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Saudi aims to curb oil reliance

UN chief slams fossil fuel companies for 'big lie' on global warming



DAVOS: UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres addresses a session of the World Economic Forum (WEF) on Jan 18, 2023. — AFP

DAVOS, Switzerland: Saudi Arabia is working to reduce its reliance on oil exports, Economy Minister Faisal Al-Ibrahim said Wednesday, as the Middle East powerhouse sent one of the largest delegations to the Davos summit to make its case. Despite its goal of achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2060, the country remains hugely dependent on crude oil exports that have powered its growth for decades, raising doubts about its potential for an economic makeover any time soon.

"We want to lessen our dependence on oil... We want to diversify our economy, it is important, it is essential," Ibrahim told AFP at the World Economic Forum. Riyadh has dispatched eight top-ranking officials to the gathering of business elite as it seeks more foreign investment and partners outside the all-important oil sector. Soaring crude prices following Russia's

invasion of Ukraine allowed the kingdom to post in 2022 its first budget surplus in nine years, giving it the financial firepower for economic development. "It's never too late for sectors that are starting from scratch in Saudi Arabia. Tourism, culture, sports and entertainment - they are going to bring a wealth of diversification," Ibrahim said. "But we also care about other sectors like mining and industry for it to be even more competitive."

Saudi Arabia is hoping to build on momentum from the high-profile visit by Chinese President Xi Jinping to Riyadh last month, where deals worth billions of dollars were signed in areas including energy and infrastructure. "It's not advertising or showcasing, people are very interested in Saudi's growth story," the minister said, noting the kingdom's 8.5 percent expansion in GDP last year even

as much of global economy struggled.

And at Davos on Tuesday, Saudi officials announced a joint initiative with the Davos forum organizers to accelerate high-tech innovation in the country via the virtual reality of the metaverse. "We've opened up much more than before and that lets people see," Ibrahim said. "They see the culture, they see the values, they see the progress and they see that we are tackling a lot of challenges and issues regionally and globally."

Meanwhile, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres skewered oil firms on Wednesday for having "peddled the big lie" about their role in global warming, telling the World Economic Forum that they should be held accountable. Addressing a room full of the world's business and political elite, Guterres drew a

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News in brief

Fitch Ratings

Fitch affirms Kuwait IDR at AA-

KUWAIT: Fitch Ratings affirmed Kuwait's long-term foreign-currency issuer default rating (IDR) at AA- with a stable outlook. According to a Fitch Ratings statement, Kuwait's fiscal and external balance sheets remain among the strongest of Fitch-rated sovereigns, despite severe oil price swings since 2014. — KUNA (See Page 8)

\$2.6m for Ronaldo-Messi ticket

RIYADH: Saudi real estate mogul Mushref Al-Ghamdi won a ticket to see Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi face off in a friendly after bidding 10 million riyals (\$2.6 million) at auction. The match on Thursday in Riyadh is set to pit Messi's Paris Saint-Germain against a select side made up of players from Ronaldo's new club Al Nassr and their Saudi rivals Al Hilal. Bidding started at 1 million Saudi riyals (\$266,000) and the auction closed at 11:30 pm local time on Tuesday. The special ticket comes with perks like photo opportunities with players and access to the locker rooms. — AFP

World's oldest person dies at 118

MARSEILLE: The world's oldest known person, French nun Lucile Randon, has died aged 118, a spokesman told AFP on Tuesday. Randon, known as Sister Andre, was born in southern France on Feb 11, 1904, when World War I was still a decade away. She died in her sleep at her nursing home in Toulon, spokesman David Tavella said. — AFP (See Page 12)



Lucile Randon

Amnesty decree published in official gazette

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The Amiri amnesty decree was published in the official gazette Kuwait Al-Youm on Wednesday, which means it has become effective and the pardoned people can immediately benefit from it. According to the decree, 34 Kuwaiti men and women have been pardoned from jail

terms they had been handed for expressing views deemed offensive against HH the Amir or Arab leaders.

A number of the pardoned people are in Kuwait jails serving years of prison terms, while the rest have been living in voluntary exile in various countries to escape imprisonment. A number of those who were pardoned confirmed on Twitter they had been granted amnesty. Relatives of Sheikh Athbi Al-Fahad Al-Sabah, the former chief of the secret service and a senior member of the ruling family, also confirmed he was among those pardoned. He has been living in exile for several years.

Several MPs and activists praised HH the Amir and welcomed the amnesty decree, which pardoned the second batch of political prisoners.

Ukraine minister among dead in helicopter crash

KYIV: Ukraine's interior minister was among more than a dozen people killed in a helicopter crash Wednesday near a kindergarten outside Kyiv, spurring condolences from allies. Officials initially said that 18 people had died but later revised the toll down to 16, including one of the minister's deputies and three children. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky described the crash of the helicopter, which was en route to the frontline in eastern Ukraine, as a "terrible tragedy".

There was no immediate claim from Kyiv that Russian forces were involved in downing the aircraft and an investigation has been launched into the cause. The helicopter carrying Interior Minister Denys Monastyrsky slammed down next to a kindergarten and a residential building in Brovary, a commuter town for the capital Kyiv that was the scene of fierce fighting with Russian forces last year.

AFP journalists at the crash site saw the charred remains of the aircraft mixed with debris from nearby buildings and a car crushed by the blades of the helicopter. Amateur footage circulating on social media in the immediate aftermath captured cries and a large blaze. "A helicopter of the state emergency service crashed in Brovary."

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KYIV: Firefighters work near the site where a helicopter crashed near a kindergarten in Brovary on Jan 18, 2023. — AFP

Erdogan sets the stage for May 14 polls

ANKARA: President Recep Tayyip Erdogan hinted Wednesday that he would bring the date of Turkey's most consequential election in generations forward to May 14 in a bid to catch his rivals off guard. The announcement sets the stage for a vote that could either extend Erdogan's Islamic style of rule into a third decade or turn the country on a sharply more secular - and potentially predictable - course.

The 68-year-old stamped his mark as both president and prime minister

by rolling back a fiercely secular tradition established by the mostly Muslim nation's founder Mustafa Kemal Ataturk one century ago. He oversaw years of economic booms and busts as well wars and even a failed but bloody coup. Erdogan's supporters revere him for giving a voice to the marginalized and creating a thriving new middle class in the nation of 85 million people. But his opponents highlight an authoritarian streak that emerged in more recent years of his rule.

The country enters the election with much of its media under a government stranglehold and thousands of activists and politicians - many of them Kurds - languishing behind bars. The NATO member's allies meanwhile remain uneasy about Erdogan's

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ANKARA: Turkish President and leader of AKP Recep Tayyip Erdogan attends a group meeting at the Turkish Grand National Assembly on Jan 18, 2023. — AFP



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Local

Kuwait's real estate sector could remain stagnant in 2023: Experts

Investors lose interest amid speculation over land prices, construction costs

KUWAIT: The real estate sector in Kuwait will remain stagnant in 2023 due to lack of interest in private housing, investments, and speculation over land prices, said experts on Wednesday. Speaking to KUNA in various interviews, the experts also pointed out that investors were not interested in purchasing real estate in inner areas due to the lack of affordable lands, construction cost, and other factors.

Former secretary of the real-estate federation Qais Al-Ghanim indicated that there was a slowdown in real-estate activities on a global level due to a number of reasons including the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, the disruption in the supply chains of goods, and high inflation in the western industrial countries. Investors are buying time and very careful in using their liquidity until a clear global picture was presented, he added.

In regards to Kuwait, Al-Ghanim said that the struggle of purchasing and selling amongst clients and property owners would result in the stagnation of real estate in Kuwait. The housing real estate is the most affected due to the lack of purchase ability on parts of clients and investors opting for bank deposits with high interest rates rather than investing in real estate, he continued. On his part, director of Al-Muasher (index) real-estate company Ahmad Al-Nabhan said that stagnation might be expected as far as 2025 due to high land prices and alarming construction cost for houses.

He noted that there were speculation over gov-

ernment procedures to impose fees on those owning more than one piece of real estate and undeveloped lands in addition to lift subsidies on electricity and water for owners of multiple homes.

Al-Nabhan also criticized the current trend in allowing apartments-style housing in private residential areas, saying that it had caused an overload on infrastructure. He stressed that the Municipality had a role in enforcing the rule of law and prevent housing in residential areas from being used for speculation and unlawful investments. Ali Al-Khadhmi, CEO of Amtar real estate, predicted that market value of real-estate housing would drop by 10 to 15 percent this year after deals within the sector fell by 45 percent in 2022. He said that inflation could be countered via increasing interest on bank deposits and loans for housing and commercial usage, indicating that resolving the housing crisis must come through providing more land for development to balance supply and demand.

There is a correlation between the thriving of global and national economies, which would have a positive impact on real estate in general, he affirmed. According to statistics by the real-estate records and documentation department at the Ministry of Justice, 2022 saw 4,470 real-estate deals worth KD 2.7 billion (around \$8.8 billion), a decrease of 14 percent in terms of value and 50 percent in terms of deals from 2021's 8,115 deals worth KD 3.2 billion (around \$10.4 billion). —KUNA



KUWAIT: Kuwait's real estate sector may remain stagnant during 2023, according to markets, experts interviewed by KUNA. — File photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat



KUWAIT: Bhutan King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck receives the Director General of the Direct Investment Promotion Authority, Sheikh Dr Mishal Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Kuwait Airways CEO Maen Razouqi and Greek Ambassador to Kuwait Konstantinos Piperigos.

Kuwait Airways to fly to Athens, Mykonos June 14

KUWAIT: Gearing up for the upcoming summer season, Kuwait Airways announced Tuesday the operation of scheduled commercial flights heading to the Greek cities of Athens and Mykonos starting June 14, 2023. The national carrier's CEO, Maen Razouqi, said that selecting Athens and Mykonos,

cities bustling with attractive touristic sites, came after careful consideration to ensure that such lines complement the Airway's plans of expansion, read a statement.

As for Greek Ambassador to the country, Konstantinos Piperigos, he commented that this is integral to the joint collaboration between the two nations as it greatly contributes to strengthening bilateral ties. Kuwait Airways was established in 1953 initially under the name Kuwait National Airways, as a privately-owned company and operated its first flight in March of 1954. The Kuwaiti Government increased its participation in the airline to 100 percent in early 1960s. —KUNA

18 electricity violations in Farwaniya area

KUWAIT: A judicial team from the Electricity and Water Ministry held a campaign in Farwaniya with the participation of committee members from the Interior Ministry and the Municipality to cut electricity of violating properties inhabited by "bachelors".

Deputy director of the team Ahmad Al-Shammary said: "Similar investigations will continue. We call on real estate owners to evict bachelors to avoid cutting off of electricity and legal procedures."

Shammary also announced a number of upcoming campaigns along with a number of government



bodies in industrial areas. He stressed the importance of real estate owners notifying janitors to avoid committing violations and wasting electricity and water. A total of 18 violations have been recorded in January.

Youth play crucial role in development of Kuwait: ChatGPT

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: As a part of our weekly series exploring articles written by artificial intelligence (AI), Kuwait Times is publishing articles written entirely by the ChatGPT bot and reviewed by a human editor. The chatbot will have a chance to express its opinion and analyze in general some subjects asked by our staff. This week's article is about the future of youth of Kuwait.

According to ChatGPT, "Youth of Kuwait have the potential to play a significant role in the development of the country. They are a large and well-educated population, and they are well-positioned to take advantage of the opportunities that are available in the country.

"One of the main advantages that the youth of Kuwait have is their education. The country has a high literacy rate and a large number of universities which means that the youth are well-educated and have the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in a variety of industries. This can be a significant advantage in a country where the economy is heavily dependent on the oil industry, as the youth can help to diversify the economy by working in other industries.

"The youth of Kuwait are also known for being tech-savvy and innovative, which can be an advantage in a country that is working to improve its infrastructure and develop new industries. They can help to drive the development of new technologies and industries, such as



renewable energy and technology, which will help to create jobs and support the country's economic growth.

"In addition, the youth of Kuwait are also well-connected to the rest of the world, which can be an advantage in a country that is looking to attract foreign investment. They are familiar with international trends and have the cultural understanding to connect with people from other countries, which can be beneficial for businesses looking to expand their operations in Kuwait.

"Finally, the youth of Kuwait are also known for being politically active, which can be a positive force for change in the country. They can help to promote transparency and accountability, and they can also advocate for policies that will benefit the country's youth and future generations.

"In conclusion, the youth of Kuwait have the potential to play a significant role in the development of the country. They are a large and well-educated population, who are innovative, tech-savvy, well-connected and politically active. With the right support and opportunities, the youth can help to drive economic growth and development in the country."

KES sees solution to engineers' allowances issue

KUWAIT: Head of the Kuwait Engineers Society Faisal Al-Atil said the municipality minister will cooperate with Civil Service Commission to pay the allowances of engineers in the Municipality after a suspension of 13 months. "The minister promised to present and approve the allowances of municipal engineers at the meeting of the Civil Service Council, which will be held on Thursday. The allowances that were discussed with the minister for approval and the establishment of a permanent mechanism for their disbursement

include site allowance, judicial control allowance, and hazard, pollution and noise allowances, which are allowances that engineers deserve," Atil said at a press conference.

"I informed the minister that the society had received repeated complaints from municipal engineers and assistant engineers of material and moral damage due to the non-payment of allowances to them on a regular basis without explanation, although these allowances are approved in accordance with the decisions of the Civil Service Commission regarding jobs, allowances and rewards for Kuwaiti engineers," he added.

He hoped the CSC will establish a fixed mechanism for the disbursement of these allowances and the disbursement of site allowances to engineers and occupants of engineering jobs on a regular and uninterrupted basis.



Local

Dr Al-Awadhi stresses role of private sector in developing health projects

Health minister opens 11th Kuwait Health Conference and Exhibition



KUWAIT: Health Minister Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi delivers his speech during the opening of the 11th Kuwait Health Conference and Exhibition, 'Kuwait Medica' on Wednesday. (Right) The minister cuts the ribbon to open conference.



Honoring ceremony during the conference.

KUWAIT: Health Minister Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi stressed the keenness of the ministry on the contribution of the private health sector as a national and strategic partner represented by local and international companies specialized in the implementation of huge health projects in the country. Awadhi indicated in a speech at the opening of the 11th Kuwait Health Conference and Exhibition (Kuwait Medica) that at the forefront of these projects are new hospitals that the ministry is executing in cooperation with concerned state ministries.

He pointed out the health sector in Kuwait is witnessing the implementation of huge projects to develop health services as part of the country's development plan and the New Kuwait 2035 vision. "Kuwait's 2035 vision is an integration between the private and government sectors, which is what the ministry seeks, and the biggest evidence of this integration is the Kuwait Medica conference and exhibition, which we hope will be repeated every year with many international hospitals," Awadhi said.

He revealed the opening of many health facilities and medical departments in many hospitals, including the new Farwaniya Hospital, which is witnessing the inauguration of departments of gynecology, obstetrics, children and preterm infants, and radiology and laboratory departments on Feb 5 which will be for citizens only. "Many medical departments will be moved

successively to complete the opening of Farwaniya Hospital and other hospitals," Awadhi said, expressing hope to complete work at the Kuwait Center for Cancer Control, "through which we aspire to cooperate with international hospitals, especially the French Gustave Rossi Hospital," he added.

Director of Al-Salam International Hospital Dr Ayman Al-Mutawa said: "The conference seeks to enhance the vision of cooperation between the public and private sectors in order to achieve the development plans set by decision makers and to stand on what has been achieved to meet the needs of patients. As private hospitals are a national health security for any country and an alternative that can be used to serve the health system further by re-studying decisions and legislation that facilitate, support and open horizons and specializations from different countries."

Quality Department Director Dr Talal Al-Fedhala said: "An award is given annually to teams that have provided innovative projects in the field of patient safety. This has enhanced the medical service in different fields as it reflects the ministry's keenness to provide a healthy environment for medical care recipients." Public Relations Manager at Dhaman Hospital Meshari Al-Duhaim said: "The expo is one of the most important conferences in the medical sector and hosts elite institutions both on the international and local levels."



KUWAIT: Health Minister Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi presides over a meeting to review the preparations for the opening of the third phase of Farwaniya Hospital.

Farwaniya Hospital's third phase to begin operational from Feb 5

KUWAIT: Health Minister Dr Ahmad Abdulwahab Al-Awadhi has concluded a meeting with technical and administrative departments at the Farwaniya Hospital to review the latest preparations prior to the inauguration of the third phase of the new Farwaniya Hospital for nationals. The new phase will start functioning from February 5.

The meeting witnessed a review of the plan of transferring patients, organizational details and procedures and a discussion of transferring the rest of the departments successively. The meeting also addressed the issue of the workflow situation as well as the challenges that accompanied the previous operational phases and ways to mitigate them in order to provide health services to citizens, according to the best required quality standards.

The operational plan for the third phase includes inauguration of work in the department of obstetrics and gynecology as well as related departments including the departments of pharmacy, radiology, laboratory, sterilization, intensive care and anesthesia.

Greek minister lauds rich cultural ties with Kuwait

KUWAIT: The Greek Embassy in Kuwait inaugurated the "Alexander the Great" exhibition under the title "Building Bridges of Communication between East and West," in the presence of Minister of Commerce and Industry, Mazen Al-Nahedh and Greek Economic and Development Minister Adonis Georgiadis. The event also witnessed the participation of a large number of ambassadors, citizens and several art-lovers.

"Alexander the Great is one of the most important figures in history. He was able to change the world and create a new world and we feel his influence even today. We always look back to the past to gain from it for the future. I am sure many people will still remember this event as one of the most significant events that has transformed the relationship between Kuwait and Greece," Georgiadis said.

Greek Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Costas Fragkogiannis said: "The phrase 'Bridges of Communication between East and West' sums up it all. Kuwait is a wonderful partner not only because it is a bridge between East and West, but it is also a dear friend," he said.

"Failaka Island is the largest witness to the historical relations that brought the two countries together and their continuous friendship. The exhibition of Alexander the Great resonated well in various parts of the world," he said stressing that bilateral relations between Kuwait and Greece will continue to grow and develop in various fields, he stated.

Greek Ambassador to Kuwait Konstantinos Piperigios said, "The aim of this exhibition is to acquaint Kuwaitis with the spirit of Alexander the Great, who and his companions established



The exhibition titled 'Alexander the Great: Building Bridges of Communication between East and West' at the Greek Embassy in Kuwait. —KUNA photos



a naval base on Failaka Island, which is considered the beginning of Kuwait's history and the first form of cultural exchange between the two countries."

"The Greek antiquities that were discovered on Failaka Island decorate the National Museum in Kuwait and the excavations and research work are ongoing which give us hope to find new antiquities," he said, adding that Failaka was the beginning of the expansion of Hellenistic civilization and values throughout the Gulf and beyond.



Konstantinos Piperigios



Exhibits on display at 'Alexander the Great' exhibition under the title 'Building Bridges of Communication between East and West.'

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News in brief

Customs razes 'sorcery objects'

KUWAIT: A committee from the search and investigation administration at the Kuwait Customs with the support officials from the interior ministry has confiscated and destroyed 84 items including 90 objects used allegedly for sorcery. Customs director Sulaiman Al-Fahad thanked the committee for their efforts, particularly in recent times when an increased use of witchcraft tools had come to the notice of the Customs. A committee to combat sorcery in the country was established in 2017 following requests from search and investigations department at the Customs.

