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**8** Sudanese tighten belts as economic crisis grinds on



**11** Women drive train to Makkah as Saudi workforce evolves



**16** Djokovic wins Australian Open to equal Grand Slam record



## Budaiwi named new GCC chief

FM meets Philippine diplomat, offers condolences on death of Filipina worker



KUWAIT: (Left) HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives on Sunday at Bayan Palace Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, who presented to him newly assigned GCC Secretary-General Jassem Al-Budaiwi and Deputy Foreign Minister Mansour Al-Otaibi. (Right) Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem receives Philippines Charge d'Affaires Jose Cabrera. — KUNA photos

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Ambassador Jassem Al-Budaiwi has been appointed Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council, succeeding compatriot Nayef Al-Hajraf. Budaiwi was most recently Kuwait's ambassador to the U.S. and previously served as Kuwait's ambassador to Belgium, the European Union and NATO.

Hajraf welcomed Budaiwi, congratulating him on assuming his duties, which will start as of Feb 1, 2023, wishing him success in performing the tasks and responsibilities entrusted to him to lead the work at the general secretariat, as well as working to strengthen the process of joint GCC action in order to achieve its lofty goals towards more cooperation and integration among GCC countries in a way that achieves the directives of the leaders of the Gulf states.

"It will undoubtedly contribute to strengthening the regional and international status of the Gulf Cooperation Council, preserving the council's gains and working towards more achievements to serve member states and the people of the GCC," Hajraf

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### News in brief

#### Iraq extends visa-free entry

KUWAIT: Iraq will allow citizens of Kuwait, GCC countries and bedoons to enter without a visa starting from Monday until Feb 28, 2023, security sources told Kuwait Times. Residents of GCC countries are still required to obtain a visa from Iraqi embassies to enter the country.

#### Jahra stick with Qatari player

DOHA: Kuwaiti club Al-Jahra said Sunday that they would use Qatar World Cup player Abdulkarim Hassan in upcoming games despite a threat of legal action by Qatari side Al-Sadd. The 29-year-old former Asian Player of the Year joined Al-Jahra last week only weeks after Al-Sadd fined and booted him out of the side because of his reaction to criticism of Qatar's performances in the World Cup. Tawari Madloul, head of football at Al-Jahra, told AFP the club would pursue its move to help Hassan rehabilitate his career in the Kuwait Premier League. — AFP



Abdulkarim Hassan

#### Qatar joins Lebanon consortium

BEIRUT: Lebanon announced Sunday that Qatar had entered a consortium to explore for offshore gas in waters near the Zionist entity, following a historic border deal last year between the two foes. The agreement green-lights Lebanon's exploration of its southern Qana, or Sidon, reservoir. Sunday's deal will see state-run QatarEnergy receive a minority 30 percent stake in two blocks of Lebanon's exclusive economic zone, according to Lebanese caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati. — AFP (See Page 8)

## Lawmakers call for action over exam cheating scandal

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Ten lawmakers on Sunday demanded the National Assembly convene a special session to debate a school exam cheating scandal in which as many as 40,000 students benefited. The request to hold the special session was filed following a meeting of the Assembly's education committee with senior

officials of the education ministry, who told the panel they learned about the scandal only from the media, head of the committee MP Hamad Al-Matar said.

Matar called on HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah to dismiss all senior officials of the education ministry including the under-secretary and assistant undersecretaries who briefed the panel on the issue. Authorities have uncovered a network of some 17 people, including 11 teachers, who leaked questions of the higher secondary exams that were held a few weeks ago. According to reports, the network leaked the questions and answers to students through WhatsApp and other means.

The leak happened despite strict procedures adopted by the education ministry in sending out the questions to a large number of exam centers. Matar

described the cheating as an "ongoing process of destroying the people of Kuwait", adding that cheating in exams has become a "culture" in the country and must be fought. He said the special session is scheduled to debate a draft law that aims at eliminating cheating at school exams by imposing a jail term of up to seven years for those who leak and distribute questions to students.

In their request to convene a special Assembly session to discuss cheating in schools, the lawmakers said they wanted the debate to inquire about government policies on fighting cheating in exams. They said they also want to inquire about reports alleging that some private schools help their students in exams to raise the success percentage to boost the image of the schools.

## Drone attack targets Iran defense site

TEHRAN: Iran on Sunday condemned a "cowardly" night-time drone attack that targeted a defense ministry site, at a time of high tensions over its nuclear program and Russia's war in Ukraine. An anti-aircraft system destroyed one drone and two others exploded, the ministry said, adding that there were no casualties and only minor damage to the site in the central province of Isfahan.

"This cowardly act was carried out

today as part of the efforts made by enemies of the Iranian nation in recent months to make the Islamic republic insecure," Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said at a press conference with his visiting Qatari counterpart, Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani. "Such measures cannot affect the will and intention of our specialists for peaceful nuclear developments," he added.

A fireball lit up the night sky in video footage widely shared on social media and published by Iranian state media, with people outside seen running and emergency service vehicles speeding towards the site. The defense ministry described the attack as "unsuccessful", saying it was

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This image grab taken from a video posted on Jan 29, 2023 shows an explosion in Iran's Isfahan province. — AFP

## 51 die in twin Pak tragedies

BELA, Pakistan: At least 51 people were killed in two separate transport accidents in western Pakistan on Sunday, when a bus plunged off a bridge and a boat carrying a class of children capsized. Forty-one are so far confirmed dead after their bus crashed into a ravine in southwestern Balochistan province, while at least 10 students died in the boating accident in northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, officials said. As many as three are still missing in the waters, with a rescue operation underway.

At the remote site of the bus crash, north of the city of Bela in Lasbela

district, senior administration official Hamza Anjum said "the dead bodies... are beyond recognition". Anjum said 40 corpses were retrieved from the wreck alongside three injured, one of whom died shortly after. The remaining two survivors were in "serious" condition.

The charred brown husk of the vehicle chassis smoked on a dry riverbed under the bridge on Sunday, according to video released by the provincial government. A team of men used heavy machinery to move the twisted metal aside and pull out the burnt remains, which were then shrouded in white cloth. Head of the local rescue service Asghar Ramazan told AFP the bus had been loaded with containers of oil.

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BELA: Residents look at the wreckage of a burnt passenger bus in Lasbela district of Pakistan's Balochistan province on Jan 29, 2023. — AFP



## Local

# Many men in our society too are stigmatized, say residents

## Stigma affects men's mental health, life in social and cultural domains

By Faten Omar

**KUWAIT:** Although the concept of stigma has been used to examine the place of various minority populations and women in society, it has not been previously applied to men. Women always demand their rights and call to be heard, but what about men? Kuwait Times spoke to citizens and residents to find out if men are struggling with male stigma.

Ali Al-Fadhli revealed many men feel the unfairness in the community. "Men are not allowed to express themselves - otherwise, they will be called weak or not manly enough," he said. He indicated men in Kuwait suffer from the injustice of not getting their rights in family law, especially over child custody, saying the law is always with women, even in domestic violence cases, which can also be against men.

Regarding mental health, Fadhli commented men are discouraged by the stigma of getting help for themselves or talking to their loved ones about mental illnesses, explaining that male stigma affects men's relationship with mental health at social, self, professional and cultural levels.

Tariq Adel told Kuwait Times what all men want is to be left alone. "Most men think that in order to take something, they must earn it. We already know our responsibilities in life. Men in Arab society - most of them - admit we have responsibilities towards our home and our wives in particular, but we are greatly influenced by calls for women's rights in the West, although women are honored in Islam and the Arab world, unless customs and traditions intervene, due to which there may be some restrictions," he said.

"I am the kind of man who believes that a man must adopt the general idea of masculinity and

express his feelings only at the right time, because when a man's feelings come out, they betray their sincerity. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) spoke about how men can keep their feelings hidden, how mental health can affect a man, and how it's difficult for him, given he is supposed to be the strong one for his family," Adel explained.

Ahmed Essam affirmed that men do not enjoy more rights than women, because the issue is not one based on quantity, but rather based on the different roles that every member of the family must follow. He pointed out the community must see the full picture and not only at women and what they cannot do, but rather what social and life privileges they have. "Men have no rights. For me, I want the right to not be involved in the saying that all men are bad. I want the right to access a good and easy life and be allowed to get married without financial burden," he said.



