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Govt resigns as tensions boil over

Cabinet suspends ministers' special salaries • MPs criticize resignation



KUWAIT: HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah chairs a Cabinet meeting on Jan 23, 2023 before submitting the government's resignation. — KUNA

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah on Monday submitted his government's resignation to HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, blaming tense "relations with the National Assembly" for the action. The move has but effectively killed great hopes that began after the elections that the Assembly and the government will work hand in hand to turn a new page in Kuwait's modern history, which has been marred with non-stop political crises due to disputes between the Assembly and previous governments.

The government was formed just over three months ago following the Sept 29 general elections, in which the opposition scored a landslide victory. The two sides enjoyed great relations at the start of the Assembly term in October, with a majority of

MPs describing the prime minister and several ministers as "reformists".

But the ties started to experience some turbulence after MPs began pushing for populist demands to fulfill their election campaign promises. The government accepted some of the demands but could not accept others. The breakaway point came when MPs rejected repeated government requests to postpone debating a number of populist draft legislation, which the government described as expensive.

The government wanted that the controversial draft laws, including a bill calling on the government to purchase billions of dinars of bank loans of Kuwaiti citizens, be sent back to the Assembly's financial and economic affairs panel for more discussions. MPs eventually said they will return the draft legislation to the committee if the government pledges to raise salaries of citizens, pensions of

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1,741 students caught cheating; teachers arrested

KUWAIT: The ministry of education announced 1,741 students were caught cheating or trying to cheat during midterm exams that ended recently in Kuwait. Meanwhile, the public prosecution has frozen the bank accounts of those accused of leaking high school exam papers after being charged with money laundering, as they reportedly made KD 3 million from high school students. Three of the suspects are Kuwaitis (two men and a woman) and one is Syrian.

Investigations were also able to identify around 500 male and female students whose names and phone numbers were found on the phones of the suspects, who were arrested. The Syrian suspect had confessed about the role of the three citizens, one of whom is physical education teacher in the Farwaniya educational zone, saying they were sending "links" through which money was paid by students to his personal account, after which he delivered the money to the three suspects at their homes in Ahmadi governorate.

The investigations included testimonies of some students who provided detailed information about the leaks. Groups were formed of twelfth grade students, in both the science and arts streams, divided into a group for male students and another for female students. The subscription charges for one group ranged between KD 100 and KD 150, while earpieces used for cheating reached KD 150 per piece.

In related news, the education ministry announced it has identified five other teachers involved in the leaks. It is expected the government will terminate their contracts and deprive them of end-of-service gratuities, as their names were mentioned in the investigations by the public prosecution and it was proven that they managed high school exams leak groups. They were detained pending investigation.

The education ministry confirmed it will not hesitate to apply all laws supporting the educational process, as it will combat negative phenomena in cooperation with concerned authorities in the country during the examination period to achieve justice and equality among students, to build a new generation capable of developing the country.

Engineers call to fix Kuwait roads amid flying gravel

KUWAIT: Kuwait Society of Engineers called on the government, specifically the public works ministry, to deal diligently with the deteriorating condition of roads, urging the ministry to launch a national engineering/architectural campaign in all areas of Kuwait, stressing that national staff are capable to take on a challenge like this.

"The state of the roads in Kuwait has turned into a chronic problem whose solution requires more costly treatments from various aspects.

There must be a public appearance by officials to explain the reality in full transparency before the people and government alike," Secretary of KSE Fahad Al-Otaibi said in a press statement.

"We also warn against the continued lack of transparency in dealing with this problem. It is unacceptable not to inform the public of the reality of the situation regarding deterioration of roads all over Kuwait. We need continuous official announcements and continuous clear data on the condition of the country's roads," Otaibi said. "It is important to put forth a timeline for maintenance through an architectural perspective and inform citizens about it, as well as quickly deal with the situation in areas

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KUWAIT: Large puddles are seen on a potholed road after rainfall in this recent file photo. — Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

Police search for motive in US shooting

MONTEREY PARK, California: California police searched Monday for what compelled a 72-year-old man of Asian descent to shoot dead 10 people as they celebrated Lunar New Year at a dance hall in the Los Angeles suburbs. The suspect identified as Huu Can Tran had once been a regular at the Star Dance Studio in Monterey Park, giving informal lessons there, US media said - and he reportedly believed that other instructors said "evil things about him", an unnamed friend told CNN.

The network said it was unclear how frequently Tran had visited the studio in recent years. He is believed to have arrived there around 10.20 pm on Saturday and opened fire inside, killing 10 people - five men and five women, all in their 50s and 60s - and wounding 10 more. Then he apparently drove to another dance hall in nearby Alhambra, where authorities believe he intended to carry out a second massacre - but was stopped by a 26-year-old employee who wrestled the gun away from him.

Security footage obtained by ABC shows the pair wrestling in the lobby of the Lai Lai Ballroom & Studio in Alhambra. "From his body language, his facial expression, his eyes, he was looking for people," the employee, Brandon Tsay, whose grandparents

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TORRANCE, California: A law enforcement official looks into the window of a van with a body in the driver's seat on Jan 22, 2023. — AFP

Earth's inner core may have started spinning other way

PARIS: Far below our feet, a giant may have started moving against us. Earth's inner core, a hot iron ball the size of Pluto, has stopped spinning in the same direction as the rest of the planet and might even be rotating the other way, research suggested on Monday. Roughly 5,000 km below the surface we live on, this "planet within the planet" can spin independently because it floats in the liquid metal outer core.

Exactly how the inner core rotates has been a matter of debate between scientists - and the latest research is expected to prove controversial. What little we know about the inner core comes from measuring the tiny differences in seismic waves - created by earthquakes or sometimes nuclear explosions-as they pass through the middle of the Earth.

Seeking to track the inner core's movements, new research published in the journal Nature Geoscience analyzed seismic waves from repeating earthquakes over the last six decades. The study's authors, Xiaodong Song and Yi Yang of China's Peking University, said they found that the inner core's rotation "came to near halt around 2009 and then turned in an opposite direction". "We believe the inner core rotates, relative to the Earth's surface, back and forth, like a swing," they told AFP. "One

cycle of the swing is about seven decades", meaning it changes direction roughly every 35 years, they added.

They said it previously changed direction in the early 1970s and predicted the next about-face would be in the mid-2040s. The researchers said this rotation roughly lines up with changes in what is called the "length of day" - small variations in the exact time it takes Earth to rotate on its axis.

So far there is little to indicate that what the inner core does has much effect on we surface dwellers. But the researchers said they believed there are physical links between all Earth's layers, from the inner core to the surface. "We hope our study can motivate some researchers to build and test models which treat the whole Earth as an integrated dynamic system," they said.

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Local

Education ministry taking measures to block cheating

KUWAIT: The Education and Interior Ministries are working together to book those involved in running social media accounts that promote cheating among students, said Ahmad Al-Huwayda, official speaker of the Education Ministry.

"Minister Hamad Al-Adwani directed that anyone who tries to tamper with the integrity of the education system and attempts to take advantage of education for financial gains should be held accountable. The ministry will spare no effort in combating corruption in all its forms, such as exam fraud, which reflects negatively on the quality of the education process in the country," he said.

Al-Huwayda's remarks came following reports concerning the involvement of hundreds of high school students in various cheating practices while taking their end-of-first-semester exams. The claims are currently under investigation. The ministry, said Al-Huwayda, is closely following the results of these investigations, which are being conducted by the Public Prosecution Office and concerned

authorities in the Interior Ministry, and will take appropriate legal action once the investigations fully conclude.

He added that the ministry had already coordinated with the Interior Ministry at the beginning of the 2022/2023 midterm exam season in order to follow up on social media accounts that promote cheating. The ministries perused legal measures against these accounts, he said.

In addition, Al-Huwayda revealed that 1,741 students across all educational regions and all types of public, private and religious education were caught cheating or trying to cheat using various methods, including electronic devices. He did not say whether these students were related to the cheating case under investigation. All involved students were deprived from taking the exam or subsequent exams, based on 2018 regulations.

He emphasized that the Education Ministry and those in charge of the examination committees took all measures to prevent cheating during the

midterms and ensure all students had an equal opportunity to pass their exams. The measures included banning students from bringing papers and electronic devices to the examination room. Any student violating exam regulations was punished accordingly.

Following directions from Minister Al-Adwani, the ministry, in coordination with concerned authorities, is devising a plan to tackle cheating in preparation for the coming end-of-second-semester exams, said Al-Huwayda. He added that the ministry is working with the Communications Ministry, the Communication and Information Technology Regulatory Authority and the Health Ministry to discuss the possibility of blocking telephone services inside schools, and the possibility of installing modern technical devices that would restrict students from utilizing technology in cheating.

The ministry is also looking into implementing a new mechanism for conducting and distributing exams within the committees.



His Highness the Crown Prince receives the Kuwaiti surgeon Waddah Al-Rifai —KUNA

Crown Prince hosts renowned Kuwaiti surgeon Al-Rifai

KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah hosted on Monday the Kuwaiti surgeon Waddah Al-Rifai who was named the head of Creighton University Hospital's technical research department in the United States of America. His Highness wished him all success in his endeavors. —KUNA

30% of diabetic patients in Kuwait have SIBO: Expert

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Consultant of internal diseases, digestive system and liver Dr Wafaa Al-Hashash said around 30 percent of diabetic patients in Kuwait have small intestinal bacterial overgrowth (SIBO), adding this is equivalent to around 340,000 people in the country. She said the elderly are more prone to the risk of getting SIBO due to the change in level of stomach acid, and most of them are taking medicines that exacerbate the risk.

Dr Hashash said SIBO occurs when there is an abnormal increase in the total number of bacteria in the small intestine, adding that in case of SIBO, food stagnates in the small intestine and becomes a fertile



Dr Wafaa Al-Hashash

medium for bacterial growth, resulting in toxins that affect absorption of nutrients. This will result in symptoms, most important of which are gases, flatulence and diarrhea even after eating a small portion of food.

She said among the most important symptoms of SIBO are abdominal pain, nausea, gas and weight loss, adding that among the factors of getting SIBO are surgeries of the abdomen, such as gastric sleeve operations, gastric bypass, peptic ulcer surgeries, small bowel adhesions and diverticulitis in intestines, as well as getting celiac disease, diabetes radiation enteritis or cases that slow the movement of intestines.

Dr Hashash said SIBO is diagnosed through breathing with hydrogen and methane, with the accu-

racy of the test up to 83 percent. The system measures the amount of hydrogen and methane the person exhales, indicating overgrowth of bacteria in the small intestine. There is also a blood test to look for vitamin deficiency and a fecal test to check for bad fat absorption. She said sometimes an x-ray, CT scan or MRI is taken to check for abnormalities in the structure of intestines.

Dr Hashash said among SIBO complications is bad absorption of fats, carbohydrates and proteins, in addition to vitamin and basic mineral deficiency. It also leads to osteoporosis and formation of kidney stones due to bad absorption of calcium. She said it is necessary to treat the main cause of SIBO by antibiotics to reduce the number of harmful bacteria. But this is a short-term treatment because bacteria may return when the antibiotic is stopped, so the doctor should change the medicine to protect against bacterial resistance. She indicated treatment by nutritional support is the most important step to compensate for vitamin deficiency and weight loss, in addition to using food supplements and a fiber-rich diet.

Abdullah Al-Salem, lasted for a year and nine days from January 1962 to January 1963. He was followed by his brother Sheikh Sabah Al-Salem, who formed three cabinets - the second, third and fourth cabinets from February 1963 to November 1965, amounting to two years and 298 days.

The third prime minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah's tenure lasted for 12 years and 73 days from November 1965 to February 1978, during which he formed five governments - from the fifth Cabinet to the ninth Cabinet of Kuwait. The tenure of the fourth and longest serving prime minister of Kuwait, Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah, lasted for 25 years and 155 days, from February 2003 to January 2006, forming 11 cabinets from the 10th Cabinet to the 20th Cabinet of Kuwait.

Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad became the prime minister in 2003, forming one Cabinet that lasted for two years and 201 days, from July 2003 to January 2006. Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammed Al-Sabah became the prime minister in January 2006, forming seven cabinets - from the 22nd till the 28th cabinets until November 2011, when Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah became prime minister for just under eight years - from November 2011 until November 2019, during which he formed seven cabinets.

In November 2019, Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah became prime minister, continuing until July 2022, a period of two years and 248 days, during which he formed seven cabinets. As for the most recent prime minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah, his tenure if he does not return as prime minister of a new Cabinet will be the shortest in Kuwait, of just 183 days.

He took office in July 2022, but the government he formed received a backlash and he resigned the day after, making it officially the shortest serving Cabinet. His latest Cabinet was formed on October 16, 2022, which resigned on January 23, 2023. One cannot hesitate to speculate about the upcoming situation and recent developments between the government and the National Assembly. On one hand, the lack of communication between the two bodies gives much to consider on whether Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf will return as prime minister or not, while on the other hand, constitutional court objections to the polls are still ongoing, which could take us on the verge of witnessing another election. This election will be the second in under six months.



Deputy FM hosts Liberian envoy

KUWAIT: The Deputy Foreign Minister Mansour Ayyad Al-Otaibi received on Monday the outgoing Liberian ambassador Jeff Gongoer Dowana. The deputy foreign minister praised, during the meeting, the outgoing envoy for his role in boosting the Kuwaiti-Liberian relations. —KUNA

In my view

The loans war

By Dr Khalid Al-Saleh

Local@kuwaittimes.com

Kuwait society is split into two sides. One side adopted the warning against writing off loans of the public and its danger towards financial security and Kuwait's future - it is represented by economists and the educated. The second side is represented by some members of the National Assembly, as the financial and economic affairs committee is still holding on to the debt write-off card and is supported by debtors who dream of their loans being dropped.

Both teams have motivations and clear arguments, and the media discussed both sides' justifications. What we need to know are the unwritten motivations that are usually the main driving force for those leading the struggle. We cannot open the heart of each leader on both sides to find out their true intentions, but we can follow some comments and slips of tongues to attempt discovering these intentions.

Intentions here are linked to an old social struggle within the Kuwaiti structure, a structure that many wrote about, including articles in foreign papers. In Kuwait, there are many classes of society who inherited injustice due to the control of a few groups on the economy. Those limited groups are dealt with by Western politicians and some benefit from them.

Today's struggle over the issue of dropping debts is part of that old struggle, so if you ask an MP who defends scrapping debts about the secret behind his motives, he will answer with a major question: "If we do not drop debts of borrowers and gain their satisfaction, where will those huge amounts of money go?" This is the core of the problem, as we all know the harm of writing off loans on the country's economy and its future, and the injustice in it. We, as people, do not need justifications and numbers to realize this; what the Kuwaiti people need to know is where the money the state has kept from debtors will go?

In Kuwait, we have a chamber of commerce and industry that was found in 1956, and its legal status is in doubt according to the administrative structure of the state. The chamber is controlled by a small group of well-known major businesses that are known locally and abroad. This limited group does not wish to submit to the state's structural system; rather they used democracy sometimes to reach out with their decision-making centers to maintain their influence in the society.

On the other hand, along with the opening of the naturalization door in the '60s, and what followed in the change of the population structure and parliamentary democracy in Kuwait with new faces who are longing to join in running the state, they consider this their right due to their large number of their supporters. This is the undeclared secret in the issue of loans and other issues to surface later and threaten development issues.

Those who are defending wiping of loans must reconstruct the image according to the new variable - they must ask the Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry to correct its legal status and stay away from monopolizing major tenders in favor of a few businesses, and also cease the war against young economic forces that are out of its group, a war that has frozen Kuwait in the field of development and made it lag behind its Gulf sisters.

On the other hand, those defending the scrapping of loans should know that the struggle should be away from using the country's capabilities and the security of its future to achieve victory, and that the country is in need of partners in success and not partners in spoils. If they do not realize this, they will be like Samson who demolished the temple on the heads of all.

Kuwait's leadership knows the secret behind the struggle and must settle the differences, because it will come up in every period and become bigger. If we cannot find a solution for it today, then it may be a catastrophe for all. There are no persons in Kuwait who have favors on Kuwait, as the country is the one having favor towards all. Also, those who built and maintained the country's unity during hard times and poverty are not like those who came in the time of prosperity.

Government resignation stirs speculations

By Khaled Al-Abdulhadi

KUWAIT: There is speculation regarding the next prime minister as recent parliamentary tensions have appeared to cause a stalemate in talks between the government and the National Assembly, leading to much speculation about the success of communica-

tion and agreement between the government and the parliament.

With the resignation of the 42nd Cabinet of Kuwait just 183 days after its formation, the history of cabinets in Kuwait come to mind, since Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah headed the first Cabinet in January 1962 after the country gained its independence in 1961 and began its parliamentary journey a year later.

Kuwait has had nine prime ministers since 1962 and 45 cabinets, with the prime minister being primarily the crown prince until 2003, when Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah became the first prime minister of Kuwait not to be the crown prince at the same time. The first Cabinet, headed by Sheikh



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Local

Continued Kuwait-US collaboration on cybersecurity essential: Official

US Embassy lecture warns against rising cyberthreats



KUWAIT: Charge d'Affaires of the US Embassy in Kuwait James Holtsnider delivers a speech. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: The US Embassy kicked off the opening session of cybersecurity lectures on Sunday in cooperation with Saad Al-Abdullah Police Academy at Abdullahif Al-Thuwaini Building. "We are in continuous collaboration with the US Embassy in diversifying cultural and educational cooperation for Saad Al-Abdullah Academy. Previously, the academy sent three students to the United States to learn more about the US constitution, and it was a good experience. Three other students will be sent in the field of cybersecurity this year," said Brig Gen Ali Al-Wuhaib, Assistant Director-General of Saad Al-Abdullah Academy for Security Sciences for Academic Affairs.

"To face the dangers and prepare for cyberattacks, there are specialists from the Criminal Investigation Department and State Security Bureau. In the field of education, we are preparing to include cybersecurity in the curriculum. We are studying this decision with security authorities and hopefully it will be included by next year,"



Cybersecurity expert Guillermo Christensen.

Wuhaib added.

James Holtsnider, the Charge d'Affaires of the US Embassy in Kuwait, said: "The importance of cybersecurity and information security to ensure a resilient, open, secure and reliable Internet, as well as stability in cyberspace, cannot be overstated.

Every day, cybersecurity becomes more essential to our economies and our critical infrastructure like financial institutions, personal data and even our elections."

Holtsnider added this kind of threat requires investment in a more inclusive, robust and skilled workforce to protect our shared interests, noting that bilateral exchange of expertise provides a foundation for a wider range of collaboration to counter increasingly sophisticated and persistent cyberthreats and bolster efforts to defend against current and future cyberthreats.

"In 2023, cyberthreats continue to increase and it is incredibly important to develop the capacity of our teams on the American and Kuwaiti sides to share information, knowledge and close cooperation by bringing experts to Kuwait," Holtsnider pointed out. He affirmed the US-Kuwaiti partnership and collaboration on cybersecurity - as with many issues - is something the embassy will continue to work on, as it is a part of its regular and annual strategic dialogue with the Kuwaiti government all year long.