Alcohol distillery raided in Fahaheel

KUWAIT: Ahmadi police raided an alcohol distillery in Fahaheel and arrested an Asian. The security forces found 20 barrels of alcoholic substances and the confiscated items have been sent to the concerned departments for further legal procedures.

Kuwait oil price edges up

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti oil price rose by 79 cents to \$84.72 in Tuesday's trading sessions, compared to \$83.93 pb Monday, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said Wednesday. Brent crude oil futures increased by 2.53 percent to \$86.06 pb and West Texas Intermediate climbed by 2.45 percent to \$80.86 pb. —KUNA

US dollar stabilizes, euro down

KUWAIT: The US dollar stabilized on Wednesday at KD 0.305, while the euro went down to reach KD 0.329, compared to Thursday's rates. The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) said in its daily bulletin that the British sterling pound went up by 0.76 percent to reach KD 0.375, as well as the Swiss franc by 0.35 to KD 0.330, while the Japanese yen stood unchanged at KD 0.002. The CBK publishes daily average exchange rates that do not necessarily reflect actual prices of the currencies' trade for the day. —KUNA

Photo of the day



KUWAIT: Clouds hover over skyscrapers in Kuwait City even as continuous rain that wrought havoc in Kuwait for two days came to an end on Tuesday. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Kuwait panel underlines need of counterterrorism strategies

Workshop highlights social media role in promoting tolerance



KUWAIT: Kuwait panel underlines need of counterterrorism strategies. —KUNA photos



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KUWAIT: A panel discussion involving Kuwaiti and European experts called for more meticulous planning as part of efforts to clamp down on terrorism, which includes eliminating any resources that help feed the scourge. Extremist and "terrorist" groups often have a wide array of tools at their disposal, said Dr. Abdullah Al-Shareeka, head of an information ministry-assembled team aiming to fight extremist ideologies, emphasizing that perpetrators of "terrorist" acts have no links to the Islamic faith.

It is incumbent upon media outlets and news sources to report with more "accuracy and transparency" when dealing with stories on terrorism, according to Prevention of Violent Extremism and Strategic Communications expert Giulia Giacomelli, of Belgium. The panel delves into the "root causes" of extremism and radicalization, said Kuwaiti antiterrorism team member Sheikh Sara Al-Sabah, pointing out that a multitude of Kuwaiti state bodies are participating in, which falls under a broader EU-Gulf Arab cooperation framework.

Meanwhile, Kuwaiti and European experts emphasized Wednesday the need to fully grasp social media platforms to help create a tolerant society away from extremist thought and terrorist acts. The specialists were participating in a three-day workshop organized by Kuwaiti Information Ministry and sponsored by Minister of Information and Culture, and State Minister for Youth Affairs

Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, to promote preventative intervention and protect states and individual alike from online terrorism. Cyber terrorism, commented the head of cybersecurity committee within electronic media union, Mohammad Al-Rashedi, has become more lethal than ever, especially considering that a cyberwar is less costly but could topple an entire country's electronic system.

Al-Rashedi underlined the need for a specialized authority to counter cyber terrorism, raise awareness, and block attacks. European Union Prevention of Violent Extremism and Strategic Communications expert Giulia Giacomelli stated that the EU began in 2015 implementing laws and stipulations to curb spread of such violence via overseeing criminal content, and removing terrorist propaganda and hate speeches online.

In 2012, people were recruited online to perform terrorist acts as some accounts post misleading elusive messages that are hard to decipher, which pushed for an agreement with social media platforms to restrict such extremist violent acts, Giacomelli explained.

The state of Kuwait is cracking down on all forms of terrorism, affirmed head of anti-money laundering and combating terrorist financing center, Saud Al-Mhesh adding that it is willing to extend a helping hand to any country to stand in the face of violent groups. —KUNA

Outgoing UN official commends Kuwait's regional, global roles

KUWAIT: The State of Kuwait always played an integral role regionally and globally, propelling its status to an important country with strong international presence, said a UN official on Wednesday. In an exclusive KUNA interview, the outgoing United Nations Resident Coordinator and Designated Official, Tarek Al-Sheikh praised Kuwait's efforts and investments in its diplomats who excelled during participations worldwide.

As the world changes, Kuwait must continue to invest in the future based on cooperation and relation building amongst, indicated the official, adding that investing and supporting leadership in various sectors would earn Kuwait a stronger spot international affairs.

Since starting his mission in 2018, Al-Sheikh witnessed a strong welcome and support from the Kuwaiti Foreign Ministry. He noted that in the first month of assuming his post, he met with the later Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. Al-Sheikh also indicated that he worked with the United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres in preparation for

the successful Kuwait-hosted conference to rebuild Iraq, held in February 2018. Al-Sheikh thanked all Kuwaiti state entities for their support and assistance during his mission, commending Kuwait for its efforts in promoting human rights and boosting notions of transparency and accountability.

For instance, the UN official noted that the UN had signed with Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) an agreement to realize the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030, which came in line with Kuwait's own 2035 Development vision. He lauded Kuwait's efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic, saying that the country did not only deal with its national emergency at that time, it helped others to handle the situation.

Kuwait was one of the only countries, which offered COVID-19 vaccines to citizens and residents alike, he said. On another subject, Al-Sheikh affirmed that he was looking forward to have more Kuwaitis employed in international organizations. —KUNA



Tarek Al-Sheikh



70 killed by Afghanistan cold snap

French-German ties under strain as they mark 60-year friendship

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LIMA: People clash with the police while protesting against the government of Peruvian President Dina Boluarte in Lima. Peruvian President Dina Boluarte asked this Tuesday to the hundreds of protesters from various regions of the country who are heading to Lima to protest against their government to do so in "peace and calm." — AFP

Peru's president urges peace, calm

Thousands of protesters descending on Lima this week

LIMA: With Peru's capital bracing for two days of anti-government protests starting Wednesday, President Dina Boluarte called on the demonstrators flooding into Lima to gather "peacefully and calmly" — even as they demand her resignation.

The South American country has been rocked by over five weeks of deadly protests since the ouster and arrest of her predecessor Pedro Castillo in early December.

Thousands of protesters from rural areas are descending on Lima this week to keep up pressure against the government, often defying a state of emergency declared to try to maintain order. With tensions mounting, many poor and Indigenous demonstrators were already making their presence felt Tuesday in the capital, where police used smoke canisters against marchers who gathered ahead of the larger mobilizations.

"We know they want to take Lima, given everything that is coming out on social media, on the 18th and 19th (Wednesday and Thursday)," Boluarte said in a speech at Peru's Constitutional Court.

"I call on them to take Lima, yes, but peacefully and calmly. I am waiting for them in the seat of government to discuss their social agendas."

Convoys of demonstrators were still on their way. Hundreds of members of the Indigenous Aymara community boarded buses Tuesday from Ilave city in the Puno region, on the border with Bolivia. "I am excited to travel to Lima because the fight continues, all the Aymara blood brothers are traveling to the fight," Julio Cesar Ramos told AFP before boarding one of the buses.

"It hurts me to see my country like this, that is why Aymara and Quechua brothers, we are united as one," said Roger Mamani, 28. At least 42 people have died in clashes between protesters and security forces, largely in the country's south and east, according to Peru's human rights ombudsman.

Various groups are demanding Boluarte's resignation, the dissolution of parliament and immediate elections. But the president warned that "the rule of law cannot be hostage to the whims" of a single group of people.

Rival marches

Demonstrators from all over Peru have arranged to meet in the capital to protest together, but despite various announcements, it is still difficult to determine how many people will arrive in Lima. By Tuesday afternoon, dozens of people were already marching through Lima's streets to Plaza San Martin, the historic epicenter of demonstrations.

"All of us who have come from the city of Cusco are joining the national strike. Dina Boluarte should leave because she does not represent the coast, the mountains, or the jungle," said teacher Edith Calixto, 45 from the Andes. Residents of the northern city of Cajamarca carried signs that read "National Insurgency." Some held "rondero" whips of the type used by local patrols in rural areas.

"Dina, please, resign so that this town calms down because the town is not going to give up," Antonia Riveros, a 55-year-old native of Huancavelica, said. Meanwhile a "march for peace" was also underway in Lima, with dozens of members from community groups and political parties

wearing white T-shirts in rejection of the protests against Boluarte.

"We do not want violence in our country. I know that now there is a group that disagrees with the current government, but nevertheless it is not the way to carry out protest," 56-year-old merchant Cesar Noa told AFP.

Roadblocks

Protesters have maintained almost 100 road blocks in several parts of Peru. Security forces cleared one road block on the Panamericana Norte highway early Tuesday morning. Boluarte said others would be dismantled soon.

President Castillo was removed from office and arrested on December 7, after attempting to dissolve the country's legislature and rule by decree, amid multiple corruption investigations. Boluarte, who was Castillo's vice president, succeeded him. But despite Boluarte belonging to the same left-wing party, Castillo supporters have rejected her, even accusing her of being a "traitor." — AFP

Philippine Nobel laureate acquitted of tax evasion

MANILA: Philippine Nobel Prize winner Maria Ressa was on Wednesday acquitted of tax evasion, among a slew of charges she has long maintained are politically motivated, calling the verdict a victory for "truth". Ressa, who shared the Nobel Peace Prize with Russian journalist Dmitry Muratov in 2021, still faces three other cases, including a cyber libel conviction now under appeal that could mean nearly seven years in prison.

"Today, facts win. Truth wins," a teary-eyed and defiant Ressa told reporters outside the Manila courtroom after the ruling on four government charges that she and her online media company Rappler had dodged taxes in a 2015 bond sale to foreign investors. It was her first court acquittal since former president Rodrigo Duterte's government began filing charges against her. Ressa had earlier termed the cases "politically motivated" and "a brazen abuse of power".

The tax court said prosecutors failed to prove "beyond reasonable doubt" that Ressa and Rappler had evaded income taxes. In a separate interview with AFP following her acquittal, Ressa said the verdict was a "victory for journalists" in the Philippines and around the world.

"If you stand up to power, yes you get beaten up (for) four years and two months. But right will win," Ressa said. "I think this is hope for anyone who has been unjustly accused." The 59-year-old has been battling a series of cases that media advocates say were filed due to her vocal criticism of Duterte and his drug war, which claimed thousands of lives.

Ressa and Muratov were awarded the Nobel for their efforts to "safeguard freedom of expression". In a statement, Rappler said: "An adverse decision would have had far-reaching repercussions on both the press and the capital markets... With you we will continue to #HoldTheLine" — a slogan used to symbolize their fight for press freedom.

Despite the ruling, Ressa still faces the threat of prison from the cyber libel case, while the future of Rappler, which she founded in 2012, remains uncertain. Ressa told AFP she was more hopeful about the prospects in the remaining cases, although she had left her fate up to the courts. "What we do know is that the world is watching and that we have a gov-



QUEZON CITY: Nobel Laureate Maria Ressa gestures after she was acquitted of the tax evasion cases against her at the Court of Tax Appeals in Quezon City, Metro Manila. — AFP

Indian heiress enters monkhood, loses fortune

AHMEDABAD: An eight-year-old girl in India who stood to inherit a multi-million-dollar diamond fortune has instead been inducted as a nun to a strict religious order after renouncing worldly pleasures. Devanshi Sanghvi was, until this week, an heiress to the Sanghvi and Sons jewellery business in the western city of Surat, known locally as "Diamond City" for its prominence in the global gem trade.

Her family are also members of the Jain faith, a small but ancient Indian religion that preaches non-violence, strict vegetarianism and love for all creatures great and small. This week, she was feted in a four-day ceremony to herald her new vocation, which at one point saw her ride in a carriage pulled by an elephant, according to pictures shared on local media.

On Wednesday, she arrived at a temple to trade her elaborate garments for a simple white cotton outfit, after having all her hair removed. Sanghvi was known among members of Surat's Jain community for her piousness even as a young child, according to a witness to Wednesday's ceremony, who spoke to AFP on condition of anonymity. "Devanshi has never watched television, movies or gone to malls and restaurants," they said, adding that the girl had been a regular presence at temple ceremonies. The child is one of the youngest people to have taken the "diksha" ceremony to abandon their material possessions and enter the Jain monkhood.

Sanghvi's parents said she had been eager to become a nun, according to local media. Jain families are sometimes said to encourage their children to enter the monkhood to enhance their relatives' social standing. Her family's business, founded in 1981, has a net worth of five billion rupees (\$61 million) according to ICRA, an Indian credit rating agency.

Jainism has more than four million followers in India, many-such as Sanghvi's family — from affluent trading communities. Followers adhere to a strict vegetarian diet and some monks and nuns cover their mouths with fabric to prevent them from accidentally swallowing insects. The religion has come under criticism for some of its ritual practices, particularly for a tradition of extreme fasts to the death. — AFP

US cop convicted of murdering George Floyd appeals case

WASHINGTON: Former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin will seek to have his conviction and sentence for the 2020 murder of George Floyd thrown out Wednesday on the grounds that his high-profile trial was tainted by adverse publicity.

Chauvin's video-recorded killing of Floyd by pressing his knee to the detained African-American man's neck sparked nationwide demonstrations and riots over police mistreatment of Blacks. Chauvin, who is white, was convicted in a Minnesota state trial for murder, and sentenced in June last year to 22 and one-half years in prison.

That is the case he is appealing. He separately pleaded guilty to federal charges of civil rights violations and in July 2022 received 20 years in prison — a sentence that won't be affected by the appeal of the murder charge.

The Minnesota Court of Appeals will hear opening arguments Wednesday in Chauvin's appeal of the murder conviction. Chauvin and three other officers with him were arrested after a bystander recorded him holding Floyd to the ground and pressing his knee to his neck after detaining the



NEW YORK: File photo shows people gathering at the unveiling of artist Kenny Altidor's memorial portrait of George Floyd - who died 25 May in Minneapolis with police officer Derek Chauvin kneeling on his neck for nearly nine minutes. — AFP

46-year-old man for allegedly using a counterfeit banknote to buy cigarettes. After some nine minutes Floyd lost consciousness and was later pronounced dead. The recording of the incident sparked outrage and national protests under the banner "Black Lives Matter." — AFP

International

French-German ties under strain as they mark 60-year friendship

Majority in both countries believe French-German collaboration is vital for European Union

PARIS: Russia's invasion of Ukraine and a changing world order are straining ties between France and Germany as they prepare to celebrate 60 years since a post-World War II treaty sealed their reconciliation. Chancellor Olaf Scholz is expected in Paris on January 22 to meet President Emmanuel Macron before the pair lead a joint cabinet meeting to mark the Elysee Treaty signed on January 22, 1963.

But the two leaders' relationship is seen as cordial at best. "Scholz isn't very European at all, he's much more 'Germany first'," a senior member of Macron's Renaissance party, who asked not to be named, told reporters this week. In Paris there's an impression of German "disinterest in the French-German relationship", said Jacob Ross, a researcher at the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP) in Berlin.

The frictions are even being felt by the public, with 36 percent of French respondents and 39 percent of Germans telling pollster Ipsos this week that relations were suffering. But the legacy of the 1963 treaty-signed in Paris by post-World War II leaders Konrad Adenauer and Charles de Gaulle-remains strong on everything from military cooperation to youth exchanges.

'Difficult'

And a vast majority in both countries believe French-German collaboration is vital for the European Union. Macron's first term from 2017 was marked by a charm offensive, as the centrist leader

tried to restore French economic credibility with Berlin and Brussels through sometimes painful and unpopular reforms. Eventually his warm ties with Scholz's predecessor Angela Merkel helped secure the unprecedented European response to the coronavirus crisis.

A more confident Macron has also been cultivating other European partners, signing bilateral treaties with Italy and Greece in 2021 and another this week with Spain. "If it's difficult with Germany right now, and not moving forward as he might hope, then he'll try to find alternative partners," Ross said.

Ukraine invasion

Differences between France and Germany have bubbled to the surface since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February last year. Both were initially reluctant to alienate Russia, Germany's top supplier of natural gas which France had seen as a key global power player.

But as the war's toll mounted, France sent powerful mobile artillery to Ukraine ahead of the Germans last April and this month announced supplies of light tanks before Washington and Berlin decided to send infantry fighting vehicles.

The head of Scholz's Social Democratic Party (SPD) Lars Klingbeil complained to the Die Zeit newspaper last week that the signal "would certainly have been even stronger if all three countries announced their decision at the same time."

Like Britain and Poland, France is

pushing Berlin to deliver modern Leopard 2 battle tanks to Kyiv, or at least to allow re-export of the German model widely sold abroad. Many observers expected German-French plans to cooperate on next-generation tanks and fighter jets to gain urgency after the war prompted Scholz to declare a "new era" in defence policy.

But "even under the pressure of the events in Ukraine, apparently there isn't much movement" with contracts for the next stage of tank development still unsigned, researcher Ross said. France has also been cut out of a German-led European missile defence programme dubbed Sky Shield, expected to use German- and US-made equipment rather than Italian or French alternatives.

In part, the gulf has arisen out of the two nations' different strategic outlooks. With its independent nuclear deterrent and seat on the UN Security Council, parts of the French elite still think of the country as "a major power, maybe a medium-sized one, but still on a level with the other members" at the top table, Ross said. Germany, by contrast, has largely been happy to leave geopolitics to others under the protection of the United States, which still has nuclear weapons and almost 40,000 soldiers stationed on German soil.

Relationship 'less real'

For Berlin, "things have got very complicated because Germany's economic and political model is being put to the



PARIS: File photo shows France's President Emmanuel Macron (R) and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz wave upon Scholz' arrival for a lunch at the presidential Elysee Palace in Paris, January 22, 2023 marks the 60th anniversary of the landmark treaty signed January 22, 1963 by then French president Charles de Gaulle and West German chancellor Konrad Adenauer. —AFP

test," said Maurice Gourdault-Montagne, a former French ambassador to Berlin. In particular, any move by China to ape Russia's grab for Ukraine in Taiwan would blast Germany's second vital great-power trading relationship, with some in Berlin now pushing to diversify the country's foreign markets.

"We have to become aware that... the time may come when China oversteps its

bounds," SPD leader Klingbeil told Die Zeit. Closer to home, Germany's European partners are trying to show Berlin that it can't throw its economic weight around willy-nilly. Last year, France and other neighbours kicked up a fuss fearing Germany's 200-billion-euro (\$216-billion) bid to subsidise energy costs for its consumers would crowd them out of the market. — AFP

French-Irish citizen held in Iran in 'critical' health

PARIS: A French-Irish citizen held in Iran since October 2022, who relatives say is on hunger strike, is in a critical state of health, a French diplomatic source said on Wednesday. Bernard Phelan, a Paris-based travel consultant and one of seven French nationals held by Iran, was arrested in October while travelling and is being held in Mashhad in northeastern Iran.

The 64-year-old's family has said he started a dry hunger strike on Monday, refusing water, in addition to the food hunger strike he had been on since the start of the year. "He is showing serious signs of physical and psychological exhaustion," said the French diplomatic source, adding he was in a "critical state".

The Iranian authorities have so far refused to release Phelan on medical grounds despite repeated requests from the French and Irish authorities, the source said. His sister Caroline Masse-Phelan told AFP on Wednesday that her brother was an innocent man detained for reasons "beyond our comprehension".