## MoH and aviation sector to sign MoU

**KUWAIT:** Minister of Health Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi and Minister of Housing Ammar Al-Ajmi paid an official visit to Kuwait Airways headquarters, where Kuwait Airways Chairman Ali Al-Dukhan received them. The visit is part of an initiative by the minister of health to oversee the medical care department at Kuwait International Airport and explore ways to enhance the quality of services at the airport.

The meeting came prior to the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the health ministry and the aviation and air cargo sectors. "This is in view of the importance the government, headed by HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah, attaches to the health sector and its keenness to strengthen the health system, particularly in various sectors of air transport," Dr Awadhi said. "The ministry has drawn up plans to execute the wise directives of HH the Prime Minister to ensure the satisfaction, safety and security of the beneficiaries of these services," he said.



**KUWAIT:** Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi received on Sunday Spanish Ambassador to Kuwait Miguel Maro Aguilar. They discussed Malaga's bid to host Expo 2027. During the meeting, the officials touched on a variety of issues, including ways to bolster ties. The meeting was also attended by special mission Ambassador for Malaga's Expo 2027 Juan Stemann. —KUNA



The newly-inaugurated mosque in Sydney.

## Kuwait opens large mosque in Australia

**KUWAIT:** Rahma International and the General Secretariat of Awqaf, represented by Ahmed Abdullah, opened one of the largest mosques in Australia in Sydney in the presence of the representative of the King of Britain and governor of the State of New South Wales Margaret Beazley, as well as ministers of labor and diversity and representatives of official authorities in Australia.

Head of the European sector at Rahma International and its representative Khaled Al-Mullah said: "On behalf of the Awqaf general secretariat, the main supporter of the mosque, and under the supervision of Rahma International, we open this blessed Islamic edifice and a distinctive architectural masterpiece in the city of Sydney."



## Robot competition: Six teams qualify

**KUWAIT:** Acting Deputy Director General of the Youth Development Sector, Dr Meshaal Al-Janoubi said in a press statement on Sunday that six winners of the underwater robot competition have been qualified for the finals of the SeaPerch West Asia Challenge organized by the Sharjah Branch of Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport. They are Abdul Hameed Al-Sayegh, Hussein Ahmed, Eman Al-Awadi and Zina Al-Hais.

SeaPerch West Asia Challenge is an annual regional competition in which participants qualify for the global competition.

He added that in the secondary stage category



Officials during the inauguration of the mosque in Sydney.

He said the mosque is an educational hub that preserves the identity of Muslim children and works to educate them, conducting prayers, sermons as well as memorization of the Holy Quran, launching scientific courses in faith, jurisprudence, hadith and Islamic culture, and a pioneering advocacy role in embracing new Muslims.

"The mosque is characterized by its multiple facilities, with 500 worshippers benefiting. It was built with modern architectural methods and means, which were praised by the crowds present at the opening ceremony. It shows Kuwait's keenness in exporting major Islamic and advocacy projects that enhance the presence of Muslims as well as their various educational incubators in various parts of the world," Mullah said.

In related news, Society for the Revival of Islamic Heritage implemented a charity bank project in Kuwait in cooperation with the general secretariat of the awqaf and Islamic affairs ministry. The director of coordination and follow-up department at the society, Nawaf Al-Sanae, said: "This project aims to help poor families, low-income families, widows,

divorcees, orphans, new converts and workers in Kuwait. The implementation of this agreement represents one of the successful steps achieved by the association in partnership with the General Secretariat of Awqaf in the field of implementing endowment banks."

"Since its inception, the society has been striving to meet realistic social and developmental needs, taking into account achieving interdependence between endowment projects as well as other projects through charitable partnership with the General Secretariat of Awqaf," he clarified.

In other news, the awqaf ministry opened registration for those intending to perform hajj through its official website. "The target group for registration is Kuwaiti citizens and residents of Kuwait, with the exception of bedouins, who will have a separate platform when the approval of the authorities in Saudi Arabia is received," the ministry said. "Priority is for Kuwaiti citizens who have not previously performed hajj. After obtaining the final approval, the pilgrim can complete the registration with the hajj operator with which he wishes to register," the ministry added.

## Prosecution looks for more suspects in cheating case

**KUWAIT:** Even as the public prosecution and ministry of interior continue investigations into cheating in high school exams, an informed source revealed concerned authorities are looking for new suspects involved in the crime.

"A large number of suspects managed groups under dual names and used phone numbers, most of which belonged to Bangladeshi expatriates. This means those accused of managing the groups and involved in cheating during the exams had prepared in advance for this crime in anticipation of being exposed. They used fictitious names in managing the groups," sources revealed to Kuwait Times, pointing out the difficulties in finding new suspects.

"A search is currently underway for these suspects and their true identities are being established," the sources added, indicating that 20 suspects have been interrogated. In addition, six others have been ordered to be arrested, who are in hiding. "The prosecution, after freezing the bank accounts of all the detained defendants, is currently checking the amounts in their accounts because the case was classified as a money-laundering one. Attorney General Saad Al-Safran is personally following up on the case of cheating and leaking high school exams," the sources said.

## Summary of copyrights law 75/2019

By Mohammed Al-Muthaffar

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**I**ntellectual property (IP) copyrights, trademarks and patents are common phrases we hear daily. The question here is do we actually acknowledge the meaning of them? It is important to be familiar with legal meanings and dig deep in this specific area of law, because it is the base of success for both the individual and group.

Intellectual property rights are all rights related to intangible assets that are owned by a person or business and are safeguarded against unauthorized use. Non-physical property, such as the right of ownership over intellectual property, is referred to as an intangible asset.

Intellectual property rights include the following examples: patents, domain names, industrial design, confidential information, inventions, moral rights, database rights, works of authorship, service marks, logos, trademarks, design rights, business or trade names, commercial secrets, computer software and geographical indications.

We will demonstrate five types, but before doing that, it is essential to illustrate the definition of the "author". Author means an individual or group who performs or creates literary, scientific content, invents something, books, music, songs, scientific innovation, inventions, paintings and much more.

### Trademarks

Any word, phrase, symbol, design or combination of these that distinguishes your products or services might be considered a trademark. Customers use it to recognize you in the marketplace and set you apart from your rivals. Both trademarks and service marks can be referred to by the term "trademark."

### Commercial secrets

Any proprietary information that gives a company a competitive advantage and that no one else is aware of may be protected as a trade secret.

### Industrial design

They are aesthetic decorative innovations that appear on a piece of a specific product or commodity and can take two-dimensional or stereoscopic "three-dimensional" forms.

### Geographical indication

A mark used for products that have a specific geographical origin and that have a characteristic or reputation based on that origin. Rights to geographical indications allow those who have the right to use the indications to prevent their products from being used by third parties who do not comply with applicable standards.

### IP Institutions

- World intellectual property organizations aim to provide assistance in order to ensure that the rights of creators and intellectual property owners are protected around the world, and that inventors and authors are thus recognized and rewarded for their creativity.

### Berne Convention

Dealing with the protection of works and their authors' rights.

- The National Library of Kuwait is concerned with accepting or rejecting author registration requests.

- National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters is based on protecting the financial rights of the author who has no heirs.

The law regulates the methods of depositing and registering works, challenging the decisions issued to refuse their registration, determine the registration fees for them and assign the Kuwait National Library to play this role.

## Local

# CODED launches third edition of 'Kuwait Codes' initiative

## Initiative in partnership with leading corporations in Kuwait's private sector

**KUWAIT:** The third edition of the "Kuwait Codes" initiative is set to launch by CODED with the support of the 2023 strategic partners: Alghanim Industries, Zain Kuwait, Kuwait Finance House, and Agility. The initiative aims to teach 1,000 male and female high school students the latest programming languages and frameworks such as Python, web development, video game development, and mobile app development using Flutter. Kuwait Codes is completely free for all high school students in Kuwait, and aims to create a tech-savvy generation proficient in the latest technologies and able to contribute innovative technology-based solutions.

