOK: Thailand's football team celebrates winning the AFF Cup final match against Vietnam at Thammasat Stadium on Jan 16, 2023. —AFP

Iraq to face Oman in final of Khaleeji Zain 25

BASRA: Oman will be vying for their third championship on Thursday after defeating Bahrain 1-0 in the second semifinal match at the Al Minaa Olympic Stadium in Basra. The victory secured Oman's spot in the championship match of the 25th Arabian Gulf Cup (Khaleeji Zain 25), where they will face host country Iraq.

With only seven minutes left, Jameel Al-Yahmadi scored the goal that sent Oman into the final match. The last time Oman participated in the championship game was in Kuwait in 2017-2018, when they won the tournament. The Iraqi national team defeated the Qatari national team earlier on Monday to advance to the final. Iraq's national team last advanced to the Gulf Cup final in the 21st edition, which was played in Bahrain in 2013. The final Arabian Gulf Cup match will be played at the Basra International Stadium on Thursday. —Agencies



BASRA: Oman's forward Jameel Al-Yahmadi is marked by Bahrain's forward Sayed Dhiya Saeed during the Arabian Gulf Cup semifinal at the Al-Minaa Olympic Stadium on Jan 16, 2023. —AFP

Barca young stars hoping trophy is first of 'new era'

BARCELONA: Barcelona's young players, led by teenage sensation Gavi, were at the heart of the club's first trophy for nearly two years as they thumped rivals Real Madrid in the Spanish Super Cup. Gavi, 18, scored and fashioned two more in their 3-1 victory on Sunday, including one for 20-year-old Pedri, while defender Ronald Araujo shackled Vinicius Junior and Alejandro Balde excelled on the other flank.

"A new era has started," yelled an ecstatic Araujo as he ran back to the dressing room with his medal, after wild celebrations on the pitch in Saudi Arabia. The ushering in of a new start for Barcelona is the club's fervent hope, after they lifted their first trophy in the 21st century without Lionel Messi being part of the squad. When the Argentine icon left for Paris Saint-Germain in 2021 after spending his whole career at the club, it shook Barca and the football world.

Deluged by debt, the Catalans spent big in the summer, a spree funded by mortgaging part of their future television income, among other methods. They signed Robert Lewandowski, who also netted against Madrid in the Super Cup triumph in Saudi Arabia, as well as Jules Kounde and Raphinha among others. Gradually the Barcelona team which conquered Europe in 2009, 2011 and 2015 is being dismantled, with only a couple of veterans remaining. Xavi was one of the first to depart, leaving on top of the world after winning the treble in 2015, and now he has been working on reshaping a club which president Joan Laporta said was "almost dead" when he took over. There is a young core to Xavi's team, with Gavi and Pedri key to the reshaped midfield, while Araujo and Kounde are in their early 20s.

Balde, 19, has displaced veteran Jordi Alba at left-back more often than not this season, while hopes Ansu Fati can become the team's star still remain. The 20-year-old forward scored a stellar volley against Real Betis in the Spanish Super Cup semifinal on Thursday, and is still rebuilding his game and his form



Gavi

after serious injuries. Gavi was particularly devastating against Real Madrid, operating from the left but coming inside to help Barcelona dominate the midfield. Madrid defender Dani Carvajal was totally overwhelmed by the combination of the midfielder and Balde on the left wing. "When you see (Gavi) compete like that, putting his soul out there, he's a character that is contagious for the team, he has an innate capacity for leadership," said Xavi. —AFP

Mali fight back to draw with Angola in thriller

ALGIERS: Ousmane Coulibaly equalized seven minutes from time as Mali came from two goals behind to draw 3-3 with Angola on Monday in an African Nations Championship (CHAN) thriller in Algeria. When Deivi 'Gilberto' Vieira gave the Angolans a two-goal lead on 72 minutes, his side looked set to win the Group D opener at the Olympic Stadium in the chilly western city of Oran.

But Yoro Diaby nodded a corner into the net six minutes later and substitute Coulibaly poked a loose ball past goalkeeper Hugo Marques to complete a dramatic comeback. Laurindo 'Depu' Aurelio had twice put Angola ahead in the opening half with 36-year-old Hamidou Sinayoko scoring in between for Mali. After only five goals in the first five mini-league matches at three other venues, the goal feast excited a small crowd on a winter evening in the 40,000-seat stadium.