She said his health condition meant he had



An undated photograph made available by the family of Bernard Phelan on January 18, 2023, shows French-Irish citizen Bernard Phelan in an undisclosed location. — AFP

to be released urgently. "It's a question of days," she said. "He's an innocent man caught in the middle of I don't know what. He loves Iran, he is 64, sick, and wants to go home." "I think he is part of a group of Europeans imprisoned for political reasons... of which I know nothing," she added. "We have nothing to do with this story." Phelan is one of two dozen foreigners who are currently held in Iran, according to activists, who describe the detainees as "hostages" seized to extract concessions from

the West. Phelan was travelling through Mashhad during the ongoing protests against Iran's clerical regime when he was arrested. He is being held in Vakilabad prison in Mashhad. Fellow French national Benjamin Briere, who was sentenced last year to eight years in prison on spying charges, is being held in the same prison. "Bernard Phelan is in contact twice a day with the crisis unit of the French foreign ministry, which passes on the messages from his family," the source said. — AFP

Former Iranian president's son freed after 7 yrs

TEHRAN: A son of former Iranian president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani has been freed after serving more than seven years of a 10-year jail sentence for fraud, Iranian media reported Wednesday. Mehdi Hashemi, 53, left Tehran's Evin prison late Tuesday, his lawyer Vahid Abolmaali said, quoted by the ISNA news agency. State prosecutors said his release was "conditional", ISNA reported.

Hashemi was convicted of fraud, embezzlement and undermining national security in August 2015, charges he had previously denounced as "politically motivated". He had served as a senior official in Iran's oil sector in the mid-2000s, a period when Norway's Statoil and French energy company Total were suspected of paying bribes to obtain access to the Islamic republic's hydrocarbon reserves.

In 2018, a Paris criminal court found Total guilty of "corruption of a foreign public agent" for payments made to Hashemi for help in securing rights to the huge South Pars offshore gas field which Iran shares with Qatar in the Gulf.

In 2009, Hashemi aroused the anger of conservatives by forming a "vote protection committee" for that year's presidential election. He actively supported reformist candidate Mir Hossein Mousavi, whose allegations of large-scale fraud in favour of populist incumbent Mahmoud Ahmadinejad prompted mass protests.

Mehdi's father, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, served as president from 1989 to 1997 and was regarded as a moderate who supported improving ties with the West. Earlier this month, Rafsanjani's daughter Faezeh Hashemi was sentenced to five years in prison for "collusion against the security of the country".

She was arrested in September and convicted of inciting Tehran residents to join protests over the death in custody of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old Iranian Kurd, who had been arrested for allegedly violating Iran's strict dress code for women. — AFP

Saudi aims to curb oil...

Continued from Page 1

parallel between the actions of oil companies and those of tobacco companies that have been hit by huge lawsuits over the adverse effects of cigarettes.

"We learned last week that certain fossil fuel producers were fully aware in the 1970s that their core product was baking our planet," Guterres said. He was referring to a study published in the journal Science that said ExxonMobil had dismissed the findings of its own scientists on the role of fossil fuels in climate change. "Just like the tobacco industry, they rode roughshod over their own science," Guterres said, referring to lawsuits that determined cigarette companies had hidden the dangers of their products.

"Some in Big Oil peddled the big lie. And like the tobacco industry, those responsible must be held to account," he said. In 1998, US states won a landmark settlement against tobacco companies worth \$246 billion aimed at recovering the costs of treating smokers from the harmful effects of cigarettes. The study on ExxonMobil found that the firm's scientists had modelled and predicted global warming "with shocking accuracy", only for the company "to spend the next couple of decades denying that very climate science".

ExxonMobil is the target of a number of lawsuits in the United States.

Asked about the Science report, an ExxonMobil spokesman said last week that the issue had come up several times in recent years and in each case the company's answer was that "those who talk about how 'Exxon Knew' are wrong in their conclusions". In his speech, Guterres urged the world to "end the addiction to fossil fuels" as he warned that the aspirational goal of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius from pre-industrial levels was "going up in smoke".

"Fossil fuel producers and their enablers are still racing to expand production, knowing full well that this business model is inconsistent with human survival," he said. "This insanity belongs in science-fiction, yet we know the ecosystem meltdown is cold, hard scientific fact," Guterres added.

Guterres also called on business leaders in the room to provide by the end of the year "credible and transparent" plans on how to achieve net-zero emissions. UN experts published recommendations at the UN climate summit in Egypt in November, saying firms could not claim to be net-zero if they invested in new fossil fuels, caused deforestation or offset emissions with carbon credits instead of reducing them.

"Here at Davos, I call on all corporate leaders to act based on these guidelines," Guterres said. He also noted that the benchmarks and criteria in corporate pledges are "often dubious or murky", which can "mislead consumers, investors and regulators with false narratives". — AFP

time to both campaign and prepare.

He delivered a campaign-style speech to his ruling party Wednesday, recalling the day Turkey held its first free election in 1950. That May 14 vote was won by Adnan Menderes - a prime minister who was toppled by a military junta in 1960 and executed a year later. Erdogan was himself deposed and briefly jailed when he was mayor of Istanbul in the 1990s and often compares himself to Menderes.

"The late Menderes said on May 14, 1950, 'enough, the people will have their say', and emerged victorious at the ballot box," Erdogan said in televised remarks. "Our people will give their answer to the (opposition) on the same day 73 years later." The election date only becomes official once it is published in the government gazette - something that might not happen for a few more months.

Erdogan enters the campaign with his approval

Ukraine minister among dead in...

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As a result of the crash, the leadership of the interior ministry died," the head of Ukraine's police service, Igor Klymenko, said in a statement.

He said that both Monastyrsky and his first deputy, Yevgeniy Yenin, were killed. According to the latest death toll cited by presidential advisor Kyrylo Tymoshenko, 16 people died. Thirty people including 12 children were hospitalized, he added. Klymenko from Ukraine's police service said that nine of those killed were on board the helicopter when it crashed. The presidency said that the aircraft was en route to the frontline in eastern Ukraine.

Zelensky said he had instructed law enforcement bodies to launch an investigation into the circumstances of the crash and that emergency services were doing all they could on the scene. "Today, a terrible tragedy occurred in Brovary, Kyiv region," Zelensky said on social media. "The pain is unspeakable." Monastyrsky, 42, a trained lawyer, had served as Ukraine's interior minister from July 2021. He was a key member of Zelensky's party and was married with two children.

ratings bruised by an economic crisis that saw inflation touch 85 percent late last year. But the fractured opposition also stands in disarray. Their best hope at one stage appeared to be Istanbul's popular mayor Ekrem Imamoglu. The telegenic 52-year-old beat Erdogan's ally in landmark 2019 polls in which the opposition also swept to power in the capital Ankara and Turkey's third-largest city Izmir.

But a criminal court last month banned Imamoglu from politics for calling officials who annulled his initial 2019 victory "idiots". Imamoglu has appealed and can still technically run for president. But he would have to step down from office if he won and his conviction for slander was eventually upheld. The risks around Imamoglu have turned the main opposition CHP party's leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu into the most likely candidate to stand against Erdogan. But the 74-year-old former civil servant's failure to light

Prime Minister Denys Shmygal said the deaths of Monastyrsky and two other senior officials were "a great loss for the government team and the entire state". EU chief Charles Michel expressed dismay and offered condolences. "We join Ukraine in grief following the tragic helicopter accident," the president of the European Council said, in a message posted to social media. "Minister Denys Monastyrsky was a great friend of the EU."

There was no immediate comment on what may have caused the crash. Aviation accidents are fairly common in Ukraine, where the use of ageing and sometimes Soviet-era infrastructure is still common. In one of the deadliest recent incidents, 26 people, most of them air cadets, were killed when their Antonov-26 plane crashed near the eastern Ukrainian city of Kharkiv in Sept 2020.

The town of Brovary is located some 20 km northeast of Kyiv and was among urban hubs around the capital that Russian troops had tried to capture after invading Ukraine last year. Regions around the capital are no longer the scene of fierce fighting after Russian forces were pushed back, but a series of Russian missile strikes have disrupted power supplies across the country, including in the Kyiv region. The crash came on the heels of a tragedy that saw 45 people including six children die when a Russian missile struck a residential building in the eastern city of Dnipro at the weekend. — AFP

Erdogan sets the stage for...

Continued from Page 1

mercurial foreign policies - most recently exemplified by his refusal to accept Sweden and Finland's bids to join the Western defence bloc.

Many analysts think the election is too close to call. His secular opposition enters the campaign arguing about the makeup of their possible government and divided over which candidate to field against Erdogan. Turkey's next general election is officially due to be held on June 18. But Erdogan has a history of calling votes early to give his rivals less

up opinion polls has caused divisions within the six opposition parties now allied against Erdogan.

The six intend to hold their next discussions about a presidential candidate on Jan 26. CHP's deputy parliamentary group chairman Engin Ozkoc pointed out that Erdogan had repeatedly ruled out the possibility of holding elections before June. "Once again, you couldn't keep your word," Ozkoc fumed. The polls will also challenge Erdogan's control of parliament.

His ruling party is currently in an alliance with a far-right group whose support has dwindled in the past few years. "Polls show the opposition in the lead but momentum seems to be back with Erdogan," emerging market economist Timothy Ash wrote in a note to clients. "I think the election really is too close to call, but I would never write Erdogan off in any election." — AFP

International

Seoul spy agency raids labour group over suspected North Korean ties

Investigators believe four KCTU officials met with N Korean agents in Cambodia

SEOUL: South Korea's spy agency on Wednesday raided the country's main labour union group, saying it was part of a years-long investigation into whether some members had illegal links to North Korea. Seoul remains officially at war with its nuclear-armed neighbour, and under its controversial National Security Act, even possession of publications or other materials produced in the North can be a criminal offence.

Spying or secretly working for the North Korean regime is punishable by up to life imprisonment, according to the law. Officials from the National Intelligence Service and the police raided the office of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) in central Seoul, saying some of its members were suspected of having "ties with North Korea", the spy agency said.

"We and the national police agency have been carrying out our own investigation into the suspects' alleged ties with North Korea for several years," an official from the spy agency told AFP. "Based on the evidence obtained in the process, we judged that a compulsory investigation was necessary, and we went ahead with the raid after the court issued a search and seizure warrant," he added.

Investigators believe four KCTU officials met with North Korean agents from Pyongyang in Cambodia and Vietnam, in 2017 and 2019, respectively, Seoul's Yonhap News Agency reported. The KCTU termed the raid "barbaric", accusing Seoul's conservative administration of "conniving" to target the labour organisation.

As one of the country's largest umbrella union groups, the KCTU was linked to recent strike action by some truck drivers, whose union falls under the KCTU. President Yoon Suk-yeol last month ordered



SEOUL: Labour group members hold placards reading "We condemn the Yoon Suk-yeol government" in front of the headquarters of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) in Seoul on January 18, 2023, as South Korea's spy agency and police raid the country's main labour union group over alleged pro-Pyongyang activities. — AFP

striking drivers in the cement, fuel and steel sectors back to work, threatening jail time or fines, prompting them to end the weeks-long action.

The National Security Act, which dates back to 1948, blocks ordinary citizens from accessing most North Korean-produced content, including its official Rodong Simun newspaper. It has been widely criticised, including by the United Nations, which says it is a "seriously problematic" challenge to freedom of expression in the South.

Thousands of people—including labour activists—were imprisoned under the law by the military governments that ruled the South for decades, often accused of engaging in pro-Pyongyang activities or spying for the North.

But the law remains on the books, and just last year two South Koreans, including a serving army captain, were arrested on charges of stealing military secrets for a suspected North Korean agent who allegedly paid them in cryptocurrency. — AFP

"We expect the cold wave to continue for another week or more," said Muradi. The ministry of disaster management said 70 people and 70,000 cattle—a vital commodity in poorer sectors of Afghan society—died over the past eight days.

Several central and northern provinces saw roads blocked by heavy snowfall, according to images posted on social media. This is the second winter since US-led forces withdrew and the Taliban swept into Kabul to replace the Washington-backed regime.

Since then, aid has dramatically declined and key national assets have been frozen by the US, leading to one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world. More than half of the country's 38 million people are facing hunger this winter, and nearly four million children are suffering from malnutrition, according to aid agencies.

Last month, many NGOs still working in Afghanistan suspended their operations in protest over a Taliban government order banning women from working with humanitarian groups, except in the health sector. — AFP

70 killed by Afghanistan cold snap

KABUL: At least 70 people have died in a wave of freezing temperatures sweeping Afghanistan, officials said Wednesday, as extreme weather compounds a humanitarian crisis in the poverty-stricken nation. Since January 10, the mercury has plunged in Kabul and several other provinces, with the central region of Ghor recording the lowest reading of -33C (-27F) over the weekend. "This winter is by far the coldest in recent years," Mohammad Nasim Muradi, the head of Afghanistan's meteorology office, told AFP. In the countryside, homeless families were seen warding off the cold by huddling around campfires, whilst in the snowy capital domestic coal heaters were fired up by the more fortunate.



MAZAR-I-SHARIF: Afghan internally-displaced children shovel snow near their tents during a cold winter day at Nahr-e Shah-e district of Balkh Province, near Mazar-i-Sharif. At least 70 people have died in a wave of freezing temperatures sweeping Afghanistan, officials said. — AFP

Pakistan regional assembly dissolved on Khan's orders

PESHAWAR: The provincial assembly in Pakistan's northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was dissolved on Wednesday, the second regional government to be brought down by former prime minister Imran Khan in his drive to force early general elections.

Pakistan has been gripped by political turmoil since Khan was ousted in a no-confidence vote last April. He was replaced by a shaky alliance led by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. The South Asian nation is facing a severe economic downturn, with rocketing inflation, a major shortage of foreign reserves and lagging bailout talks with international lenders.

On Wednesday, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) governor Haji Ghulam Ali signed a letter dissolving the assembly "with immediate effect" at the request of the provincial chief minister, who is a senior figure in Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party. Khan's PTI held a majority or was in a coalition government in two of Pakistan's four provincial parliaments.

The move in KP came after the assembly in the most populous province, Punjab, was dissolved late on Saturday by Khan's coalition partners, on his orders.

As per the constitution, fresh elections in both legislatures must be held inside three months.

Historically, federal and provincial elections have always been held simultaneously, but the constitution does allow for separate polling dates. General elections are due no later than mid-October, and Sharif's government is holding out hope of engineering an economic turnaround to boost its faltering popularity.

"The current government has failed to govern so it's time they realised their responsibility and go for elections to end this political instability," PTI spokesman Fawad Chaudhry told AFP. "We are ready for elections, and we are ready for a street movement as well," Chaudhry said. "If they don't call the elections we will have to go for a street movement."

Khan still maintains a huge following, and has held a series of anti-government demonstrations to rally support for his cause, a platform based mainly on fighting corruption. The 70-year-old has repeatedly touted claims he was ousted by a US-led "conspiracy", but has not provided evidence that this was the case. His ouster from government came after analysts said he fell out of favour with Pakistan's military, which has directly ruled the country for roughly half of its 76-year history, and maintains a strong influence on governance and policy.

In November, Khan was shot and wounded at a party rally, blaming the assassination bid on Sharif and a senior army intelligence officer, without providing evidence of his allegations. — AFP

News in brief

Teen wife killer jailed

TEHRAN: An Iranian man has been jailed for more than eight years after decapitating his wife and displaying her head in public, in a case that shocked the country, the judiciary said Wednesday. Mona Heidari, 17, was killed in February 2022 by her husband and brother-in-law in Ahvaz, capital of the southwestern province of Khuzestan. Video that emerged later of her smiling husband parading her decapitated head in the street sparked an outpouring of grief and outrage in the Islamic republic. Sajjad Heidarnava was sentenced to seven and a half years in prison for murder and eight months for assault, judiciary spokesman Massoud Setayeshi told reporters. The family of Heidari had pardoned the killer rather than demanding qesas-Iran's Islamic law of retribution. "The accused has no right to protest against the verdict and the decision is final," the spokesman said.

Russian soldier killed

MOSCOW: Russian authorities on Wednesday announced having killed a soldier who left his military base, with state media identifying the man as an armed deserter from fighting in Ukraine. "Dmitry Perov, wanted for the unauthorised abandonment of his military unit, was found and liquidated," the government of the Lipetsk region, in western Russia, said on social media. "The situation is under control," it said. "There is no threat to residents. Investigations are under way." It did not say how the man was killed. A local branch of the state VGTRK television network said the man was 31-years-old and had fled "the zone of the special military operation"—Moscow's term for its offensive in Ukraine. It published a search notice that said he fled Ukraine on January 13 armed with a rifle and grenades, and that he could be headed for his native village. There have been several cases of desertions among Russian soldiers fighting in Ukraine in recent months.

Macau jails 'junkie king'

MACAU: Macau's former "junkie king" Alvin Chau was sentenced on Wednesday to 18 years in jail for running an illegal gambling empire, ending a criminal trial that shocked the casino hub and toppled one of its highest-profile gaming tycoons. The 48-year-old founder of Suncity Group pioneered the junkie industry that brought high rollers from mainland China to Macau, the only place in the country where casinos operate legally. At its peak during the 2010s, junkies contributed the bulk of gaming revenue for the former Portuguese colony, which boasted a pre-pandemic casino industry bigger than Las Vegas. Chau's downfall coincided with Chinese President Xi Jinping's years-long anti-corruption drive, which has included much closer scrutiny of corrupt officials who might travel to Macau to place bets and launder money. Prosecutors charged Chau with 289 counts of fraud, money laundering.—AFP

7.0-magnitude earthquake hits eastern Indonesia

MOROTAI: An offshore earthquake with a magnitude of 7.0 hit near eastern Indonesia's Maluku islands on Wednesday, forcing panicked residents to run into the streets and briefly triggering a tsunami warning. There were no immediate reports of casualties but light damage was reported on at least one island.

The epicentre of the tremor was located 150 kilometres (93 miles) northwest of the eastern Indonesian island of Halmahera, at a depth of 48 kilometres, the US Geological Survey (USGS) reported. The undersea quake occurred around 13:06 pm local time (0606 GMT) off the coast of Sulawesi island, shaking nearby islands and sending some residents into the streets.

"The quake was felt around 15-20 seconds. The shakings were quite long," an AFP journalist on Morotai island in the Maluku archipelago said. "Some people went outside because they were afraid of buildings collapsing." Abner Manery, the head of North Halmahera disaster mitigation agency, said some houses on Morotai were damaged. A resident described the moment the quake shook the island.

"When it hit, we rushed outside, slightly panicked," Rizkal Fuadsamlan, 29, told AFP. The NWS Pacific Tsunami Warning Center in Hawaii said in an updated warning the tsunami threat had passed. It said earlier tsunami waves could hit coastal areas around 300 kilometres from the epicentre. The quake was also revised down from an initial magnitude of 7.2 reported by the USGS. Indonesia's Meteorology, Climatology and Geophysics Agency (BMKG), which put the magnitude at 7.1, warned of possible aftershocks. Daryono, the head of the agency's earthquake and tsunami centre who like many Indonesians goes by one name, said the tremor was followed by 10 aftershocks, the largest with a magnitude of 5.3.