Ahmad Marafi, CEO of CODED said: "We are happy to announce the launch of the third edition of the "Kuwait Codes" initiative in collaboration with our 2023 strategic partners Alghanim Industries, Kuwait Finance House, Zain Kuwait, and Agility. The initiative aims to teach 1,000 high school students, from private and public schools, the latest languages, technologies, and frameworks in the field of programming currently used by the biggest tech companies worldwide.

After the success of the first two editions, here we are launching the third edition to continue our goal of creating a generation of tech-savvy youth. We believe in the youth and their ability to harness their innovative minds every chance they get in different fields. Our role is to equip them with the technical and life skills necessary to succeed in the future and help them turn their tech ideas into reality from Kuwait to the world.

We would like to extend our gratitude to our esteemed Strategic Partners for their continuous support to CODED and youth in Kuwait, and we hope that we reach our goal of further developing the technical skills of the next generation. CODED calls on all high school students to seize the opportunity and apply to this free-of-charge initiative through our website [www.code.kw](http://www.code.kw) to get a chance to create a better future for themselves."

Abdullateef Al-Sharikh, Senior Director of Corporate Communications at Alghanim Industries: "We are honored today to join our esteemed peers in the private sector to renew our support as strategic partners of Kuwait Codes. This is our second year backing this initiative to equip our country's youth with programming skills. Our belief in the minds of tomorrow remains as firm as our belief in developing their digital skill sets for the future. The world is rapidly evolving, especially when it comes to digitalization, automation, and other advanced technologies - all of which rely on coding.

Across the many sectors we operate in, literacy in coding plays a crucial role. Our deepest gratitude goes to CODED for closing that knowledge gap by providing our young talent with the skills that will help them build successful careers in the future," he added.

Waleed Al-Khashti, Zain Kuwait's Chief Corporate Affairs and Relations Officer said: "The local community always anticipates Zain's presence behind every successful Kuwaiti project, and this is exactly what we aim for as part of our strategy to achieve sustainable development within the nation's various sectors."

"After the fantastic success of the first two seasons, we're thrilled today to announce Zain as a main and strategic partner of Kuwait Codes' third season in collaboration with our colleagues at CODED Academy, continuing our journey of empowering the next generation of Kuwaiti programmers and developers," Al-Khashti added.

Al-Khashti explained: "Zain is extremely proud to be a part of this initiative's success story, especially that we were here since the beginning. The program's goals are well aligned with our corporate values of empowering a generation of capable and digitally aware young people. By providing them with such an exceptional educational environment, we contribute to giving youth the



From the press conference.

skills they need for their future careers, many of which now require digital competencies as a prerequisite."

"We couldn't be prouder to be one of the top strategic partners of CODED Academy throughout the past years, which has contributed to bringing hundreds of young programmers and developers to the local market. We wish our colleagues at CODED all the best of luck in this upcoming third season," Al-Khashti concluded.

During the press conference held by Coded Academy, KFH Group Deputy General Manager Public Relations and Media, Yusef Abdullah Al-Ruwaieh said: "We are proud at KFH to continue our strategic partnership with Coded Academy to support technological innovations, through which we aspire to support the youth of Kuwait and contribute to providing them with the best educa-

tional tools in the field of programming," indicating that this comes within the framework of social responsibility and support for innovation, students and youth, in line with the bank's sustainability strategy.

Al-Ruwaieh added: "KFH is keen to encourage scientific progress, innovation initiatives, and technological creativity. Therefore, we are pleased to continue our strategic partnership with Coded Academy to launch the third edition of the Kuwait Codes initiative, and enhance efforts to enrich knowledge, support innovation, creativity, and pay attention to youth and nurture their talents."

He pointed out that KFH is keen to support this initiative, provide the best educational environment for Kuwaiti youth, and contribute to the creation of an advanced generation in the technological field that keeps up with the

requirements of the future.

Henadi Al-Saleh, Agility Chairperson, said: "Agility has long supported educational initiatives in the communities where we operate, especially initiatives that support the development of technical and digital capabilities, key skills we need in our workforce. CODED provides students in Kuwait with practical coding skills that set the foundation for the future. I look forward to seeing the progression and growth in the coming Kuwait Codes cohorts, especially progress achieved in girls' participation."

In 2022, Agility supported CODED's UniCode program which provides digital coding basics to undergraduate students, and it has been organized with the support of the Computer Engineering Society (CPES) at Kuwait University, reaching 335 students, 60 percent of whom were female.

## MoH to initiate action against erring doctors

**KUWAIT:** The Ministry of Health (MoH) will take disciplinary action against doctors who conducted medical examinations and X-rays for expatriate patients without charging the prescribed fees for the procedures, informed sources revealed. The action will include financial consequences of those who were treated without fees.

"Inspector at the MoH noticed the uses of medical devices and services without the patient paying the bill for the service, which is usually collected by the employee before the service. After further investigation, they found out that some doctors are letting some relatives and friends, who are expatriates, to use the services without paying the required fee," sources revealed to Kuwait Times.

"The use of medical devices and X-rays is carried out individually between the competent employee and the concerned doctor, as the employee in charge of the medical device and X-rays mostly implements what is written by the doctor to the patient. It is not the responsibility of the employee to ascertain whether the patient has paid or not," the sources added.

"The decisions will include disciplinary measures against the violating doctors, including referring them to an investigation within the ministry or referring them to the Public Prosecution Office if it is found that this doctor committed these violations repeatedly," sources clarified.

## KU's Arab Journal issues new edition

**KUWAIT:** The Arab Journal for Human Sciences with the support of the Academic Publishing Council at Kuwait University has published its 161st issue for the winter of 2023.

Acting chief editor of the magazine, Dr Fahad Al-Zumaye introduced the edition saying: "In the context of our Arab world, which is living through one of its worst historical eras, human studies are no longer an intellectual or cultural luxury. Human studies are an important tool for combating intellectual backwardness either in historical concepts or in practices in our societies that have created a stumbling block for human development," he said.

The magazine included seven researches from acclaimed scientists such as Arabic professor at Kuwait University, Dr Mohammed Al-Qenaie, Ajman university Arabic professor, Dr Fayez Al-Dhunaybat, History professor at Kuwait University, Dr Ahmad Al-Qenaie, history professor at King Saud college, Ali Al-Mashhour, Dr Jamilah Matouq at Ahmad Draya College, history professor Dr Ali Hamed and English and linguistics professor at the Public Institute for Applied Sciences, Dr Fahad Al-Mutairi.

## Chance of light rain in Kuwait Monday; heavy rain Tuesday

**KUWAIT:** The Kuwait Meteorological Department expects chances of light rain on Monday which may gradually increase to sporadic heavy rain on Tuesday as it peaks in the afternoon and continues until Wednesday morning.

Amira Al-Azmi, Head of the Navigational Forecasting Department at the Department, told Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) on Sunday that the country is expected to be affected by a rainy situation as a result of the extension of a surface depression accompanied by a moist air mass that coincides with the presence of an air depression in the upper layers of the atmosphere. This might lead to the multiplication of low and medium clouds accompanied by thunderstorms and a decrease in horizontal visibility in some areas.

She added that the chance of light rain is likely on Monday with light to moderate southeasterly winds that are gradually gaining, especially in coastal areas, with waves rising at night to more than 6 feet. Al-Azmi expected them to increase.

Al-Azmi expected that the intensity of the rain could gradually pick up from Tuesday and it will peak from afternoon until Wednesday morning. It



KUWAIT: Rain drenched various areas across Kuwait last week. Kuwait Meteorological Department said on Sunday that there are chances of light rain on Monday. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

is expected to moderate in its entirety with active to strong winds at a speed of more than 70 kilometers per hour, leading to turbulent waves as they may reach a height of 8 feet.

It is expected that the maximum temperatures will rise significantly on Monday and Tuesday between 24 and 27 degrees Celsius and then drop again on Wednesday. She indicated that

the gradual improvement in the atmosphere begins from Wednesday when clouds and chances of rain drop with the progression of a high atmospheric extension. It will be accompanied by a cold air mass, and the weather tends to be cold during the day and cold to very cold at night, especially over open areas with chances of fog formation. —KUNA



## 68 violating camps removed in Abdullah Mubarak

**KUWAIT:** The head of the Farwaniya and Mubarak Al-Kabeer governorates department at the Kuwait Municipality Nawaf Al-Kanderi has stated that an inspection team removed 68 camps which were erected on public property in Abdullah Mubarak area. He pointed out that



the Municipality is keen on clearing anything that disrupts the general aesthetics of public places or constructions that exploit state property.