Mali and Angola have both come close to winning a unique national team tournament as it is restricted to footballers playing at clubs in their country of birth. Angola finished runners-up to Tunisia in 2011 and Mali lost the 2016 final to the Democratic Republic of Congo and were beaten by Morocco in the 2020 title decider.

After the drama of the opening match in a double-header, Cameroon defeated Congo Brazzaville 1-0 in Group E in a much less exciting central African showdown. Cameroon, who came fourth as hosts of the last edition, always looked likely winners, but took 63 minutes to break the deadlock against dogged opponents.

PSG slip-ups give glimmer of hope to Ligue 1 rivals

PARIS: Could there actually be a title race in France this season? That is the question being asked after Paris Saint-Germain slumped to a second defeat of 2023 on Sunday to give hope to their rivals at the halfway stage of the campaign. At the start of the season the question was whether the PSG of Lionel Messi, Kylian Mbappe and Neymar could go the whole campaign undefeated in the league.

They duly went unbeaten through their first 16 games but that run was ended when they came up against their nearest challengers Lens on New Year's Day. With Messi still taking a post-World Cup break, PSG were blown away in an intimidating atmosphere in France's far north and lost that game 3-1. On Sunday they suffered a second straight defeat on the road, losing 1-0 at Champions League chasers Rennes despite fielding Messi, Mbappe and Neymar together for the first time since the World Cup.

Lens and Rennes are two of the best-run clubs in France and two of the strongest teams at home, so losing against these opponents is no disgrace. But it is the manner in which PSG have been beaten that is a cause for concern for coach Christophe Galtier. His team are yet to rediscover the form they enjoyed before the season paused for the World Cup. Now a crunch Champions League last-16 tie against Bayern Munich is on the horizon - the first leg in Paris is on Feb 14. "If it is a question of time then it is urgent. We can find a thousand excuses, our players were scattered all over the place for weeks. But the World Cup is finished now," Galtier said after Sunday's game.

PSG's season will ultimately be defined by what happens in Europe, and another exit from the Champions League in the last 16 against Bayern - a year after they went out to Real Madrid at the same stage - could be very costly for Galtier. But a deep run in Europe may make them more likely to drop points in Ligue 1, like in 2021 when they reached the Champions League semifinals and missed out on the domestic title to Lille. That was just the third season since the Qatari takeover of 2011 in which they have not finished as champions. —AFP

Today's matches

SUPERCOPPA ITALIANA

AC Milan v Internazionale Milano 22:00

AD SPORTS 2 HD

AD SPORTS Premium 1

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

Crystal Palace v Manchester United 23:00

beIN Sports HD 1 English

beIN Sports Connect

beIN Sports 1 HD Premium

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Hospitals

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

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144

Change of Name

I, SAIFUDDIN holder of Passport No. Z4825362 do hereby change my name to SAIFUDDIN (as Given name) NASIR (as Surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name SAIFUDDIN NASIR and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. (C#2834)

I, BURHANUDDIN holder of Passport No. Z4827273 do hereby change my name to BURHANUDDIN (as Given name) GOTHA (as Surname) for all purposes. I

will henceforth be known in the name BURHANUDDIN GOTHA and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. (C#2837) - 18-01-2023

I, ALI ASGAR, holder of Passport No. L1458574, do hereby change my name to ALI ASGAR (as Given name) MAIMOON (as Surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name ALI ASGAR MAIMOON and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. (C#2835)