Cybersecurity expert Guillermo Christensen has provided expertise to senior officials and 320 police cadets. He has extensive expertise and experience in national defense and critical infrastructure. Christensen said that the premise behind his lecture titled 'Cyber threats' history as a guide to the future' is that cybersecurity has historically been an area for military and espionage operations to understand today's threats, noting that today's nation-state capabilities equal to tomorrow's cyberthreats, adding the lesson is to make people know the limitations of technology, because if they do not do so, it will bring them down.

Christensen explained the characteristics of nation-state attacks, saying hackers will employ specialists and have teamwork and logistics, while exhibiting patience and long-term presence to reach their purpose to access zero-day and hardware exploits by using hackers or human intelligence such as spies. At the end of the event, Wuhaib presented a plaque to Holtsnider. The three-day event will cover the history of cybersecurity and other topics including ransomware.

AFP delegation visits Kuwait Times and Kuwait News



KUWAIT: Agence France-Presse (AFP) Sales and Marketing Director, Middle East and North Africa Antoine Salame and AFP Gulf Sales and Marketing Manager Ziad Obeid visited Kuwait Times and Kuwait News offices on Monday. Kuwait Times Deputy Editor-in-Chief Abdullah Boftain, along with senior editorial team, received the AFP delegation and took them on a tour of various departments at Kuwait Times. During the visit, both sides explored means of further enhancing collaboration between Kuwait Times and AFP. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

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KUWAIT: Dr Amal Al-Yahya addresses the participants.

MoH opens 11 clinics to treat nicotine addiction

KUWAIT: The events for the treatment of 'nicotine' addiction in Kuwait began on Sunday with the functioning of 11 centers for treatment of people suffering from nicotine addiction. The events are organized by the National Anti-Smoking Program at the Ministry of Health in cooperation with the King Hussein Cancer Center in Jordan.

Program appointee, Dr Amal Al-Yahya said: "30 female doctors will be trained on the basics of nicotine addiction treatment in order to qualify more doctors to run nicotine cessation clinics. Currently there are 11 clinics and the national strategic plan aims to open 10 more clinics yearly to cover all areas of Kuwait."

It is worth noting that the King Hussein Center is accredited by Johns Hopkins University for training in the treatment of nicotine addiction and this cooperation was preceded by the holding of two joint training courses. Director of the health promotion department Dr Abeer Al-Bahwa said that the administration is keen on spreading health awareness in all areas.

In a statement on the sidelines of the event organized by the administration at Adan Specialist Center in Mubarak Al-Kabeer, under the sponsorship of Director of Mubarak Al-Kabeer Region, Dr Walid Al-Busairi, Al-Bahwa said: "The awareness day included an enlightening program for patients about the factors that cause chronic diseases as well as measuring blood pressure and sugar levels. The administration is continuing its national campaign to raise awareness of chronic diseases and about the risk factors that cause them."

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: The pinnacle of Kuwait's iconic skyscraper Al-Hamra Tower seen above a thick fog that enveloped Kuwait on Monday morning. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Kuwaiti-Saudi committee reviews progress of Khafji joint operations

Sheikh Dr Nimer stresses need to remove barriers to joint programs

KUWAIT: The joint Kuwaiti-Saudi Standing Committee held a meeting in the Al-Khafji Joint Operations area, Saudi Arabia, on Sunday to review reports on onshore oil operations in the Partitioned Zone and the adjacent submerged Partitioned Zone.

The meeting was co-chaired by Undersecretary of the Kuwaiti Ministry of Oil Sheikh Dr Nimer Fahad Al-Malik Al-Sabah and Saudi Assistant Minister of Energy Eng Muhammad bin Abdul Rahman Al-Ibrahim, a statement from the Kuwaiti Ministry of Oil said. The meeting focused on the

progress of the emergency plans and procedures, and the joint action to serve the strategic interests of both countries.

Sheikh Dr Nimer stressed the importance of removing any obstacles facing the implementation of joint programs, environment safety projects, the training of the national workforce, the use of advanced modern technologies in the stages of petroleum operations. The meeting explored the possibility of maximizing benefit from the oil projects through coordination between the ministries of petroleum of both countries, he noted. Sheikh Dr

Nimer thanked Eng Muhammad for the fraternal spirit, the facilities provided and the tangible cooperation, to ensure the progress of the Wafra and Khafji joint operations.

The discussions dealt also with the efforts to ensure the safety of workers of oil companies, including Aramco Gulf Operations Company and Saudi Arabian Chevron Company in addition to the company Kuwait Gulf Oil. Established under the agreement dividing the neutral zone in 1965, the standing joint committee reports directly to the ministers of oil and energy of both countries. — KUNA

UN Resident Coordinator visits Kuwait Times and Kuwait News



KUWAIT: United Nations Resident Coordinator and Designated Official Dr Tarek El-Sheikh visited Kuwait Times and Kuwait News on Monday on the occasion of the end of his tenure in Kuwait. Dr El-Sheikh was received by Kuwait Times Deputy Editor-in-Chief Abdullah Boftein and the senior editorial team and was taken on a tour of various departments at Kuwait Times. The UN official, in talks with the KT editorial management, discussed means of bolstering cooperation between UN office in Kuwait and Kuwait Times, particularly in the domain of media relations. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



'Not afraid of the virus': Wuhan turns page on COVID, three years on

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Canada to pay indigenous abuse survivors \$2.1 billion



MONTEREY PARK: Monterey Park police officers stand at the scene of a mass shooting in Monterey Park, California, on January 22, 2023. —AFP

Residents of 'very safe' Monterey Park stunned by mass shooting

Deadliest US shooting since the Uvalde massacre

MONTEREY PARK: The "Year of the Rabbit" began in horror on Sunday for the inhabitants of Monterey Park, the largely Asian American suburb of Los Angeles where a mass shooting left 10 people dead. In this city of 60,000 people, red lanterns and banners in Chinese characters celebrating the Lunar New Year still fluttered over a roadway.

But around the dance hall where the shooting unfolded, yellow police tape and heavily armed policemen supplanted any sign of festivities. "This kind of thing doesn't happen here," said Wynn Liaw, a neighbor who came to this popular senior citizens' venue after hearing news bulletins.

Liaw, a 57-year-old retired veterinarian, has lived the past four decades in Monterey Park. She still finds it hard to believe that a massacre unfolded here, behind the white-and-green awning of the venue she passes daily to do her shopping.

"This is a very safe neighborhood, where I can walk alone

at night and where I don't have to worry about gun violence," she told AFP as police helicopters whirred overhead. On Saturday night, a gunman entered the ballroom and killed five men and five women, and wounding at least 10 others, authorities said.

The mass killing — the deadliest US shooting since the Uvalde massacre, in which 19 children and two teachers were killed in an elementary school in Texas — took Monterey Park by surprise. Just a few miles east of downtown Los Angeles, Monterey Park is considered the city's "new Chinatown."

Residents here read newspapers in Mandarin, most business signs are in Chinese, and the majority of the inhabitants approached by an AFP journalist did not speak English. "This area is one of the safest neighborhoods in Los Angeles County," said John McKinney, a local prosecutor in the sprawling Southern California metropolis.

'So many guns'

"You don't see much happening here," added Ken Nim, a 38-year-old IT worker walking his dog. Nim said in the 20 years he's lived here, the only crime he's experienced is the theft of the catalytic converter from his car. "It's a really sad thing, this country is getting crazy," Nam said. "We saw mass shootings in a lot of different cities and in other states, but now it is coming to us."

David Kwan, a Malaysian-born security guard, appeared stunned by the shooting. "I'm often confronted with violence but in other areas of Los Angeles," Kwan said. "It's the first time that I see it in my own community."

Along the cordoned-off streets, inhabitants sought to make sense of the spasm of violence. On their phones, they saw photos of dead bodies lying on the ground in a room lit by multi-colored spotlights. At first, many feared that it was a hate crime.

But the Asian origin of the suspect, confirmed in the morning by the sheriff, has cast doubt on that interpretation.

"I feel like this is a personal story," said Jerry Liu, a 26-year-old truck driver, near the hundreds of white tents lined up at the Lunar New Year market. A day earlier, thousands of people had crowded the main market site, between the meat skewer stands and the fairground.

"There's a reason he targeted that ballroom. Otherwise he could have gone to the fair earlier during the day and killed a lot more people," Liu said. In front of the police cordon, Chester Chong suggested a possible motive: the jealousy aroused in a man not invited to a party where his wife was enjoying herself. "The problem is, we have so many guns in this country," said Chong, chairman of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce of Los Angeles. "It's so easy to grab a gun and do something stupid." —AFP

Hero tells of wrestling gun from killer

LOS ANGELES: The young coder credited with disarming the 72-year-old suspect in a mass shooting during Lunar New Year celebrations in California has described his "primal" battle with the gunman. The man, identified by the New York Times as 26-year-old Brandon Tsay, was in the office of the Lai Lai Ballroom & Studio in Alhambra on Saturday night watching dancers when he looked up to see the suspect pointing a gun at him.

"My heart sank, I knew I was going to die," he told the newspaper. "That moment, it was primal instinct," he said. "Something happened there. I don't know what came

over me." He lunged at the man and grabbed the barrel of the gun, beginning the fight of his life.

Tsay, whose grandparents founded the ballroom, did not know that the suspect, identified by police as Huu Can Tran, was believed to have killed 10 people and wounded 10 others just minutes earlier at another dance hall in nearby Monterey Park. He said he had never seen a gun in real life — but that it was clear the gunman was there not to rob the place but to kill. "From his body language, his facial expression, his eyes, he was looking for people," Tsay told the Times.

Tsay and his family said that security footage showed the pair struggling for around 90 seconds before he was able to seize the gun from the suspect. He immediately pointed it back at him and yelled "Go, get the hell out of here," he told the newspaper.

The suspect fled. Hours later he was dead, shooting himself inside a white van in Torrance,

several miles to the south, on Sunday afternoon as police moved to arrest him. Five men and five women, all in their 50s or 60s, were killed by the gunman in Monterey Park on Saturday night.

Police have said the reason behind the attack, which came as Asian communities around the world celebrated the Lunar New Year holiday, remained a mystery. They said they believe the gunman intended to carry out a similar massacre in Alhambra, and credited those who disarmed him with saving lives.

Los Angeles County sheriff Robert Luna has said two people disarmed the suspect in Alhambra — but Tsay and his family, who still run the ballroom, say the video footage shows he alone grappled with the killer. Tsay's older sister Brenda, who runs the business, said the footage showed the gunman's fierce struggle to keep control of his weapon. "He kept coming at him," she told the Times. "He really wanted the gun back." —AFP

France 'still deeply sexist', report finds

PARIS: Sexism remains at an "alarming" level in France with many young men judging discriminatory or violent behavior against women to be acceptable, a report published Monday found. Based on a study of 2,500 people France's High Authority on Equality (HCE), a consultative body, found that while most respondents bemoaned sexism in principle, "they fail to reject it in practice".

French people had become more aware of gender inequality, partly thanks to the #MeToo movement, but "bias and gender stereotypes, sexist clichés and everyday sexism are still commonplace", it said. "The report shows a French society that remains deeply sexist in all its spheres," the HCE said.

Some of sexism's most violent manifestations were actually getting worse, it

said, especially for the younger generation. While older men often remained stuck in conservative views on male and female roles in society, younger men sometimes displayed aggressively macho tendencies, the report said.

Some 20 percent of men between 25 and 34 years polled said bragging about sexual exploits was needed to "be respected as a man in society", while 23 percent said that men "sometimes need to use violence to get respect".

'Less well treated'

While most men over 65 judged that the image of women in pornography was "problematic", only 48 percent of men aged 15-34 years thought so. Some 80 percent of women questioned said, meanwhile, that they thought they had been "less well treated" in their lives because of their gender.

Fourteen percent said they had had a sexual act forced on them, and 37 percent said they had lived some sexual situation to which they had not consented. A quarter of the men in the report downplayed sexual violence, saying that

"too much attention is being paid to sexual assaults".

The HCE said it had detected a male "backlash" across French society, with "macho raids" on social media seeking "to reduce women to silence or discredit them". New forms of sexual targeting were making things worse for many women, the report found, citing online violence, verbal abuse on social media and porn productions with "barbaric" content.

HCE president Sylvie Pierre-Brossolette said the authorities needed to target male attitudes "from a very young age", including "massive action" in education, and more stringent regulation of the online sphere. "Everyday sexism leads to violent sexism," Pierre-Brossolette told AFP.

She also called for the creation of a public independent high authority to fight sexist violence in politics, and more financial and human resources to combat domestic violence. The HCE also recommended a ban on gendered toys for children and making public subsidies for companies contingent on progress in terms of equality. —AFP



ARABI ENERTECH KSC

Condolence

We deeply mourn the passing away of

Mr. John Mathew

Deputy Chairman and Founding Partner of

Arabi EnerTech KSC

We pray for his departed soul and offer our deepest condolences and sorrow to his loved ones.

International

‘Not afraid of the virus’: Wuhan turns page on COVID, three years on

Crowds return as China celebrates Lunar New Year

WUHAN: Residents of China's Wuhan said Monday they were hopeful for the future and no longer afraid of COVID-19, three years after the city was locked down over what was then a mysterious virus. Since Beijing ordered Wuhan sealed off in a bid to suffocate the outbreak in January 2020, COVID has devastated the planet, killing millions and plunging the global economy into turmoil.

But life is now back to normal for many across the globe and after almost three years of grueling lockdowns and mandatory mass testing, Beijing last month lifted its hardline zero-COVID policy. As China celebrated Lunar New Year this week, Wuhan was unrecognizable compared to the apocalyptic scenes that gripped the city of 11 million in early 2020.

Locals crowded into busy markets and families — some not wearing masks — bought toys and threw stones along the Yangtze River. Many flocked to Guiyuan Temple, one of Wuhan's most famed sites — opened for a Lunar New Year holiday for the first time in three years. Others enjoyed snacks and local specialties on Hubu Alley, a popular historic thoroughfare bustling with stalls and small restaurants. Some told AFP they were elated that life was returning to normal.

"The new year will of course be better," Yan Dongju, a cleaner in her sixties, told AFP. "We are not afraid of the virus anymore... we don't have that fear in our heart anymore, as long as we protect ourselves and wear our masks," she added.

"Now that we have opened up, everyone is quite happy," said delivery driver Liang Feicheng, wearing glasses and a black face-

mask to keep warm. "A lot of our worries and depression have all slowly been resolved," he added. "People are going about their lives, coming together with family and friends, going out to play and travel and being happy."

'House of hope'

The January 2020 decision to lock down the city, announced in the middle of the night, took Wuhan's residents by surprise as the world watched on with uncertainty. For 76 days, Wuhan was cut off from the world, with residents holed up in their homes for fear of being infected as hospitals overflowed with patients. But the horrifying scenes which marked the world's first COVID lockdown are now a thing of the past.

Outside a shop where AFP captured the scene of a man who lay dying in the street in January 2020 — in an image that would become a symbol of the world's fight against COVID — a sign for a new school on the second floor reads "House of Hope". And a makeshift hospital built in just ten days during the early days of the pandemic lay abandoned, now featuring a triumphant banner hailing China's battle against the virus.

But in a cogent reminder of the fraught geopolitics that would emerge as the virus spread across the globe, Wuhan's Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market — once suspected of being the epicenter of the outbreak — remains closed. The area around the once-bustling wet market was desolate when AFP visited Monday, though a police car kept watch.



WUHAN: A customer buys fruit at a local market in Wuhan, in China's central Hubei province, on January 23, 2023. —AFP

Over a billion infected

China, relatively unscathed for years after its initial outbreaks thanks to draconian zero-COVID measures, has faced its biggest-ever case surge in recent weeks. About 80 percent of the population is believed to have contracted COVID since health restrictions were lifted in December, according to leading epidemiologist Wu Zunyou.

On Saturday, China reported at least 13,000 COVID-related deaths in just under a week. This figure, which only includes deaths reported in hospitals, adds to the approximately 60,000 deaths since December that were previously reported by authorities. But it is likely a huge underestimate for a population of 1.4 billion, and Beijing's official case tally is no longer believed to reflect reality. —AFP

Two children among 11 burned to death in Thai van crash

BANGKOK: Eleven people, including two children, burned to death in a passenger van crash in central Thailand over the Lunar New Year holiday, police said Monday. Traffic accidents are common in the kingdom, which has a notorious road safety record, particularly during busy public holidays.

The van carrying 12 people was travelling from northeastern Amnat Charoen province to Bangkok when it veered off the highway in central Nakhon Ratchasima province Saturday night, said Police Colonel Yingyos Poldej. Yingyos told AFP that one man had been able to climb out a window, but the other passengers were trapped and died in the blaze. The survivor, Thanachit Kingkaew, a 20-year-old student, said he was asleep when he was jolted awake after hearing someone scream. "I woke up and the next thing I know, the van was upside down. I didn't see what happened," he said. "After the crash, the fire started engulfing the whole van starting from the back." "I started kicking the windows and managed to crawl through a small hole," he said. "Soon after that, the van exploded." Nikhom Seau, a volunteer with a local rescue team, said the van exploded just seconds after it was engulfed in flames. —AFP

Japan PM says tackling birth rate crisis 'cannot wait'

TOKYO: Japan's low birth rate and ageing population pose an urgent risk to society, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said Monday, pledging to address the issue by establishing a new government agency. Birth rates are declining in many developed countries, but in Japan the issue is particularly acute because it has the world's second-

highest proportion of people aged 65 and over, after the tiny state of Monaco, according to World Bank data.

"The number of births dropped below 800,000 last year, according to estimates," Kishida told lawmakers in a policy address marking the start of a new parliament session. "Japan is standing on the verge of whether we can continue to function as a society," he said. "Focusing attention on policies regarding children and child-rearing is an issue that cannot wait and cannot be postponed."

The conservative leader said his policies — including launching the new Children and Families Agency in April — were designed to support parents and ensure the "sustainability" of the world's

third-largest economy. Kishida added that he eventually wants the government to double its spending on child-related programs. "We must build a child-first social economy to reverse the (low) birth rate," he said.

Japan has a population of 125 million and has long struggled with how to provide for its fast-growing number of elderly residents. Birth rates are slowing in many countries including Japan's closest neighbors, due to factors including rising living costs, more women entering the workforce and people choosing to have children later. Official data showed last week that China's population shrank in 2022, for the first time in more than six decades. —AFP

Cyprus issues first-ever fines for poisoning birds

NICOSIA: Cypriot authorities have for the first time issued fines for the killing of rare wild birds using poison baits, conservationists on the Mediterranean island said Monday. Fines totaling 21,000 euros (almost \$23,000) were last week ordered for an individual after three birds of prey were found dead at a rural property in the southern Limassol district, the group BirdLife Cyprus said.

The punishment "represents a big step forward that will hopefully have a strong deterrent effect on similar illegal actions", BirdLife's project coordinator Melpo Apostolidou said in a statement. "It is the first time in Cyprus the crime of using poison baits and killing wild birds with the use of poison has been prosecuted."