He said the intensive inspection campaigns by supervisory teams will continue in all regions of the province to monitor and limit all violations as well as take legal measures against violators. These measures will reduce all negative manifestations in all regions of the province whether by explicit encroachments on state property or by practicing an activity without a permit from the municipality, he added.

## Education ministry adopts decision on fees for student services

**KUWAIT:** Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, and the Chairman of the Council of Private Universities, Dr Hamad Al-Adwani, approved a ministerial decision regarding fees for student services, office activities, and other fees in private universities. The ministry said in a press statement Sunday that ministerial resolution No 44, was issued recently regarding fees for student services and activities.

The decision called on the educational institution to submit a statement of the budget allocated for extra-curricular student activities, in addition to the size of its contribution and the number of students participating in the various activities in order to ensure that it continues to receive this contribution in return for students' grievances or academic procedures such as evaluating exams and discussing grades.

Educational institutions may not oblige students to buy textbooks, pay additional fees, or for additional services. The statement indicated that educational institutions must be committed to announcing all fees for services and determining their value and time of maturity. He added that it is not permissible for the educational institution to oblige students to sign an undertaking and to acknowledge the payment of additional fees or to withhold graduation certificates. —KUNA

## News in brief

Gold prices  
jump in Kuwait

**KUWAIT:** Gold prices rose to the level of \$1927 per ounce at the end of last week's trading, gaining for the sixth week in a row. A specialized economic report issued by Dar on Kuwaiti bullion said on Sunday that gold investors were able to absorb the recent US economic data which indicates an increase in the basic personal consumption expenditures index which is the preferred inflation measure of the US Federal Reserve. On the local market, the price of a gram of 24 carat closed at a high of \$18.92, while 22 carat reached \$17.34, while the price of silver reached \$276 per kilogram. It is also called an ounce and is equal to 28.349 grams, while it is equal to as a unit of measurement for precious metals 31.103 grams. —KUNA

Dollar stabilizes  
against dinar

**KUWAIT:** The exchange rate of the US dollar against the Kuwaiti dinar stabilized Sunday at 0.305, while the euro's exchange rate decreased by 0.36 percent to the level of 0.331 dinars, compared to last Thursday's prices. The Central Bank of Kuwait stated in its daily bulletin on its website that the exchange rate of the pound sterling settled at the level of 0.378 dinars, while the Swiss franc decreased by 0.29 percent to the level of 0.331 dinars, and the Japanese yen settled at 0.002 dinars. It is noteworthy that the exchange rates announced by the Central Bank of Kuwait are the average currency prices for the day and do not reflect the actual buying and selling prices. —KUNA

## Photo of the day



**KUWAIT:** Souq Al-Mubarakiya is spruced up with Kuwait's national flags ahead of the National and Liberation Day on February 25 and 26. Souq Al-Mubarakiya, a historic souq in Kuwait City, is one of the oldest souqs in Kuwait. It is a popular traditional market which has been around for at least 200 years. —Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

# Fishermen Union seeks entry permits for expat laborers

## Animal farmers complain of shortage of livestock feed in Kuwait



**KUWAIT:** A fish vendor sells fish in a market in Kuwait City.

**KUWAIT:** Head of the Kuwait Fishermen Union Thaher Al-Suwayyan has requested Interior Minister Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Sabah to allow entry permits for expatriate workers, as the industry currently is short of labor and local replacements are not available.

"The Kuwaiti labor market needs more fishing workers because many of the expatriate laborers have left the country and do not intend to return. The necessity of approving applications submitted by the owners of fishing licenses is very important at this juncture, so that they can carry out their national duty by ensuring marine food security for the people of Kuwait," Suwayyan pointed.

He hoped the fishing sector will be able to overcome the challenges facing it, foremost of which is the provision of employment, stressing the importance of concerted efforts for the common good. "Many members of the union applied for new work permits for employing fishermen and they were not answered, either with a rejection or approval. As a result, their files became suspended. Many fishing boats have stopped working due to a lack of fishing workers as no replacement was made for the laborers who left the country," he added.

Meanwhile, head of the Union of Fresh Dairy Producers Abdulkhalek Al-Ahmad said: "The agriculture authority lacks long-term plans, and some of its officials work without clear plans that support farmers produc-

ing or working in the livestock sector. The sector is suffering due to the lack of experience among leaders and decision-makers."

Ahmad pointed out that the agricultural authority lacks technically qualified and specialized national labor, pointing to the lack of clarity in its plan aimed at increasing animal production or protecting the livestock sector. He added most of the current problems were predicted by the Union of Fresh Dairy Producers before they occurred, but there is no one in the authority to address these issues, he said.

"We predicted the problem of a shortage of livestock feed four years ago without the commission paying any attention to it. This led to a rise in feed prices during the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. It also ignored the solutions provided to control the spread of animal diseases, immunity weakness and other veterinary problems," he added.

"It is important that the state provides immunizations and veterinary care for cows and livestock for five continuous years without interruption, in coordination with the finance ministry, who in turn has expressed its readiness to provide funds for all immunizations required by the authority to control epidemics. It also directed the Kuwait Municipality to approve the establishment of dairy factories in the union farms because they are marketing outlets in accordance with the terms and conditions in place," he added.



A group of trained drivers

## Deliveroo partners with MoI to provide road safety training

**KUWAIT:** Deliveroo has partnered with the Ministry of Interior (MoI) to offer ongoing road safety training sessions to its riders. During the training, the MoI helped provide additional safety training for Deliveroo riders, educating riders on road safety tactics and providing participants with an overview of new traffic laws and regulations. The training session, led by the MoI in partnership with Deliveroo, was held in the Civil Defense venue at Al-Zahra on Jan 22.

"We would like to thank the Ministry of Interior for providing additional road safety training as part of our collective efforts in pursuit of safer driving in Kuwait," said Seham Al-Husaini, Deliveroo's General Manager. "Deliveroo is pleased to provide regular training to our riders as part of our ongoing commitment to road safety. We would also like to thank our riders for taking part in this training, and we hope to continue to empower them to uphold only the highest standards of safety while on the road."

"We are excited to partner with Deliveroo to offer additional road safety training to local riders," said Colonel Nawaf Al-Hayyan, the Head of the Public Relations and Traffic Awareness Department at the



**KUWAIT:** Colonel Nawaf Al-Hayyan from the Ministry of Interior with Karim Al-Gharballi from Deliveroo.

General Traffic Department: "We are delighted to help riders around the country enhance their safety training, and we look forward to collaborating with Deliveroo on more training sessions in the future."

Deliveroo is committed to ensuring that riders undergo regular training throughout the year. Last year, Deliveroo partnered with the Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) to offer road safety training sessions to its riders. Recently, Deliveroo riders also underwent first aid training in partnership with the KRCS and received training in emergency response tactics and how to administer life-saving first aid.

Deliveroo launched in Kuwait four years ago, and has set itself apart with its unbeatable customer service, wide selection of global & local restaurants, and consistently reliable delivery.



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Tunisians vote in second round of poll for defanged parliament

## UK PM ruthlessly fires ally over tax scandal

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JERUSALEM: Palestinian girls sit in the debris of the house of Rateb Hatab Shukairat, after it was demolished by Zionist bulldozers, in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Jabal Mukaber on January 29, 2023. — AFP

# Zionists target Palestinian families

## Rights group slams measures • Moves to ease permits for settlers to carry firearms

**JERUSALEM:** The Zionist entity prepared to demolish the family home Sunday of a Palestinian in east Jerusalem who killed seven people near a synagogue, as part of measures to revoke certain rights of the relatives of Palestinians who attack Zionists. The security cabinet announced a slew of steps late Saturday, including revoking the rights to social security of “the families of terrorists that support terrorism”.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s cabinet also announced that the home of 21-year-old Khayri Alqam, who was shot dead by police following Friday’s attack, “will be sealed immediately ahead of its demolition”. An AFP correspondent saw Zionist forces Sunday on the terrace of the building after they sealed its entrances, with Palestinians clearing out their belongings.