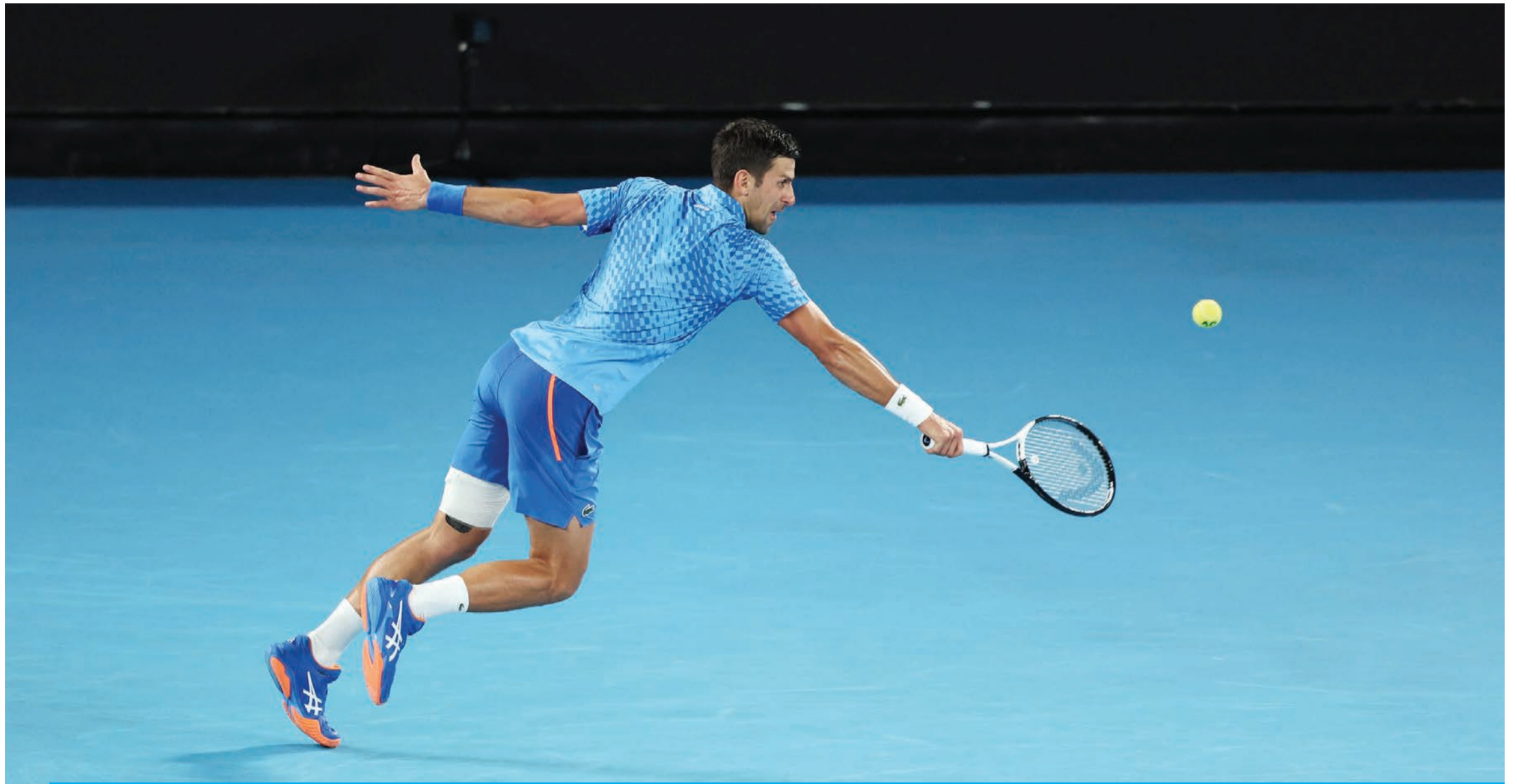
I have changed my name from

Hojafa holding Indian passport no. P6320762 to Huzafa Bohra for all purposes. In future be called and known by new name. Flat No. 105, Ali Apartment, Soniyo Ka Nohra, Boharwadi, Udaipur, Raj. (C#2836) - 17-01-2023

I, SAIFUDDIN (current name in passport) holder of Indian Passport No. Z3810159 having permanent Address NAJAMPURA, SAGWARA, DISTT. DUNGARPUR, RAJASTHAN, INDIA, PINCODE NO. 314025 residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as under: Given name: SAIFUDDIN and Surname: BURAKSHA (C#2833) - 16-01-2023

Djokovic storms into second round

Murray, Jabeur also triumph as weather plays havoc at Australian Open



MELBOURNE: Serbia's Novak Djokovic hits a return against Spain's Roberto Carballes Baena during their men's singles match on day two of the Australian Open on Jan 17, 2023.— AFP

MELBOURNE: Novak Djokovic enjoyed a rousing reception on a winning return to the Australian Open on Tuesday and Andy Murray rolled back the years to stun Matteo Berrettini in a classic. On a day of bans on Russian flags and weather-induced disruption, two of the sport's biggest names belatedly brought the focus back on tennis in Melbourne.

A heavy title favorite, the 35-year-old Djokovic was back after his deportation last year because of his stance on COVID vaccines. If the Serb was worried about how he might be received by the Melbourne Park crowd, he needn't have been - the nine-time Australian Open champion walked out to loud cheers. Against the backdrop of chants of "Nole", Djokovic sent Spain's 75th-ranked Roberto Carballes Baena packing at Rod Laver Arena, 6-3, 6-4, 6-0, to surge into round two.