He tweeted the quake was "triggered by (a) rock deformation in the Maluku Sea Plate". The initial quake was felt as far away as the city of Gorontalo in northern Sulawesi, where it shook houses, and the provincial capital, Manado. A powerful quake hit deep under the ocean in eastern Indonesia earlier this month, rattling nearby islands and damaging homes and schools.—AFP



HANOI: File photo shows Vietnam's President Nguyen Xuan Phuc speaking at a ceremony commemorating the 45th anniversary of Vietnam's accession to the United Nations in Hanoi's international convention centre. — AFP

Vietnam parliament approves president's resignation

HANOI: Vietnam's rubber stamp National Assembly on Wednesday approved the resignation of President Nguyen Xuan Phuc, a day after he dramatically stepped down as part of an anti-corruption drive. His sudden and unprecedented departure comes during a period of significant political upheaval in Vietnam, where the anti-graft purge and factional fighting have seen several ministers fired. In an extraordinary meeting that was closed to international media, more than 93 percent of National Assembly members voted to approve Phuc's resignation, state media said. With no successor yet appointed, Vo Thi Anh Xuan, the current vice-president, automatically becomes interim president, according to the constitution.

Authoritarian Vietnam is run by the Communist Party and officially led by the general secretary, president, and prime minister. Key decisions are made by the politburo, which now numbers 16. The sudden departure of Phuc is a highly unusual move in Vietnam, where political changes are normally carefully orchestrated, with an emphasis on cautious stability.

On Tuesday, the Communist Party ruled the 68-year-old 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—Pham Binh Minh and Vu Duc Dam—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.

'Transforming the party'

General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong—the most powerful man in the party—is widely seen as the architect behind the anti-corruption drive, which has proved popular among the Vietnamese public. Jonathan London, an expert on contemporary Vietnam, said the "dramatic culmination" of the campaign was "transforming the party at its highest levels".

"People can use the terminology of a political purge," he told AFP. "But I think it's perhaps better understood as a coincidence of internal competition within the party and then these major missteps by these people in senior positions." Only one other Communist Party president has ever stepped down, and that was for health reasons.

Analysts are divided over whether losing Phuc—who has significant experience in the international arena—will have significant consequences for the country. Le Hong Hiep, a fellow at the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute in Singapore, said the collective nature of Vietnam's leadership meant major policy changes were unlikely. But for London, the turnover of personnel meant "a risk Vietnam is left with few people in positions of authority... who have experience and competency" on the international stage. Phuc 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. — AFP

THURSDAY, JANUARY 19, 2023

Business

Fitch Ratings: Kuwait's long-term IDR at AA- with stable outlook

Country's key credit strengths are its exceptionally strong balance-sheets

KUWAIT: The Finance and Insurance Company, Fitch Ratings, has affirmed Kuwait's Long-Term Foreign-Currency Issuer Default Rating (IDR) at (AA-) with a stable outlook. According to a Fitch Ratings statement, "Kuwait's key credit strengths are its exceptionally strong fiscal and external balance sheets, while key weaknesses include frequent institutional gridlock and political constraints on reforms that would address fiscal and structural challenges stemming from heavy oil dependence, a generous welfare state and a large public sector."

The statement mentioned that Kuwait's fiscal and external balance sheets remain among the strongest of Fitch-rated sovereigns, despite severe oil price swings since 2014. "We forecast Kuwait's sovereign net foreign asset position will average 470 percent of GDP in 2022-2024, the highest among all Fitch-rated sovereigns and more than 10x the 'AA' median." Fitch Ratings continued "Gross government debt/GDP is low and we expect it to fall below 10 percent of GDP in the fiscal year ending March 2023 (FY22) against a 'AA' median of 49 percent. However, assuming the passage of a debt law, limited fiscal reform and lower oil prices, we forecast government debt will double to 20 percent of GDP in FY24 and rise further in subsequent years."

On structural fiscal challenge, Fitch indicated, "More than 70 percent of government spending consists of sticky current spending, including salaries and subsidies, and about 80 percent of Kuwaiti nationals are employed in the public sector. The fiscal break-even oil price (excluding investment income) will remain high (at around \$80/bbl) and the non-oil primary deficit/non-oil GDP is extremely weak at more than 80 percent, significantly worse than regional peers." "Kuwait has been unable to issue debt since 2017, owing to the lack of an updated debt law."

The new government has said that a debt law remains a priority and we assume that it will be agreed during FY23, but a high level of uncertainty remains. The government would still be able to meet its limited debt service obligations in coming years given the assets at its disposal, even if a debt law is not passed. "We forecast a budget surplus of 12.2



- Kuwait's sovereign net foreign asset position will average at 470% of GDP in 2022-2024
- Gross govt debt/GDP is low and may fall below 10% of GDP in fiscal year 2023

percent of GDP in FY22, due to higher oil prices (\$95/bbl) and production. We forecast lower oil revenue in FY23 and FY24, assuming average oil prices of \$79/bbl and \$61/bbl in those years and broadly stable output levels (around 2.7 million b/d). This will drive a narrowing of the budget surplus to 5.9 percent of GDP in FY23 and a return to deficit in FY24. Our forecasts assume a marginal decline in nominal

government spending to below KD 23 billion (\$75.9 million), helped by an automatic decline in fuel subsidies and spending restraint across some budget lines in the context of lower oil prices."

"Excludes investment income, our forecasts would translate into budget deficits/GDP of 2 percent and close to 10 percent in FY23 and FY24 respectively. Combined with debt service of less

than 1 percent of GDP, this corresponds to the government's fiscal financing need. In FY24 we assume this will be met via 6 percent of GDP in net domestic and foreign borrowing and around 4 percent of GDP in drawdowns from GRF assets. If a debt law is not passed this would imply higher drawdowns from GRF assets." "Budget outcomes are highly sensitive to changes in oil price and production. A \$10/bbl change in our oil price assumption for 2023 would affect the budget by around 4 percent of GDP, other things equal. A change of 100,000 bbl/day of production affects the budget by around 1.5 percent of GDP," added the statement."

Kuwait has an ESG Relevance Score (RS) of '5' for both Political Stability and Rights and for the Rule of Law, Institutional and Regulatory Quality and Control of Corruption. These scores reflect the high weight that the World Bank Governance Indicators (WBI) have in our proprietary Sovereign Rating Model. Kuwait has a medium WBI ranking at the 51st percentile reflecting low scores for voice and accountability, weak government effectiveness and middling scores across other governance indicators. "Factors that could, individually or collectively, lead to negative rating action/downgrade were structural features displaying signs of greater pressure on GRF liquidity in the absence of a new debt law, legislation permitting access to the FGF or other extraordinary measures to ensure that the government can continue to make good on its payment obligations, including but not limited to debt service."

Public and External Finances showing significant deterioration in fiscal and external positions, for example, due to a sustained period of low oil prices or an inability to address structural drains on public finances. Factors that could, individually or collectively, lead to positive rating action/upgrade including structural features/public finances displaying evidence that Kuwait's institutions and political system are able to tackle long-term fiscal challenges, for example, through actions to implement a clear deficit reduction plan that is resilient to lower oil prices, as well as adopting a transparent and sustainable government funding strategy. — KUNA

US retail sales shrinks by most in a year

NEW YORK: US retail sales slumped for a second straight month in December, according to government data released Wednesday, with its largest drop in a year signaling a key growth engine is faltering. This comes as separate reports on Wednesday showed industrial output plunging last month, while producer prices made the biggest slump since early in the pandemic. The US central bank has been raising interest rates steeply to cool the world's biggest economy as households found themselves squeezed by decades-high inflation—and the effects are rippling across sectors including previously resilient consumer spending. Retail sales contracted more than expected by 1.1 percent in December from a month prior, to \$677.1 billion, said the latest Commerce Department figures. This was down from a revised one percent drop in November.

Falling sales at department stores and gasoline stations proved to be major drags, while the auto and furniture segments also saw declines. Gas prices plunged last month, and analysts said bad weather across the country could have temporarily held back vehicle sales. Spending at restaurants and bars took a hit as well, dropping 0.9 percent between November and December, despite remaining strong previously in the face of high inflation.

"Consumers continue to spend, albeit at a pace that is slowing compared to earlier in the recovery,"



ARCADIA, US: In this file photo taken on November 25, 2022 people shop during Black Friday in Santa Anita within the city of Arcadia, California. Retail sales in the United States slumped for a second straight month in December, according to data released January 18, 2023. — AFP

said President Joe Biden in a statement. Retail sales remains 6.0 percent up from December 2021. For all of last year, total sales jumped 9.2 percent from a year ago, the Commerce Department said. In a separate report, the Labor Department said US producer prices fell 0.5 percent in December from November, the biggest drop since early in the pandemic. This signals further easing in inflationary pressures, as gauges for goods and energy costs both fell.

"Today, we received more evidence that we are making real progress tackling inflation and lowering

costs," Biden added of the Producer Price Index (PPI). "We are not letting up, and there are even more reasons for optimism this year," he said. Economist Matthew Martin of Oxford Economics cautioned that "decline to energy overstates the true trajectory of PPI in the months ahead," even if headline inflation will likely continue easing. "This is wrapped up in more global demand dynamics such as the warmer winter months in Europe as well as uncertainty over China's demand as they attempt to lift COVID restrictions," he told AFP. — AFP

its ownership to 100 percent. Italy's previous government launched the process last year of selling off a majority of ITA Airways, the successor to the iconic but loss-making national carrier Alitalia.

The government, under then-premier Mario Draghi, at first preferred a bid by US investment fund Certares, Air France-KLM and Delta Air Lines. But when those negotiations failed to make headway, Italy's new right-wing cabinet under Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni declared in late October that the period of exclusivity talks had ended—putting Lufthansa back in the running.

The German group—which also owns Swiss, Brussels and Austrian Airlines—has always made clear it was interested in a "true privatization" of ITA Airways. Swiss shipping giant MSC had teamed up with Lufthansa in the first round of bidding but said in November it was pulling out, leaving Lufthansa to pursue the ITA deal alone.

Separately, Air France-KLM said Wednesday it had informed the Italian government it was drop-

ping out of the race too, clearing the path for rival Lufthansa as the sole bidder. Lufthansa hopes to turn Rome into a key European travel hub, including by offering direct flights to Italy from the United States, its biggest market. "For Lufthansa Group, Italy is the most important market outside of its home markets and the US," the company said.

"Italy's importance for both business and private travel lies in its strong export-oriented economy and status as one of Europe's top vacation spots."

ITA Airways replaced the national carrier Alitalia, which was put under state administration in 2017 after years of fruitless attempts to find a buyer. The Italian state has spent more than 13 billion euros trying to get the airline back on its feet over the past two decades.

Italy's government agreed late last year to inject another 400 million euros into ITA to keep the airline afloat as the bidding process dragged on. ITA posted an operating loss of 170 million euros for 2022. — AFP

UK inflation slows in December but remains sky-high

LONDON: Annual inflation in Britain slowed to 10.5 percent in December, official data showed Wednesday, but remained close to historically high levels that are causing a cost-of-living crisis and mass strikes. The Consumer Prices Index (CPI) rate compared with 10.7 percent in November, the Office for National Statistics said in statement. "Inflation eased slightly in December, although still at a very high level, with overall prices rising strongly during the last year as a whole," said ONS chief economist Grant Fitzner. He noted that petrol prices "fell notably in December, with the cost of clothing also dropping back slightly".

"However, this was offset by increases for coach and air fares as well as overnight hotel accommodation," Fitzner added. UK inflation began soaring last year amid sharp price rises worldwide due to supply constraints caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the lifting of COVID pandemic lockdowns. Britain was also hit by fallout from Brexit, which has increased the cost of doing business across a range of sectors.

Consumer inflation reached 11.1 percent in October, the highest level since 1980. Official data Tuesday revealed that average British wages sank 2.6 percent at the end of last year as pay rises failed to keep pace with inflation, triggering major strike action.

While some striking workers have managed to agree new pay deals, tens of thousands of workers across the private and public sectors continue to stage walkouts. Nurses in England on Wednesday began two days of strikes, with officials warning of disruptions for thousands of patients in the UK's state-run health service. Nurses are also set to join teachers and railway workers in further stoppages at the start of February. It comes as the Conservative government seeks to limit strikes with controversial legislation, arguing that increasing pay will hinder efforts to cool inflation.

Welcoming December's dip in inflation, finance minister Jeremy Hunt said it was "vital" the government took "the difficult decisions needed" to reduce prices further. "High inflation is a nightmare for family budgets, destroys business investment and leads to strike action, so however tough, we need to stick to our plan to bring it down," he said in a statement. The main policy used to cool inflation is the raising of interest rates by central banks. The Bank of England and its peers are forecast to keep increasing borrowing costs this year but by less than the aggressive amounts seen in 2022. — AFP

Lufthansa closes in on stake in Italy's ITA Airways

FRANKFURT: German airline giant Lufthansa submitted a fresh offer Wednesday for Italy's troubled ITA Airways, bringing a turbulent takeover process closer to the finish line. Lufthansa's proposal would see the carrier initially take a minority stake in state-owned ITA, with the option "to purchase the remaining shares at a later date", it said in a statement.

No financial details were disclosed, but Bloomberg News reported earlier that the deal could see Lufthansa pay up to 350 million euros (\$375 million) for an initial 40-percent stake before increasing

Business

GCC fiscal positions will remain robust in 2023...

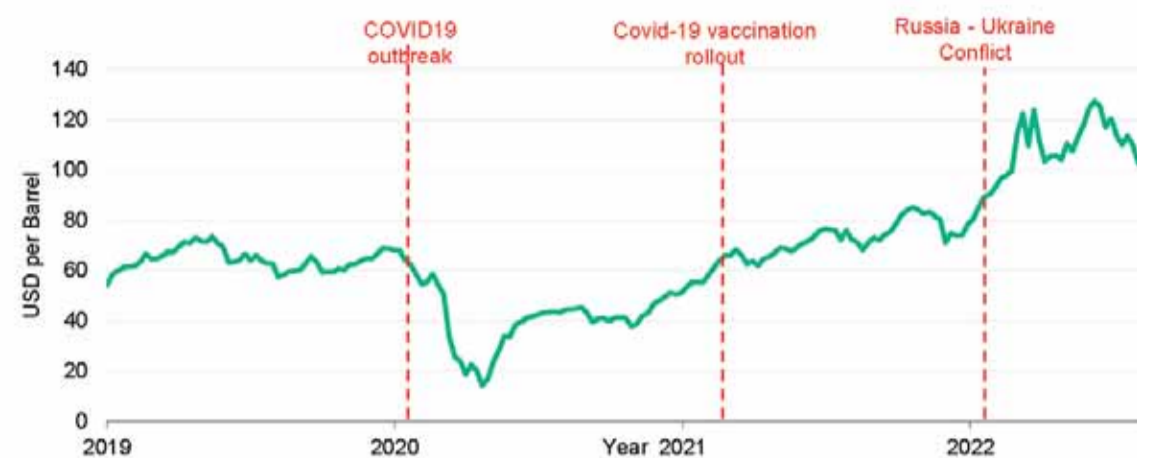
Fiscal balances, \$ billion



Note: Price of Brent crude oil in USD per barrel
Sources: Energy Information Administration, Moody's Investors Service

Oil prices will remain at supportive levels over the next 12 to 18 months

Price of Brent Crude oil in USD per barrel



Note: Price of Brent crude oil in USD per barrel
Sources: Energy Information Administration, Moody's Investors Service

GCC fiscal positions to remain robust in 2023/24: Moody's

Banks entering uncertain 2023 in solid shape

KUWAIT: Continued economic growth, moderate domestic inflation and higher rates will preserve GCC banks' solid financial performance, driving a stable outlook, says Moody's Investor Service in its latest report. Higher oil prices and increased production after an OPEC+ agreement in 2021 have substantially increased hydrocarbon revenues in all six GCC countries. Crude oil output is likely to decline in 2023 after recent strategic production cuts announced by OPEC+, but hydrocarbon revenues will remain sufficiently robust for most GCC sovereigns to run substantial fiscal and current account surpluses in 2023. This will allow governments to pay down debt, rebuild fiscal reserves, accumulate foreign-currency buffers, and progress with structural reforms and economic diversification projects. Strengthening government balance-sheets will boost confidence in the non-oil economy where banks do most of their business. Over time, more diversified

economies will improve resistance against economic and fiscal shocks.

High energy prices through 2023 and ongoing economic diversification initiatives will support business sentiment in non-oil sectors where GCC banks do most of their lending. Robust capital and reserves provide protection GCC banks have robust core capital buffers against unexpected losses, and their problem loans are for the most part fully covered by provisions set against expected losses, Moody's said.

Moderate inflation

Moderate inflation and resilient economies will keep loan performance stable. Inflation will stay moderate in the GCC thanks to robust fiscal positions, tightening monetary policy and a strong US dollar. This will keep loan performance steady. Higher government hydrocarbon revenues will swell

explore potential areas of cooperation," the State Department said in November.

'Seek common ground'

Referring to the Bali meeting, Yellen said that "we share a responsibility to show that China and the United States can manage our differences and prevent competition from becoming anything ever near conflict." "We have areas of disagreement, and we will convey them directly," said Yellen, who was on a brief stop in Zurich before an 11-day trip to Africa, aimed at deepening economic ties on a continent where China has become a key player.

But "we should not allow misunderstandings, particularly those stemming from a lack of communication, to unnecessarily worsen our bilateral economic and financial relationship," she said.

Liu, who on Tuesday told the World Economic Forum in nearby Davos that it was time to end a "Cold War mentality", seemed to agree. "Right now, it seems that we do face some problems," he acknowledged Wednesday. "But as President Xi said, we all have one planet Earth, and there are always more solutions than problems."

"We must always bear in mind the bigger picture, try to manage our differences appropriately and seek common ground," he added. "No matter how the circumstances change, we should always maintain dialogue and exchanges." Yellen heads to Africa as US seeks closer ties amid China inroads

US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen is heading for an 11-day trip to Africa starting this week, aimed at deepening economic ties on the continent where China has become a key player. Yellen's travel to Senegal, Zambia and South Africa from Wednesday onwards comes after a detour to Switzerland where she is set to meet Chinese Vice Premier Liu He on macroeconomic issues. The extended visit follows a US-Africa summit in Washington last month, where the United States laid out billions in projects over the coming years along with private sector investment.

With rivals China and Russia competing for influence and opportunity in Africa, the US has been working to stave off an erosion of its once-powerful position in the region. Yellen's visit will begin in Senegal, where she will meet on Friday with President Macky Sall, who is also the current chair of the African Union. She is expected in Senegal to highlight US efforts to boost economic ties with the region "by expanding trade and investment flows," the Treasury said in a statement previewing her trip.

Yellen will then travel to Zambia to meet President Hakainde Hichilema as well as other finance officials. Hichilema, who took office in 2021, has promised to restore the copper-rich nation's credibility and creditworthiness after inheriting a cash-strapped economy.

Yellen is also expected to speak on efforts to improve global health and prepare for future pandemics, as well as on food production. In South Africa, which recently assumed the chairmanship of the BRICS emerging economies group, Yellen will meet Finance Minister Enoch Godongwana and South Africa Reserve Bank Governor Lesetja Kganyago.