The Zionist entity already routinely demolishes the homes of Palestinians who kill Zionists, although the process necessitates that prior notice be given to families and the chance to appeal the decision. Dani Shenhar, a legal expert at rights group HaMoked, said sealing the home overnight demonstrated the government’s “will of revenge against the families”. The measure was “done in complete disregard for the rule of law”, he said, and HaMoked intends to protest to the attorney general.

### More guns for civilians

The Zionist security cabinet said there will also be a discussion Sunday over a bill to revoke identity cards from the relatives of Palestinians who attack Zionists. The measures announced are in line with proposals from Netanyahu’s extreme-right political partners which enabled him to return to power at the end of December. They are likely to apply primarily to Arab citizens of the Zionist entity, and Palestinians with east Jerusalem residency permits.

Hours after the deadly shooting outside the synagogue in the settlement of Neve Yaacov, a 13-year-old Palestinian boy shot and wounded two Zionists just outside the walled Old City of east Jerusalem. The boy blamed for the attack in the Silwan neighborhood was shot and wounded at the scene and detained.

No group has claimed responsibility for either of the shootings. Another Palestinian hurt in prior clashes with Zionist forces in Silwan died from his wounds Friday, a Shaare Zedek hospital spokeswoman told AFP. The mounting toll was described as a “death spiral” by Pope Francis, who referred to both Palestinians and Zionists killed. “The death spiral that increases day by day only closes the few glimmers of trust that exist between the two peoples,” the pontiff said Sunday.

The security cabinet also decided to make it

easier to obtain permits to carry firearms. “When civilians have guns, they can defend themselves,” extreme-right National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir told reporters outside a Jerusalem hospital on Saturday. Zionist forces have been placed on high alert, and the army has announced that it will be reinforcing troop numbers in the West Bank, while calls for restraint have multiplied from abroad.

Meanwhile, Zionist guards killed a Palestinian near a settlement in the occupied West Bank, Palestinian health officials said Sunday. Karam Ali Ahmad Salman, 18, was shot dead by “the (Zionist) occupation near the settlement of ‘Kedumim,’” the Palestinian health ministry reported. The Palestinian health ministry said Kedumim was built on private-owned Palestinian land.

### Deadly raid

The Jerusalem attacks came after nine Palestinians were killed in the deadliest raid by Zionist forces in the West Bank in nearly two decades. The Zionist entity said Thursday the raid targeted Islamic Jihad operatives, whose militants along with Hamas later fired several rockets from Gaza towards the entity.

Most of them were intercepted by Zionist defense systems, before the military responded

with strikes on Hamas targets inside the Palestinian enclave. There were no casualties reported on either side, but Gaza’s armed groups vowed further action. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken is expected in Jerusalem and Ramallah on Monday and Tuesday to discuss steps for de-escalation. The surge in violence has sparked fears of further reprisals.

Friday’s attack near a synagogue sparked outrage in Europe and the United States and condemnation from several Arab governments that have ties with the Zionist entity - including Jordan, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates. But the Palestinian Authority led by President Mahmoud Abbas instead insisted that the entity was “fully responsible for the dangerous escalation”.

Abbas and Netanyahu are due to meet separately with Blinken next week, talks that have taken on renewed urgency amid the widening bloodshed. It will be Netanyahu’s first high-level US meeting since returning to office as the head of the most right-wing government in the Zionist entity’s history. Netanyahu’s domestic critics continued their protests on Saturday, with thousands turning out in Tel Aviv to oppose his controversial judicial reform plan that aims to give politicians more control over the supreme court. Demonstrators observed a minute of silence for those killed on Friday. — AFP



TEHRAN: Iranians gather around a fire to stay warm after an earthquake struck the city of Khoy in West Azerbaijan province on January 29, 2023. — AFP

## Shallow earthquake kills three, injures hundreds in northwestern Iran

**TEHRAN:** A 5.9-magnitude earthquake hit northwestern Iran overnight, killing at least three people and injuring more than 800 in the region near the border with Turkey, state officials and media said Sunday. Panicked residents fled their homes as buildings collapsed and rubble crushed cars, with hundreds seeking shelter from freezing winter conditions in evacuation centers as more than 20 aftershocks rattled the region.

The shallow quake hit the city of Khoy, with a population of around 200,000, in West Azerbaijan province at 9:44 pm (1814 GMT) Saturday, said the Seismological Center of the University of Tehran.

“This incident has left 816 injured and three dead,” West Azerbaijan governor Mohammad Sadegh Motamedian was quoted as saying by IRNA news agency.

People were seen wrapped in blankets and huddling around fires in the snow-dusted region, in images published by Iranian media, as state TV broadcast footage of major damage to residential buildings, including half-destroyed houses. Buildings in 70 villages suffered quake damage, the state news agency reported, with rescuers clearing rubble to free those trapped in the area around 800 kilometers (500 miles) northwest of the capital Tehran.

Iran’s Red Crescent Society chief, Pirhossein Koolivand, later announced the search and rescue operations had finished, with no more survivors or bodies believed trapped. Iran’s interior minister, Ahmad Vahidi, travelled to Khoy to observe the situation, where he said water, power and gas connections were impacted but being restored, IRNA reported. — AFP

## Next election ‘our one shot’ to save America: Trump

**COLUMBIA:** Donald Trump warned Saturday that the next election would be America’s last chance for salvation as he attempted to revive a faltering third run for the White House in two US states that launched his winning 2016 presidential campaign. Buffeted by political and legal headwinds, the 76-year-old Republican addressed a few hundred supporters at an intimate rally in South Carolina’s capital Columbia after speaking to grassroots activists in Salem, New Hampshire.

“The 2024 election is our one shot to save our country and we need a leader who’s ready to do that on day one,” Trump said from a podium beneath the Statehouse rotunda, flanked by American flags and some of his most loyal political allies.

The events were seen as a chance to revitalize a stuttering campaign amid criticism over Trump’s failure to make any public appearances since he announced his latest run in November. But there was no discernible shift in his messaging as he launched into his debunked claims of a stolen 2020 election and reprised his litany of disparaging nicknames for his political rivals.

He touched on favorite culture war talking points, railing against critical race theory that he said was being taught in the military as well as gender ideology and windmills that he said were mainly Chinese-made bird-killers. “There’s only one president who has ever challenged the entire establishment in Washington, and with your vote next year, we will do it again,” he said seeking to revive his 2016 image as an insurgent outsider.

His most divisive remarks were reserved for the conservative critics he refers to as “RINOs” - Republicans in name only-whom he criticized at both events, arguing in New Hampshire that they were “even more dangerous than Democrats.” During his address to party activists in Salem he had touted his record on law and order, immigration



COLUMBIA: Former U.S. President Donald Trump delivers remarks at the South Carolina State House on January 28, 2023 in Columbia, South Carolina. — AFP

and “rebuilding” the US military as he vowed to save the country from “being destroyed by a selfish, radical, corrupt political establishment.” “I’m more angry now and more committed now than I ever was,” Trump said. “We need a president who’s ready to hit the ground running on day one.”

New Hampshire and South Carolina hold outside influence as two of the first states in every presidential election year to hold nominating contests. They cemented Trump’s frontrunner status in 2016 after a lukewarm start in Iowa. But he has reportedly struggled to hold together a support base in South Carolina amid simmering discontent over his endorsements of candidates who lost swing state races in November’s midterms.

The nomination could wind up a two-horse race between Trump and Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, who came out on top in a straw poll at the National Pro-Life Summit in Washington just last weekend. The biggest roadblock on Trump’s path to the nomination may end up being his mounting legal woes, with a quasi-independent “special counsel” appointed to look into numerous allegations of misconduct. “These are radical left-wing prosecutors who are absolutely horrible, horrible people,” Trump said in New Hampshire, vowing to investigate the Justice Department if he is reelected. — AFP

## International

# UK PM Sunak ruthlessly fires ally Zahawi over tax scandal

## 'The stench of sleaze just hangs around the Conservative party'

**LONDON:** British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on Sunday dismissed a senior ally whose murky tax dealings have focused anger at the government as a cost-of-living crisis brings misery to millions. An inquiry into the wealthy Conservative party chairman Nadhim Zahawi's tax affairs - dating from his founding of the YouGov polling company in 2000 - had found a "serious breach" of ministerial rules, the government said. "As a result, I have informed you of my decision to remove you from your position in His Majesty's Government," Sunak wrote in a publicly released letter to his Iraqi-born ally.