The offences occurred in December 2021 when two rare Bonelli's eagles and one long-legged buzzard were found dead near Dierona village after a GPS transmitter fitted to one of the eagles led authorities to the discovery. Evidence collected linked the deaths to the suspect who was found to have intentionally killed the animals "to protect chickens" from the birds, Apostolidou said.

Under Cypriot law, courts can impose prison sentences of up to three years or fines of up to 20,000 euros, or a combination of both for each offence. BirdLife described the use of poison baits in the countryside as a wildlife crime, saying it has driven iconic species including the griffon vulture to the brink of extinction in Cyprus.

Once a common sight over Cyprus — in the 1950s there were several hundred of the large scavengers across the island — there are now thought to be only nine griffon vultures left. Since 2005, 31 vultures have been poisoned and attempts are being made to restock the population with birds from Spain. Apostolidou called on the authorities to do more to prevent the poisonings. —AFP

WHO: Billions still exposed to toxic trans fat

GENEVA: Five billion people are exposed to higher heart disease risks through trans fat, the World Health Organization said Monday, calling out countries that have failed to act against the toxic substance. The WHO issued an appeal in 2018 for the industrially produced fatty acids in foods to be eliminated worldwide by 2023 amid evidence it caused 500,000 premature deaths every year.

Although 43 countries with combined popula-

tions of 2.8 billion people have now implemented best-practice policies, the other five billion plus people on the planet remain unprotected, the UN's health agency said. It said Egypt, Australia and South Korea are among countries that have not enacted such policies and have particularly high rates of heart disease from trans fat.

The solidified oil that clogs up arteries around the heart is often used in packaged foods, baked goods, cooking oils and spreads like margarine. "Trans fat is a toxic chemical that kills, and should have no place in food," WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said amid the release of the annual progress report. "It's time to get rid of it once and for all." He added the substance carries "huge health risks that incur huge costs for health systems." —AFP

Govt resigns as tensions boil...

Continued from Page 1

retirees and social aid for the needy sections of the society. The government apparently did not like the conditional offer and decided it was time to part ways with MPs. The resignation nullifies plans by lawmakers to grill two ministers on Tuesday. The Cabinet also decided to suspend a decision issued earlier that granted special extra salaries to ministers. The 'special salary' issue has been the focus of tensions between the Cabinet and Assembly in recent weeks.

HH the Crown Prince will decide on the fate of the resignation, but signs indicate the resignation is expected to be accepted. But it is not clear what will come next. Some commentators said HH the Amir may dissolve the Assembly or simply accept the resignation and ask the prime minister to form a new Cabinet that can cooperate with the parliament.

Only a few lawmakers commented on the developments. MP Saud Al-Asfour said the move was expected because the government was unable to cooperate with the Assembly. He also charged that the government was unable to fulfill promises it made to the Assembly. MP Saleh Ashour accused the government of running away from facing issues, adding the government should have attended Assembly sessions and proposed alternatives to ideas proposed by MPs.

Engineers call to fix Kuwait roads...

Continued from Page 1

where the streets are broken and have solutions for them." Otaibi stressed on the importance to have

quality control over roads, with usage of asphalt that is meant for Kuwait's climate and working on filling potholes in streets that do not deteriorate again, as seen during the recent rainfall. Following a policy of charging contractors for any damage to vehicles as a result of flying gravel, potholes and manholes has proven to be effective and can be applied in Kuwait, he said. "The problem of flying gravel is an annual affair, and we must take early measures to face it," he added.

Earth's inner core may have started...

Continued from Page 1

Experts not involved in the study expressed caution about its findings, pointing to several other theories and warning that many mysteries remain about the center of the Earth. "This is a very careful study by excellent scientists putting in a lot of data," said John Vidale, a seismologist at the University of Southern California. "(But) none of the models explain all the data very well in my opinion," he added.

Vidale published research last year suggesting the inner core oscillates far more quickly, changing direction every six years or so. His work was based on seismic waves from two nuclear explosions in the late 1960s and early 1970s. That timeframe is around the point when Monday's research says the inner core last changed direction - which Vidale called

"kind of a coincidence". Another theory - which Vidale said has some good evidence supporting it - is that the inner core only significantly moved between 2001 to 2013 and has stayed put since.

Hrvoje Tkalčić, a geophysicist at the Australian National University, has published research suggesting that the inner core's cycle is every 20 to 30 years, rather than the 70 proposed in the latest study. "These mathematical models are most likely all incorrect because they explain the observed data but are not required by the data," Tkalčić said. "Therefore, the geophysical community will be divided about this finding and the topic will remain controversial." He compared seismologists to doctors "who study the internal organs of patients' bodies using imperfect or limited equipment".

Lacking something like a CT scan, "our image of the inner Earth is still blurry", he said, predicting more surprises ahead. That could include more about a theory that the inner core might have yet another iron ball inside it - like a Russian doll. "Something's happening and I think we're gonna figure it out," Vidale said. "But it may take a decade." — AFP

Police search for motive in...

Continued from Page 1

founded the family-run studio, told the New York Times. Tsay seized the gun from the suspect, pointed it back at him and yelled "Go, get the hell out of here," he told the newspaper.

The suspect fled. He shot himself inside a white van in Torrance, several miles to the south, on Sunday afternoon as police moved to arrest him. Police have said the motive behind the attack, which came as Asian communities around the world celebrated the Lunar New Year holiday, remained a mystery. CNN reported that Tran had met his ex-wife some 20 years ago at the studio in Monterey Park, a majority Asian American city.

The network did not identify the ex-wife, but said the pair met when Tran - who was giving informal lessons - spotted her and offered lessons. He was an immigrant from China, CNN reported. The marriage

did not last long, with the pair divorcing by 2006. The ex-wife said Tran was never violent to her, but would become frustrated when, for example, she missed a step in a dance.

CNN also interviewed an old friend of Tran's who said at one point he was attending the studio "every night". Tran was "hostile to a lot of people there," the friend said. It was not clear if Tran was still a regular attendee at the Monterey Park studio. Tsay, who told the New York Times he is a coder who works several days a week at his family's dance studio in Alhambra, said he had never seen Tran before.

Authorities had initially feared the attack was a hate crime targeting Asian Americans. "We don't know if this is specifically a hate crime defined by law," Los Angeles County sheriff Robert Luna told reporters Sunday, "but who walks into a dance hall and guns down 20 people?" Monterey Park, only a few miles from downtown Los Angeles, is home to around 60,000 people, most of them Asian or Asian American. Decorations erected in the city for the Lunar New Year hung above police tape Sunday. Tens of thousands of people had gathered earlier for the two-day Lunar New Year festival, one of the area's largest. — AFP

International

Canada to pay indigenous abuse survivors \$2.1 billion

Settlement for class action lawsuit by 325 Indigenous groups

OTTAWA: Canada will pay hundreds of Indigenous communities more than \$2 billion in compensation for nearly a century of abuse suffered by children in residential schools, its government has announced.

The Can\$2.8 billion (US\$2.1 billion) settlement, the result of a class action lawsuit by 325 Indigenous groups, will be placed in a not-for-profit trust independent of the government. It will be used to "revitalize Indigenous education, culture, and language — to support survivors in healing and reconnecting with their heritage," according to a press release.

"It has taken Canada far too long to own up to its history, own up to the genocide it committed and recognize the collective harm caused to our nations by residential schools," said Garry Feschuk, an Indigenous leader who is one of the plaintiffs in the suit. "It is time that Canada not only recognize this harm, but help undo it by walking with us. This settlement is a good first step," he said in the statement released Saturday.

From the late 1800s to the 1990s, Canada's government sent about 150,000 children into 139 residential schools mostly run by the Catholic church, where they were cut off from their families, language and culture. Many were physically and sexually abused, and thousands are believed to have died of disease, malnutrition or neglect.

The discovery of hundreds of unmarked graves at the sites of the former schools over the past two years has dragged the legacy of those institutions back into the spotlight as Canada reckons with its dark colonial past. More than 1,300 graves have been identified, the most recent earlier this month.

In Lebret, Saskatchewan, ground-penetrating radar has uncovered nearly "2,000 areas of inter-



SADDLE LAKE: In this file photo taken on June 8, 2022 Eric Large, former Saddle Lake First Nation chief and Blue Quills Indian Residential School survivor, points to where unmarked graves have been found in Saddle Lake Cemetery on Saddle Lake Cree Nation in Alberta. — AFP

est" that need to be thoroughly investigated, the Star Blanket Cree community said. A fragment of a child's jawbone dating to some 125 years ago has already been identified on the grounds of a former residential school in the western Canadian community. The search areas were selected near the Catholic-run residential school — which was open until 1998 — on the advice of former students.

"The residential school system decimated our languages, profoundly damaged our cultures, and left a legacy of social harms. The effects go beyond my generation. It will take many generations for us to heal," said Shane Gottfriedson, another Indigenous

leader and plaintiff. "We believe that all survivors deserve justice and the compensation to which they are owed," said Marc Miller, federal minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations in the press release.

The precise terms for disbursing the \$2.8 billion will be determined by the federal court on February 27. A national commission of inquiry in 2015 called the residential school system a "cultural genocide." Last year, Pope Francis visited Canada on a penitential trip to apologize for the "evil" perpetrated in the schools — a gesture seen by many survivors as overwhelming, but only the beginning of a process of healing and reconciliation. — AFP

advocates. To loud applause, she assailed recent abortion-limiting laws passed by "extremists, including in states like Florida," adding: "We will not back down."

'Movement is recharging'

Florida, whose Republican governor Ron DeSantis is considered a rising star on the American right, now bans abortions after 15 weeks, with no exceptions for incest or rape. One in three American women now live in a state that has imposed severe restrictions on abortion, according to Planned Parenthood, an abortion advocacy group and women's health provider.

"While what's happening to patients and providers is devastating, our movement is recharging," the group's president, McGill Johnson, said at the event with Harris. "Rain or shine, we will show up and keep fighting. Every. Single. Day."

Biden's own powers in this area are relatively limited, with the battle mostly going on now at the state level. And anti-abortion groups, with strong support on the religious right, have not lessened their pressure.

Nationwide, thousands of them marched Friday to demand a nationwide abortion ban. Biden, in his series of tweets Sunday, said that "a woman's right to choose is non-negotiable," and he called on Congress to pass legislation codifying the abortion rights laid out in the Roe case. But with Republicans now in control of the House of Representatives, the lower chamber of Congress, such legislation has virtually no chance of succeeding. Since June, Biden has had to settle for issuing relatively limited orders, such as authorizing Veterans Administration hospitals to provide abortion services. The White House also wants to protect access to mifepristone-based pills, which can be used to end a pregnancy in the early weeks. — AFP

US abortion rights 'war' rages on 50 years after ruling

WASHINGTON: The fight for abortion rights "isn't over," US President Joe Biden said Sunday, 50 years after a landmark Supreme Court ruling had guaranteed that right, before the court reversed itself last June.

"Today should've been the 50th Anniversary of Roe v. Wade," the Democratic president said on Twitter, referring to the original ruling. "Instead, MAGA Republican officials" — supporters of former president Donald Trump, with his Make America Great Again slogan — "are waging a war on women's right to make their own health care decisions."

Since the Supreme Court overturned the Roe ruling — a reversal made possible with the votes of three conservative justices appointed by Trump — some 20 Republican-led US states have passed laws banning or severely restricting abortion rights. Biden added: "I haven't stopped fighting to protect women's reproductive rights - and I never will." In a weekend of competing demonstrations from the two sides of the heated national debate, some 300 women in New York demonstrated Sunday for abortion rights, chanting slogans — including "My body, my choice" — like those heard at the time of the original 1973 Roe ruling.

And Vice President Kamala Harris, speaking in Tallahassee, Florida, joined the calls to protect abortion rights. "How dare they?" she asked in an impassioned address before a group of abortion-rights



MOSCOW: Estonian and EU flags fly outside the Estonian embassy in Moscow on January 23, 2023. — AFP

Estonia to expel Russian ambassador in tit-for-tat move

TALLINN: Estonia said Monday it would expel the Russian ambassador from Tallinn in retaliation for Moscow's expulsion of the Estonian ambassador. Tensions between Russia and its European neighbours have spiked since Moscow invaded Ukraine last year.

"We stand by the principle of parity in relations with Russia," the Estonian ministry of foreign affairs said in a tweet sent in English, adding that the Russian ambassador would have to depart at the same time as his Estonian counterpart, ordered by Moscow to leave on February 7.

Russia's foreign ministry said in a statement issued on Monday it downgraded its diplomatic relations with Estonia, accusing the Baltic country of "total Russophobia." This is the first time Russia has expelled an ambassador of an EU country since Moscow sent troops to Ukraine on February 24.

The measures come after Estonia drastically reduced staff levels at Russia's embassy in Tallinn, Moscow's statement said. "Russia's steps will not deter us from providing continued support to Ukraine," Estonian Foreign Minister Urmas Reinsalu said in a tweet following tit-for-tat response from Tallinn.

Controversial welcome

Elsewhere, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov was welcomed by his South African counterpart for talks in Pretoria on Monday, in a visit that has sparked criticism against the backdrop of the war in Ukraine.

A continental powerhouse, South Africa has refused to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine and resisted taking sides over the war. The conflict has triggered sweeping Western sanctions against Moscow and attempts leave it diplomatically isolated.

South African foreign Minister Naledi Pandor told a press briefing ahead of the meeting the talks would help "strengthen the already good relations" between the two countries. Sitting alongside Lavrov she described Russia as a "valued partner".

South Africa recently assumed the chairmanship of the BRICS, a grouping that also includes Brazil, Russia, India and China to challenge the dominant US- and European-led global governance structures. Last week, it announced it will host 10-day joint maritime drills with Russia and China off the port city of Durban and Richards Bay in February.

But the links with Moscow has triggered criticism in the country, with some accusing the government of having abandoned its neutral stance. "It is becoming increasingly clear that the South African government is openly siding with Russia," said Darren Bergman, a lawmaker with the main opposition Democratic Alliance (DA) party.

Last week, the foundation of late South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu, a Nobel Peace Prize winner, called the planned naval exercises "disgraceful" and "tantamount to a declaration that South Africa is joining the war against Ukraine". — AFP



TALLAHASSEE: US Vice President Kamala Harris speaks to mark the 50th anniversary of the 1973 US Supreme Court Roe v. Wade decision, in Tallahassee, Florida, on January 22, 2023. — AFP

Wagner deserter arrested in Norway

OSLO: A former member of Russian mercenary group Wagner who fled to Norway about 10 days ago has been arrested for violating immigration law, Norwegian police said Monday. Twenty-six-year-old Andrei Medvedev crossed the Russian-Norwegian border in the far north in the early hours of January 13 and sought asylum in the Scandinavian country. His lawyer told AFP last week that he was "willing to speak about his experiences in the Wagner Group to people who are investigating war crimes".

Medvedev claims to have fought in Ukraine as a member of Wagner for four months before deserting in November, when the paramilitary organization led by businessman Yevgeny Prigozhin allegedly extended his contract against his will. A potentially valuable witness in shedding light on the group's reported brutality in Ukraine, Medvedev has been questioned by Norwegian authorities since arriving in the country.

"The concerned individual has been arrested under the immigration law and it is being considered whether

he should be processed for detention," Jon Andreas Johansen, a police official in charge of immigration affairs, told AFP in an email. The police did not specify the exact reasons for his arrest and declined to comment further.

Medvedev's Norwegian lawyer, Brynjulf Risnes, said that Medvedev was arrested for refusing to follow restrictions imposed by police since his arrival in the country. "There are naturally lots of security measures that have been taken and he finds it difficult to conform to them," Risnes added. "He's not accused of anything."

Many questions remain about Medvedev's past and the circumstances of his escape, with some experts saying he could not have crossed the heavily guarded border without assistance. He claims to have dashed across the frozen Pasvik river that marks part of the Russian-Norwegian border as he was chased by attack dogs and Russian border guards who fired at him. AFP has not been able to independently confirm his account of events.

Wagner has not denied he worked for the controversial fighting force. The Norwegian police's criminal investigations service Kripos, which is taking part in an international inquiry into war crimes in Ukraine, has been interrogating Medvedev since Saturday. — AFP

News in brief

US forces capture IS members

BEIRUT: US forces have captured three Islamic State group members during a helicopter and ground raid in eastern Syria, the US military's Central Command (CENTCOM) said Sunday. CENTCOM described the militants as facilitators, a logistician, and an "associate" of the jihadist group and said they were captured a day earlier. A civilian sustained "minor injuries" and was taken to a medical facility, CENTCOM said in a statement. — AFP

Arab states boycott Libya meeting

TRIPOLI: Major Arab states boycotted a ministerial meeting hosted by Libya's interim government on Sunday, with just five of the Arab League's 22 members sending their top diplomats and even the bloc's secretary general staying away. The snub underlines Arab divisions over the Tripoli-based government, whose legitimacy is contested by a rival administration in the war-scarred country's east. — AFP

Egypt lawyers end strike

CAIRO: Members of the Egyptian Bar Association on Sunday called off a days-long strike held in protest against the jailing of six colleagues, a statement said. The association had announced Thursday an open-ended strike to condemn their colleagues' sentencing to two years in jail over a court brawl earlier this month. The bar association decided "to cancel the suspension of work", it said in the statement. The move came after an appeals court on Sunday ordered the six be released and scheduled a verdict for February 5. — AFP

No blast in 1994 ferry sinking

STOCKHOLM: A faulty bow door rather than a blast or collision caused the 1994 sinking of the Estonia ferry that killed 852 people, investigators said Monday, dismissing questions raised by a 2020 documentary. The preliminary findings of a fresh probe opened in 2021 by Estonian, Finnish and Swedish authorities reinforce the conclusions of the official 1997 inquiry. That report found that the disaster in the Baltic Sea was caused by the bow door of the ship being wrenched open in heavy seas, allowing water to gush into the car deck. — AFP

Chavez ally released from prison

CARACAS: A close ally of the late Venezuelan leader Hugo Chavez who fell out with his successor Nicolas Maduro said Saturday he had been freed after spending five years in prison. The release of Miguel Rodriguez Torres, a former minister, was widely seen as stemming from recent reconciliation talks in Mexico between the leftist Maduro government and the Venezuelan opposition. The talks are aimed at ending a long-running political and economic crisis. After his release, news reports said Rodriguez Torres left for exile in Spain. — AFP

US citizen detained in Iran ends hunger strike

WASHINGTON: A US-Iranian dual national imprisoned in Tehran ended a seven-day hunger strike on Monday, saying he had lost 10 pounds but felt strengthened in his resolve to fight for the release of US prisoners. Siamak Namazi, who has been detained since October 2015, said his strike marked the seventh anniversary of Washington's decision to exclude him from a prisoner release that saw five other Americans freed after the inking of a historic denuclearization deal with Iran.

Namazi had called on US President Joe Biden to consider the plight of American prisoners in Iran for a minute each day — one "for each of the seven years of freedom he... lost" since the prisoner swap, according to a statement released by his lawyer on Monday.