While in Africa, Yellen is also to stress the importance of accelerating clean energy access and "underscore the spillover effects" of war in Ukraine, the Treasury said. Former US ambassador Susan Page told AFP that despite positive developments like the major summit in Washington last year, "the proof is in the pudding" when it comes to pledges of support for African countries. "Are they really going to come up with the serious money... Or is it going to be a trade-off?" asked Page, now a professor at the University of Michigan. She added that while US moves have been largely framed as countering China's advances, it "is a shame because African countries want to be treated as Africa, and not as a wedge between great power competition." — AFP

GCC banks' deposit base, while regulatory liquidity buffers will remain sound. Demand for credit in Saudi Arabia is strong as work around the government's vision 2030 megaprojects is intense and will continue to squeeze the funding base of the country's banks.

GCC banks have little direct exposure to carbon transition risks. However, the health of GCC economies tracks changes in oil prices. Oil revenue is also the main driver of government spending and of the non-oil business activity that provides the main lending opportunities for banks. Their indirect exposure is therefore higher. Hydrocarbon revenue accumulation will bolster the credit quality of GCC sovereigns in 2023, lifting business confidence.

GCC fiscal position

After a peak of \$102 in 2022, we expect the price

of Brent crude to average \$95 a barrel (bbl) this year and \$90/bbl in 2024, well above the 2021 average of \$70/bbl. This is because slower global growth and the related impact on hydrocarbon demand will be largely offset by a geopolitical premium to oil and gas prices stemming from the military conflict in Ukraine (Caa3, negative). GCC governments are focused on maintaining fiscal discipline and implementing reforms to reduce oil dependence. Government spending will therefore be less expansive than in previous periods of high oil prices. In nominal terms, we expect total spending across GCC countries to increase by around 1 percent in 2023, compared with an annual average of around 12 percent during 2011-2014. Nevertheless, windfall oil revenues will preserve some level of spending, boost market sentiment and enhance the region's economic resilience.

Yellen: US, China must communicate on economic issues

ZURICH: Close communication between the United States and China on economic issues is vital, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said Wednesday ahead of a meeting with a top Chinese official in Zurich. "Amid a complicated global economic outlook, there is a pressing need for the two largest economies in the world to closely communicate on global macroeconomics and financial conditions," Yellen said at the start of her first face-to-face meeting with Chinese Vice Premier Liu He.

The countries also needed to "exchange views on how we are responding to various challenges," she said. Yellen voiced hope that the pair, who have already met virtually on three occasions, would on Wednesday "delve deeply into topics of mutual concern, including macroeconomic cooperation and climate finance". Speaking through an interpreter, Liu also called for "serious communication and coordination on macroeconomic affairs, climate change and other issues of mutual interest".

"In our view the China-US relationship is highly consequential," he said.



ZURICH: US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen (right) greets Chinese vice-premier Liu He (center) ahead of their meeting in Zurich, on January 18, 2023. -AFP

Keeping tensions in check

Wednesday's meeting comes amid heightened diplomatic efforts to keep high tensions in check between the two behemoths. A US official confirmed Tuesday that Secretary of State Antony Blinken would visit Beijing in early February. He will be the first US secretary of state to travel to China since a brief visit in October 2018 by his Republican predecessor Mike Pompeo, known for his blistering criticism of Beijing.

Long-simmering disputes between the two countries flared during the Donald Trump presidency and have continued-if less acutely-under President Joe Biden. The United States and China, which are locked in a fierce strategic competition, spend more on their militaries than any other nation. But both Biden and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping have said they want to reduce tensions. When the two leaders met in November on the sidelines of the Group of 20 summit in Bali, both voiced guarded hope at preventing disputes from spiraling out of control.

They pledged "to continue responsibly managing the competition between our two countries and to

Taiwan records biggest economic contraction since 2009

TAIPEI: Taiwan's economy shrank in the final quarter of 2022, the government said Wednesday, in the island's worst quarterly contraction since it was hampered by the global financial crisis in late 2009. Gross domestic product in the last quarter fell 0.86 percent year-on-year, according to preliminary figures released by the Directorate-General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics.

That is the first decline since the first quarter of 2016 and far worse than the 1.52 percent increase the government had forecast in November. "Pressure from inflation and interest rate hikes continued to suppress

global demand, and the industrial chain continued to adjust inventories," the government's budget department said in a statement announcing the results.

The worsening pandemic in China, which is Taiwan's largest trade partner, has also "disrupted consumption and manufacturing activities", it said. Taiwan, despite its size, is one of the world's most important economies thanks to its outsized role in producing high-tech equipment, particularly state-of-the-art semiconductors, an industry that it dominates.

The island weathered the initial coronavirus pandemic well, becoming one of the few economies to record growth in 2020. In 2021 it saw an explosion of orders as the world began reopening after months of pandemic shutdowns. Demand for semiconductors was enormous and Taiwan's foundries could barely keep up.

The following year saw strong growth initially but demand cratered in the last quarter.—AFP



Al-Sayer Group earns GSAS Platinum certification

KUWAIT: As part of our mission to achieve the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030 and in line with Kuwait National Development Plan 2035, the Gulf Organization for Research & Development (GORD) has awarded Al-Sayer Group's Toyota Mega Delivery Center- Ardiyah in Kuwait a Platinum rating for GSAS Operations Certification, aligning with the objective to create an environment toward a sustainable future.

The award was handed over by Dr Yousef Alhorr, Founding Chairman of Gulf Organization for Research & Development (GORD) to Al-Sayer Chairman, Faisal Bader Al-Sayer along with Bengt Schultz, COO, Ibrahim Al-Fouzan, Senior Business Director, Service, Nehad Al-Haj Ali, Group Manager, Corporate Excellence. GSAS Operations certification was awarded in recognition of implementing sustainable measures such as:

- The building's roof houses the biggest PV Solar Project in private sector. Serving ALSAYER Delivery Center with a capacity of 1 MWp, the system generates around 1.5 Gigawatt hrs annually. Covering 25 percent of the building consumption and reducing the carbon footprint by 950 Metric tons of CO2 emissions.
- A two-tunnel automated car wash technology which incorporates water recycling reverse osmosis system reducing out environmental impact. With this technology up to 80 percent of the water used is recycled and reused.
- Energy efficient HVAC system consisting of water-cooled chillers.
- High-performance large glass facades for natural day light.
- Healthy Indoor Environment for employees & visitors.

- Efficient heat insulation for the external walls and the upper roofs for effective air conditioning system
- Latest energy saving light fittings.
- Photocell water mixers.

In addition to above, sorting waste at the source and facilitating the recycling of paper and engine oil, Al-Sayer Delivery Center is diverting a significant amount of waste from landfills.



According to Mohamed Naser Al-Sayer, Executive Board Member and Chairman of Sustainability Committee at Al-Sayer Group "In Al-Sayer Group, we realize that one of the most important pieces in the climate-change puzzle is achieving a balance between natural resources and human consumption that is respectful of the nature yet fuels our modern way of life. For the future of our planet and the humans who populate it, it is vital to weigh the competing needs of environmental protection and human development so both the nature and society are able to flourish.

Previously, three projects of Al-Sayer have achieved GSAS Operations with Platinum rating for Al-Sayer head office 1 in free trade zone, Al-Sayer showroom located in Aswaq Al-Qurain, and Fahaheel after sales center. And now is the fourth building: Toyota Mega Delivery Center - Ardiyah and still we shall work on more buildings to reinforce sustainability in our coming projects.

Business

Bank of Japan leaves policy unchanged, yen weakens

CB to continue with 'large-scale' purchases of government bonds

TOKYO: Japan's central bank left its ultra-easy monetary policy unchanged Wednesday, bucking heavy speculation that it could again tweak a key lever, and sending the yen plunging. The announcement after a two-day Bank of Japan meeting saw the yen sink over two percent against the dollar, with the greenback buying more than 131 yen after the decision, from around 128.50 earlier in the day.

Bank officials shocked the market last month by widening the band in which they allow rates for 10-year government bonds to move. The bank said the surprise decision would "improve market functioning", and the change saw the yen gain ground against the dollar after months of weakening over the gap between Japanese and US central bank policy.

The range set last month has been breached regularly in recent days, intensifying speculation that the BoJ would have to act again. But policymakers left the yield curve control range intact and said the bank would continue with "large-scale" purchases of government bonds to support the parameters.

Bank Governor Haruhiko Kuroda told reporters he believed the current policy was sustainable, with more time needed to see the effects of last month's tweak.

"We do not believe it is necessary to further expand the fluctuation band for the long-term bond yield," he said. "What is important is that we support the economy so that businesses can increase wages." The unchanged policy and the weaker yen also boosted Tokyo stocks, with the key Nikkei index closing up 2.5 percent.

Under pressure

For months, the BoJ has bucked the tightening trend set by global peers and stood its ground on its loose monetary policy, convinced that inflation has not yet taken hold in Japan in a sustained fashion. Prices have risen over the past year, and while they have not neared the levels seen by other developed economies, Japan's inflation rate is at a 40-year high.

Kuroda, whose term ends in spring, has repeatedly insisted that the price rises are largely temporary and linked to exceptional factors like the war in Ukraine. "We are not at a point where we can foresee that the two-percent target can be achieved in a stable and sustainable manner," he said Wednesday.

Still, the bank now expects inflation to hit 3.0 percent for fiscal 2022, up from the 2.9 percent it predicted in October. But it forecast inflation of 1.6 percent the following year, unchanged from its last estimate, rising to 1.8 percent for fiscal 2024, up from 1.6 percent previously.

Last month's policy tweak fuelled speculation that the BoJ would gradually tighten policy, though Kuroda warned then that the move should not be seen as an effective rate hike. Clifford Bennett, chief economist at ACY Securities, said that while other central banks have hiked rates, "Japan has long been a different story and remains so," especially given uncertain economic growth and low inflation levels. Other analysts said the bank would be under pressure to move soon.

"Speculation will remain that it will eventually review its policy," said Takahide Kiuchi, executive economist at Nomura Research Institute and a



TOKYO: Bank of Japan (BOJ) Governor Haruhiko Kuroda (center) attends a monetary policy meeting at the BOJ headquarters in Tokyo on January 18, 2023. —AFP

former BoJ policy board member. "Market focus will now shift to the appointment of a new governor," he told AFP before the decision, noting that the bank needs to "make its policy flexible" whenever is appointed.

The BoJ also revised its growth projections for

the world's third largest economy, tipping GDP expansion for fiscal 2022 of 1.9 percent, against a previous forecast of 2 percent. The following year it now expects 1.7 percent growth, down from 1.9 percent forecast in October, but falling to 1.1 percent in 2024, having predicted 1.5 percent. —AFP

Microsoft to cut workforce again: Reports

NEW YORK: Microsoft is readying to cut more positions from its global workforce as tech giants continue paring headcount to ride out rough economic conditions, according to media reports on Tuesday. The computer industry stalwart could announce layoffs in its engineering divisions as early as Wednesday, Bloomberg News reported.

A Microsoft spokesperson told AFP that the company would not comment on what it referred to as "rumor." The Washington state-based company, which industry trackers say has more than 220,000 workers, trimmed its ranks of employees twice last year.

A new layoff announcement would come a week before Microsoft is to report its earnings for the final three months of last year. "Over the last few weeks we have seen significant headcount cut reduction from stalwarts Salesforce and Amazon," Wedbush analyst Dan Ives said in a note to investors.

Wedbush is expecting staff cuts of another 5 to 10 percent across the tech sector, Ives told investors.

"Many of these companies were spending money like 1980's Rock Stars and now need to reign in the expense controls ahead of a softer (macro-economic conditions)," Ives wrote. Amazon announced in early January that it plans to cut more than 18,000 jobs from its workforce, citing "the uncertain economy" and the fact the online retail behemoth had "hired rapidly" during the pandemic.

The job-slashing plan is the largest among recent layoffs that have impacted the once-unassailable US tech sector, including at giants such as Facebook-owner Meta. Some of the Amazon layoffs would be in Europe, CEO Andy Jassy in a statement to staff, adding that the impacted workers would be informed starting on Wednesday, January 18. Major platforms with an advertising-based business model are facing budget cuts from advertisers, who are reducing expenses in the face of inflation.

Meta announced in November the loss of 11,000 jobs, or about 13 percent of its workforce. At the end of August, Snapchat let go about 20 percent of its employees, around 1,200 people. —AFP

Uber resumes services in Tanzania

DAR ES SALAAM, Tanzania: Ride-hailing giant Uber has resumed its services in Tanzania, it said on Wednesday, settling a fare dispute with the government. Uber suspended services in the East African country last April after the government introduced legislation capping maximum commission from drivers at 15 percent from the previous 33 percent. Uber said the new regulations made it difficult to continue operating while the government defended them as maintaining competition and ensuring affordable taxis.

After months of negotiations, Tanzania's transport regulator last month allowed ride-hailing companies to charge up to 25 percent commission and a 3.5-percent booking fee.

"We are excited to kick off the year on such a

Goldman Sachs profits hit by big drop in mergers

NEW YORK: Goldman Sachs reported a steep decline in fourth-quarter earnings Tuesday, on much lower merger activity in results that missed analyst expectations and weighed on shares.

The big investment bank pointed to a "significant decline" in completed mergers and acquisitions as fewer big companies bought rivals and the number of initial public offerings fell sharply compared with recent years. Goldman's profit drop comes on the heels of a trove of mixed results last week from other financial giants, with some large banks pointing to a "mild recession" as a likely scenario.

The results were also marred by nearly \$1 billion in provisions set aside for Goldman's consumer-oriented credit card business and the growing GreenSky home-improvement loan business.

The bank's net income was \$1.2 billion, down 69 percent following a 16 percent fall in revenues to \$10.6 billion. The fourth quarter marked Goldman's fifth straight reported period of lower profits, compared with the year-ago quarter.

Shortly after midday, shares of Goldman were down 7.5 percent at \$346.00, weighing on the Dow index. Chief Executive David Solomon acknowledged that the results were "disappointing," but emphasized that the company had achieved double-digit returns for all of 2022.

Executives highlighted a plan to scale back Goldman's ambitious consumer banking operation and noted that results would be helped in 2023 by lower expenses after cutting 3,200 jobs earlier this month. Investment banking fees were down 48 percent during the fourth quarter, a hit that was offset by a 44 percent jump in revenues tied to trading in fixed income, commodities and currencies.

United Airlines sees 2023 profit jump amid tight capacity

NEW YORK: Eyeing another year of strong travel demand and limited airline industry capacity, United Airlines projected a big jump in 2023 profits Tuesday after releasing fourth-quarter earnings that topped expectations. The big US carrier forecast 2023 profits of between \$10 and \$12 per share, which is more than four times the level from last year.

United reported profits of \$843 million for the fourth quarter, compared with a loss of \$646 million



Macro outlook 'uncertain'

Solomon alluded to a cloudy outlook in 2023. "There were headwinds we expected, like high inflation, but some we never thought we'd see like the ongoing war in Ukraine," Solomon told analysts on a conference call. "There aren't many signs of widespread distress, balance sheets and company fundamentals are relatively healthy," he said.

But he added that it is "clear that the outlook for 2023 remains uncertain." Solomon said the dramatic drop in merger-related revenues reflected an exceptional level of activity in late 2020 and 2021 due to heavy fiscal stimulus that was "not normal." That climate "pulled a lot of activity forward," he said. "And then because of market disruption, we've tightened monetary conditions

meaningfully in 2022."

In October, Goldman announced it was streamlining its company to three operating segments from four, a move that reorganizes its "Marcus" consumer business which had hit obstacles.

Goldman executives said Tuesday they ceased offering new loans on the Marcus platform, while narrowing the "Platform Solutions" business to three areas: transaction banking; credit cards and GreenSky. But as those operations ramp up, Goldman is setting aside provisions, said Chief Financial Officer Denis Coleman.

"Our focus remains singularly on driving towards profitability of this segment, but there will continue to be a period of time during which we lose money," Coleman said. —AFP

in the year-ago period. Revenues rose 51 percent from a year ago to \$12.4 billion.

United called the post-pandemic airline environment an "unprecedented opportunity," according to a company PowerPoint presentation. The airline's forecast includes a skeptical appraisal of the industry's ability to increase capacity in 2023, calling the targets "unachievable, similar to 2022," the presentation added. Limited air industry capacity has boosted airplane ticket prices and airline profits, as consumers seek out travel after the pandemic grounded many people.

Key constraints on capacity include a continued pilot shortage, along with delays in the manufacturing and delivery of new planes from Boeing and Airbus. Another factor is the fact that airlines and US air traffic control have "outgrown tech infrastructure," the company said. —AFP



NEWARK: In this file photo taken on January 11, 2023, a United Airlines plane taxis at Newark International Airport, in Newark, New Jersey. —AFP



positive note by re-entering the Tanzanian market," Uber said in a statement. "It is our priority to provide a platform where drivers can make substantial earnings while providing convenient and reliable options for riders in Tanzania."

The San Francisco-based company, founded in 2009, arrived in Tanzania in 2016, capitalizing on the country's low levels of personal car ownership and lack of efficient mass transport. —AFP

Auto sales in Europe hit three-decade low in 2022: Report

BRUSSELS: New vehicle registrations in Europe dropped to their lowest level since 1993 last year as component shortages continued to hinder automakers, an industry group reported Wednesday. Despite an uptick in sales since August, the overall number of EU registrations fell 4.6 percent to 9.3 million, a level last seen three decades ago, the European Automobile Manufacturers' Association said.

It marks a third difficult year for the industry since the factory and showroom closures during the COVID-19 outbreak in 2021 and the resulting supply bottlenecks—not least for key semi-

conductors—that persisted even as the pandemic eased. Germany was the only major European market that saw growth last year, at 1.1 percent, while Italy registrations plunged 9.7 percent, France 7.8 percent and Spain 5.4 percent.

But the auto association, known by its French abbreviation ACEA, said sales had picked up in most countries during the final months of the year, with December registrations up 12.8 percent overall from the year earlier. For the year, Volkswagen remained the European market leader with 2.3 million vehicles sold, a 5.2 percent decline, for a stable market share of 25.1 percent.

The Stellantis group followed with 1.8 million vehicles, a 14.1 percent drop, while Renault sales slid 4.3 percent to 985,000. The German auto industry association said last week that it expected only a mild recovery for the domestic car market this year, even as supply chain bottlenecks are expected to ease. —AFP

Lifestyle | Features

Film on 1948
Nakba shows
Palestinian agony

Jordanian film "Farha", vehemently criticized in Zionist entity, is based on true events and represents "only a drop in the ocean" of Palestinian suffering, director Darin J. Sallam told AFP. Released last month on Netflix, "Farha" depicts atrocities against Palestinians during the 1948 conflict following Zionist's creation, which Palestinians call the Nakba, or "catastrophe".

The Arabic-language film tells the story of a Palestinian teenager, Farha, whose village comes under attack by Zionist forces. Her father hides her and, through a crack in a door, she witnesses the execution a family of Palestinian civilians, including two girls. Sallam, 35, said the plot for her first full-length feature was inspired by a story told to her by her mother, about a Palestinian woman named Radiyah.



The film recounts "the story of a girl who had been forced to abandon her dreams because of events she had no control over", Sallam said. "Farha" featured in the 2021 Toronto International Film Festival and has won a dozen awards in other festivals.

In Zionist entity, where discussion of alleged atrocities during the 1948 war

remains largely taboo, officials condemned Netflix over the decision to stream the film. "I wanted to open the world's eyes to this pivotal moment in the history... and to show that this land was not without people," Sallam said, of what is now Zionist entity and the Palestinian territories. "Rather, it was a land with people who had lives, dreams, hopes and history."