Sunak appointed Zahawi as the party chairman, and cabinet minister without portfolio, when he entered 10 Downing Street nearly 100 days ago, following the implosion of Liz Truss's premiership and the demise of the scandal-plagued Boris Johnson. Then, as his letter noted, Sunak vowed to deliver "integrity, professionalism and accountability at every level".

Instead, the Zahawi case, and allegations of bullying levelled by civil servants at Deputy Prime Minister Dominic Raab, have undermined Sunak's attempts to restore public faith in the beleaguered Conservatives. The inquiry report by Sunak's newly appointed independent ethics advisor, Laurie

Magnus, found that Zahawi effectively lied to successive Conservative leaders when he came under investigation by the UK's tax authority.

Zahawi settled the matter last September - with a fine for late payment reportedly worth £5m (\$6.2m) - months after he started serving under Johnson as chancellor of the exchequer, in ultimate charge of the UK tax agency. But he did not reveal the fine in his declaration of ministerial interests, until it emerged in newspaper reports this month. Initially last year, he tried to silence journalists and a tax consultant with threats of libel lawsuits. Zahawi had failed "to be honest, open and an exemplary leader through his own behavior", the damning report by Magnus found.

Sunak's decision to fire Zahawi, rather than invite him to resign with some saving of face, underlined the serious political stakes at play at a time when millions of Britons are struggling to pay the bills. Zahawi oversaw Britain's Covid vaccine rollout and was well regarded in his party as an aspirational success story, having moved to Britain aged 11 with his Kurdish family not speaking any English.

### 'Stench of sleaze'

The opposition Labour party said Sunak should

have fired Zahawi immediately, rather than seeking to buy time by asking Magnus to investigate. The scandal underlined that Sunak was a "weak" prime minister, senior Labour MP Bridget Phillipson told Sky News. "The stench of sleaze just hangs around the Conservative party," she said.

Sunak has faced questions himself about his family's tax affairs after it emerged that his Indian wife Akshata Murty had for years enjoyed "non-domicile" status, which shielded her from paying UK taxes on her overseas income from her family's Infosys business group. And last week he apologized for receiving his second police fine, after he was filmed not wearing a seatbelt in the back seat of a moving car. As chancellor himself under Johnson, Sunak was fined along with the then prime minister for attending an illegal workplace party during a Covid lockdown. The "partygate" scandal was one of several that brought down Johnson.

Sunak's vows of integrity were in sharp contrast to that record, but he remains stalked by his predecessor's dealings in government. A separate probe is underway into reports that just before he was made chairman of the BBC by Johnson, former banker Richard Sharp was involved in securing a private credit line for up to £800,000 (\$990,000)



**LONDON:** In this file photo taken on July 5, 2022 Britain's Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi arrives to attend a cabinet meeting in Downing Street in London. — AFP

for the then-PM from a Canadian businessman. Zahawi, who had insisted on his innocence, vowed to continue supporting Sunak as a backbench Conservative MP. — AFP



**KYIV:** Friends and colleagues of Andrew Bagshaw, 47, British voluntary worker, who was killed in Donetsk region, take part in the memorial service in Refectory Church of St. Sophia Monastery in Ukrainian capital of Kyiv on January 29, 2023. — AFP

## Ukraine battle rages as Pyongyang denies arming Russia militia

**KYIV:** Ukraine's military said Sunday its forces repelled an attack near Blahodatne in the eastern Donetsk region after Russia's Wagner mercenary group claimed it took control of the village. Kyiv's forces "repelled attacks near... Blahodatne" and 13 other settlements in the Donetsk region, the Ukrainian General Staff said in its daily report.

Earlier, Russia's private military group Wagner said its units had taken control of the village. There was no immediate confirmation from Russia's defense ministry. The United States had designated the Wagner group as a "transnational criminal organization", citing its weapons dealings with Pyongyang in violation of UN Security Council resolutions. The US had accused the nuclear-armed

state of supplying rockets and missiles to the private Russian army.

In a statement carried by the official Korean Central News Agency on Sunday, a senior North Korean official rejected the accusations, warning that the US would face a "really undesirable result" if it persisted in spreading the "self-made rumor". "Trying to tarnish the image of (North Korea) by fabricating a non-existent thing is a grave provocation that can never be allowed and that cannot but trigger its reaction," said Kwon Jong Gun, director general of the Department of US Affairs. He also called it "a foolish attempt to justify its offer of weapons to Ukraine".

Along with China, Russia is one of the North's few international friends and has previously come to the regime's aid. Other than Syria and Russia, North Korea is the only country to recognize the independence of Luhansk and Donetsk, two Russian-backed separatist regions in eastern Ukraine. Moscow has made capturing the eastern Donetsk region, which it has already declared a part of Russia, its primary goal in Ukraine. — AFP

## Budaiwi named new GCC...

Continued from Page 1

said, pointing to Budaiwi's impressive diplomatic career.

Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Sunday presented to HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah the newly-assigned GCC Secretary General Budaiwi and Deputy Foreign Minister Mansour Al-Otaibi at Bayan Palace.

Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem also received Philippines Charge d'Affaires Jose Cabrera on Sunday to offer condolences on the death of domestic worker Jullebee Ranara, who was the victim of a brutal murder in Kuwait. A statement by the Philippine Embassy said Sheikh Salem asked Cabrera to convey his deepest condolences to the family and the Philippine government on the brutal and tragic death of Ranara.

Sheikh Salem condemned her murder and said the perpetrator, who has been arrested and is cur-

rently in detention, will be punished for this heinous crime. Sheikh Salem added that the actions of the perpetrator do not in any way reflect the character and values of Kuwaiti society, the Kuwaiti people and the Kuwaiti government.

The statement said Cabrera expressed appreciation for the cooperation and assistance of Kuwaiti authorities, particularly for the swift action and response in the apprehension of the suspect and in the clearances for the repatriation of Ranara's remains. Sheikh Salem said the ministry will provide the Philippine Embassy all necessary assistance as it continues to monitor Ranara's case.

Cabrera informed Sheikh Salem that based on statements by Susan Ople, Secretary of the Department of Migrant Workers, there is no ban on deployment to Kuwait. Sheikh Salem and Cabrera also discussed bilateral relations between the Philippines and Kuwait and expressed a mutual commitment to closer dialogue and engagement between the two countries, especially in the coming months.

The charred remains of Ranara, 35, were discovered in the Salmi desert last week. It was reported she was pregnant and had been subjected to blunt-force trauma. The 17-year-old son of her employer was arrested by police.

he had been speeding during the long-distance trip. "We will investigate the causes of the accident," he said, adding that DNA tests would be needed to determine the identity of the remains, which had been "badly mutilated".

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, local police official Mir Rauf told AFP all of the drowned so far recovered from the boating accident on Tanda Dam lake were aged between seven and 14. A total of 17 were rescued alive from the reservoir by Sunday afternoon. "Everything was normal until suddenly the boat overturned," said 11-year-old survivor Muhammad Mustafa from his hospital bed in the nearby city of Kohat.

"I got stuck under the boat," he told AFP. "My shawl and sweater weighed me down, so I took them off. The water was extremely cold and my body went numb. I thought I was going to pass out

## Memphis disbands police unit linked to fatal beating

**MEMPHIS:** The US city of Memphis on Saturday disbanded the special police unit whose officers fatally beat a young Black man, after graphic video of the assault sparked widespread shock and outrage. The video, which shows five officers repeatedly kicking and punching 29-year-old Tyre Nichols as he moans and calls out for his mother, triggered calls for police reform.

The southern US city on Saturday announced it had deactivated the officers' special unit, known as Scorpion, which was launched in 2021 to reduce illegal activity by assigning more police to high-crime areas. The Memphis Police Department said in a statement it was "in the best interest of all to permanently deactivate the SCORPION Unit," which stands for Street Crimes Operation to Restore Peace in Our Neighborhoods. "The officers currently assigned to the unit agree unreservedly with this next step," the department added.