"I went on hunger strike because I've learned the hard way that US administrations tend to rely more on their political thermometer than their moral compass when deciding whether or not to enter a prisoner deal with Iran," he said. "I denied myself food for an entire week so that maybe President Biden will recognize just how desperate the situation of the US hostages here has become." According to his lawyer, Namazi lost about 10 pounds (4.5 kilograms) and his blood pressure spiked above normal levels during the hunger strike. He also struggled to stay warm, the statement said. Namazi was blocked from leaving the country after a 2015 visit and sentenced to 10 years for collaborating with a foreign government, charges that he denies and that US officials have called groundless.

After Donald Trump nixed the nuclear deal with Iran, the Biden administration had sought to restore it, while also insisting the pact could not go forward without the release of imprisoned Americans. But, after painstaking negotiations, Biden has acknowledged that the deal is effectively dead. Tehran generally refuses to acknowledge dual citizenship and earlier this month announced the execution of British-Iranian dual national Alireza Akbari, convicted of spying for the United Kingdom, a charge he denied. — AFP

Business

TUESDAY, JANUARY 24, 2023

Concern over plan to withdraw from Kuwait's Future Generation Fund

Markaz conference discusses investment opportunities and challenges



The first dialogue session.



The second dialogue session.

By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: Former Managing Director of Kuwait Investment Authority Farouk Bastaki expressed concerns over reported plans by the government to withdraw from the Future Generations Fund after taking advantage of the General Reserve Fund during the previous period, especially since the price of a barrel of oil is expected to range between \$50 and \$60 in the next five years.

His statement came during one of the sessions of the Kuwait Financial Center Company (Markaz) conference under the title "Identifying Investment Opportunities in Light of Current Market Challenges", which was moderated by Abd Al-Latif Al-Nesf, Managing Director of Wealth Management and Business Development at Markaz, in the presence of a group of company's experts and prestigious local and international institutions to discuss effective strategies for seizing opportunities in various markets.

During the session moderated by CEO of Markaz Ali Hassan Khalil, Bastaki said in light of oil prices reaching those levels, the budget deficit will reach KD 8 to KD 9 billion annually, so the solution may be to resort to withdrawing from the Future Generations Fund, wondering how many years it will hold up under this strain. He said the budget deficits during the past eight years collectively amount to around KD 41.7 billion (\$137 billion), and they were covered through the General Reserve Fund by depleting it.

Bastaki pointed out that 90 percent of Kuwait's budget is dependent on oil, and is therefore subject to fluctuations in its prices, citing the estimated deficit for the budget for 2021/2022 was KD 12.1 billion, while the final accounts showed the deficit was only KD 3 billion due to the rise in oil prices as a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and not because of diversifying investments or making prudent decisions.

Solutions

On another hand, Bastaki mentioned that every year, 25,000 young men and women graduate, and the government must provide around 100,000 jobs in four years to accommodate them, pointing out the solution lies in taking many decisions, the most important of which is reducing expenses, especially since 75 percent of the country's budget is allocated



Abd Al-Latif Al-Nesf

to salaries and subsidies, with expectations that this figure will rise in the coming period due to the declared government directions. He noted the remaining part of the budget directed to development is very small and does not exceed 12 percent after deducting expenses.

Bastaki said the second solution lies in privatization, such as of ports, airport and the electricity, education and health sectors. He cited an example of the cost of a high school student to the state. According to studies, it amounts to KD 8,000 to KD 10,000 annually, but with half of this amount, the student can enroll in a private school whose quality is 10 times higher than that of the state sector.

Bastaki said the government should establish companies to include under its umbrella all public services, offering 25 percent of them to the private sector, keeping 25 percent and offering 50 percent to citizens, indicating that this also applies to the health sector, which has a budget of KD 2.6 billion, but despite this, everyone complains about their poor services, stressing that after enabling the private sector, taxes can be imposed on companies.

CEO of Markaz Khalil said Markaz continues its permanent commitment to support the development of the financial services sector and capital market in Kuwait by enhancing investment awareness among investors, adding this conference confirms this trend, as macroeconomic elements and geopolitical challenges affect the reality of the market, stressing its importance for the investor to have complete knowledge before making any investment decisions in order to effectively achieve financial goals. Khalil added the company has taken the initiative to support investors by providing them with knowledge



KUWAIT: Ali Hassan Khalil (left), CEO of Markaz with Farouk Bastaki, former Managing Director of Kuwait Investment Authority.

that leads to informed and responsible decisions in order to seize the available investment opportunities in various asset classes.

The first session focused on regional markets, where Executive Vice President of Investment Banking and Fixed Income Services at Markaz Rasha Othman discussed the most important events and trends in 2023 and opportunities in the fixed income sector and bond issuances at higher prices. Senior Vice President of Real Estate Investment Management in the Middle East and North Africa at Markaz, Khaled Al-Mubarak, discussed the effects of high interest rates on the real estate sector, and the most important emerging opportunities in the region in the current year.

Vice President of Equity Investments in the Middle East and North Africa region at Markaz Fahd Al-Rasheed spoke about the most important emerging challenges and opportunities for investors, supported by the positive outlook for the region, and highlighted the investment opportunity portfolios in the company.

In a related context, Abdul Razzaq Razzouqi, Vice President of Consulting, Mergers and Acquisitions, and Investment Banking Department at Markaz, highlighted the activities of mergers and acquisitions, the direction of family businesses and large companies and where opportunities lie.

During the second session, Managing Director of Mar-Gulf, the real estate arm of Markaz in the US, Sami Shabshab, spoke about the most important factors affecting the American market, including the impact of inflation and interest rates in the real estate sector, as well as his opinion about the sectors that provide the best opportunities for investors during the current year.

Assistant Vice President of the International Investment Consulting Department at Markaz, Sheikh Hammoud Salah Al-Sabah, referred to the important role played by due diligence and the importance of choosing an asset manager in investment success, pointing to the importance of setting clear goals and assessing levels of risk tolerance and asset distribution efficiently.

The speakers also included CEO of Golub Capital Lawrence E Golub, who explained the US economy is in a healthy condition and that the market today is the most suitable for lenders in years, noting that interest rates are at their highest levels since the financial crisis. Walid Zain, Middle East and North Africa partner at Hamilton Lane, participated in the session. He reviewed the role of governance in private markets in increasing the number of open, semi-liquid funds, and highlighted the attractiveness of risk-adjusted returns provided by private loans in an environment characterized by high interest rates.

Pakistan power outage continues into night

ISLAMABAD: A massive power cut across Pakistan continued after night fell on Monday, affecting most of the country's 220 million residents, including in the metropolises of Karachi and Lahore.

Pakistan's power system is a complex and delicate web, where problems can quickly cascade. The breakdown was caused by a fault in the national grid at about 7:30 am (0230 GMT), linked to a cost-cutting measure as the country's economy ails. "We hope that the electricity will be restored throughout the country by tonight," Energy Minister Khurram Dastgir Khan said in a video statement.

A variation in frequency on the national grid caused the cut, as power generation units were turned on early in the morning. The units had been temporarily switched off at night to save fuel, Khan earlier told the media. Localized power cuts are common in Pakistan and hospitals, factories and government institutions are often kept running by private generators. The machines are, however, beyond the means of most citizens and



MUZAFFARABAD, Pakistan: Vendors warm themselves as they light a bonfire at a market during a nationwide power outage, in Muzaffarabad on January 23, 2023. A massive power breakdown in Pakistan on January 23 affected most of the country's more than 220 million people, including in the mega cities of Karachi and Lahore. —AFP

small businesses.

In parts of northern Pakistan, temperatures were due to drop below freezing on Monday night with supplies of natural gas—the most common heating method—also unreliable due to load-shedding.

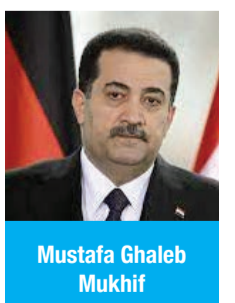
The economy is already hobbled by rampant inflation, a falling rupee, and severely low forex

reserves, with the power cut piling extra pressure on small businesses. In the garrison city of Rawalpindi, homeware trader Muhammad Iftikhar Sheikh, 71, said he was unable to demonstrate electronic products to browsing customers.

"The customers never buy without testing first," he said. "All of us are sitting idle." —AFP

Iraqi CB governor leaves post amid currency volatility

BAGHDAD: Iraq's prime minister said on Monday the country's central bank governor had been relieved of his duties as the local currency continues to fall against the dollar. "Today, the central bank governor's request for discharge was approved, as was the request for retirement by the president of the Trade Bank of Iraq," Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani said during a televised address.



Mustafa Ghaleb Mukhif

Mustafa Ghaleb Mukhif's departure as head of the Central Bank of Iraq comes after the market value of Iraq's dinar fell against the greenback in recent months. Without identifying the successors for the key posts, Sudani said they were "known for their experience, their abilities and their integrity". While an official exchange rate is set by Baghdad at 1,470 dinars to the dollar, the market value of the currency has dropped to 1,620 dinars since mid-November, according to the official INA news agency. —AFP

Business

Macau ponders future even as tourists and gamblers return

It is far from business as usual at Chinese casino hub

MACAU: Macau's streets were packed in the run-up to the Lunar New Year after pandemic controls were abruptly lifted but it is far from business as usual as the Chinese casino hub wrestles with questions about its future. Mainland Chinese tourists filled winding passages leading up to the historic Ruins of Saint Paul's, and stores selling local snacks like almond cookies and meat jerky had trouble keeping up.

"We don't have enough goods for this Lunar New Year as we didn't expect this," a business owner surnamed Li told AFP. Tourists may now be back, but Beijing wants the former Portuguese colony to diversify its casinos-reliant economy.

President Xi Jinping has led a years-long anti-corruption campaign that clamped down on money laundering and gambling. Yet quitting gambling-and the huge tax revenues casinos generate-will be a hard habit to break. "The government has an inherent conflict," gaming consultant David Green told AFP.

"It needs to be seen by the central government to be promoting non-gaming, but... it has to be cognizant of maintaining its revenue stream." The city of some 700,000 is the only place in China where casinos operate legally and for years has relied on mainland Chinese gamblers as its economic lifeline. Last year Macau saw gaming revenues plunge to a record low of 42 billion patacas (\$5.2 billion) after the government shut down most businesses at the height of a coronavirus wave.

'Can't use the old ways'

Macau issues just six operating concessions for a multi-billion-dollar industry that, until the pandemic hit, generated six times the gaming revenue of Las Vegas. In December, the government awarded new decade-long concessions to all incumbents, effectively keeping the status quo but adding new requirements



MACAU: This photo shows tourists from mainland China strolling down a street in the southern Chinese enclave of Macau. Streets were packed in the run up to the Lunar New Year after pandemic controls were abruptly lifted, but Macau remains far from business as usual as the Chinese casino hub wrestles with questions about its future. — AFP

for non-gaming investment. The firms have since pledged a total of \$14.9 billion on projects including theme parks, convention and exhibition centers, fine dining and performance venues. Former lawmaker Sulu Sou said it was "a step forward" for Macau to set clear demands for diversification, instead of relying on vague slogans as it had for years.

"Changes in the industry and shifting attitudes toward gambling in mainland China forced the [Macau] government to spell these requirements out in black and white," he told AFP. Sou pointed to the downfall of "junket king" Alvin Chau, who was sentenced to 18 years in jail last week for hosting illegal

gambling on a vast scale. "It was a major signal to society that even as we return to normality, we can't use the old ways to make a fortune anymore," Sou said.

Chau was the figurehead of an industry that thrived on enticing high rollers from mainland China to gamble in Macau, by running VIP rooms and extending credit for bets. VIP guests contributed around 15 percent of industry earnings before the pandemic, but the majority of this would be "permanently gone" due to regulatory concerns, according to Credit Suisse analysts.

"China's multi-year campaign against capital out-

flow and cross-border gambling carried on, rather than eased," they wrote earlier this month.

Pandemic legacy lingers

Last month, Macau dismantled most of its pandemic controls and reopened its borders, following Beijing's abrupt decision to abandon its signature zero-COVID policy. For residents like pharmacist Mariana Soares, the reopening capped off nearly three years of anxiety and economic doldrums-but it also came with a sense of whiplash.

"It's a shock to the system," she told AFP. "Suddenly everyone is coming in and it's like whatever happened before had been erased." Dance studio owner Kam Pang said he was closing his business after two "mentally draining" years, adding that he lost up to \$25,000 when the government ordered businesses to close.

"We couldn't do business because all of a sudden we were in lockdown for half a month," he said. Eager to make the virus a memory, Macau officials have doubled down on new year celebrations with the hopes that the economic momentum can be sustained. High-end hotels were fully booked during the festive period and officials said weekend visitor arrivals have recovered to around half of pre-pandemic levels.

Mass-market gaming revenue should be up to 55 percent of pre-pandemic levels by the end of the year, and 85 percent in 2024, according to Credit Suisse analysts. Soares told AFP the pandemic changed how she saw her home city and that she would consider leaving for better economic opportunities. "Macau will bounce back, I just don't know whether it would go back to its glory days," she said. Pang said he believed Macau was "slowly establishing new ways of surviving." "The question is whether people would like to come to Macau not to gamble but for other things." — AFP

Stocks rise, dollar struggles on US rates outlook

LONDON: Stock markets headed higher Monday and the dollar lost some ground as investors eyed less aggressive US interest rate hikes this year with inflation starting to cool from sky-high levels. Tokyo was the standout performer, rallying more than one percent following a blockbuster pre-weekend performance on Wall Street as tech shares rallied.

Comments from top Federal Reserve officials provided support to equities after they indicated the bank could lift rates at a slower pace compared with 2022. The euro on Monday reached the highest level since April last year, at \$1.0927, before slipping back. "Investor confidence has surged into the Lunar New Year after China lifted its drastic COVID restrictions and hopes have risen that the end to interest rate hikes may finally be in sight," noted Susannah Streeter, senior investment and markets analyst at Hargreaves Lansdown.

"There have been signs economies may prove more resilient in the downturn," she added. Philadelphia Fed boss Patrick Harker has again called for slower US rate increases, while Kansas City Fed boss Esther George said she was optimistic the world's top economy could still achieve a soft landing despite worries that a series of big borrowing-cost hikes last year would tip it into recession.

In Asia, trading was then with a number of stock markets closed for the Lunar New Year holiday. "Although most Asian markets are closed for Chinese Lunar New Year celebrations, Japanese and Australian stocks are picking up on the better mood from US investors and on expectations of China's economy returning to some semblance of a pre-pandemic trend," said SPI Asset Management's Stephen Innes. Crude oil futures extended their strong start to the year. "Oil prices are trading higher on diminishing recession risks while easing inflation pressure suggests the days of outsized hikes are behind us, broadly supporting risky assets," Innes added. — AFP



German antitrust watchdog opens probe into PayPal

BERLIN: Germany's antitrust watchdog said Monday it had launched an investigation into PayPal to examine whether the US online payment giant was using its dominance to restrict competition. The Federal Cartel Office (FCO) said it would examine whether the conditions set out in PayPal's terms of use amount to a possible "hindrance of competitors and restriction of price competition".

Paypal is Germany's leading online payments service but also its most expensive, the regulator said. "We will now examine what market power PayPal has and to

what extent online retailers are dependent on offering PayPal as a payment method," FCO president Andreas Mundt said in a statement. The charges paid by sellers to use PayPal's service start at 2.49 percent of the payment amount plus 0.35 euros per transaction.

According to the FCO, traders are not allowed to offer their goods and services at lower prices if customers choose a cheaper payment service, nor may they express a preference for payment methods other than PayPal. This could prevent rival services from entering the market, keeping the surcharges high. In the end customers lose out, Mundt said, because "ultimately they pay for these higher fees indirectly through the product price."

New legislation in 2021 gave Germany's antitrust watchdog sweeping powers to take action against tech companies suspected of abusing their dominant market positions. The FCO has also opened proceedings against Google, Amazon and Facebook. — AFP

For corporates in India, getting right talent is a task

MUMBAI: Like in other parts of the world, a good majority of employees in India have started returning to offices as COVID-19 restrictions are eased and the local economy reopens. However, high workloads and growing expectations have led many workers to remain constantly connected, with the subsequent burnouts becoming a problem for the corporate sector.

"The corporate culture that employees need to be available 24/7 is not new or only a post-pandemic phenomenon," says Sonica Aron, managing partner and founder of Marching Sheep, an HR advisory company. "During work-from-home, where personal and professional lines got blurred, this pinch was felt even more by employees." It has now become "more prevalent" in companies "to authentically address this issue" and try to bring a balance between "work expectations and giving employees adequate time to recharge and rejuvenate", she says.

For many companies, the pandemic and how employees delivered during those stressful days has changed the way they look at their staff's well-being, human resources experts say. Implementing measures for the physical and mental health of employees is the foremost priority in a bid to retain skilled workers - of whom there is often a shortage in the country. Companies across industries in India are trying to hire aggressively, but 83 per cent say that they find it difficult to fill positions amid a dearth of the right talent in the country, according to an employment outlook survey by ManpowerGroup India released in 2022.

Other schemes being introduced by companies in India to help attract and retain staff and prevent them from burning out include offering unlimited days off, counseling services, working retreats and hybrid work options.

"There is a choice for employees these days to look

for better opportunities if they are getting excessively overworked at an organization," says Gaurav Bhagat, a business coach and founder of the Gaurav Bhagat Academy.

"There are many companies in India that allow employees to sign off when not at work and hence these are the companies that get recognized as great places to work and they get the right talent."

The corporate sector in India is increasingly witnessing a "mindset shift when it comes to employee welfare and mental health", says Neeti Sharma, co-founder and president of TeamLease Edtech, a learning solutions company in India, which is focused on improving employability.

"Organizations that take steps to create a good work culture tend to retain employees and witness reduced absenteeism and less instances of sickness. "Reduced turnover also leads to reduced hiring costs and thereby improves the bottom line for any organization." As well as companies developing more awareness of the importance of holidays to recharge, many organizations are also "implementing a no-call policy

Ecuador: Trade talks with Mexico at a 'dead end'

QUITO: Ecuadoran President Guillermo Lasso said on Sunday that negotiations for his nation to reach a free-trade accord with Mexico are at a "dead end." Such a free-trade deal would have been a stepping stone for Ecuador to enter the Pacific Alliance, a broader trade bloc. But Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador "has told me that the banana and shrimp producers in Mexico don't want shrimp and plantains or bananas from Ecuador arriving there," Lasso said. "We are at a dead end." Ecuador warned in December that it would be "impossible" to sign a free-trade accord with Mexico unless a deal included shrimp and bananas, its major exports after petroleum.

Lasso, speaking to a local reporter in an interview later released by his government, said that the failure to get a trade accord with Mexico "is not so serious" since Ecuador has expanded and intensified trade talks elsewhere. Mexico is one of the founding members of the Pacific Alliance, which also includes Chile, Colombia and Peru. Lasso said Ecuador sought entry to the Pacific Alliance "in order to access Asian markets" but that "today we are doing so directly," noting that Ecuador is expected to sign a free-trade accord with China imminently. Ecuador is also pursuing trade talks with South Korea, Canada, Costa Rica and the United States. — AFP

post office hours", Sharma says.