'I am Farha'

The film was shot in the northern Jordan towns of Ajlun and Al-Fuhais, which resemble the Palestinian village where Farha's story begins. The teenage girl tries to persuade her father to let her complete her studies in the city, prepares for a friend's wedding, and picks figs before her village is attacked. Sallam said she avoided showing violence, with the exception of the unarmed family's killing.

"This scene, which shook the Zionist government, is only a drop in the ocean of the suffering of millions of Palestinians during the Nakba," she said. Sallam called for more filmmakers to explore this painful chapter in Palestinian history, which "almost never appears in cinema". Her mother, of

Syrian origin, had heard Radiyah's story at a refugee camp in that country and passed it on to her, "and I decided to make a film and share it".

"Radiyah had been locked up by her father who feared for her, and when she was finally able to come out of hiding she went to Syria," Sallam said. "That's where she told the story to my mother." The filmmaker said she had "lost all contact with this woman", a resident of the war-ravaged Palestinian refugee camp of Yarmouk, north of Damascus, since fighting in Syria began in 2011. After one screening of the film in the United States, an audience member spoke to Sallam. "A woman aged in her eighties who had survived the Nakba told me: 'I am Farha'", she said.

'Lies'

Former Zionist minister Avigdor Lieberman, who had served in government until Benjamin Netanyahu returned to power last month, said in November the film's "whole purpose is to create a false pretence and incite against Zionist soldiers". Chili Tropper, Zionist's former culture minister, said "Farha" shows "lies and libels". For Sallam, whose father is Palestinian, "denying the

Nakba is denying my existence, denying the tragedy of millions of people." "My own father survived the Nakba. He... fled to Jordan with his parents." Sallam's father was born in Ramle, in what is now central Zionist entity.

Most of its Arab residents fled or were forced from their homes during the 1948 conflict, as were more than 760,000 Palestinians across the country. Many of their descendants live to this day in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. More than half of Jordan's population of about 10 million people are of Palestinian origin, the result of mass displacement in 1948 and during the 1967 Six-Day War, when Zionist entity occupied the West Bank and east Jerusalem.

Last year, Zionist director Alon Schwarz faced backlash over his documentary on an alleged 1948 massacre of Palestinians in Tantura, a Mediterranean village in the northwest of what is now Zionist entity. Calls have mounted in recent years, including among Zionist activists, for greater transparency about the conduct of nascent Zionist forces during the 1948 conflict.—AFP



This photograph shows shoetrees, used to make shoes, displayed at the French shoemaker Weston's factory in Limoges, where all shoes are crafted on leather soles and produced using traditional shoe-making techniques. — AFP photos



An employee of French shoemaker Weston prepares and manages shoetree, used to make shoes, at the company's factory in Limoges.



An employee of French shoemaker Weston shows a pair of loafers model 180 made with alligator skin at the company's factory in Limoges.



An employee of French shoemaker Weston sews a shoe at the company's factory in Limoges.

FORMAL SHOES MAKING COMEBACK AFTER YEARS OF SNEAKER DOMINANCE

Once the preserve of nerds and stuffy young conservatives, loafers, moccasins and other formal shoes are increasingly taking over from sneakers as the first choice for fashion-conscious men. Romain Costa, a 32-year-old Parisian architect, is spoiled for choice as he considered the footwear options in his Montmartre apartment: sturdy-soled black loafers, funky-colored brogues, leather or suede, with or without tassels...

He finally opts for a tricolor pair, that he matches with baggy jeans and an expansive black sweater, before hopping on his bike and heading off to work. For him, sneakers were what he wore as a teenage skater. "I like having adult shoes. At work, it's reassuring for clients. It makes me look more serious," he told AFP. "And they age better than sneakers," he added.

Loafing plans

The trainer boom of the last decade is still going strong, but there are signs of a slowdown. Data from industry website Business of Fashion showed 45 percent of well-heeled American and British men were planning to buy dress shoes in 2023, compared with around a third who were opting for sneakers. And formal styles are all over red carpets and catwalks sported by trendsetters like rapper ASAP Rocky and US actor-director Donald Glover.

French designer Simon Porte Jacquemus-so hot right now, as the fashionistas say-wore black loafers and dressed his models in them for his last show in December, despite his high-profile sneaker collaboration with Nike.



An employee of French shoemaker Weston holds a shoetree, used to make boots, at the company's factory in Limoges.

Some are still struggling to get over the old connotations. "There are never loafers at a Hermes show," said Pierre Hardy, who heads up shoe design at the French label. "It was really the preppie, right-wing, reactionary shoe." They might not strike the right vibe for the catwalk, but Hermes still produces and sells loafers, and Hardy understands why sales have been spiking. "After the lockdowns, people grew tired of everything being cozy. Now we have permission to go out and we want elegant, chic things," he said.

Mix and match

The same is happening across the water in Britain, where upmarket department store Browns has "definitely noticed a shift from fashionable sneaker styles to more formal footwear," according to its menswear manager Thom Scherdel. "As we see less and less sneakers go down the runway, customers are taking note, with lots of people looking to mix and match casual and



This photograph shows labeled leather rolls and garments used for lacing shoes displayed at the French shoemaker Weston's factory in Limoges.

sartorial pieces in their wardrobe," he told AFP. That marks one big change from the past: wearing formal shoes not just with suits, but with sportswear, overalls-even shorts.

"There is a return of formal tailoring, but now with a comfort side, because people got used to jogging bottoms and we don't want to go back to tight-fitting clothes," said Hugues Fauchard of Uniforme, a young label that worked with shoemaker Weston on new versions of its classic loafer. "The other important thing is that trainers fall apart quickly—they're not durable and hard to repair," he said, pointing out that Weston offers lifetime repairs.

"We have to stop with these throw-away clothes." It is perhaps an inevitable part of the fashion cycle, as new sneaker drops became ubiquitous and resale prices ridiculous (a pair of Nikes co-designed and worn by Kanye West sold for \$1.8 million in 2021). "Trainers were for all situations, all ages, and they put in the shade other shoes that gave more of a solid footing to men," fashion historian Olivier Saillard told AFP. "But with every fashion, there is a boomerang effect."— AFP



This photograph shows loafers (top) of French shoemaker Weston displayed at the company's factory in Limoges.



An employee of French shoemaker Weston selects leather at the company's factory in Limoges.



An employee of French shoemaker Weston prepares and manages shoetree, used to make shoes, at the company's factory in Limoges.

Lifestyle | Features

World's oldest known person dies aged 118

The world's oldest known person, French nun Lucile Randon, has died aged 118, a spokesman told AFP on Tuesday. Randon, known as Sister Andre, was born in southern France on February 11, 1904, when World War I was still a decade away. She died in her sleep at her nursing home in Toulon, spokesman David Tavella said.

"There is great sadness but... it was her desire to join her beloved brother. For her, it's a liberation," Tavella, of the Sainte-Catherine-Laboure nursing home, told AFP. The sister was long feted as the oldest European, before the death of Japan's Kane Tanaka aged 119 last year left her the longest-lived person on Earth. Guinness World Records officially acknowledged her status in April 2022.

Randon was born in the year New York opened its first subway and when the Tour de France had only been staged once. She grew up in a Protestant family as the only girl among three brothers, liv-



In this file photo Sister Andre, Lucile Randon in the registry of birth, the eldest French and European citizen, prays in a wheelchair, on the eve of her 117th birthday. — AFP

ing in the southern town of Ales. One of her fondest memories was the return of two of her brothers at the end of World War I, she told AFP in an interview on her 116th birthday.

"It was rare, in families, there were

usually two dead rather than two alive. They both came back," she said. She worked as a governess in Paris—a period she once called the happiest time of her life—for the children of wealthy families. She converted to Catholicism and was

baptized at the age of 26.

Driven by a desire to "go further", she joined the Daughters of Charity order of nuns at the relatively late age of 41. Sister Andre was then assigned to a hospital in Vichy, where she worked for 31 years. In later life she moved to Toulon along the Mediterranean coast.

Her days in the nursing home were punctuated by prayer, mealtimes and visits from residents and hospice workers. She also received a steady flow of letters, almost all of which she responded to. In 2021 she survived catching Covid-19, which infected 81 residents of her nursing home.

'Work kept me alive'

Randon told reporters last year that her work and caring for others had kept her spry. "People say that work kills, for me work kept me alive, I kept working until I was 108," she told reporters in April last year in the tearoom of the home.

Although she was blind and relied on a wheelchair, she used to care for other elderly people much younger than herself. "People should help each other and love each other instead of hating. If we shared all that, things would be a lot better," she said at the same meeting with journalists.

But the Catholic nun had rejected requests for locks of hair or DNA samples, saying that "only the good Lord knows" the secret of her longevity. It is likely that France's new oldest person is now 112-year-old Marie-Rose Tessier, a woman from Vendee, longevity expert Laurent Toussaint told AFP.

But Toussaint warned that it was always possible an even older person had not yet made themselves known. Jeanne Calment, who died in 1997 in Arles, southern France, at the age of 122 holds the record for the oldest confirmed age reached by any human. — AFP



New research shows porpoises not harmed by offshore windfarms

Researchers in Scotland have developed a tool to help ensure porpoises are not being harmed by the construction of offshore wind farms, which are crucial for scaling up renewable energy globally. The pile driving required to build offshore turbines can harm or even kill noise-sensitive marine mammals like porpoises, sparking concern among environmentalists. To move them away from the construction sites, acoustic deterrents (ADDs) are often installed underwater: delivering sound at specific frequencies and volumes that temporarily drive the porpoises away.

These devices have been used for years, but it was hard to precisely track how far the porpoises were travelling, and for how long. Without knowing this, no one could be sure if the animals were avoiding harm. But researchers have improved the technology to track the marine mammals, confirming in fact that they were avoiding injury caused by noise from the turbine building site in the study area.

"It's the first time that we've been able to directly show that the porpoises are swimming directly away from the ADDs... which is what we want," lead author Isla Graham of the University of Aberdeen told AFP. The findings, published Wednesday in the Royal Society journal, help to assuage fears that building offshore wind farms harm nearby cetaceans, by ensuring that ADDs actually work.

Offshore wind farms are crucial for the green energy transition to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, and have the potential to generate massive amounts of energy compared to onshore projects. "There are obvious climate benefits to the expansion of renewable energy. But that needs to be balanced with the potential impacts that it could have-negative impacts, positive impacts too," Graham said. In 2021, of the total wind capacity installed globally, 93 percent was onshore, with the remaining offshore, according to the International Energy Agency.

'Seal scarers'

ADDs, colloquially known as "seal scarers", were initially designed to keep seals away from fish farms and agricultural sites. They are commonly deployed during the construction of offshore wind farms, to clear the surrounding site of sound-sensitive animals like porpoises whose hearing can be harmed by noisy pile-driving. Hearing is very important for porpoises' communication, social interaction and foraging.

Graham said tracking animals driven away by ADD devices can be hard, since it's tough to see animals in the water, especially at night. But the new tool developed by her team allows for more accurate tracking in real time, using seven underwater sound recorders about a kilometer apart, called a hydrophone cluster, to listen to the porpoises. The study, conducted in 2019 near the Moray East offshore wind farm in the North Sea off the Scottish Coast, found that about half of the porpoises moved up to 7.5 kilometers (five miles) from the site during the piling. — AFP

Marvel movies return to China after nearly 4-year break

Chinese film fans on Wednesday celebrated the return of Marvel movies to the country's cinemas after an absence of nearly four years. Foreign films are tightly controlled in China, which imposes an annual release quota, and movies in the hugely popular Marvel franchises have been off the silver screen since the release of "Spider-Man: Far from Home" in July 2019. Disney-owned Marvel Studios on Wednesday said on Weibo that "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever" will be released in Chinese cinemas on February 7, followed by "Ant-Man and the Wasp:



Quantumania" on February 17.

The China Film Administration, affiliated with the Communist Party's propaganda department, has not offered any explanation on why Marvel movies were blocked. Disney had previously declined requests

by Chinese censors to remove references to same-sex relationships in films including "Eternals" and "Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness". Chinese fans welcomed the announcement.

"It feels surreal... I've missed the Marvel

universe, one Weibo user wrote, referring to the huge set of interconnected franchises that have raked in billions of dollars worldwide for the company. "Will they also release the other six installments of the Marvel (franchises) that were blocked?" wrote another, adding: "Now we can at least escape from our COVID-hit reality." "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever", the sequel to the 2018 blockbuster "Black Panther", debuted in cinemas worldwide in November.

"Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania"—the third movie in that franchise—will hit Chinese cinemas on the same day it premieres in the United States. A return to China would mark an end to Disney's lost earnings in one of the world's biggest movie markets. The first Black Panther film took in \$105 million at Chinese cinemas, while the second Ant-Man movie generated \$121 million, according to Box Office Mojo. — AFP

Two thirds of reef sharks and rays risk extinction

Nearly two thirds of the sharks and rays that live among the world's corals are threatened with extinction, according to new research published Tuesday, with a warning this could further imperil precious reefs. Coral reefs, which harbor at least a quarter of all marine animals and plants, are gravely menaced by an array of human threats, including overfishing, pollution and climate change.

Shark and ray species—from apex predators to filter feeders—play an important role in these delicate ecosystems that "cannot be filled by other species", said Samantha Sherman, of Simon Fraser

University in Canada and the wildlife group TRAFFIC International. But they are under grave threat globally, according to the study in the journal Nature Communications, which assessed extinction vulnerability data from the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) to look at 134 species of sharks and rays linked to reefs.

Keeping reefs healthier

"It was a bit surprising just how high the threat level is for these species," Sherman told AFP. "Many species that we thought of as common are declining at alarming rates and becoming more difficult to find in some places." Sherman said the biggest threat to these species by far

approved a plan to protect dozens of shark and ray species, adding 21 coral reef species in addition to the 18 species already covered by the regulations.

Sherman said this was "a step in the right direction", but added that a global effort was needed to improve implementation, while the regulations themselves do not stop these species being killed as "bycatch". She added that the study showed greater risks to rays on coral reefs, but that they enjoy fewer protections.

"The solutions are similar for both sharks and rays—limits on fishing, well placed and properly implemented Marine Protected Areas, and alternative livelihood solutions to reduce the number of fishers on coral reefs," Sherman said. Coral reef fisheries directly support the livelihoods and food security of over half a billion people, but this crucial ecosystem is facing an existential threat by overexploitation and global heating. Human-driven climate change has spurred mass coral bleaching as the world's oceans get warmer.

Modeling research has shown that even if the Paris climate goal of holding global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius is reached, 99 percent of the world's coral reefs will not be able to recover. At two degrees of warming, the number rose to 100 percent. "We know coral reef health is declining, largely due to climate change, however, coral reef sharks and rays can help keep reefs healthier for longer," said Sherman. The study was carried out by an international team of experts from universities, government and regional oceanic and fishery organizations as well as non-governmental organizations across the world. — AFP



This handout image released by Simon Fraser University/James Cook University shows a Bluespotted lagoon ray.



This handout image released by Simon Fraser University/James Cook University shows a porcupine stingray near a jetty.



This handout image released by Simon Fraser University/James Cook University shows a pair of shovel-nose rays off the coast of Australia.

University in Canada and the wildlife group TRAFFIC International. But they are under grave threat globally, according to the study in the journal Nature Communications, which assessed extinction vulnerability data from the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) to look at 134 species of sharks and rays linked to reefs.

The authors found 59 percent of coral reef shark and ray species are threatened

with extinction, an extinction risk almost double that of sharks and rays in general. Among these, five shark species are listed as critically endangered, as well as nine ray species—all so-called "rhino rays" that look more like sharks than stingrays.

These regions are heavily fished and do not currently have management in place to reduce the impact on these species, said Sherman. Last year countries at a Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species summit

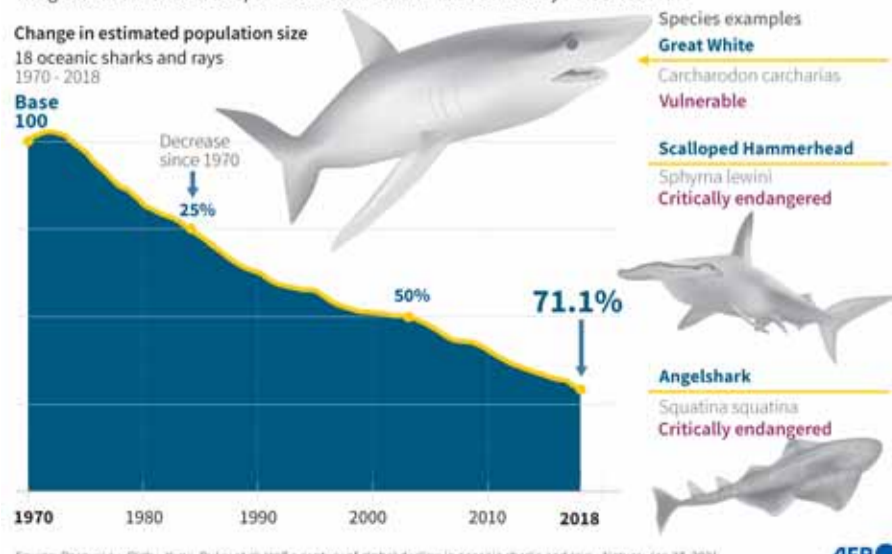
is overfishing. Sharks are under most threat in the Western Atlantic and parts of the Indian Ocean, whereas the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia are the highest risks for rays.



This handout image released by Simon Fraser University/James Cook University shows bull sharks in the waters off Fiji. — AFP photos

Sharp drop in shark numbers

The global abundance of 18 species of oceanic sharks has declined by 71% since 1970



Lifestyle | Features



Madonna

Madonna announces major global tour

Madonna on Tuesday announced a massive global tour paying homage to her more than four-decade long career. The 35-city string of dates will kick off on July 15 in Vancouver, with stops in US cities including Detroit, Chicago, Miami and New York, where her storied rise to superstardom began. "The

Celebration Tour" will continue in Europe into the fall, with stops including London, Barcelona and Paris, with a final show in Amsterdam on December 1. "I am excited to explore as many songs as possible in hopes to give my fans the show they have been waiting for," Madonna said in a statement. The

64-year-old dropped news of the tour in a video that nods to her 1991 documentary "Truth or Dare." In the clip, the Queen of Pop plays the classic sleepover game with a tinge of the risqué with fellow celebrities including Diplo, Jack Black, Lil Wayne and Bob the Drag Queen, who will accompany her on

the tour. Madonna is a seven-time Grammy-winner with 14 studio albums as well as live, soundtrack, and compilation recordings to her name, and has asserted incalculable influence over her 40 years as one of music's greatest stars. — AFP

Alhue and Mailen were born in captivity but conservationists hope to free the chicks soon as part of a project to boost Chile's ailing population of Andean condors. The Andean condor, a type of vulture, is the largest flying bird in the world but its population is considered "vulnerable" by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature's Red List of Endangered Species. There are just an estimated 6,700 Andean condors living in the wild.



Baby condor Mailen is photographed at the Center for the Rehabilitation of Birds of Prey (CRAR) of the Chilean Ornithologists Union.