Several dozen demonstrators called for police reform Saturday afternoon as they gathered in the chilly rain in front of city hall shouting "No justice, no peace!" and carrying signs with slogans such as "Justice for Tyre Nichols." At one point, a police car ended up surrounded by a group of protesters, who directed their angry chants at the vehicle. Memphis City Council member JB Smiley Jr addressed the crowd's demands, speaking to protesters in the rain. "Memphis has an opportunity to set the standard on how to respond to actions like this," he told them.

### 'A horrible thing'

The five Memphis officers, who are all Black, were charged with second-degree murder in the beating of Nichols, who died in hospital on January 10, three days after being stopped on suspicion of



**MEMPHIS:** Protesters hold signs during a rally against the fatal police assault of Tyre Nichols, outside of the Federal Courthouse in Houston, Texas, on January 28, 2023. — AFP

reckless driving. The lengthy video footage from police body cameras released Friday evening shows the group of officers detaining Nichols, attempting to take him down using a Taser, then giving chase as he evades them. Subsequent segments-the footage runs about an hour in total, and is audio-only in parts-show Nichols calling for his mother, and groaning as officers repeatedly assault him.

"They had beat him to a pulp," Nichols's mother Row Vaughn Wells told CNN Friday. "He had bruises all over. His head was swollen like a watermelon. His neck was bursting because of the swelling." Despite nationwide calls for police reform following George Floyd's death and subsequent protests in 2020, the number of people who died during interactions with police hit a 10-year high in 2022, at 1,186 fatalities, according to the website Mapping Police Violence. Nancy Schulte, 69, who works at a hotel in downtown Memphis, said she lost respect for city police after viewing the grim footage. "It's just a horrible thing," said Schulte. "Watching five big guys beat the living heck out of this man." — AFP

## Drone attack targets Iran...

Continued from Page 1

carried out "on one of the workshop complexes of the ministry", according to state news agency IRNA.

"The attack, which occurred at around 11:30 pm (2000 GMT) on Saturday, did not cause any disruption to the operation of the complex," it said. Authorities did not elaborate on activities at the site, but IRNA said the strike had targeted "an ammunition manufacturing plant". It added that "one of the quadcopters used in the attack, which suffered less damage during the confrontation operation, was handed over to the security forces stationed in the complex".

Parliament member Mohammad-Hassan Assafari told the Mehr news agency that "opponents and enemies" of Iran aimed to "disrupt the defensive power" of the country with the attack. The drone strike comes at a tense time in Iran, which has been rocked by protests over the death in custody of

Kurdish-Iranian woman Mahsa Amini in September, and as the standoff with major powers over its nuclear program remains unresolved.

Iran has also faced Western accusations that it has been supplying armed drones to Russia for use in the war in Ukraine, a charge Tehran denies. Iran has been engaged in a shadow war for years with its arch-enemy the Zionist entity, blamed for a series of sabotage attacks and assassinations targeting the Iranian nuclear program, and with the Zionist entity's ally the United States.

A few hours before the Isfahan attack, a major fire broke out at a motor oil production plant in the northwestern province of East Azerbaijan, IRNA reported. It published images of the blaze in the key industrial complex of Shahid Salimi linked to the industry ministry, and said authorities were investigating. Shahid Salimi in the city of Azarshahr is the largest industrial zone in northwestern Iran, hosting 790 factories and other facilities employing nearly 28,000 workers, according to state media.

Iran has several known nuclear research sites in the Isfahan region, including a uranium conversion plant. In April 2021, Tehran announced it had started producing 60 percent enriched uranium at the Natanz site in Isfahan province. — AFP

## 51 die in twin Pak tragedies...

Continued from Page 1

"When the bus fell down, it immediately caught fire," he said. The oil "caused the fire to flare up so much that it was difficult to control", he added. The bus was reportedly carrying a total of 48 passengers when it hit a pillar on the bridge and careened off course earlier on Sunday. It had been travelling overnight between Balochistan's provincial capital of Quetta and the southern port city of Karachi.

"It is feared that the driver may have fallen asleep," Anjum said, also mentioning the possibility

when a man on an inflatable tube saved me." One of the rescued was a teacher, who remained unconscious as the rescue operation continued for up to three pupils still missing. The class of madrasa students "went out for a picnic and boating" at the scenic location, district police chief Abdul Rauf told AFP. "According to the information so far, the boat was in a dilapidated condition and it was overloaded too," he said.

Ramshackle highways, lax safety measures and reckless driving contribute to Pakistan's dire road safety record. Passenger buses are frequently crammed to capacity and seatbelts are not commonly worn, meaning high death tolls from single-vehicle accidents are common. In November, 20 people, including 11 children, were killed when a minibus crashed into a deep and water-logged ditch in southern Pakistan. — AFP



**KOHAT, Pakistan:** Rescue workers search for victims drowned in the waters of Tanda Dam after a boat carrying students capsized on Jan 29, 2023. — AFP

## International

# Tunisians vote in second round of poll for defanged parliament

The latest polls are seen as the final pillar of Kais Saied's transformation of politics



TUNIS: A Tunisian voter casts his ballot in the second round of parliamentary elections on January 29, 2023, in Ettadhamen, a working-class suburb west of the capital Tunis. — AFP

TUNIS: Polling began in the second round of elections for Tunisia's toothless parliament on Sunday, but as the divided nation grapples with economic woes, all eyes will be on turnout. A handful of voters trickled through a polling station in central Tunis on Sunday morning, casting ballots for a total of 262 candidates competing for 131 seats in the new legislature.

The body has been largely stripped of its authority following President Kais Saied's dramatic power grab in the birthplace of the Arab Spring uprisings. On July 25, 2021, Saied sacked the government and froze parliament before dissolving it and pushing through a new constitution granting him almost unlimited powers, sweeping away the system that had emerged from the 2011 revolt.

The latest polls, whose first round in December saw just 11.2 percent of registered voters take part, are seen as the final pillar of Saied's transformation of politics. The new legislature will have almost no power to hold the president to account. "There's no way I'm voting," said Mohamed Abidi, 51, a waiter at a cafe in Tunis. "Saied isn't listening to anyone to find solutions for our situation. The whole economy is suffering but he's not interested—he only wants to keep his place in

the presidential palace."

But taxi driver Belhassen Ben Safta disagreed. "We've got to vote! We can't leave even the slightest possibility that the old system returns." Analysts predict few of Tunisia's 7.8 million eligible voters will cast their ballots in the second round, as major parties including Saied's arch-rivals, the Islamist-inspired Ennahdha, call for a boycott. The ISIE elections watchdog said that by 11:00 am (1000 GMT), around 4.7 percent of voters had cast their ballots, slightly more than at the same time during the first round.

### 'Dramatic' situation

Youssef Cherif, director of Columbia Global Centers in Tunis, said "this parliament will have very little legitimacy, and the president, who is all-powerful thanks to the 2022 constitution, will be able to control it as he sees fit." Cherif also noted Tunisians' "lack of interest" in politics.

With inflation at over 10 percent and repeated shortages of basic goods from butter to cooking oil, Tunisia's 12 million people have been focused on more immediate issues. Ratings agency Moody's on Saturday downgraded Tunisia to Caa2, citing "the

absence of comprehensive financing to date to meet the government's large funding needs".

Omrane Dhoubi, an apprentice baker in the capital, said he was struggling to make ends meet, and had no faith in any of the country's political elite. "Saied had the chance to make radical changes. He seized all powers but he did nothing," he said. More than 32,000 Tunisians are estimated to have made clandestine bids to reach Europe over the past year, as poverty and unemployment rise.

The election takes place in the shadow of Tunisia's drawn-out negotiations with the International Monetary Fund for a bailout worth nearly \$2 billion. Cherif said the talks were stumbling over the United States' concerns for the future of Tunisian democracy and Saied's apparent reluctance to "accept the IMF's diktats" on politically sensitive issues, including subsidy reform.