It is "encouraging to see such steps being taken", she adds. Depending on the nature of work, there could be companies where co-workers would need to be contacted while on leave or after work hours for urgent matters, she states. RP Yadav, chairman and managing director of Genius Consultants, a human resources solutions company in India, agrees.

"I am not very sure about the practicality of this situation in a company," he says. "In case [a] person, who has the authoritative power of taking a decision is not connected at such times due to implementation of a policy where you will be fined, it can lead to major work being put off and can have serious implications." Nonetheless, it is a good step and similar "unplug" policies have been rolled out across some multinational companies in Europe and the US.

Dream11 is the first company in India to make such a public announcement, Yadav says. Even before the pandemic, there were calls for India's corporate culture to change and help ensure a healthier work-life balance among employees. — Agencies



NEW YORK: Traders work on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange during opening bell in New York City. — AFP



Business

Microsoft invests billions in ChatGPT firm OpenAI

Multiyear, multibillion dollar investment to accelerate AI breakthroughs

WASHINGTON: Microsoft on Monday said it had extended its partnership with OpenAI, the research lab and creator of ChatGPT, an artificial intelligence chatbot that has sparked widespread fears of cheating in schools and universities.

In a company blog post tweeted by CEO Satya Nadella, the tech giant announced a "multi-year, multibillion dollar investment to accelerate AI breakthroughs" that would be "broadly shared with the world."

OpenAI's ChatGPT became an internet sensation when it was released without warning in November, allowing users to experiment with its ability to write essays, articles and poems as well as computer code in just seconds.

With teachers alarmed by its ability, ChatGPT is banned in universities and school districts - including in New York City and Washington DC - and has sparked nervous debates about the future of office work.

California-based OpenAI is also the creator of DALL-E, a program that can swiftly draw up digital images and illustrations at a simple request.

'Aggressive'

Media reports have put Microsoft's fresh investment in OpenAI at \$10 billion, which would value the company at roughly \$29 billion.

The announcement comes less than a week after Microsoft said it would lay off 10,000 employees in the coming weeks and redeploy investment to new priorities such as AI.

Microsoft's statement said that the company would deploy OpenAI's models "across our consumer and enterprise products."

This indicated that Microsoft intended to include the technology behind ChatGPT and DALL-E into its own software products such as Bing, the search engine or the company's Office apps.

"With ChatGPT being one of the most innovative AI technologies seen in the industry, Microsoft is clearly being aggressive on this front and not going to be left behind on what could be a potential game changing AI investment," analyst Dan Ives of Wedbush Securities said in a note.

Founded in late 2015 with Tesla tycoon Elon Musk an early investor, OpenAI is led by Sam Altman, a 37-year-old entrepreneur and former president of startup incubator Y Combinator.

The company has counted on the financial support of prestigious contributors from the start, including LinkedIn co-founder Reid Hoffman, investor Peter Thiel and Musk.

The multi-billionaire served on OpenAI's



board until 2018, but left to focus on Tesla, the electric vehicle company.

The startup also relies on a team of computer scientists and researchers led by Ilya Sutskever,

a former Google executive who specializes in machine learning. OpenAI had about 200 employees by 2021, according to a query made directly on ChatGPT. —AFP

CBK issues KD 200m bonds, tawarruq

KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) announced on Monday that it issued bonds and related tawarruq estimated at KD 200 million (about \$660 million) for a three-month term. The securities bear a return rate of 4.125 percent, the central bank told KUNA in a statement. On January 2, the CBK issued bonds and tawarruq valued at KD 240 million (about \$792 million) for six months with a return rate of 4.250 percent. —KUNA

Saudi's Almarai reports jump in Q4 profit

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia's Almarai, the Middle East's largest dairy company, has reported a 24 per cent rise in fourth-quarter net profit, boosted by higher sales in its poultry and bakery businesses.

Consolidated profit attributable to shareholders for the three-month period ending December 31 climbed to 355.8 million Saudi riyals (\$94.8 million), compared with 286.5 million riyals during the same period last year, the company said in a statement on Sunday to the Saudi stock exchange Tadawul, where its shares are traded. Revenue during the period rose nearly 14 per cent to 4.84 billion riyals. "Positive trend from the first three quarters have continued in the fourth quarter, driven mainly by poultry and bakery [businesses]. Volume growth rates have continued in the current quarter driven by food service expansion and school normalization activities," Almarai said in the statement.

Sales in all categories, including dairy and juice, bakery and poultry, rose during the period. Revenues from the bakery section rose about 29 per cent, while those from poultry increased more than 31 per cent, the company said. Dairy and juice sales jumped 5.8 per cent, but income from the business was offset by "cost inflation, mainly in dairy and feed commodities".

Almarai's full-year profit rose more than 12 per cent to 1.76 billion riyals in 2022. Revenue rose about 18 per cent to 18.7 billion riyals.

"We expect this positive momentum to continue, albeit at a lower rate in the future as we enter a normalized consumption pattern after full opening of education institutions and resumption of tourism activities," the company said. "The key risk remains surging cost inflation for dairy and feed commodities. We continue to see parts of global supply chain remaining under stress although some areas are now showing signs of stability."

Consumer prices in Saudi Arabia edged up to 3.3 per cent year-on-year in December, with higher housing costs driving up inflation, according to the latest government data.

The Consumer Price Index in December was up from 2.9 per cent in November, Saudi Arabia's General Authority for Statistics (Gastat) said in the latest CPI data released last week. Prices in December were up by 0.3 per cent on the month, the report showed. Inflation globally has risen sharply due to steep increases in the prices of food and other commodities since the Ukraine conflict began in February last year. However, inflation in the GCC has been significantly lower than in most advanced and emerging market countries amid improved economic activity, driven by higher oil and gas prices. —Agencies



KUWAIT: Participants of Gulf Bank's second version of its "Data Ambassadors" program.

Gulf Bank launches 'Data Ambassadors' program for staff

KUWAIT: As part of its successful digital transformation journey, and its keenness to develop and enhance the skills of its employees, Gulf Bank launched the second version of its "Data Ambassadors" program, which is the first data and analytics program in Kuwait. The program, which aims to upskill and empower employees to use advanced data science and was developed by Kuwaitis within the Bank, is also set to be approved by world-famous data expert, Dr Thomas Redman.

About 60 employees from various bank departments are participating in the second edition of the Data Ambassadors program, and are currently being trained on how to use data and analytics tools, noting that 140 employees were awarded the title of "Data Ambassador" in 2022.

On this occasion, Gulf Bank's Chief Data Officer (CDO), Mai Al-Owaish, said, "The Data Ambassadors Program comes in implementation of Gulf Bank's 2025 strategy, which aims to consolidate Gulf Bank's leading position as the Kuwaiti Bank of the Future. The program also falls in line with the national development plan, Kuwait Vision 2035, which considers the development of human capital as one of its main pillars."

She pointed out that Gulf Bank is keen to empower its human talent across various disciplines in light of the pivotal role that data plays in various sectors and fields. The program is set on helping employees benefit from data and providing them with the tools and knowledge to extract ideas and information efficiently while preserving data integrity and quality as a basis for business development.

She added: "At Gulf Bank, we firmly believe that our employees are the cornerstone of our success,

Britain trailing on green growth: Business lobby

LONDON: Britain is falling behind global competitors in green investment growth, the CBI business lobby warned Monday, urging action to soften the blow of recession. CBI head Tony Danker will in a speech call on UK finance minister Jeremy Hunt to make "big decisions" on green investment to "get growth going".

"Our international competitors in Europe, Asia and the United States are going hell for leather on green growth and getting firms investing," Danker will say in the London speech, extracts of which were released to media. "We are behind them now and seem to be hoping for the best."

Danker will add: "It's time for us to take



and the secret behind our excellence. That is why we are keen to invest in them continuously, train them on the latest sciences, and provide them with new skills that keep pace with the requirements of the labor market, and are compatible with big leaps in the banking industry."

She continued, "We are working to invest in integrated technological solutions to facilitate digital transformation inside and outside the bank by spreading a culture of data. Gulf Bank is proud to have demonstrated a dynamic response to the digital requirements that the banking industry is witnessing both locally and globally."

Al-Owaish concluded, "We are proud to develop our in-house talent in important digital disciplines such as data science and cybersecurity, and we are excited to reap the many benefits that result from encouraging our employees to build their capabilities in critical thinking and learn how

those hard decisions, generating the forward momentum not only to limit recession this year but also get us really growing next."

According to the business chief, Britain lag "Germans on heat-pumps, insulation and building retrofits, the French on electric vehicle charging infrastructure, and the US on operational carbon capture and storage projects. "We're lagging all three on hydrogen funding," he will add.

Britain is on course to lose an estimated £4.3 billion (\$5.3 billion) in European green technology growth value by 2030, according to the CBI. Danker will call on the government to relax planning and regulation to help stimulate demand for greener technologies.

He will urge it to replace a tax break on capital investment that will otherwise expire at the start of April. And he will seek clarity over what will replace European Union laws, which were retained following Brexit, but will expire at the end of this year.

The government has long promised to make Britain carbon net zero by 2050. —AFP

to use and manage data science." Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the Future. The Bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience.

Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining a robust sustainability program at the community, economic, and environmental levels through sustainability initiatives that are strategically selected to benefit both the country and the Bank. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with various parties to achieve it.

Spotify to cut 6% of workforce

STOCKHOLM: Swedish music streaming giant Spotify said Monday it was cutting six percent of its roughly 10,000 employees, the latest cost-cutting announcement among technology companies.

"In hindsight, I was too ambitious in investing ahead of our revenue growth. And for this reason, today, we are reducing our employee base by about six percent across the company," Spotify chief executive Daniel Ek said on Spotify's official blog. "I take full accountability for the moves that got us here today," Ek added. The Swedish company, which is listed on the New York Stock Exchange, has invested heavily since its launch to fuel growth with expansions into new markets and, in later years, exclusive content such as podcasts.

Spotify has never posted a full-year net profit despite its success in the online music market. In recent months, tech giants such as Google parent company Alphabet, Facebook-owner Meta, Amazon and Microsoft have announced tens of thousands of job cuts as the sector faces economic headwinds. —AFP



IWG, TURKISH EMBASSY CELEBRATE TURKISH CULTURAL HERITAGE

Tea culture in Kuwait, Turkey is an important social practice that shows hospitality

The International Women's Group (IWG) and the Turkish Embassy celebrated the taste and flavor of Turkish tea at an event on Sunday. The event commemorated the addition of Turkish tea on UNESCO's List of Intangible Cultural Heritage as a symbol of identity, hospitality and social interaction. The popular beverage was acknowledged by the UN in December.

Watching traditional dance performances and live music, attendees enjoyed traditional Turkish tea and baklava. "Tea culture in Kuwait and Turkey is an important social practice that shows hospitality. It helps build and maintain social ties. It is used to celebrate important moments in the lives of communities," said Turkish Ambassador Tuba Nur Sonmez.

Ghada Shawky, IWG President and wife of Egypt's ambassador to Kuwait, lauded Turkey for its rich cultural heritage, being one of the most visited countries in the world and home to 19 UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Sonmez said the cultural similarities between Kuwait and Turkey, specifically the significance of tea in both cultures, play an important role in "facilitating friendly interaction". "In Kuwait, guests are welcomed in gatherings and diwanis with (chai). It is often served alongside traditional deserts and delicious dates," she explained.

The event also aimed to promote the role women play in advancing cultural heritage, she said, explaining why the embassy decided to collaborate with IWG

to organize the event. "IWG is a vibrant, diverse, vocal and active community of women that help bridge our differences within Kuwaiti society in a sisterly way," Sonmez said.

The ambassador thanked HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for their contribution to "improving and strengthening the position of women in every field of Kuwaiti society". The event included a screening of a short film about Turkey and a presentation given by Turkey's leading state-owned tea company, Caykur.



Graceland memorial service for Lisa Marie Presley, daughter of Elvis

Singer-songwriter Lisa Marie Presley, the only child of rock and roll icon Elvis Presley, has been laid to rest at the family's legendary Tennessee home Graceland, where hundreds of fans and loved ones gathered Sunday for a public memorial service. Crowds lined up at dawn in Memphis to pay tribute to the singer who died on January 12 at age 54, after she was rushed to hospital for cardiac arrest.

Priscilla Presley - Lisa Marie's mother and Elvis's wife for six years until their divorce in 1973 - joined forces with performers including Alanis Morissette, Guns N' Roses frontman Axl Rose and

Smashing Pumpkins singer Billy Corgan, to pay tribute. "Grief is the price we pay for love," the Duchess of York, Sarah Ferguson, told the mourners, quoting her former mother-in-law-the late Queen of England Elizabeth II, who famously used those words to address the families of vic-

tims of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States.

Presley, who led a tumultuous life in the sprawling shadow of her world-famous father, and who attended a high-profile awards ceremony just this month, had been rushed to a California hospital's

intensive care unit for cardiac arrest and died shortly after. She was Elvis's only child. She previously controlled Elvis Presley Enterprises, but sold the bulk of shares in the company to a private equity firm in 2005.

She retained control of Graceland, the estate her father owned and where he was found unconscious in August 1977. Elvis was taken to a hospital but pronounced dead from a heart attack. Toxicology reports found high levels of prescription drugs in his system.

Lisa Marie released three albums this century, and is the mother of actor Riley Keough, who appeared in "Mad Max: Fury Road." In addition to Danny Keough, whom she divorced in 1994, she has also been married to actor Nicolas Cage, pop superstar Michael Jackson and actor-composer Michael Lockwood. She was left devastated following the death by suicide of her son Benjamin less than three years ago. Reports said she was buried next to him at Graceland. — AFP

Chinese gamers bid sad farewell to 'World of Warcraft'

Chinese players of roleplaying epic "World of Warcraft" bade a sad farewell to the land of Azeroth on Monday, with the game set to go offline after a dispute between US developer Blizzard and local partner NetEase. Massively popular worldwide, particularly in the 2000s, "World of Warcraft" — often abbreviated as WoW — is an online multiplayer role playing game set in a fantasy-Medieval world where good battles evil. It is known for its immersive and addicting gameplay, and players can rack up hundreds of hours of game time. Blizzard's games have been available in China since 2008, through collaboration with internet giant NetEase — under local law, foreign developers are required to partner with Chinese firms to enter the market.

But after 14 years and millions of players in China, the two firms announced in November that talks over renewing their operating contract had failed to lead to an agreement. As a result, WoW's Chinese servers will go offline Tuesday at midnight local time (1600 GMT). Other popular titles by the Californian gaming giant — one of the world's biggest — will suffer the same fate, including "Overwatch", "Diablo III" and "Hearthstone". "It's the end," wrote one Weibo user, accompanied by crying emojis.

"It was not just a game. It was also the memories of a whole generation" of young Chinese, another wrote. "The two companies have taken players hostage," Wu, a 30-year-old doctoral student and a longtime fan, told AFP.

Last week, Blizzard China said it had requested an exceptional six-month contract extension — which NetEase refused. "One day, when what has happened behind the scene could be told, developers and gamers will have a whole new level understanding of how much damage a jerk can make," NetEase's President Simon Zhu wrote on LinkedIn late last year. — AFP



A view of the grave of Lisa Marie Presley during her memorial. — AFP photos



Priscilla Presley speaks at the public memorial for Lisa Marie Presley at Graceland on January 22, 2023 in Memphis, Tennessee.



Axl Rose performs at the public memorial for Lisa Marie Presley.



(L-R) Maryam Keshavarz, Sundance Film Festival Senior Programmer Shari Frlot, Layla Mohammadi, and Niusha Noor attend 2023 Sundance Film Festival "The Persian Version" Premiere at Library Center Theatre in Park City, Utah.



(L-R) Maryam Keshavarz, Noora Niasari and Sierra Ulrich speak at the 2023 Sundance Film Festival Women at Sundance Celebration. — AFP Photos

IRANIAN WOMEN TAKE CENTER STAGE AT SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL

Movies by and about Iranian women took center stage at the Sundance film festival this weekend, as diaspora filmmakers reflected on female-led protests and the deadly challenges of censorship and resistance in their ancestral home. "Joonam," a documentary about a three-generation family of Iranian women now living in Vermont, and "The Persian Version," a colorful but candid dramedy which hops between Iran and New York over several decades, received world premieres on Saturday.

"Shayda," a drama directed by Noora Niasari about a Persian woman who flees her abusive husband in Australia, debuted earlier at the high-profile independent film festival in Utah. Their inclusion in Sundance's line-up follows four months of mass demonstrations in Iran, triggered by anger over the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini after her arrest for violating the Islamic republic's strict dress rules.

At least 481 people have been killed in the crackdown and at least 109 others are facing execution in protest-related cases, in addition to the four already put to death,



Layla Mohammadi attends Sundance Institute's Inaugural Opening Night: A Taste of Sundance presented by IMDbPro at the Basin Recreation Fieldhouse.

according to NGO Iran Human Rights.

The protesters "are literally putting themselves on the line... I stand in support with them 100 percent," said "Joonam"

director Sierra Ulrich. "You can't speak freely in Iran, they're imprisoning filmmakers and imprisoning artists," Ulrich told AFP. "I can speak freely outside of Iran-to an extent."

Iran has arrested a number of celebrities from the country's film industry in connection with the protest movement. Renowned director Jafar Panahi has been in prison six months following an earlier conviction for "propaganda against the system." While US-born Ulrich cannot visit Iran for security reasons, her film chronicles her efforts to connect with and better understand the country by learning Farsi and interviewing her mother and grandmother.

She learns about the murder of an ancestor, and the story of how her grandmother was married at 14 to a man she met before reaching puberty. While her grandmother is happy to reflect, her mother worries it is "very dangerous" to delve into the family's past on camera, at one point warning her daughter that in Iran, "the filmmaker will be the one hanged."

"Coming into Sundance, the film is on the world stage. I think Iranians are always

weighing how truthful they will be, versus what they will say causing consequences for people that are back home," said Ulrich.

"It wasn't until my grandmother shared the story of her grandfather's martyrdom that I really understood this wall of fear that had been built by this authoritarian regime, to so many people in Iran, outside of Iran. "My mom was trying to protect me from that reality."

'Resilience'

In "The Persian Version," rebellious young Iranian-American Leila (played by Layla Mohammadi) has a fractured relationship with her immigrant mother, caused by Leila's sexuality and their seemingly different views on the role of women.

But as she uncovers the truth about her parents' experiences in Iran and their departure from the country, both generations of women gain perspective on their complicated heritage. "I'm proud to have an Iranian film here at this moment about women," said director Maryam Keshavarz at the film's premiere, where cast members wore badges in Iranian flag colors with the

protest movement's slogan "Woman Life Freedom."

"I think it speaks to the resilience through the decades, not just now. It's been forever in the making," she said. "Even before this regime, women have always pushed against society for what they've wanted."