Condors are photographed at the Center for the Rehabilitation of Birds of Prey (CRAR) of the Chilean Ornithologists Union, located in the town of Talagante in Santiago, Chile.

At Chile's Rehabilitation Center for Birds of Prey (CRAR), conservationists are trying to boost those numbers. "The aim is to introduce condors to nature born from condors that cannot be freed, who are here for life," said



Chile preparing threatened condor chicks for release into wild

Eduardo Pavez, the CRAR founder. The CRAR center in Talagante, 40 kilometers from Santiago, looks after birds that cannot be released into the wild, either because they cannot fly or have become too accustomed to human contact. The parents of both Alhue, a male, and female Mailen, have lived in the center for years and cannot be released.

Venerated but threatened

The condor has long been venerated by indigenous peoples in the Americas. In Andean religious mythology, the condor was a symbol of power and ruled the upper world, acting as

an intermediary with the world of spirits and the sun god, Inti. It features on the coat of arms of several countries, such as Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia and Chile. It is virtually extinct in Venezuela in the north of the continent, while the largest concentrations are found in the south of Chile and Argentina.

The greatest threat to the condor is human occupation of the Andean mountain range, and a lack of food. CRAR, founded in 1990, takes in all sorts of birds of prey including owls and falcons that are injured, have been in an accident or were kept in captivity. Its aim is to rehabilitate them

and release them back into the wild, but in many cases that is impossible.

Alhue's mother, for example, was injured by a power line and can no longer fly. Mailen's mother, who was brought to the center at the age of about one, has become too accustomed to humans to be able to survive in the wild. Over the years, CRAR has already freed 13 out of 25 condor chicks born in captivity, with another four due to be soon released.

Teaching by pecks

Within the next six to nine months, once they are fully grown, Alhue and Mailen will be separated from their



A condor is photographed at the Center for the Rehabilitation of Birds of Prey (CRAR) of the Chilean Ornithologists Union.

parents. The parents will then be able to begin reproducing again while their offspring will start socializing with and learning from other adult condors at the center. They will be taken to a large cage where adults that cannot be released mix with juveniles preparing for the outside world.

There they can fly around and communicate with other members of their species. "Here they establish a hierarchy where the adult males dominate. They have to learn that hierarchy, sometimes by force of pecks, so they find their place in condor society," said Pavez. That is a vital apprenticeship for Mailen and Alhue ahead of their likely release in the southern hemisphere in spring of 2024 so that they are able to build relationships with other wild condors, get to know their territory and find food. — AFP



Condors are photographed at the Center for the Rehabilitation of Birds of Prey (CRAR) of the Chilean Ornithologists Union.



Workers of the Center for the Rehabilitation of Birds of Prey (CRAR) of the Chilean Ornithologists Union take care of condors in the town of Talagante in Santiago, Chile.

Fugitive tiger euthanized in South Africa after attacks

A tiger who escaped from a farm and roamed the countryside outside of Johannesburg for four days, attacking a man and killing several animals, was euthanized on Wednesday, a local community leader said. The eight-year-old female Bengal tiger was put down just before dawn after it killed a dog, the latest in a series of attacks that followed its escape from an enclosure at a private farm on Saturday, Gresham Mandy, a member of a local safety volunteer group in Walkerville, 30 kilometers (18 miles) south of Johannesburg, told AFP.

Tigers are not native to South Africa, but in recent years their breeding has become common in the country. Following its escape, the tiger named Sheba, attacked a 39-year-old man, who survived the assault and was hospitalized with injuries to his legs. It also

killed a dog and a deer and mauled another dog so badly that it had to be put down, Mandy said.

Dozens of people, including animal experts and members of the community group tracked the big cat using drones and helicopters. The decision to put her down was made after her latest kill. "She killed the dog in a private farm with dwellings where six families reside, it was becoming too much of a risk,"

Mandy said. "In that moment there was no other option but to put her down," said Mandy. A report by global animal rights charity, Four Paws, said that 359 tigers—almost a tenth of the world's population—were exported from South Africa from 2011-2020, most of them sold to zoos.—AFP



Members of a private anti-poaching unit company prepares a cage in Walkerville, as the search for a missing female tiger who escaped from her private enclosure intensifies. — AFP

In rare attack, polar bear kills two people in Alaska

A polar bear on a rampage killed a woman and a boy in a remote area of Alaska, police said, in a rare attack on humans. The bear was itself then shot and killed by a resident in the tiny community of Wales, on the far western coast of Alaska. "Initial reports indicate that a polar bear had entered the community and had chased multiple residents," police said in a statement on Tuesday's attack.

"The bear fatally attacked an adult female and juvenile male—it was shot and killed by a local resident as it attacked the pair," police said, adding that state troopers and Fish and Game Department authorities were trying to reach the town "as weather conditions allow." The victims' identities were not made public as authorities were trying to notify their families.

Polar bear attacks are extremely rare, with local media reporting one of the most recent fatal encounters between a human and polar bear in Alaska was in 1990.

According to Canadian NGO Polar Bears International, only 20 people worldwide are known to have been killed by polar bears between 1870 and 2014, though the frequency of attacks is increasing.

Wales, a village of about 150 people on the Bering Strait that separates the United States from Russia, is part of the Alaska Nannut Co-Management Council, a group of Indigenous communities that have traditionally hunted polar bears for subsistence. The giant bears—males can grow up to 1,500 pounds (680 kilograms) — face increasing threats from climate change, with their Arctic sea ice habitat disappearing as the far north warms up to four times faster than the rest of the world.—AFP



In this file photo shows a polar bear with its cubs in the Sea Ice, northeast of Prudhoe Bay in Alaska in 1985. — AFP

Sports

Odermatt betting on downhill breakthrough for Kitzbuehel glory

KITZBUEHEL: Swiss tyro Marco Odermatt has yet to win a World Cup downhill race, but the runaway leader in the overall standings believes he has "two good chances" to win in Kitzbuehel. Olympic giant slalom gold medalist Odermatt's confidence is nothing short of brazen given the Streif piste in the Austrian resort is widely regarded as the most testing on the circuit. "To win here is a dream, and to win a downhill in general is also a dream," the 25-year-old acknowledged.

Odermatt touched down in Kitzbuehel after two impressive podiums on home snow in Wengen: a third place in the super-G and second in downhill. Seeking back-to-back World Cup overall crowns, Odermatt has won 11 times in the giant slalom and six in super-G, but a downhill title remains elusive despite eight podium finishes including second place in Kitzbuehel last season.

"I was very close to winning last year, then again at the start of this season (when he was edged into second in Beaver Creek). In Wengen last week I was further behind Aleksander Aamodt Kilde, but here I'll have two good chances," Odermatt added: "Wengen was tough for the head and legs. I was tired right through Monday but feel better now. I went home for just a day, barely enough time to pack some clean clothes in my suitcase."

Norway's Kilde stands second in the overall standings, but has previous form in Kitzbuehel, winning a downhill last season, a fact he said made him optimistic. "It's different having won here one time," said the Norwegian, whose partner is American star Mikaela Shiffrin. "I can come knowing that I'm capable of winning and that gives me confidence. "My

form has never been as good. I'm enjoying myself and that's the most important thing to keep up motivation every weekend. "I feel different this year, less stressed at the startgate. I know I'm skiing well at the moment. I'm excited!"

'Some sort of cat'

Kilde came in second in Tuesday's first training run albeit missing a gate, while Wednesday's second training was cancelled amid heavy snow. A third training session is scheduled for Thursday. The covering of white at least hid the brown and green terrain that was showing through on the Hahnenkamm mountain. "Unfortunately we're starting to get used to it this winter," he said of a lack of snow. "But the piste is exceptional, they've done an amazing job, it's excellent to ski on."

Odermatt agreed, saying: "The slope is steep in Kitzbuehel, faster than in Wengen. "I like this downhill. This year it'll be easier to ski, it'll be less icy than usual!" One skier who will be making his final appearance at Kitzbuehel will be Odermatt's teammate Beat Feuz, a three-time winner on the Streif and current Olympic downhill champion. Feuz will hang up his skis at the end of the season after a storied career.

"It's emotional," Kilde said of Feuz's final outing down the Streif. He's brought so much to this sport, producing some of the best runs in history, like Matthias Mayer," the now-retired Austrian who claimed wins in the super-G and downhill in Kitzbuehel. "It'll really be different without Beat. We had a great battle for the globe last year. He's so smooth, his way of gliding over the snow, like some kind of cat, beautiful to watch." — AFP



KITZBUEHEL, Austria: Switzerland's Marco Odermatt races during the first training run of the men's downhill competition of the FIS Ski World Cup on Jan 17, 2023. — AFP

Firing of ex-FIFA secretary-general abusive: Court

GENEVA: A Swiss court has ruled that the way FIFA fired its acting secretary-general Markus Kattner in 2016, when the scandal-ridden body dismissed him without notice over allegations of financial mismanagement, was unjustified. In a verdict issued last October but only made public on Tuesday, the supreme court of the Swiss canton of Zurich - where world football's governing body has its headquarters - ruled that the firing of the German national was abusive.

Kattner's sacking without notice was "considered as unjustified" by the cantonal supreme court, a court spokesman told AFP. That ruling overturned an earlier finding by the lower labour court in Zurich, he said. Zurich's highest tribunal sent the case on to the labour court to rule on what damages should be awarded to Kattner, 52, who is reportedly seeking 10 million Swiss francs (\$10.8 million) in compensation.

Kattner, who served for more than a decade as FIFA's finance director, took over as interim secretary-general in September 2015, after Frenchman Jerome Valcke was pushed out over a scandal involving tickets resold on the black market. But less than a year later, Kattner himself got the axe. FIFA fired him with immediate effect on May 23, 2016, saying an internal investigation had shown "failures" in the way he had carried out his financial duties.

Audio recording

FIFA accused him of providing himself and close associates with significant bonuses, set up under secretive terms, with the knowledge and authorization of only a few people in the institution. Among other things, the organization alleged that he had breached a range of agreements and illegally obtained an audio recording of a meeting.

The Zurich supreme court ruled though that procuring a recording of a meeting he had been excluded from did not constitute valid grounds for a dismissal without notice. Kattner's firing was only one in a string of episodes that rocked FIFA after the biggest scandal in the history of world football erupted on May 27, 2015, when Swiss police marched into a Zurich hotel and arrested, on US warrants, seven high-level officials.

Under pressure, disgraced long-time president Sepp Blatter announced a few days later he would resign, with current chief Gianni Infantino elected to succeed him in February 2016, just weeks before Kattner was let go. Blatter had come to Kattner's defense at the time of his sacking, telling AFP in an interview at the time that he had "never met a more honest man".

Beyond his termination, Kattner was also hit in June 2020 with a 10-year ban from all football-related activities and a stiff fine of one million Swiss francs. That punishment was handed down by FIFA's ethics committee, which following an internal investigation into the bonus payments ruled that Kattner was guilty of conflicts of interest and abusing his position. — AFP

Germany's Bauhaus holds off Ewan to win first TDU stage

ADELAIDE: Germany's Phil Bauhaus (Bahrain Victorious) held off fast-finishing Australian Caleb Ewan to narrowly take out the first stage of the men's Tour Down Under in Adelaide on Wednesday. Bauhaus had less than half a wheel to spare as he flashed across the finish line in Tanunda as Ewan (Australian National Team) stormed home from well back in the pack at the end of the 149.9km stage through South Australia's Barossa Valley wine growing region.

Australia's Michael Matthews (Jayco-AlUla) was third across the line from Italy's Alessandro Covi (UAE Team Emirates). Italy's Alberto Bettiol (EF Education First) led the TDU overall after his win in Tuesday's Prologue around Adelaide's streets. Bauhaus recovered from a crash earlier in the opening stage to get in position for a crack at the finishing sprint down the main street of Tanunda.

"I crashed pretty bad, it was a massive impact, but I recovered and the team did a really good job, we were always in front in the last lap," Bauhaus said. "In the (leadup) Schwalbe Classic I waited too long, so this time with 300 meters left I just went for it and it was pretty close at the end with Caleb, but I'm super happy. I did not want to celebrate early. I was only sure I won later. It was super nervous today. A lot of guys went down."

The stage was marred by a series of pile-ups and



ADELAIDE: German cyclist Phil Bauhaus from Bahrain Victorious team sprints to the finish to win stage one of the Tour Down Under UCI cycling event on Jan 18, 2023. — AFP

a few riders came down in a scrimmage in the closing furious kilometer. American Magnus Sheffield (Ineos Grenadiers) went down in the final run and sustained cuts on both knees. He was able to cross the line, retaining his third place overall. His team said he was being evaluated. Ewan relished the rough and tumble in the closing stages, tweeting: "Doesn't get better than a big crash does it?"

There was also a mass fall with 50km left with a half dozen riders tumbling onto the bitumen. Dutchman Robert Gesink (Jumbo-Visma) and New Zealand's Patrick Bevin (DSM) could not continue in the stage. Matthews, making his first appearance in

the TDU since 2014, pulled a few seconds back on race leader Bettiol through time bonuses and was satisfied with his day's work.

"I wouldn't have minded a bit harder stage today. We nailed the two intermediate sprints," Matthews said. "It was a successful day to try to set me up for the overall. When you're that close to a win you're going to be disappointed. Overall it was a good day for us." Matthews lies second overall, six seconds back, with Sheffield slipping to third at eight seconds behind Bettiol heading into Thursday's Brighton to Victor Harbor second stage raced over 154.8km. — AFP

USA thrash New Zealand in World Cup warning

WELLINGTON: Alex Morgan scored her 120th international goal as the United States thrashed New Zealand 4-0 in a friendly in Wellington on Wednesday to fire a World Cup warning. Forward Mallory Swanson netted twice and Lynn Williams was also on the scoresheet for the world's top-ranked side, six months before the Americans defend their title in New Zealand and Australia.

The match was the first of the year for the Americans, who will be pursuing a third World Cup crown in a row. Coach Vlatko Andonovski said he wants his team get familiarized with the stadiums, training venues and travel before the month-long global showpiece starting on July 20. The US will play their three World Cup pool games in Wellington and Auckland and potentially return to those cities for a quarter-final and semifinal.

They spurned a host of chances in the first half but capitalized on their dominance after the interval with four goals in 20 minutes. Swanson's headed opener came via a cross from Trinity Rodman, the daughter of former National Basketball Association star Dennis



WELLINGTON: New Zealand's Mackenzie Barry and USA's Alex Morgan vie for the ball at Sky Stadium on Jan 18, 2023. — AFP

Rodman. Star striker Morgan doubled the lead before Swanson grabbed her second and Williams capitalized on another assist from Rodman. The four-time world

champions will play a two-match series against the 24th-ranked New Zealanders, which concludes in Auckland on Saturday. — AFP

Gunnarsdottir wins claim against Lyon over pregnancy pay

PARIS: French club Lyon were ordered by FIFA to compensate former player Sara Bjork Gunnarsdottir for an effective pay cut during her pregnancy. The 32-year-old hailed the ruling as a guarantee of financial security for all female players, in an open letter published in The Players' Tribune. Global players' union FIFPro also hailed what they called "a landmark ruling", the results of which FIFA published in full on Tuesday.

Lyon, record eight-time Women's Champions League winners, put Gunnarsdottir on maternity

leave in 2021. FIFA said clubs must pay pregnant players their full salary and ruled against Lyon. Gunnarsdottir joined from Wolfsburg in 2020. She helped Lyon win the French title and also scored in their Champions League final win over Wolfsburg. In early 2021 she became pregnant, but continued to play and train until returning to Iceland, with a plan for an immediate return to France after the birth.

The Icelandic international said Lyon failed to pay her wages as she instead received just a fraction from state benefits. But on Tuesday the club were ordered to compensate her 82,000 euros (\$88,577). "The victory felt like a guarantee of financial security for all players who want to have a child during their career," said Gunnarsdottir, who had a son, Ragnar, in Nov 2021. "These are part of my rights, and this can't be disputed - even by a club as big as Lyon."

Gunnarsdottir left Lyon at the end of last season

and signed a two-year deal with Italian club Juventus. "FIFA has reproached us for not having offered another job to Sara Bjork Gunnarsdottir during her sick leave and then her maternity leave when at the time the law forbids us from doing so in France and the player had expressly asked us to be able to return to live in Iceland, which we accepted," Lyon wrote in a statement.

"We're proud to have had Sara Bjork Gunnarsdottir in the squad. Our paths separated purely for sporting reasons. If she wishes to help us today further develop French law, we would be happy to involve her in our efforts alongside Amel Majri to allow all athletes to fully experience their pregnancy as well as their return to competition," the club added. Majri, 29, became the first active France international to have a child in July. She played her first match in 15 months on Saturday, having suffered a serious knee injury before her pregnancy. — AFP

Sports

Elliott rocket sends troubled Liverpool into fourth round

LONDON: Jurgen Klopp said he got the reaction he wanted after Harvey Elliott's sublime strike put troubled Liverpool back on track with a 1-0 win at Wolves in Tuesday's FA Cup third-round replay. Klopp's side came in for scathing criticism after losing their last two Premier League games in desultory fashion at Brighton and Brentford. But Elliott's brilliant long-range effort in the first half at Molineux secured a much-needed first victory in four games in all competitions.

Ironically, Liverpool's reward for seeing off Wolves is a return trip to Brighton in the fourth round. The Reds' dismal 3-0 defeat at Brighton on Saturday left them languishing in ninth place in the Premier League, 10 points adrift of the top four. "It feels like ages ago that we had that feeling that we win and play well," Klopp said.

"We played a really good first half and in the end it was just passion to block the shots. It's the reaction we wanted to see from ourselves and the boys delivered. The goal was exceptional. I don't want to make Harvey's performance smaller, but I had a few men of the match today, just the others didn't score."

In the bout of soul-searching that followed that embarrassment, Klopp said his struggling team needed to go "back to basics". Amid mounting questions about Klopp's own future at Anfield, the German claimed this week that he will not leave the club unless he is forced to and hinted at changes in his squad during the summer.

Hamstrung by injuries to a host of key players including Virgil van Dijk and Luis Diaz, Klopp made eight changes after the Brighton debacle, with only

Cody Gakpo, Thiago Alcantara and Ibrahima Konate retaining their places. Mohamed Salah and Alisson Becker were among those left out, but Liverpool's understudies rose to the challenge.

Wolves had forced the replay with a 2-2 draw at Anfield, but Julen Lopetegui's side were angered when they had a potential winning goal from Toti controversially ruled out for offside in the final seconds. They were unable to take their chance to avenge that injustice despite a lively start that saw Adama Traore's cross headed just wide by Raul Jimenez.

It was Elliott who produced the opener in breathtaking fashion in the 13th minute. Klopp's midfield has been written off as ageing and past their best this season. But the 19-year-old Elliott offers hope for the future, a point he underlined by running unchecked from the halfway line before blasting a superb strike over Jose Sa from 25 yards.

Tenacious Liverpool

Sa was caught too far off his line but that should not detract from the quality of Elliott's first goal since October. Snapping into tackles and winning second balls, Liverpool were showing more hunger and tenacity than in recent weeks. Gakpo was still searching for his first Liverpool goal in his third appearance since signing from PSV Eindhoven. The Netherlands forward nearly broke his duck with a dipping volley that flashed just over.