"Thank you for giving me such a welcoming reception that I could only dream of," said Djokovic, who is chasing a record-equaling 22nd major title. "I feel really happy that I'm back here in Australia and on the court where I

have had the biggest success in my career." Prior to that, the day had belonged to another 35-year-old in Murray - and Melbourne's famously fickle weather.

The Briton saved match point to defeat Italy's 13th seed Berrettini 6-3, 6-3, 4-6, 6-7 (7/9), 7-6 (10/6) in 4hrs 49mins at Rod Laver Arena, where the roof was closed because of the extreme heat. "I will be feeling this this evening and tomorrow," said the former world number one, who plays with a metal hip after career-saving surgery. "But right now unbelievably happy and proud of myself."

Also in the men's draw, Norwegian second seed Casper Ruud battled through to the second round with a 6-3, 7-6 (8/6), 6-7 (5/7), 6-3 defeat of Tomas Machac. The match finished after 1:00 am. "It's been a long day," said Ruud, after kicking off a campaign that could see him become world number one.

Earlier, Russia's fifth seed Andrey Rublev ended the tournament of 2020 finalist Dominic Thiem 6-3, 6-4, 6-2 in 36 degrees Celsius (96.8 Fahrenheit) temperatures. As the mercury rose, the heat forced play to be halted on out-

side courts. The roofs were closed on the three main stadiums: Rod Laver Arena, Margaret Court Arena and John Cain Arena.

Play resumed on the outside courts about three hours later, only to be disrupted again in the evening when a storm hit, dumping torrential rain that eventually saw some matches suspended for the day. Eighth-seeded Taylor Fritz, 12th seed Alexander Zverev and ninth seed Holger Rune all rolled into the next round.

Jabeur labors

The women's draw threw up no real shocks. Tunisia's second seed Ons Jabeur, runner-up at Wimbledon and the US Open last year, was far from her fluent best but eventually defeated Slovenia's Tamara Zidansek. The shaky Jabeur won the first set on a tiebreak, lost the second 6-4, then finally found her rhythm to clinch the decider 6-1. "I just tried to follow what my coach told me to do," she said of her turnaround in the third set. "I wasn't really doing that and he's going to kill me after the match," she joked.

Caroline Garcia and Aryna

Sabalenka - fourth and fifth seeds respectively - had it easier as they swept into the second round. France's Garcia took just 65 minutes to overwhelm Canadian qualifier Katherine Sebov 6-3, 6-0 and cement her status as a contender for the first Grand Slam of the year. Sabalenka beat the Czech Republic's Tereza Martincova 6-1, 6-4. The 26th seed Elise Mertens was another winner. The Belgian outlasted Spain's former Melbourne finalist Garbine Muguruza, who was cramping before losing 3-6, 7-6 (7/3), 6-1.

Russian flag ban

Earlier Tuesday, Tennis Australia banned Russian and Belarusian flags after a complaint from the Ukrainian ambassador to Australia. The red, white and blue stripes of Russia were seen Monday during at least two matches, with Ukrainian fans reportedly calling security and police to the stands. "The ban is effective immediately," said Tennis Australia. Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Russian and Belarusian players have normally competed under a neutral flag as independents, as is the case at the Australian Open. — AFP

What Ronaldo can expect in Saudi Arabia

RIYADH: After lighting up football's biggest stages, Cristiano Ronaldo faces a very different reality in Saudi Arabia with smaller stadiums and less exalted teams - and some very high temperatures. Ronaldo, 37, says he's embracing the "challenge" of the Saudi Pro League, a step into the unknown for a player who is more used to Real Madrid's heaving Santiago Bernabeu stadium or the "Theatre of Dreams", Manchester United's Old Trafford.

The transition has been eased by the combined 400 million euros he'll receive in wages from his new team, Al Nassr, and a separate payment to act as an ambassador for an expected Saudi World Cup bid, according to sources close to the club. But it will be a big adjustment for the five-time Ballon d'Or winner, who will soon be running out at modest venues including the 6,000-seat Al Batin Stadium.

After an exhibition appearance against his great rival Lionel Messi's Paris Saint-Germain in the Saudi capital Riyadh on Thursday, Ronaldo will make his Saudi Pro League debut for

Al Nassr on Sunday. The 16-team league will take Ronaldo from Dammam on the Gulf coast to Jeddah on the Red Sea, as well as desert-bound provincial cities such as Majma'ah and Hofuf, a hub for Saudi Arabia's date industry.