"They've upended the norms and they've learned to find their way of being free." Keshavarz has not been able to return to Iran since the release of her debut film "Circumstance," about two teenage Persian girls who fall in love.

Ulrich still hopes to visit one day, but is watching the protests from afar, and for now hopes that her film can be "a small part of that struggle for freedom." "I think part of why it's so moving to see what's happening in Iran right now, and to be here with these other filmmakers," she said, "is it's a real sense of community, and being able to tell our stories openly." — AFP

Sean Penn Ukraine doc to premiere at Berlin film fest

US actor and director Sean Penn will premiere a documentary he filmed in Kyiv featuring Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky at next month's Berlin film festival, organisers said Monday. The 73rd-annual Berlinale, as the February 16-26 event is known, will shine a spotlight on the war, which will mark the first anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine during the event.

Penn's "Superpower," billed as "the chronicle of a film project that reality forced to change into something less controllable but more meaningful", will be the most prominent among the Ukraine entries at the festival. Festival co-director Carlo Chatrion told reporters the film was shot under "very difficult circumstances".

Penn was in Kyiv to shoot a documentary in late February 2022 when the Russian invasion began. The two-time Oscar winner was photographed attending a government news conference in Kyiv, and could be seen meeting with Zelensky in a video posted to the Ukrainian president's Instagram account.

The 62-year-old actor shot the documentary for Vice Studios with directing partner Aaron Kaufman. Penn has previously attracted controversy as a result of his forays into current affairs, especially after he and Mexican-American actress Kate del Castillo interviewed the Mexican drug lord Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman while he was on the run.

In 2018, Penn was reported to be in Turkey making an as-yet-unreleased documentary about the murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi Arabian consulate. "Superpower" will screen in the Berlinale Special section of the festival, out of competition.

Chatrion said the festival, Europe's first major cinema showcase of the year, would spotlight several documentaries and feature films from Ukrainian directors, in addition to works from dissident Iranian filmmakers, in a sign of "solidarity". It will also provide free exhibition space to Ukrainian film industry representatives at the festival's sprawling European Film Market, and highlight co-production possibilities with Ukraine's embattled directors, the Berlinale said. — AFP

Avatar: 'The Way of Water' surges past global \$2bn mark

"Avatar: The Way of Water" gave no sign of relinquishing its box office domination, taking in an estimated \$19.7 billion in its sixth weekend out in North America, industry watcher Exhibitor Relations said Sunday.

The James Cameron sci-fi epic thus sailed past the \$2 billion mark globally, best in the pandemic era, with accumulated ticket sales of \$598 million domestically and \$1.42 billion internationally. That makes the Disney/20thCentury film only the sixth movie ever to surpass the \$2 billion mark (not adjusted for inflation), though it still trails the all-time leader, the original "Avatar," by \$1.5 billion.

Showing considerable buoyance after



Storm Reid and Nia Long attend the Stage 6 and Screen Gems world premiere of "Missing" at Alamo Drafthouse Cinema Downtown Los Angeles. — AFP

five weeks out, Universal's family-friendly "Puss in Boots: The Last Wish" rose one spot from last weekend to place second, at \$11.5 million for the Friday-

through-Sunday period. Down one spot was scary-doll thriller "M3GAN" from Universal and Blumhouse Productions, at \$9.8 million. The film's title doll, creat-

ed as a companion to a young orphan, gradually takes on a creepy life of her own.

In fourth spot was Sony's new release "Missing," at \$9.3 million. Storm Reid stars as a teenager desperate to find her mother (Nia Long) after she disappears during a vacation in Colombia. David A. Gross of Franchise Entertainment Research called the opening "impressive" for a crime thriller, adding, "The reviews are excellent."

And in fifth, down one spot from last weekend, was Sony's feel-good "A Man Called Otto," at \$9 million. Tom Hanks plays the title curmudgeon, a character based on popular Swedish novel "A Man Called Ove."

Rounding out the top 10 were: "Plane" (\$5.3 million) "House Party" (\$1.8 million) "That Time I Got Reincarnated as a Slime" (\$1.5 million) "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever" (\$1.4 million) "The Whale" (\$1.3 million). — AFP



Members of team Japan hold the trophy as they celebrate winning the 2023 Bocuse d'Or pastry competition at the SIRHA (Salon International de la Restauration, de l'Hotellerie et de l'Alimentation) in Chassieu Eurexpo hall near Lyon, southeastern France. — AFP Photos

Japan wins World Pastry Cup

Japan scored their third win Saturday in the World Pastry Cup, seeing off France and Italy at Sirha, the plum event for catering and hotel professionals. The Japanese added to triumphs in 1989 and 2007 in coming through a two-day contest near Lyon against 17 teams from around the globe all comprising a chocolate maker, a sugar expert and a master ice cream maker.

Feted French pastry chef and chocolatier Pierre Herme saluted the winning entrants for their "attention to detail, perseverance, commitment" in producing a dessert on the theme of wind and lightness at Chassieu, outside Lyon in eastern France. "The level of competition rises with every edition, as witnessed by such very close results," said Herme.



Team South Korea's Kim Jeong-Bin prepares a creation as he competes in the 2023 Bocuse d'Or pastry competition.

Yann Brys, for the French runners-up, said he was disappointed. "It's not the result we wanted — placing second is always tough but it's a good showing nonetheless," he said. Canada won a special eco-friendly prize. All entrants had to produce desserts without any coloring or additives on a theme of climate change. — AFP

Tom Hanks nominated for three 'Razzies'

His recent hit film "Elvis" is an Oscars frontrunner, but Tom Hanks was left all shook up Monday as he earned three nominations from the Razzies, which "celebrate" the year's worst films. Hanks was short-listed by the tongue-in-cheek awards for his roles as Presley's manager in rock 'n' roll biopic "Elvis," and Geppetto in Disney's critically slated live-action "Pinocchio" remake.

A press release from organizers of the Razzies dubbed Hanks' "Elvis" role as "2022's most widely derided performance," and piled on a further nomination for "worst screen couple" to "Tom Hanks & His Latex-Laden Face (and Luciduous Accent)."

While "Elvis" and its star Austin Butler have generally received acclaim, Hanks' appearance as his exploitative manager Colonel Tom Parker was panned by many critics. A New York Times review said Hanks appears "with a mountain of prosthetic goo, a bizarre accent and a yes-it's-really-me twinkle in his eyes," and portrays Parker as "part small-time grifter, part full-blown Mephistopheles."

"Disney's Pinocchio" was among five "worst picture" nominees for the annual Golden Raspberry-or Razzie-awards, as was the controversial Marilyn Monroe biopic "Blonde." Also in the running were regular Razzies punching bag Jared Leto, and his Spider-Man spinoff "Morbius."

Just last year, Leto was named worst supporting actor for his flamboyant performance-complete with a campy Italian accent and heavy prosthetics-in "House of Gucci." The Razzies are usually announced the day before the Oscars, serving to mock the following night's self-congratulatory Tinseltown back-slapping.



Tom Hanks

But last year, the Razzies themselves were left embarrassed, after jokingly creating a new category labelled "Worst Performance by Bruce Willis in a 2021 Movie" to accommodate all of the former "Die Hard" star's questionable output.

Organizers rescinded the prize after his family revealed Willis suffered from a cognitive illness called aphasia. Nominations for this year's Academy Awards will be announced on Tuesday. — AFP

Lifestyle | Features



Models present a creation from the Menswear Ready-to-wear Fall-Winter 2023-2024 collection for Dior at Paris fashion week. — AFP Photos

Women who dress men

Women are increasingly making their mark in men's fashion, breaking through the "fabric ceiling" that has seen the industry dominated by men, and attracted by a sector where some of the most radical changes are taking place. Fashion has long been an industry focused predominantly on women but run by men, with a 2019 study by PriceWaterhouseCooper showing just 12.5 percent of fashion houses had female bosses.

While change is slow at the top, the latest men's fashion week in Paris that wrapped up on Sunday highlighted the number of exciting women designers choosing to focus on menswear. Grace Wales Bonner's opening night show in a Place Vendome hotel-her first physical event in Paris-was one of the hottest tickets.

Known for literary references and highlighting black and minority artists, it was clear why she is considered a frontrunner to replace the late Virgil Abloh at Louis Vuitton. "I went into menswear because I thought there's a lot more room for expression," she told AFP.

"It feels like it's not overdeveloped — (menswear) can be quite conservative at times." It was well-received, with Bloomingdale's men's director Justin Berkowitz praising her "sharp tailoring... with charming details for a spot-on, personal collection".

Bode, meanwhile, returned to Paris for the first time since the pandemic, with a vintage collection inspired by rural America and her mother's family. Known for handcrafted clothes, often made from recycled materials, she was named menswear designer of the year at the CFDA Awards in 2022.

There were also shows from France's Marine Serre, who has disrupted the industry with her determined adherence to sustainability, and Britain's Bianca Saunders, who told AFP she was attracted to menswear because it offered "a different canvas where I could be very explorative". Wales Bonner, Bode, Serre and Saunders are all in their early thirties, but more experienced designers like Gabriela Hearst and Isabel Marant have also launched menswear lines in recent years as the sector heats up.

"Men chase an ideal-today I want to feel like Marlon Brando so I throw on a leather jacket," said Hermes shoe designer Pierre Hardy, a longtime collaborator of Veronique Nichanian, who has headed menswear at the label for 35 years. "Women come with fewer cliches, with an external and more neutral perspective," he told.—AFP

ROSALIA, WOMEN DESIGNERS, STARK CONTRASTS

One of the buzziest menswear weeks in recent memory wrapped in Paris on Sunday. Here are some of the highlights:

Dior vs Louis Vuitton

Two very different approaches from two of the biggest houses, who built giant rival hangars on either end of the Tuileries Gardens that run through cen-



tral Paris. While Vuitton created an entire apartment full of primary colours and brought along Rosalia for a thumping performance on top of a car, Dior went with a starkly lit black runway and refined, sombre outfits, to the soaring music of German composer Max Richter and a small orchestra.

Both went down well, even if some complained it was hard to focus on the clothes at Vuitton while also watching Rosalia. Justin Berkowitz, men's fashion director at New York department store Bloomingdale's said the Vuitton show was the funniest of the week, but he also praised Kim Jones's collection for Dior as "incredibly elegant with a new sophistication and sumptuousness rendered in a soft colour palette".

BTS, Chalamet, Usher

The celeb count was high this week, with the biggest crowds of screaming fans turning up outside the Dior show for a glimpse of J-Hope from Korean pop phenomenon BTS. Timothee Chalamet was a special guest for Loewe, with artistic director Jonathan Anderson saying he epitomises the more daring approach to menswear that is seeing the sector take off.

"Fashion has never felt more exciting," Anderson told AFP. "The landscape is changing." Omnipresent throughout the week was RnB star Usher, who was hard to miss with his new, bright-red hairstyle.

A veteran still excites

Rick Owens has been bringing his



gothic, post-apocalyptic madness to the Paris catwalk for years, but he still excites the crowd, which this week included David and Victoria Beckham. "Rick Owens continues to impress each and every season, developing new silhouettes, proportions and fabrications all while staying true to his singular and truly compelling vision," said Simon Longland, head of menswear and womenswear at British department store Harrods.

Emerging women designers

A quartet of women in their early thirties-Britain's Grace Wales Bonner and Bianca Saunders, France's Marine

Serre and US award-winner Emily Bode-were among the hottest tickets. It was the first live show in Paris for Wales Bonner, inspired by black Parisian icons, and it showed off her "sharp tailoring... and charming details for a spot-on, personal collection", said Berkowitz.

Bode, hot off a CFDA menswear designer of the year award, returned to Paris for the first time since the pandemic with a vintage collection inspired by her mother's family that transformed the stage of the Chatelet Theatre into a scene from rural America. — AFP

Women who lived as sex slaves to an Indian goddess

Dedicated to an Indian goddess as a child, Huvakka Bhimappa's years of sexual servitude began when her uncle took her virginity, raping her in exchange for a saree and some jewellery. Bhimappa was not yet 10 years old when she became a "devadasi"-girls coerced by their parents into an elaborate wedding ritual with a Hindu deity, many of whom are then forced into illegal prostitution.

Devadasis are expected to live a life of religious devotion, forbidden from marrying other mortals, and forced at puberty to sacrifice their virginity to an older man, in return for money or gifts. "In my case, it was my mother's brother," Bhimappa, now in her late 40s, told AFP.

What followed was years of sexual slavery, earning money for her family through encounters with other men in the name of serving the goddess. Bhimappa eventually escaped her servitude but with no education, she earns around a dollar a day toiling in fields.

Her time as a devotee to the Hindu goddess Yellamma has also rendered her an outcast in the eyes of her community. She had loved a man once, but it would have been unthinkable for her to ask him to marry. "If I was not a devadasi, I would have had a family and children and some money. I would have lived well," she said.

Devadasis have been an integral part of southern Indian culture for centuries and once enjoyed a respectable place in society. Many were highly educated, trained in classical dance and music, lived comfortable lives and chose their own sexual partners.

"This notion of more or less religiously sanctioned sexual slavery was not part of the original system of patronage," historian Gayathri Iyer told AFP.

Iyer said that in the 19th century, during the British colonial era, the divine pact between devadasi and goddess evolved into an institution of sexual exploitation.

It now serves as a means for poverty-stricken families from the bottom of India's rigid caste hierarchy to relieve themselves of responsibility for their daughters. The practice was outlawed in Bhimappa's home state of Karnataka back in 1982, and India's top court has described the devotion of young girls to temples as an "evil".

Campaigners, however, say that young girls are still secretly inducted into devadasi orders. Four decades after the state ban, there are still more than 70,000 devadasis in Karnataka, India's human rights commission wrote last year.

'I was alone'

Girls are commonly seen as burdensome and costly in India due to the tradition of wedding dowries. By forcing daughters to become devadasis, poorer families gain a source of income and avoid the costs of marrying them off.

Many households around the small southern town of Saundatti-home to a revered Yellamma temple-believe that having a family member in the order can lift their fortunes or cure the illness of a loved one.

It was at this temple that Sitavva D. Jodatti was enjoined to marry the goddess when she was eight years old. Her sisters had all married other men, and her parents decided to dedicate her to Yellamma in order to provide for them.

"When other people get married, there is a bride and a groom. When I realised I was alone, I started crying," Jodatti, 49, told AFP. Her father eventually fell ill, and she was pulled out of school to engage in sex work and help pay for his treatment.

"By the age of 17, I had two kids," she said. Rekha Bhandari, a fellow former devadasi, said they had been subjected to a practice of "blind tradition" that had ruined their lives. She was forced into the order after the death of her mother and was 13 when a 30-year-old man took her virginity. She fell pregnant soon after. "A normal delivery was difficult. The doctor yelled at my family,

saying that I was too young to give birth," the 45-year-old told AFP. "I had no understanding."

'Many women have died'

Years of unsafe sex exposed many devadasis to sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. "I know of women who are infected and now it has passed on to their children," an activist who works with devadasis, who asked not to be named, told AFP.

"They hide it and live with it in secrecy. Many women have died." Parents are occasionally prosecuted for allowing their daughters to be inducted as devadasis, and women who leave the order are given meagre government pensions of 1,500 rupees (\$18) per month.

Nitesh Patil, a civil servant who administers Saundatti, told AFP that there had been no "recent instances" of women being dedicated to temples. India's rights commission last year ordered Karnataka and several other Indian states to outline what they were doing to prevent the practice, after a media investigation found that devadasi

inductions were still widespread.

The stigma around their pasts means women who leave their devadasi order often endure lives as outcasts or objects of ridicule, and few ever marry. Many find themselves destitute or struggling to survive on poorly paid manual labour and farming work.

Jodatti now heads a civil society group which helped extricate the women AFP spoke to from their lives of servitude and provides support to former devadasis. She said many of her contemporaries had several years ago become engrossed by the #MeToo movement and the personal revelations of celebrity women around the world that revealed them as survivors of sexual abuse.

"We watch the news and sometimes when we see famous people... we understand their situation is much like ours. They have suffered the same. But they continue to live freely," she said. "We have gone through the same experience, but we don't get the respect they get. "Devadasi women are still looked down upon." — AFP



Huvakka Bhimappa (L) along with other former 'devadasi' women who were dedicated by their families to the Hindu Goddess Yellamma Devi, cleanse themselves in a pond before visiting Yellamma Devi temple in Savadatti of Belgaum district, in India's Karnataka state.

— AFP Photos



Former 'devadasi' women who were dedicated by their families to the Hindu Goddess Yellamma Devi, along with members of the Mahila Abhivrudhi Mattu Samrakshana Samsthe (MASS) non-governmental organization (NGO) who work for the rehabilitation and support of 'devadasi' women, register to attend an annual meeting in Savadatti of Belgaum district, in India's Karnataka state.

Sports

Lakers rally to stun Trail Blazers as Nets down Warriors in comeback

LOS ANGELES: LeBron James scored 20 of his 37 points in the second half as the Los Angeles Lakers rallied from a 25-point halftime deficit to stun the Portland Trail Blazers 121-112 on Sunday. The Lakers, who scored just 13 points to Portland's 45 in the second quarter, roared back to become the first team to win a game in which it lost a quarter by 30 or more points since the Boston Celtics against the Buffalo Braves in 1972.

The remarkable reversal was just one dramatic comeback on a night that saw the Brooklyn Nets - led by 38 points from an inspired Kyrie Irving - beat the NBA champion Golden State Warriors 120-116 in San Francisco. However, the two top teams in the Western Conference - the Denver Nuggets and Memphis Grizzlies - couldn't climb all the way back from early deficits, Denver falling 101-99 to the Oklahoma City Thunder and Memphis losing 112-110 to the Phoenix Suns.

In Portland, a Lakers team struggling for consistency in the absence of injured Anthony Davis started promisingly, making their first six shots on the way to an early 14-point lead. But the second quarter saw them "falling apart on both sides of the ball," coach Darvin Ham said, and they were on the ropes after the period in which their six made shots were one fewer than their seven turnovers.

But James scored 16 points in the third quarter and Dennis Schroder added 14 as the Lakers cut the deficit to five heading into the final frame. "Thank god for the standing eight count," James said. "We were able to stay in the bout." Schroder finished with 21 points in total and Thomas Bryant added 31 points and 14 rebounds for the Lakers, who regained the lead on Bryant's three-pointer midway

through the fourth and took the lead for good on Bryant's floater - off a feed from James - with 5:08 to play.

"We just challenged the team," Ham said of the locker room conversation at halftime. "There's 24 minutes left. Twenty-five points is a huge deficit but in the NBA ... playing the right way you can cut into it pretty quickly and give yourself a chance."

In San Francisco, Irving drove the Nets' comeback, but with the Warriors defense locked on him it was Royce O'Neale who hit a go-ahead three-pointer with 28.5 seconds remaining. Irving drained a pair of free throws to seal the win. "Total team effort," Irving said after the Nets out-scored the Warriors 27-10 over the last seven minutes.