Gakpo was replaced by Salah for the last 25 minutes, but it was Wolves who finished strongly with Ruben Neves' free-kick narrowly clearing the crossbar. Wolves' best chance to draw level



WOLVERHAMPTON: Wolverhampton Wanderers' Spanish midfielder Adama Traore shoots but misses to score during the FA Cup match against Liverpool at Molineux stadium on Jan 17, 2023. — AFP

came when Jimenez couldn't head home on the goalline from Traore's cross as Joe Gomez got the crucial block.

Elsewhere, Championship side Birmingham survived a scare in their 2-1 win at third-tier Forest Green. In a delayed third-round clash after the original tie was postponed due to a waterlogged pitch,

Ben Stevenson's brilliant long-range strike put Forest Green ahead after eight minutes. But Lukas Jutkiewicz grabbed Birmingham's equalizer in the 50th minute and Kevin Long killed off League One's bottom club 15 minutes later. Bristol City won 2-1 at Swansea, while Luton beat Wigan 2-1 and West Brom thrashed Chesterfield 4-0. — AFP

Sacked Wallabies coach says he had players' support

MELBOURNE: Sacked Wallabies coach Dave Rennie insisted Wednesday he had the support of the players and staff as his successor Eddie Jones laid out his vision of a more attacking style of rugby from a "super-fit" Australian team. New Zealander Rennie, who took over from Michael Cheika at the end of 2019, was shown the door on Monday after only five wins from 14 Tests last year, replaced by the former England boss.

Rennie said he had received hundreds of messages of support from current and former players, coaches,

administrators and others since his shock firing. "The support has been immense and much appreciated from the more than 500 messages I've received," he said in his first comments since being let go. "I've loved my time with the team. They're outstanding young men who are keen to learn and prepared to work hard."

Rennie, who is well respected, has been linked with a move to Kobe Steelers in Japan. He made no comment on his future, only saying that he was "disappointed I won't be able to see out my contract in the way I agreed to back in 2019". "But (I) leave knowing I had the full support of the playing group



Dave Rennie

and the staff," he added. "I certainly felt we have made massive shifts over the past three years both on and off the field, which is off the back of a hell of a lot of hard work put in by good people."

Jones will assume the reins on Jan 29, his second stint in charge after his 2001-2005 spell during which he took the Wallabies to the 2003 World Cup final. They lost that game on home soil to England, thanks to a last-minute drop-goal from Jonny Wilkinson.

The 62-year-old's deal will take him through to the 2027 World Cup in Australia and he said there was unfinished business. "To be honest, I never really thought about getting the opportunity to coach Australia again. The first time in 2005, that was a difficult time," Jones, who was axed by England in December, told reporters. "You're coaching your country and it gets taken away from you, but you move on and just get on with it, then re-focus on what you're doing." — AFP

Mahious strikes again as Algeria reach quarters

ALGIERS: Ayem Mahious became the match-winner for Algeria in successive African Nations Championship (CHAN) matches when they beat Ethiopia 1-0 on Tuesday to reach the quarterfinals. Backed by a passionate 40,000 crowd at the Stade Nelson Mandela in Algiers, the hosts won the match thanks a 52nd-minute goal from the forward.

Mozambique neglected to mark Mahious at a corner, and he controlled the ball with his chest before poking it into the net off the hands of goal-

keeper Fasil Gebremichael. Mahious scored the only goal last Friday, from a penalty, when Algeria beat Libya in the opening match of a tournament confined to footballers playing for clubs in their country of birth.

A couple of victories gave Algeria six points in Group A, followed by Mozambique with four, Ethiopia with one while Libya are pointless. Mozambique scored three times in 10 minutes as they came from behind to edge Libya 3-2 in the first match of a double-header.

In the final Group A matches on Saturday, Algeria will play Mozambique in Algiers while Ethiopia take on Libya in the eastern coastal city of Annaba. It was another efficient performance by title favorites Algeria, who finished fourth in their only previous CHAN appearance 12 years ago. "I prefer to be efficient than to play well," said coach

against an initially second-string Napoli and Luciano Spalletti was forced to bring on star striker Victor Osimhen just after Leonardo Sernicola was sent off in a bid to win the tie.

The Nigeria forward drew a superb save from Marco Carnesecchi late in the first half of extra time before Simeone smashed his rebound effort off the post and bar with an open goal at his mercy. But Cremonese, under new coach Davide Ballardini after Massimiliano Alvini was sacked on Sunday with the team winless after 18 league matches, held off a Napoli onslaught in soaking conditions and held their nerve in the shootout. Ballardini's team netted all five of their spot-kicks while Stanislav Lobotka missed his for Napoli, who exit the competition early. Tuesday's match was also the first time an all-female on-pitch team of officials took charge of a match featuring two Serie A clubs. Referee Maria Sole Ferrieri Caputi, who was promoted to the top rung of Italian football's match officials in the summer, was flanked by assistants Francesca Di Monte and Tiziana Trasciatti. — AFP

Lineker red-faced by 'sabotage' of FA Cup coverage

LONDON: Gary Lineker said the BBC's television coverage of the FA Cup clash between Wolves and Liverpool had been sabotaged after loud pornographic noises were heard during the build-up to Tuesday's match. BBC presenter Lineker was discussing the third-round replay in a studio at Molineux alongside pundits Paul Ince and Danny Murphy when audible wailing broke out in the background.

Former Tottenham star Lineker was clearly startled and struggled not to laugh as he said: "Would you stop making those noises, Danny." When the sexually charged sounds continued after an interview with Liverpool boss Jurgen Klopp was aired, Lineker cut to colleague and fellow former England striker Alan Shearer in the commentary gantry. "Somebody's sending something on someone's phone, I think. I don't know whether you heard it at home," Lineker said.

Once the match kicked off, Lineker revealed the cause, tweeting a picture of a mobile phone and three laughing emojis alongside the words: "Well, we found this taped to the back of the set. As sabotage goes it was quite amusing." During the half-time analysis, Lineker took the opportunity to make further light of the bizarre incident. Talking to Ince and Murphy, he said of Liverpool's opening goal: "Harvey Elliott's goal was a screamer... which was not the only one we've had tonight."

The stunt did not go unnoticed by viewers as the incident was widely shared on social media. A BBC spokesperson said on Twitter: "We apologize to any viewers offended during the live coverage of the football this evening. We are investigating how this happened." — AFP



Gary Lineker

Today's matches on TV

ARABIAN GULF CUP

Iraq v Oman	19:00
Dubai Sports 1	
Kuwait Sports HD	
AD Sports 1 HD	

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

Manchester City v Tottenham Hotspur	23:00
beIN Sports HD 1 English	
beIN Sports Connect	
beIN Sports 1 HD Premium	

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Hospitals

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	2487430/9

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144

Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

Change of Name

I, 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 Huzaifa 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

NAME CHANGE

It is informed to the general public that in the past my name is Hussain, in front of which I have changed my surname to Singapore wala and finally I shall be known and written as Hussain Singaporewala by my new name.

Hussain Singaporewala. 24/205, Sutaron Ka Vas (Lakkar Pitha) Ratlam (M.P)

Emergency 112

Injured Nadal makes early exit

Gauff edges Raducanu in battle of prodigies | Red-hot Medvedev keeps title dreams alive

MELBOURNE: Defending champion Rafael Nadal hobbled out of the second round in a huge upset at the Australian Open on Wednesday, as Coco Gauff beat Emma Raducanu in a battle of the rising stars. Nadal's wife Mery was in tears as the injury-hampered Spanish great lost to 65th-ranked Mackenzie McDonald at Rod Laver Arena, where the roof was closed because of more rain in Melbourne.

The 36-year-old Nadal was clearly hindered by a hip issue that required a medical timeout, as he went down 6-4, 6-4, 7-5 to the American. It was the reigning champion's earliest exit from a major in seven years and will lead to more questions about whether injury and age are catching up with the record 22-time major champion. The men's title now looks Novak Djokovic's to lose.

Nadal said defeat "hurt" and acknowledged that injuries were taking a toll. In contrast to Nadal's disappointment and pain, 27-year-old McDonald is into the third round and a match against Yoshihito Nishioka of Japan. "He's an incredible champion, he's never going to give up regardless of the situation," said McDonald of his beaten opponent. "I was trying to stay focused on what I was trying to do and he kind of got me out of my rhythm, and I just got through it."

Melbourne's famously fickle weather played more havoc on day three. On Tuesday play on most courts was stopped because of extreme heat and then matches were suspended later in the day on the outside courts by heavy rain. More rain fell on Wednesday as organizers frantically tried to clear a backlog of matches. Only matches on the three main stadiums, which have roofs, were able to begin on time. The outside courts belatedly saw action, but six hours of play was lost.

The Italian 15th seed Jannik Sinner, 16th seed Frances Tiafoe and sixth seed Felix Auger-Aliassime all won. So too did Daniil Medvedev, the losing finalist at the past two Australian Opens, who overcame a partisan crowd to dismiss Australian wildcard John Millman 7-5, 6-2, 6-2. Seventh seed Medvedev will fancy his chances now that Nadal is on his way home. So too will Greek third seed

Stefanos Tsitsipas, who raced past Australian wildcard Rinky Hijikata in 92 minutes.

'We were nervous'

The 18-year-old American Gauff, seen as the heir to now-retired Serena Williams, defeated former US Open champion Raducanu 6-3, 7-6 (7/4). It was a first-ever meeting between the two and a glimpse of an exciting future for women's tennis. The two good friends went toe-to-toe throughout, exchanging service breaks, but the turning point came in the second set when the American grittily saved two set points at 4-5.

Gauff then edged past the 20-year-old Briton on her third match point in the tiebreak, before they embraced warmly at the net. "The whole match was great and considering the circumstances I can imagine both of us was nervous. This was a long-anticipated match-up since the draw came out," said Gauff. Earlier, world number one Iga Swiatek and dangerous American Jessica Pegula led the charge into the third round.

Polish title favorite Swiatek swept past Colombia's Camila Osorio 6-2, 6-3 while third seed Pegula downed Belarusian Aliaksandra Sasnovich 6-2, 7-6 (7/5). Greece's Maria Sakkari also went through, but she looked anything but the sixth seed in a 3-6, 7-5, 6-3 struggle against Russian qualifier and college student Diana Shnaider. Sakkari was irked by Shnaider's fist pumps and celebratory screams, before finding her composure. "During a match, you can be very pumped," Sakkari said. "But the way that some players celebrate their points, it's not appropriate. I wasn't happy with that." In the last match of the day, last year's beaten finalist Danielle Collins had an almighty scare before defeating Karolina Muchova 6-7 (1/7), 6-2, 7-6 (10/6). — AFP



Rafael Nadal

Nadal exit raises fresh questions about future

MELBOURNE: Rafael Nadal made history at the Australian Open a year ago when he won a then-record 21st Grand Slam crown, but his dispiriting defeat on Wednesday raises fresh questions about how much longer the ailing Spaniard can keep going. Nadal's wife Mery was in tears at Rod Laver Arena as her injury-hampered husband succumbed 6-4, 6-4, 7-5 to 65th-ranked Mackenzie McDonald of the United States. Nadal hobbled out of the arena, his hip sore and his title defense over after just two matches.

So what now for one of the best men's tennis players of all time? In the short term, 36-year-old Nadal needs to diagnose and fix his hip. In the aftermath of his physically and emotionally painful defeat, Nadal said he had had the problem for "a couple of days" but did not know what the issue was. "I don't know what's going on, if it's muscle, if it's joint," the deflated Spaniard told reporters. "I have history in the hip that I had issues. I had to do treatments in the past, address a little. Was not this amount of problem. Now I feel I cannot move."

As far as Nadal is concerned, the future beyond that is clearer - he says that he intends to carry on playing. "From here on, I guess when things move forward, the right decisions will be made because what I want is to continue playing tennis," he said. "Don't think I'm saying all this because I want to take a step back. It is not the case, but my current feelings are bad."

'We have to be realistic'

He may have been hindered by his hip against McDonald - the latest in a long line of injuries that have blighted his career. But even prior to this the signs were not good for Nadal that he would make it a 23rd major title in Melbourne, having won number 22 at Roland Garros last year. Following that success at the French Open, Nadal pulled out ahead of his Wimbledon semi-final with a torn abdominal muscle.

At the US Open a few weeks later, he lost in the last 16 to Frances Tiafoe and went on to lose three more times towards the end of 2022. The retirement in September of old friend and rival Roger Federer, albeit older at 41, brought Nadal's future in tennis into even clearer focus. This year started no better for the Spaniard, with two defeats at the United Cup. Nadal was then not at his best in his opener at Melbourne Park, needing four sets to defeat 38th-ranked Jack Draper, the young Briton who suffered cramps late in the match.

Speaking after his shock defeat on Wednesday, Nadal made clear that the injuries were taking their toll. "It hurts as always, but in the end, the glass is getting fuller," he said in Spanish, a phrase that means getting fed up or reaching your limit. "I've never been in a position to complain, life has given me so many positive things that I have no right to complain. But it is clear that things happen and at a sporting level the glass is filling up and there comes a time when the water can overflow. We have to be realistic." If Nadal wins the French Open, his favorite tournament, again in May-June it would be his 15th triumph there. It is the kind of round number that would make for a perfect send-off. — AFP

Jokic triple sparks Denver over Portland, Spurs stun Nets

LOS ANGELES: Nikola Jokic bagged his 13th triple-double of the season as the Denver Nuggets overcame a 44-point display from Damian Lillard to defeat the Portland Trail Blazers 122-113 on Tuesday. Two-time NBA Most Valuable Player Jokic finished with 36 points, 12 rebounds and 10 assists as Denver extended their winning streak to seven games to move one game clear of Memphis at the top of the Western Conference.

It was the 17th 30-point triple-double of Jokic's career, placing him in illustrious company alongside Magic Johnson and Larry Bird in seventh on the all-time rankings. A high-scoring first half saw Denver take a 73-66 lead, with Lillard keeping Portland firmly in the hunt with 30 points in the opening two quarters. But Denver's defensive adjustments in the second half helped them take a firm grip on the contest as they stretched away in the fourth quarter - leading by as much as 20 points at one stage - to close out the win.

"It's always tough and it's always interesting against them," Jokic said afterwards. "They're a good team with a good coach and Lillard is playing amazing right now. "But I think in the second half we played really good defense... and that's why we won the game." Jokic's 36-point haul came from 13-of-14 shooting from the field, including a near-perfect display from the free-throw line.

The Serb was one of five Denver players in double figures - Michael Porter Jr. added 23 points and Jamal Murray 17. Bruce Brown had 12 off the bench while Aaron Gordon added 11. Portland talisman

Lillard meanwhile made six-of-12 from three-point range and was a perfect 14-of-14 from the foul line in his 44-point tally.

Elsewhere on Tuesday, a depleted Brooklyn Nets slumped to a third straight loss in a 106-98 defeat to the San Antonio Spurs. The Nets were missing Kevin Durant (knee) and Kyrie Irving (calf) through injury, and the absentees proved critical as Spurs star Keldon Johnson bagged a career-high 36 points and 11 rebounds. The victory snapped a five-game losing streak for San Antonio, who remain one place off the bottom of the Western Conference with 14 wins and 31 defeats. Brooklyn have not won a game since Durant suffered his right knee injury against Miami on January 8.

'A team effort'

While Brooklyn are struggling to rediscover their winning rhythm without Durant, Milwaukee once again shrugged off the loss of their star Giannis Antetokounmpo as they rolled to a 130-122 win over the Toronto Raptors. Antetokounmpo has now missed four straight games for the Bucks, but Jrue Holiday stepped up with a big performance to guide the 2021 NBA champions to victory.

Holiday finished with a season-high 37 points, with six rebounds and seven assists, as second-placed Milwaukee edged closer to Boston at the top of the Eastern Conference. Milwaukee trailed 74-67 at half-time but cut loose in the third quarter to effectively seal victory, outscoring Toronto 38-23. "Definitely a team effort, everybody just played their hearts out and got the win," Holiday said afterwards.

In Tuesday's other game, Joel Embiid scored 41 points as the Philadelphia 76ers overpowered the Los Angeles Clippers 120-110 on the road. The Sixers remain third in the Eastern Conference standings at 28-16. — AFP



DENVER: Nikola Jokic of the Denver Nuggets shoots the ball during the game against the Portland Trail Blazers on Jan 17, 2023 at the Ball Arena. — AFP

Ratcliffe's Ineos declares interest in buying Man Utd

LONDON: British billionaire Jim Ratcliffe's Ineos company officially joined the race to buy Manchester United on Tuesday. United's owners, the Glazer family, said they were willing to listen to offers for the Premier League club in November and Ratcliffe is keen to strike a deal. Boyhood United fan Ratcliffe, who made an unsuccessful £4.25 billion (\$5.2 billion) bid to buy Chelsea last year, has long been linked with the Old Trafford outfit. "I can confirm that we have formally put ourselves into the process," an Ineos spokesman told AFP.

After failing with his Chelsea takeover when Roman Abramovich sold the Blues to American tycoon Todd Boehly and his consortium, Ratcliffe is back in the hunt for a Premier League giant. United have yet to comment on the news of the 70-year-old's interest in taking over from the

United States-based Glazers.

But, born in Failsworth, Greater Manchester, Ratcliffe is one of Britain's richest men and might be more palatable to the United support than the Glazers, who have experienced numerous fan protests during their troubled reign. The Glazers, who completed a leveraged takeover of the club in 2005, have proved deeply unpopular with supporters due to the team's declining fortunes on the pitch in recent years.

Their purchase of United also saddled the club with huge debts and they have long been accused of taking more out financially than they have invested in terms of transfer funds. The Glazers further angered United fans by backing the failed European Super League project in April 2021 which would have led to the club joining a breakaway competition.

A statement from United in November said the board will "consider all strategic alternatives, including new investment into the club, a sale, or other transactions involving the company". United have not won the Premier League since 2013 and their last major trophy came six years ago. After a dismal sixth-place finish in the Premier League last season, United have been revitalized by boss Erik ten Hag and sit fourth in the table after beating archrivals Manchester City 2-1 on Saturday.

'One of the biggest sports brands'

Ineos is keen to expand a sporting portfolio which already includes ownership of French side Nice and Swiss team FC Lausanne-Sport, as well as the cycling team Ineos Grenadiers, formerly Team Sky. Ratcliffe may face competition from Saudi Arabian investors after the country's sports minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Turki Al-Faisal said in November there "could" be interest in buying United and Liverpool, who are also up for sale.

American investment firm Raine Group, who handled Chelsea's sale, are exclusively advising United, who are valued at around £5 billion. Ratcliffe's entry into the bidding process came just hours after United legend Peter Schmeichel defended the club's decision to set up a luxury lounge at the World Economic Forum in Davos. Positioned near global software companies, consultancies and banks, the club has created a lounge on the main high street of Davos, a luxury Swiss ski resort teeming with billionaires and CEOs this week during the annual Forum.

"If you look at what we say about ourselves - we say that we are one of the biggest sporting brands in the world - then I think you have to back it up by having a presence in places like this," Schmeichel,



who is acting as an ambassador, told AFP. Schmeichel, who won five Premier League titles and the Champions League with United, said his personal preference would be for fans to buy the club, but he conceded that this was an unlikely outcome.

"I know there's a lot of fans who are wanting a change in ownership," he said. "For me... would it make a difference to change the ownership? I think the only difference would be if it was owned by the fans, but I think that's probably impossible. It's too big." — AFP