Chartered planes

While Al Hilal and Al Ittihad, the giants of Saudi football, play in 62,000-capacity home grounds, a handful of Pro League teams have small venues for less than 10,000 fans, and some pitches are surrounded by running tracks. "Sometimes the stadiums are not in the best condition," Moqbel Al-Zabni, editor-in-chief of the Al Riyadh newspaper, told AFP, cautioning that empty seats are a common sight. "The attendances that Ronaldo is used to will not exist. We are not used to seeing stadiums full to capacity," he said.

Ronaldo's home ground will be Al Nassr's 25,000-capacity Mrsool Park, which lies on a university campus in Riyadh and was packed for his gala unveiling earlier this month. Chartered planes will ferry the superstar and his team-mates to away games, club sources said, sparing him long coach trips through the desert landscape.

The Pro League season runs from August to May, avoiding the worst of the fierce summer heat when tempera-



RIYADH: Al Nassr's new Portuguese forward Cristiano Ronaldo greets fans during his unveiling at Mrsool Park Stadium in the Saudi capital on Jan 3, 2023.— AFP

tures routinely top 40 degrees Celsius. Even the evenings, when many games are played, can remain above 30C (86 Fahrenheit) in August and September, and from March until the end of the season. "The weather will pose a challenge to Ronaldo... but I think he will adapt and excel," said Saleh Al-Khalif, Al-Riyadiah's deputy editor-in-chief.

'No walk in the park'

Saudi Arabia is a leading force in Asian football with six World Cup

appearances, including a famous victory over Messi's Argentina at the recent edition in Qatar. Al Hilal and Al Ittihad have won six AFC Champions League titles between them. With Ronaldo, Al Nassr will have hopes of qualifying for this year's competition and joining their great rivals as Asian champions. Although the Pro League's standards cannot match the heights of England, Spain and Italy, where Ronaldo has spent his career so far, it is a competitive division.

The Saudi league was launched in 1976 but in the 14 years since the Pro League became the top tier, there have been six different winners. Khalif said the league's "strength and diversity" were comparable to English football, insisting it would be no "walk in the park" for Ronaldo. The Pro League is packed with 128 foreign players from 48 countries, with each team allowed to sign eight.

At Al Nassr, coached by Frenchman Rudi Garcia, Ronaldo's team-mates include Colombia and ex-Arsenal goalkeeper David Ospina and Brazilian midfielder Luis Gustavo, formerly of Bayern Munich. Ronaldo's first task will be to keep Al Nassr on top of the league and secure their first title in four years. But the other teams will be highly motivated to stop him. "Ronaldo is a legend... and all teams will play to beat Ronaldo," said Khalif. — AFP

Concern over lack of air-con in Paris Olympic village

PARIS: The lack of air conditioning in the rooms of the athletes' village for the Paris 2024 Olympics is raising concerns from some federations and athletes, sources told AFP on Tuesday. The Olympic Village, based in Saint-Denis seven kilometers north of central Paris, will accommodate nearly 14,000 athletes and staff members during the Olympics in the French capital in July and August 2024.

The games organizers have promised the global event will be carbon neutral, with the use of materials chosen for their energy performance. After the games, the Olympic village will be converted into housing. On Tuesday Nicolas Ferrand, head of Solideo which has been chosen to construct the Olympic buildings, said there was no problem to address.

"We are building rooms where it will be six degrees cooler than the outside temperature," during the French summer, he assured during a press conference. If the Olympic Games organizing committee later demands air-conditioning, "there will be air-conditioning", he added, while cautioning that the carbon footprint would be affected. "It's a question for society. Do we collectively accept being at six degrees less and having an excellent carbon footprint, or do we say it's not okay, and we're ready to downgrade the carbon footprint," Ferrand said.

The possibility of another scorching summer, with temperatures in excess of 40 degrees Celsius, has been taken into account, the organizers assured last year. But the reassurances have not appeased everyone. "Imagine several days in a row at more than 40 degrees, in rooms at 34 degrees. It's still pretty crazy that these scenarios have not led to any changes," said a high-ranking French sports official.

The Olympic organizers have chosen to make the 2024 event "an ecological project", said another sporting figure. "But in the event of a heat wave, the well-being of the athletes is not taken into account." Some sports federation are already looking for solutions, including finding accommodation elsewhere. "If they continue like this, they will empty the village," he added. Paris-2024 organizers are considering their options, including using floor fans. "It's still a work in progress," they said. —AFP