Nuggets streak ends

In Denver, Oklahoma City's Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 34 points as the Thunder ended the Nuggets' nine-game winning streak. With two-time reigning MVP Nikola Jokic still sidelined by a hamstring injury, the Nuggets trailed much of the night. They tied it at 99-99 with 30.2 seconds remaining, but Gilgeous-Alexander banked in a go-ahead basket with 9.2 seconds left and Denver's Jamal Murray, facing stifling defense from Lu Dort, missed as the clock ticked down.

Murray finished with 26 points to lead seven Nuggets players in double figures, but Denver lost for just the fourth time at home this season. In Phoenix, the Suns dominated much of the game, leading by as many as 29 points in the third quarter only for Memphis to cut the lead to two with less than 30 seconds left. The Suns held on, Mikal Bridges scoring 24 points and Chris Paul adding 22



PORTLAND: Shaedon Sharpe of the Portland Trail Blazers defends against Kendrick Nunn of the Los Angeles Lakers at Moda Center on Jan 22, 2023. —AFP

with 11 assists in his return from a hip injury.

Ja Morant scored 27 points with eight assists and Desmond Bane added 24 points for the Grizzlies, who have lost two in a row on the heels of an 11-

game winning streak. The Los Angeles Clippers - led by Kawhi Leonard's 30 points and nine rebounds - used a late surge to topple Luka Doncic and the Mavericks in Dallas 112-98. —AFP



TOULOUSE: Toulouse's French full-back Melvyn Jaminet is tackled by Munster's Irish fly-half Jack Crowley at Ernest-Wallon stadium on Jan 22, 2023. —AFP

S Africans turn Champions Cup 'upside down'

PARIS: Toulouse head coach Ugo Mola said on Sunday that South African sides "have turned things upside down" in the Champions Cup after his French club secured a last 16 home tie against the Bulls with a 20-16 win over Munster. Sharks, Stormers and Pretoria-based Bulls have reached the knockout stage in their first participation in the competition previously contested only by European teams.

Record five-time winners Toulouse needed just a bonus point in the re-run of the 2008 final to make sure of home ground advantage with the next round being played at the start of April, when they will play the Bulls. "South Africans teams have turned things upside down," Mola told reporters. "You may as well play them as they're here. I can't wait," he added.

Munster could have claimed a home tie for themselves with a bonus-point victory against the Top 14 leaders. Nine of the 11 Toulouse's players named in France's squad for the Six Nations were part of Sunday's matchday 23. Fly-half Joey Carbery started for the away side days after being omitted from Ireland's Six Nations set-up, while Jack Crowley, picked for the national squad, was at inside centre.

The home side led 11-8 at half-time as flanker John Hodnett responded for the visitors after Argentina's Juan Cruz Mallia dived over early on for Toulouse. Ireland lock Tadhg Beirne silenced the sold-out home crowd eight minutes after the break as he found a way through the defence although Carbery missed a second conversion. Munster led 13-11 with half an hour left but still needed to collect a bonus point to claim a home last-16 tie.

Saracens at home

Toulouse camped inside Munster's 22m and Melvyn Jaminet added a fifth three-pointer with six minutes left to clinch the home spot. Later, in the Scottish capital, Edinburgh held on to beat Saracens, who won the last of their three titles in 2019. Despite the 20-14 loss, the English side still claimed a knockout game on their own turf.

Earlier, Montpellier's South Africa scrum-half Cobus Reinach knocked London Irish out of the Champions Cup as well as Challenge Cup contention with a try that secured a 21-21 draw. The French club had already qualified for the top-tier's next stage. By the end of Saturday's action the teams in the last 16 were all known, including Leinster who hammered Racing 92 36-10 at Lansdowne Road, the venue of May 20's final to claim top seeding in Pool A. —AFP

Bengals beat Bills, 49ers end Cowboys' hopes in playoffs

MIAMI: The Cincinnati Bengals shrugged off driving snow to defeat the Buffalo Bills 27-10 and return to the AFC Championship game while the San Francisco 49ers beat the Dallas Cowboys 19-12 on Sunday to head to the NFC title contest. The Bengals win sets up a repeat of last year's AFC Championship clash with the Kansas City Chiefs while the 49ers will face the Philadelphia Eagles for a place in the NFL's Super Bowl.

While the Bengals will again be slight underdogs against Patrick Mahomes and company, they showed all their qualities of tough, no-nonsense football, with their offensive line giving outstanding protection to quarterback Joe Burrow. Burrow completed 23 of 36 passes, throwing for 242 yards and two touchdowns while running-back Joe Mixon put up 105 yards and a touchdown on 20 carries. "It was a complete game from everybody, offense, defense, special teams, domination from start to finish, that is what we expected," Burrow told CBS television.

The Bengals set the tone from the opening series with Burrow leading his team on a six-play, 79-yard drive completed with a 28-yard touchdown pass to Ja'marr Chase. Cincinnati soon had a 14-0 first quarter lead with Burrow finding an open Hayden Hurst with a 15-yard TD pass. Injured Bills safety Damar Hamlin, who suffered a cardiac arrest in the abandoned regular season game against the Bengals earlier this month, was watching the game from a suite and received a standing ovation when he was introduced to the crowd.

But despite the home field advantage, the Bills struggled to get their offense moving until quarterback Josh Allen got them on the scoreboard with a one-yard rush at the end of a 15-play drive in the second quarter. The Bengals thought they had a third touchdown just before half-time with a superb Burrow pass to Chase at the back of the end-zone but the catch was ruled incomplete after review and Cincinnati had to settle for a field goal which sent them in 17-7 up at half-time.

Rahm holds off Thompson to win American Express

LOS ANGELES: Fourth-ranked Jon Rahm endured a frustrating day on the greens, but his four-under-par 68 was enough to hold off rookie Davis Thompson and claim a second US PGA Tour title in as many weeks at the American Express tournament. Spain's Rahm, who opened the year with a victory in the Tournament of Champions in Hawaii, had five birdies on the Stadium Course in La Quinta, California, finishing with a 27-under-par total of 261.

Thompson, who started the day tied with Rahm for the lead, carded a three-under 69 for 262. "Ball-striking was great, I hit a lot of great putts - it's just golf," Rahm said of a multitude of putts that didn't drop. "I was burning edges all day." Rahm led much of the day after back-to-back birdies at the first and second-both from about two feet. He rolled in a seven-foot birdie at the ninth and picked up another stroke at 11 - but it was far from smooth sailing from there.

A bogey at 13, where he missed the green and his five-foot putt to save par lipped out, Rahm was tied with Thompson for the lead. He got his nose in front again with a birdie at the par-five 16th, where his second shot from the fairway avoided a steep drop off to a greenside bunker and his eight-foot birdie putt agonizingly circled the cup before falling in. Thompson, meanwhile, was in a tough lie in a fairway bunker on the way to a par at 16.

"The turning point was 16," Rahm said. "He missed that tee shot and I put it in the fairway. That's pretty much a half-stroke penalty right there. I knew if I did what I could do I was mostly likely going to have a one-shot lead going to the last two holes." Thompson, a former amateur standout at the University of Georgia and a winner on the Korn Ferry developmental tour, had followed his first birdie of the day at the fourth with a bogey at the fifth, where he was in the water. He closed the gap to one stroke with birdies at the sixth, ninth and 11th.

He came agonizingly close to pulling level again at the 17th, where his 48-foot birdie putt brushed the pin and didn't drop. "I usually always leave the stick in from a long dis-



ORCHARD PARK, New York: Josh Allen of the Buffalo Bills slides against the Cincinnati Bengals at Highmark Stadium on Jan 22, 2023. —AFP

A Bills field goal brought them within a score of levelling the game but the Bengals were playing with a smart, disciplined approach and they extended their lead when the tireless Mixon finished off a 12 play drive with a one-yard rush.

Cowboys wait continues

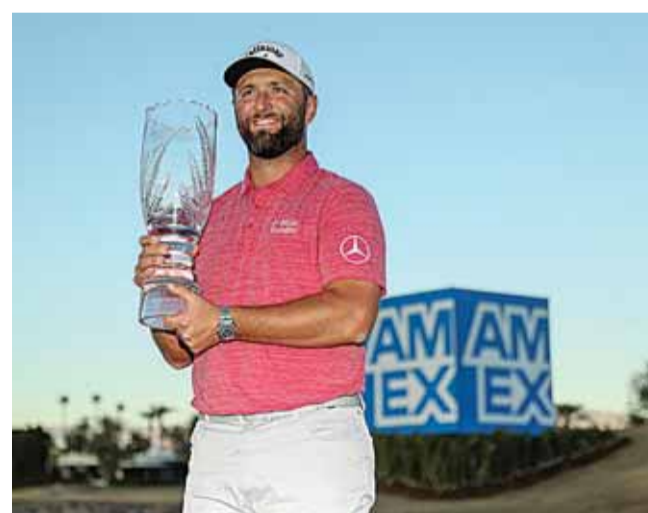
The Cowboys' 27 year wait for a return to the Super Bowl continues after they once again failed to get past the divisional round. Dallas has lost on each of the last seven occasions they have reached the divisional round and in a gruelling game, dominated by the defenses, they were hampered by losing their lead running-back Tony Pollard with an ankle injury in the second quarter.

After San Francisco opened the scoring with a field goal, Dallas responded with a second quarter four-yard touchdown pass from Dak Prescott to Dalton Schultz. But troubled kicker Brett Maher missed the extra-point

conversion - the sixth miss in his last seven kicks - and two interceptions from Prescott before the half didn't help. Robbie Gould had no such problems, converting from 47-yards and 50-yards before half-time to give the 49ers a 9-6 lead at the break.

Maher's relief was evident after he was successful with his field goal attempt from 25 yards in the third quarter. But San Francisco, led by rookie quarterback Brock Purdy, then produced the best drive of the game with George Kittle juggling the ball to complete a crucial 29 yard catch before the series ended with Christian McCaffrey's two-yard burst into the end-zone.

Down seven points, Dallas came up against an impressive San Francisco defense, living up to their ranking as the league's number one. Maher struck a 43-yard effort between the sticks but with Gould responding and the 49ers not offering Cowboys any gifts, Dallas were left with 45 seconds to try and conjure up a miracle that didn't materialize. —AFP



LA QUINTA, California: Jon Rahm of Spain celebrates with the trophy after winning the final round of The American Express at PGA West Pete Dye Stadium Course on Jan 22, 2023. —AFP

tance," Thompson said. "I feel like it helps me with my speed. I'll probably play the 'what if' game in my head for a long time, unfortunately." Rahm then saw his 20-foot birdie attempt at 17 settle on the edge, and he was in a fairway bunker off the tee at 18 while Thompson found the fairway.

But Thompson's second shot went through the green, leaving him a tough chip from a swale below the putting surface while Rahm found the green for a routine par to win. "Luckily, it was enough," Rahm said. Despite the disappointment, Thompson called it a "great week" in the California desert, where his five eagles in the first two rounds matched the PGA Tour record for a 72-hole tournament. "A lot of nerves and I hit a lot of quality golf shots under pressure, which was really cool," he said.

Xander Schauffele and Chris Kirk shared third on 263. Schauffele's 62 included an albatross at the par-five fifth - where he holed his second shot from 225 yards out in the fairway. Kirk closed with a 64. Second-ranked Masters champion Scottie Scheffler, who needed a solo ninth-placed finish or better to supplant Rory McIlroy atop the rankings, carded a 65 for a 22-under total of 266 that left him tied for 11th. —AFP

India crash out of hockey World Cup

BHUBANESWAR: India suffered an early exit from the hockey World Cup after the hosts lost 5-4 to New Zealand on penalties in a dramatic crossover match on Sunday. Fancied India, led by defender Harmanpreet Singh, needed a win to make the quarter-finals of field hockey's biggest tournament and had the home fans on edge after the match ended 3-3 in Bhubaneswar.

New Zealand came back from 3-1 down to level the contest and then held their nerve as the penalty shootout went to sudden death. Sean Findlay starred for New Zealand, ranked 12th in the world, scoring the goal that forced penalties and then twice converting in the shootout as the underdogs celebrated at the Kalinga Stadium.

Sixth-ranked India once dominated men's field hockey, winning eight Olympic gold medals between 1928 and 1980. The former national game of the cricket-mad nation witnessed a revival after India won bronze at the Tokyo Olympics and followed it up with a Commonwealth Games silver in Birmingham last year. Australia, holders Belgium, the Netherlands, England and Spain have also secured their place in the quarterfinals. —AFP

Sports

Madrid triumph in Bilbao, Barca scrape past Getafe

BILBAO: Karim Benzema and Toni Kroos' goals kept Real Madrid on Barcelona's tail in La Liga with a 2-0 win against Athletic Bilbao on Sunday. After the Catalans had beaten Getafe 1-0, champions Madrid won a tight clash at the San Mames to remain three points behind their rivals. Benzema broke the deadlock with a superb volley in the first half while Kroos fizzed home the second late on to kill off Athletic's hopes.

After losing the Spanish Super Cup to Barcelona last weekend, anxiety had increased in the capital, but a stirring Copa del Rey comeback against Villarreal on Thursday settled nerves. This victory in Bilbao will reassure Los Blancos fans further, ahead of their derby clash in the cup with Atletico Madrid next week. "It's clear that the team is defending well again, (we were) compact, solid," Real coach Carlo Ancelotti told DAZN. "With us ahead in the game we needed to defend and we did it well. We did not give things away and in the end we won."

Madrid had let in eight goals in their previous four games across all competitions, but despite the injury absences of David Alaba and Aurelien Tchouameni, they were far more sturdy in the Basque Country. Anticipating a physical clash with the Basques, Ancelotti benched midfield stalwarts Luka Modric and Kroos, opting to line up with Eduardo Camavinga and Fede Valverde as part of his central trio.

Dani Ceballos, Nacho Fernandez and Marco Asensio also started after their fine performances against Villarreal. Athletic started well but Benzema volleyed Madrid ahead from Asensio's header back in his direction. It was Benzema's 228th La Liga goal, pulling him level with the iconic Raul Gonzalez as Madrid's second top scorer in the competition - with Cristiano Ronaldo leading the way on 311. "What Karim does is incredible, he helps us a lot with his goals, it's good that he's on fire

for us," Nacho told DAZN. The hosts fought hard for a leveler but were finished off by Kroos, who steered home from the edge of the box to wrap up Madrid's victory in the 90th minute. Athletic sit eighth, five points below the Champions League qualification spots.

'Sluggish'

Pedri Gonzalez's goal made the difference for Barcelona in their single goal win over Getafe. Without suspended striker Robert Lewandowski, Barcelona created few noteworthy chances, but did just enough to emerge with the three points to drive on their bid for a first league title since 2019. "We didn't play well, we were sluggish, we didn't attack well," Barcelona coach Xavi Hernandez told Movistar.

"We did defend well, but it's always hard to attack a defensive line sitting so deep, but we weren't polished in our play, we didn't have a great game by any means and we have to improve. But we do take an important win, three points at home, and another clean sheet which is important too." Xavi's side have won six games in a row across all competitions and fans chanted the coach's name in the final stages despite a sub-par display.

The coach selected Ansu Fati up front in place of Lewandowski but the young Spain international struggled to get into the game. Barca's first real chance came in the 35th minute and was converted by Pedri from close range, turning home Raphinha's cross after a great interception by Andreas Christensen set the Brazilian free.

Former Madrid striker Mayoral should have equalized for the visitors but was denied by Marc-Andre ter Stegen when through on goal, after a poorly judged Pedri back-pass. Barcelona's German stopper is back to his best this season after a long dip in form and that is reflected in their sparkling defensive record. The



BILBAO: Real Madrid's French forward Karim Benzema fights for the ball with Athletic Bilbao's Spanish defender Aitor Paredes at the San Mames stadium on Jan 22, 2023. —AFP

Catalans have kept 13 clean sheets in 17 La Liga matches, conceding just six goals in the top flight.

The result leaves Getafe 16th, along with Celta Vigo and 18th place Real Valladolid on 17 points. Earlier

Villarreal, fifth, beat mid-table Girona 1-0 thanks to Dani Parejo's 100th minute penalty. Bottom of the table Elche earned a 1-1 draw against Osasuna, seventh, but remain without a win this season in the top flight. —AFP

Dortmund beat Augsburg on Haller's return

DORTMUND: Borussia Dortmund clinched a 4-3 thriller at home against Augsburg on Sunday as Sebastian Haller returned to the team after battling testicular cancer. Dortmund took the lead three times, only for Augsburg to equalise, exploiting the home side's disorganized defense. Dortmund manager Edin Terzic brought on Jamie Bynoe-Gittens and Gio Reyna in the 70th minute, with both wingers scoring goals to help carry their team to victory.

Terzic praised his team's resilience in a "wild, chaotic match". "I'm happy we still won the game with all the setbacks. The positive thing is that we fought back." Augsburg coach Enrico Maassen said his side, who are just one place above the relegation playoff spot, could take positives from the "annoying"

result. "We played a huge game. We will get our points if we play like this."

Dortmund had the better of the early proceedings before Jude Bellingham broke through in the 29th minute. The 19-year-old Englishman collected the ball on the edge of the box and sent the Augsburg defenders the wrong way, before drilling a low shot into the bottom right corner of the net. Despite Dortmund's dominance of possession, Augsburg hit back in the 40th minute, when Dion Beljo dispossessed a sloppy Nico Schlotterbeck before passing to Arne Maier, who hammered home.

Schlotterbeck redeemed himself immediately, however, heading in a Julian Brandt free-kick to put Dortmund up 2-1. Augsburg equalised in stoppage time, Ermedin Demirovic chipping over Dortmund keeper Gregor Kobel for his sixth goal of the campaign. Haller came off the bench in the 61st minute to rapturous applause from the home and away fans, his first competitive appearance since May 2022.

He took to the field wearing boots adorned with the words 'F*ck cancer',



DORTMUND: Dortmund's US midfielder Giovanni Reyna fails to score past Augsburg's Polish goalkeeper Rafal Gikiewicz on Jan 22, 2023. —AFP

celebrating the striker's return after a six-month battle with the disease. With the game drifting towards more dropped points for the home side, Bynoe-Gittens and Reyna were intro-

duced. The home side reclaimed the lead almost immediately, with the 18-year-old Englishman Bynoe-Gittens superbly curling the ball in from outside the box. —AFP

Juve held by Atalanta in 6-goal thriller

MILAN: Juventus played out a thrilling 3-3 draw with Atalanta in their first match since being slapped with a massive points deduction for illicit transfer activity, Roma taking their place in Serie A's Champions League positions following a 2-0 win at Spezia. Italy's biggest football club were rocked on Friday by the Italian Football Federation's decision to dock them 15 points after ruling they had managed capital gains from transfers to artificially benefit their accounts.

That decision, which leaves them ninth in Italy's top flight on 23 points, drew howls of disapproval from Juve fans at the Allianz Stadium before a hugely entertaining encounter and was blasted as "unjust and unequal" by CEO Maurizio Scanavino pre-match. But the team showed fight to twice come back from going behind to Ademola Lookman goals to draw an exciting encounter, with Danilo's drive midway through the second half eventually earning his team a point.

Juve are 14 points from the Champions League positions,

a bad situation for a club whose last accounts were nearly 240 million euros in the red and have various bodies examining their financial conduct. "I think we'd need 71 points to get into the Champions League... We need to look at the reality who how things are," said coach Massimiliano Allegri.

Juventus had been leading at half-time when Angel Di Maria's 25th-minute penalty cancelled out Lookman's early opener before Arkadiusz Milik's superb volley nine minutes later. But the hosts were rocked again when Nigeria forward Lookman sent Joakim Maehle through to level seconds after the break. Lookman then thumped home a perfect header in the 53rd minute to take his tally in his debut Serie A season to 11 before Danilo made sure both teams would share the spoils and leave Atalanta in fifth place.

"We're in a good position now but there's a long way to go... this is a very strange season and we don't know what will happen," said Atalanta coach Gian Piero Gasperini. "I don't like it when the table changes during the season, it should be done at the start or the end, otherwise you haven't got credibility."

Roma in top four

Roma are fourth, level on 37 points with Inter who host Empoli on Monday and just one behind second-placed AC Milan ahead of the champions' trip on Tuesday to take on Lazio, who will move above Jose Mourinho's side into the



TURIN: Juventus' Italian forward Federico Chiesa fights for the ball with Atalanta's Italian defender Rafael Toloi on Jan 22, 2023. —AFP

top four with a win. They came away with the three points at Spezia despite the absence of Italy international Nicolò Zaniolo, who refused to be picked in the matchday squad and was openly criticized by the club's general manager Tiago Pinto pre-match. —AFP

Al-Hubail said the committee is keen on ensuring maximum security and safety of all participants in the March of Gratitude. She lauded the support of the interior and health ministries as well as voluntary teams, as the bicycle paths will be secured by police, with mobile medical teams for participants' safety. She said the Gulf Initiative began in 2018 and elicited good reaction from various age groups, and the past five years saw large numbers of participants who were up to the challenge to achieve their goals.

Preparations on for cycling event

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Organizing committee of the Gulf cycling initiative completed its preparations for the start of activities on Thursday until Saturday. The Gulf initiative is held under the theme "March of Gratitude"

Senegal, Ivory Coast win to reach quarters

ALGIERS: A successful night for west Africa saw regional powerhouses Senegal and the Ivory Coast qualify for the African Nations Championship (CHAN) quarterfinals on Sunday in Algeria. Senegal, who began the final round in Group B lying second, trounced two-time former champions the Democratic Republic of Congo 3-0 in the eastern city of Annaba. The surprisingly comfortable victory elevated the Senegalese to first, and a last-eight showdown with the Group D winners, probably Mali, this Friday.

Ivory Coast were last in the standings as they kicked off against then leaders Uganda, but a 3-1 triumph lifted them to second and qualification for the knockout phase. The Ivorians will face Algeria on Friday in Algiers at the Stade Nelson Mandela, a ground where the host nation won all three Group A matches without conceding.

Senegal finished with six points, the Ivory Coast and Uganda four each and the DR Congo two in a competition confined to footballers playing for clubs in their country of birth. The head-to-head rule separated the Ivorians and Ugandans, and ensured all three west African contenders will be involved in the quarter-finals as Ghana have qualified from Group C.

After holding DR Congo and beating Senegal, a Ugandan side coached by Serbian Milutin "Mico" Sredojevic hoped to go beyond the group stage for the first time in six attempts. But they began disastrously, allowing Sankara Karamoko and Vignion Ouotro to put the Ivory Coast two goals ahead after 27 minutes.

Moses Waiswa impressively converted a penalty on 34 minutes to halve the deficit, and Uganda missed chances before Aubin Kouame notched a third Ivorian goal 12 minutes from time. Luck was not on the side of the east Africans as the woodwork denied Travis Mutyaba a late goal off a brilliantly taken free-kick.

In Annaba, DR Congo fell behind midway through the first half when Ousmane Diouf scored and they were reduced to 10 men before half-time after the red-carding of Kevin Mondeko. Senegal sealed victory with two goals inside three minutes, from Pape Diallo and a Baggio Siadi own-goal, in the closing stages. —AFP

Today's matches

ITALIAN CALCIO LEAGUE

SS Lazio v AC Milan 22:45

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Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Hospitals

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804

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

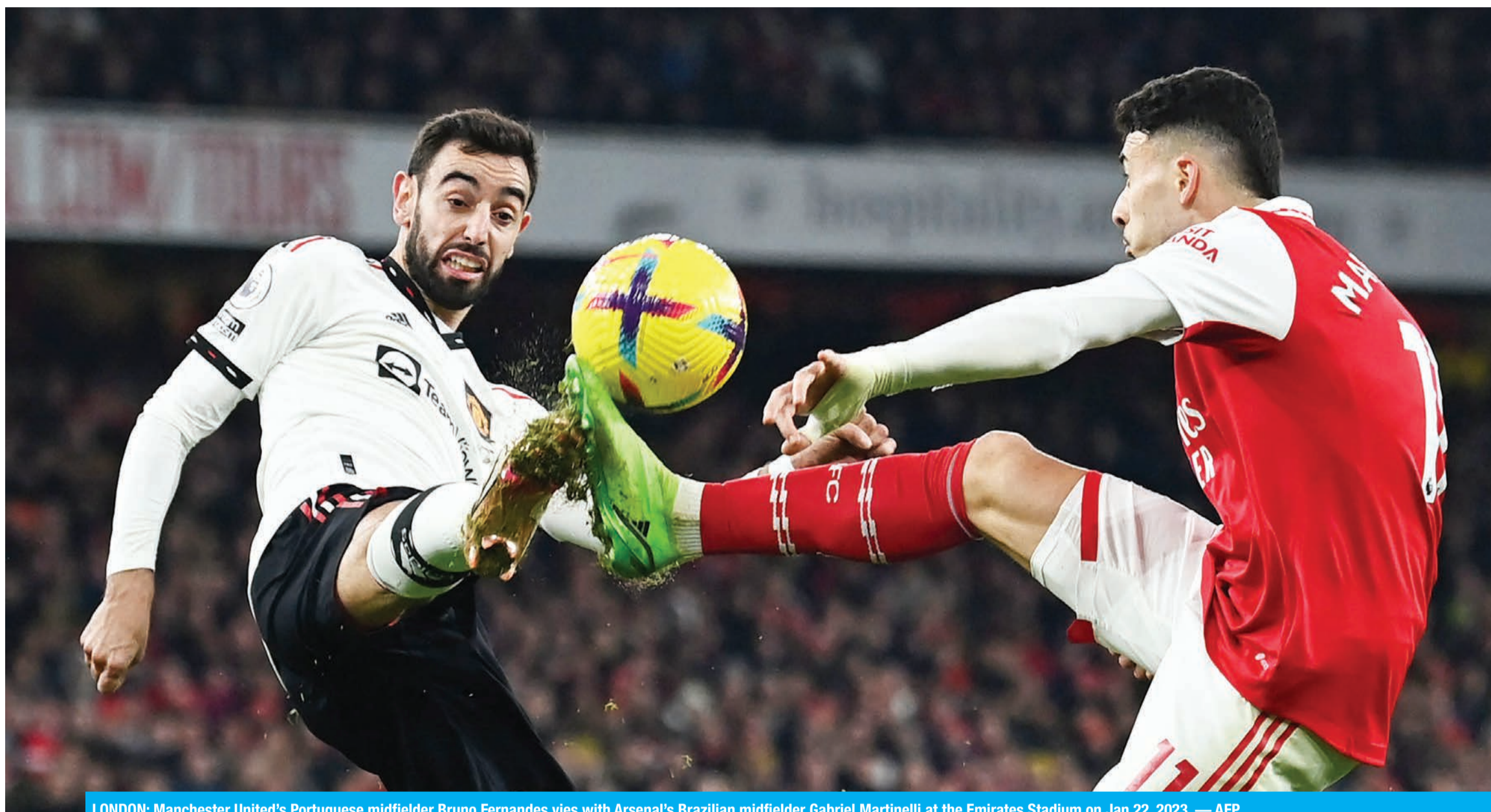
Change of Name

I, SAYRA, holder of Passport No. L5934531, do hereby change my name to SAYRA (as Given name) TALIB (as Sumame) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name SAYRA TALIB and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. (C#0885) 24-1-23

I, Aalam Manaiah S/o Aalam Subbarayudu (old name), R/o. H.No.5/3, Eguva Reddy Palli (VII), T.Kammappalli Post, Pullampet Mandal, YSR Kadapa District, A.P, have Indian passport No.L5941032, have changed my name as Alam Manaiah S/o Alam Subbarayudu (new name) (C#0884) 22-1-23

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Arsenal silence doubters with win



LONDON: Manchester United's Portuguese midfielder Bruno Fernandes vies with Arsenal's Brazilian midfielder Gabriel Martinelli at the Emirates Stadium on Jan 22, 2023. — AFP

LONDON: Premier League leaders Arsenal have had their title credentials questioned all season but their last-gasp 3-2 win against Manchester United has silenced many of the remaining doubters. Eddie Nketiah scored the winner in the dying moments of a pulsating match at the Emirates on Sunday as the home fans were infused with fresh belief that this could be their year.

The game against in-form United was seen as a critical test for the Gunners, especially after Manchester City closed the gap at the top of the table to just two points earlier in the day. It was a challenge they did not fluff, hitting back hard after conceding the first goal, scored by Marcus Rashford, and staying calm after Lisandro Martinez cancelled out Bukayo Saka's strike in the second half.

Arsenal, who have made their best-ever start to an English top-flight season, now have 50 points after 19 games - five clear of defending champions City with a game in hand at the halfway point of the

campaign. "I don't think it gets much better than that," said a buoyant Arsenal coach Mikel Arteta. "It was a beautiful moment, a really special one because we were pushing and pushing and pushing and the goal wasn't coming and it came at the end... it was just electric. It was really emotional, really passionate and I lost it."

Arteta said he hopes the result, which follows last week's 2-0 win against Tottenham in the north London derby, gives his team the belief that Arsenal can be crowned league champions for the first time since 2004. But he wants to keep his team's feet on the ground despite a remarkable season in which they have lost just once in the league. "We know our reality, we know how much we still have to improve," said the Spaniard, who was previously Pep Guardiola's assistant at City.

Winnable matches

Arsenal face the defending champions in the middle of next month but their upcoming fixtures all

look winnable and it is getting increasingly difficult to see where they will slip up. Leaving the match against City aside, Arsenal's next opponents in the league are relegation-threatened Everton, Brentford, Aston Villa, Leicester, Bournemouth, Fulham, Crystal Palace and Leeds.

City, with title-winning pedigree, appear to have found their form again after a wobble and the sides at the bottom of the table will fight for their lives as the trap door looms. But former Arsenal captain Arteta has transformed his side from also-rans last season into title favorites, through luck and judgement. Saka has gone from strength to strength while Nketiah has stepped up in the absence of new signing Gabriel Jesus, injured while playing for Brazil at the World Cup.

The 23-year-old now has six goals in six games in all competitions since the tournament in Qatar. "What Eddie's doing is incredible," said Arteta. "We cannot say we saw that. We were hoping that he could do that because of the way he is,

because of his mentality, because of his qualities." When asked to sum up the first half of the season, Arteta said it was "extraordinary" but was again careful to avoid the impression that his team are the finished article. "It doesn't get much better than that, that's the reality," he said. "I think we deserve the points that we have. We have played well enough to win most of the matches but the reality as well is that we still have a lot of things that we can get much better at."

So does he believe Arsenal are now favorites for the title, on course to win the Premier League for the first time since Arsene Wenger's last triumph nearly two decades ago? "I don't have an opinion," he said. "It can be a perception. I know my team so well, I know where we are, I know why we are here and I know where we want to be. "And we are still far from that and I know the level of the other teams, especially one that has won everything in the last five or six years and we are not there yet." — AFP

Ronaldo starts with win after Saudi move

RIYADH: Cristiano Ronaldo made a winning start to life in the Saudi Pro League as he led Al Nassr to a 1-0 victory over Ettifaq on Sunday in his first match since becoming the best paid footballer in history. The Portuguese superstar didn't score but there were promising signs for Al Nassr, who are eyeing domestic and continental silverware after the 37-year-old moved for deals totaling more than 400 million euros.

However, Ronaldo's league debut had an anticlimactic feel in front of

22,862 fans after he scored twice in this week's lively 5-4 exhibition defeat to Lionel Messi's Paris Saint-Germain. "He's one of the best players in the history of football, so it's very important for us to do everything possible to put him in the best condition," said Al Nassr coach Rudi Garcia. "I want him to enjoy playing and tonight he was happy to play for the first time with his new team."

Ronaldo, leading out Al Nassr as captain, made a low-key start in the first half, twice losing the ball with attempted trickery as his team-mates struggled to get him on the ball. Ronaldo's early shot from the edge of the box was deflected over, and he nearly met Abdulmajeed Al Sulaiheem's cross that was headed in by Anderson Talisca for the game's only goal on 31 minutes. —AFP

Ruthless Djokovic, Sabalenka sweep into quarterfinals

MELBOURNE: Novak Djokovic surged into the Australian Open quarterfinals with his "best match of this year" on Monday, while Aryna Sabalenka was an equally ruthless winner. After a series of shocks at Melbourne Park, normal order was more or less restored on day eight, except for fourth seed Caroline Garcia bowing out under the weight of expectation.

Djokovic demolished Alex de Minaur for the loss of just five games to sweep into the last eight and step up his bid for a 10th Melbourne crown, and record-tying 22nd major title in all. He will meet fifth seed Andrey Rublev for a semi-final berth after the Russian toppled Danish teenager Holger Rune in a thrilling five-set clash also at Rod Laver Arena.

The Serb's 6-2, 6-1, 6-2 triumph over 22nd-seeded home hope De Minaur was an ominous statement of intent. Significantly, his troublesome left hamstring appeared much improved. Asked afterwards how he had been so emphatic, Djokovic told the crowd: "Because I wanted to. I cannot say I'm sorry you did not watch a longer match. I really wanted to win in straight sets." The 35-year-old called it his "best match of this year so far" and of his hamstring said: "I did not feel anything today, so today was great."

Rublev admitted he was "lucky" after saving two match points against Rune, in energy-sapping heat. He described beating the 19-year-old as "not like a rollercoaster, it's like they put a gun to your head. A rollercoaster is easier." In a men's

draw decimated by shocks, including the second-round exit of reigning champion Rafael Nadal, there will be a last-eight clash between two unseeded Americans. The 20-year-old Ben Shelton, on his first trip outside the United States, emerged from another five-setter against friend and fellow

American JJ Wolf. Shelton is only the fourth man in the past 20 years to reach the Melbourne quarter-finals on debut. "I really focused in the fifth set, just being energetic, trusting my fitness and just hustling, being courageous and I thought I did a really good job of competing at the highest level in the fifth set," said the 89th-ranked Shelton. He plays Tommy Paul, who defeated 24th seed Roberto Bautista Agut.

'Not comfortable' Garcia

In the women's draw, Garcia became the latest top-10 seed to fall, with a shock defeat to Magda Linette, ranked 45 in the world. This is the first Grand Slam since the Open era began in 1968 to lose the top two seeds in both the men's and women's draws before the last eight. Unseeded Pole Linette stunned Garcia 7-6 (7/3), 6-4 and the French player admitted that expectations and nerves got the better of her.

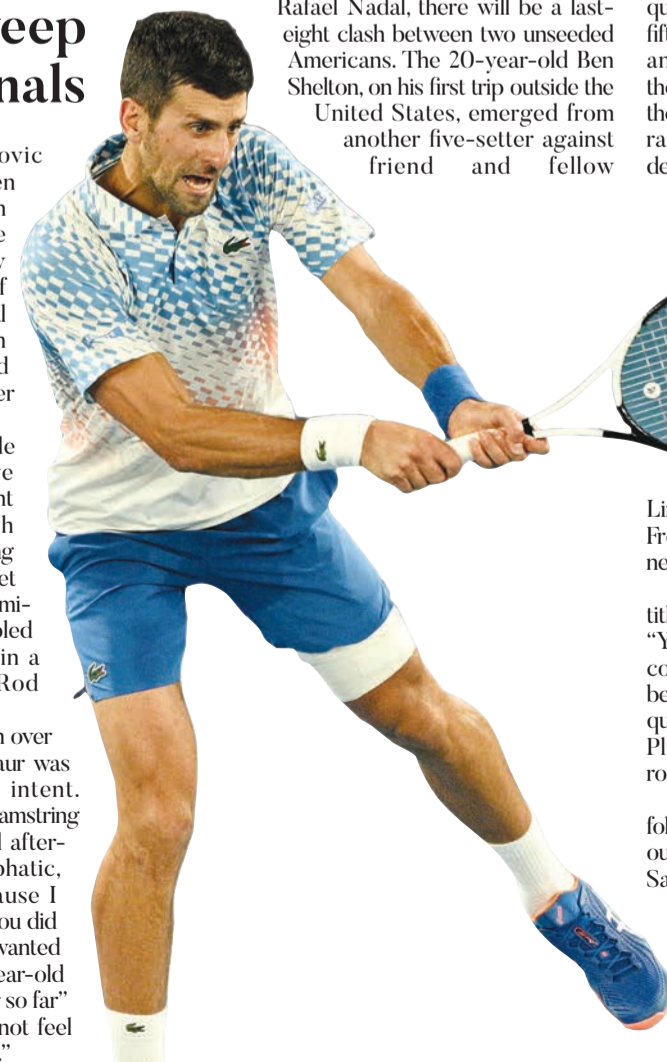
Asked if being one of the favorites for the title had been too much to handle, she replied: "Yes, I think so. "It's one of the things I'm not comfortable with." Linette said she "couldn't believe it" as she reached her first Grand Slam quarter-final at the age of 30. She faces Karolina Pliskova after the former world number one romped past China's Zhang Shuai 6-0, 6-4.

Sabalenka never really looked like she would follow top seed Iga Swiatek, Garcia and the rest out of the first major of the year. The Belarusian Sabalenka and third-seeded American Jessica Pegula - both chasing a maiden major crown - are now the women to beat. Sabalenka defeated dangerous 12th seed Belinda Bencic 7-5, 6-2 to set up a last-eight clash against unseeded Donna Vekic, who beat 17-year-old Linda Fruhvirtova in three sets.

Hard-hitting Sabalenka sprinted into her first quarterfinal at the Australian Open and said: "My whole life, it took me a little while to understand that negative emotion is not gonna help you on court. "You have to just stay strong and believe no matter what, and then do everything you can." — AFP



RIYADH: Al Nassr's Portuguese forward Cristiano Ronaldo attempts a shot during a Saudi Pro League match against Al Ettifaq at King Fahd Stadium on Jan 22, 2023. — AFP



MELBOURNE: Serbia's Novak Djokovic hits a return against Australia's Alex De Minaur on day eight of the Australian Open on Jan 23, 2023. — AFP