Lawyer and political expert Hamadi Redissi said there was a "blatant discrepancy" between Saied's rhetoric against the IMF and the programme his government proposed to the lender "on the sly". "We have a president who opposes his own government," he said. — AFP

## Ivory Coast leprosy sufferers fight social exclusion

DUQUESNE-CREMONE, Ivory Coast: "A week before my mother died, her house was broken into and burned down," said Mathieu Okoma Agoa, from a village in Ivory Coast. "After her funeral, women danced in the village because, according to them, the evil was gone," he said.

Okoma Agoa's mother suffered from leprosy, a disease that made her a social outcast long before she died. And the experience left its mark on him, too. "I am scarred for life," he said. He is not the only one. Camille Kouassi Assi, the village chief, told how his parents were also ostracized because of their leprosy, right up until the end of their lives. Recalling their ordeal, his voice trembled, his eyes welling up with tears.

Both men spoke to AFP in the run-up to World Leprosy Day on Sunday. They live in the southern Ivorian village of Duquesne-Cremone, which since the 1960s has been a refuge for leprosy patients and their relatives fleeing social exclusion. Around 100 kilometers (60 miles) from the economic hub Abidjan, Duquesne-Cremone is named after a French priest and the Italian city whose inhabitants financed its creation.



DUQUESNE-CREMONE: A doctor consults children during a leprosy screening campaign in village of Djougbo, near Adzope, on January 25, 2023. — AFP

## 'Ideology of hate' consuming India: Tushar Gandhi

MUMBAI: India's rising tide of Hindu nationalism is an affront to the legacy of Mahatma Gandhi, his great-grandson says, ahead of the 75th anniversary of the revered independence hero's assassination. Gandhi was shot dead at a multi-faith prayer meeting on January 30, 1948, by Nathuram Godse, a religious zealot angered by his victim's conciliatory gestures to the country's minority Muslim community.

Godse was executed the following year and remains widely reviled, but author and social activist Tushar Gandhi, one of the global peace symbol's most prominent descendants, says his views now have a worrying resonance in India. "That whole philosophy has now captured India and Indian hearts, the ideology of hate, the ideology of polarization, the ideology of divisions," he told AFP at his Mumbai home. "For them, it's very natural that Godse would be their iconic patriot, their idol." Tushar, 63, attributes this tectonic shift to the rise of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Modi took office in 2014 and Tushar says his government is to blame for undermining the secular and multicultural traditions that his namesake sought to protect.

"His success has been built on hate, we must accept that," Tushar added. "There is no denying that in his heart, he also knows what he is doing is lighting a fire that will one day consume India itself." Today, Gandhi's assassin is revered by many Hindu nationalists who have pushed for a re-evaluation of his decision to murder a man synonymous with non-violence.

A temple dedicated to Godse was built near New Delhi in 2015, the year after Modi's election, and activists have campaigned to honor him by renaming an Indian city after him. Godse was a member of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a still-prominent Hindu far-right group whose members conduct paramilitary drills and prayer meetings.

### 'We feel at home here'

At first glance it is like any other Ivorian village. But this community of 2,800 inhabitants, isolated at the end of a long track that cuts through an immense forest, is sheltered from the gaze of outsiders. And it still has 54 patients. "We feel at home here," Kouassi Assi, a father of four and mathematics teacher, told AFP in the small courtyard of his home. Further along the same road, Gisele Abena, 29, was being treated at the Raoul Follereau Institute, a hospital belonging to a French group of the same name.

The medical center has been fighting leprosy and Buruli ulcer, a skin infection, for almost a century. Abena emerges from one of the pastel-colored buildings grouped together on 42 hectares, whose open windows let in the tropical heat. She is in a wheelchair, as leprosy has eaten away at her feet. "I feel good here," said the mother of two. "There are a lot of us and I have made friends." Originally from Bondoukou in the northeast, she has no desire to return there and experience again the stigma local people imposed upon her.

"The leprosy microbe socially excludes patients," said Professor Bamba Vagamon, director general of the Raoul Follereau Institute. "It distorts the face, distinctive features. The patient no longer recognizes himself, nor do those who know him," he explained. "It is as if he no longer really exists. I find this all the more horrible since the patient retains all his mental faculties," he said. "Between 70 and 80 percent of patients have a depressive symptom," he added. — AFP



NEW YORK: This combination of pictures created on January 27, 2023 shows people walking their dog on February 2, 2021 (top) and January 25, 2023 (bottom) in front of the skyline of lower Manhattan and the Brooklyn Bridge in New York City. — AFP

## 'Drought' has New Yorkers asking: 'Where's the snow?'

NEW YORK: The idea of New York in wintertime conjures up images of Manhattan's Times Square and Central Park shrouded in snow. Not this year. The city is forecast Sunday to surpass a 50-year record for the latest first snowfall of the season. It is also close to recording its highest number of consecutive days without any measurable flakes.

The snowless streak has New Yorkers puzzled, some questioning their love-hate relationship with the white stuff. "It's really sad," said retired teacher Anne Hansen. "Basically, we don't like to see the snow. But now we're sorely missing it," she told AFP. The Big Apple usually gets its first dusting around mid-December. Last season it arrived on Christmas Eve.

A heavy load often results in "snow days," beloved by children and office workers who gets days off school and work. Kids grab their sleds and head to the nearest grassy slope. Adults cross-country ski around the main parks. "You stay home, you drink hot cocoa; it's beautiful and the dog loves it," filmmaker Renata Roman told AFP.

Joy turns to despair fairly quickly though, as the snow turns yellowy-brown, trash piles up on the sidewalk and trips to the laundrette become hazardous. "The snow is pretty to look at the first day, but afterwards it's dirty and I don't like it. It's slushy. It's nasty," added Roman.

Meteorologists define snowfall in NYC as snow that measures at least 0.1 inches in Central Park. Some flakes fell last Wednesday but not enough to count. The longest residents have had to wait for measurable snow is January 29, a record set in 1973, according to the National Weather Service (NWS). No snow Sunday will mean the longest wait since records began in 1869.

New York is also approaching its longest streak of consecutive days without snow. The current record is 332, which ended on December 15, 2020. Sunday would be day 326. Accuweather has called the period a "snow drought." "It's very unusual," NWS meteorologist Nelson Vaz told AFP, saying the global La Nina weather pattern was responsible for keeping colder fronts further north and west.

Up to 40 inches (one meter) of snow fell in Buffalo, New York state, near the Canadian border, in December, killing at least 39 people. But a few hundred miles southeast, in NYC and surrounding Atlantic coastal areas, the precipitation has meant lots of rain amid mild temperatures. Only 1932 had a warmer first 25 days of January in New York than 2023, according to Weather.com.

Scientists say climate change is causing winters to be warmer and shorter. "It's disconcerting," Hansen said of recent balmy days that have felt more like fall. New York has never gone a whole cold season without measurable snow. And with February usually its snowiest month, a white blanket could soon envelope the Big Apple yet. "That's what makes New York, New York, right?" said Roman. — AFP

## Indonesian leprosy survivor crafts limbs for shunned villagers

TANGERANG, Indonesia: When Ali Saga visited a clinic in Jakarta four decades ago, he watched as patients and health workers scrambled to get away from him. "The doctor suddenly shouted at the patients, 'stand back! this person is a leper!'" the 57-year-old said, recalling one of the most devastating moments after his diagnosis in the 1970s.

"They also roughly used a syringe to test my skin and I cried. My skin might not feel anything but my soul was hurt," the former leprosy patient added, choking back tears. Now he is using his pain to help other residents of a village on the outskirts of the Indonesian capital live a normal life after leprosy with hand-crafted prosthetic limbs.

After Brazil and India, Indonesia has the world's third-highest cases of leprosy—a contagious bacterial disease transmitted by prolonged close contact with untreated cases. Ahead of World Leprosy Day on Sunday, the health ministry said the country still



TANGERANG: This photo taken on January 18, 2023 shows former leprosy patient Ali Saga displaying a prosthetic hand as he compares it to his own hand inside his workshop in Tangerang, where he makes artificial limbs at affordable prices for people with disabilities. — AFP

has over 15,000 active cases, with more than 11,000 new cases recorded last year. The ancient disease, which causes disabilities and loss of feeling in reddish skin patches, is now diagnosed with a skin biopsy and easily treated with multidrug therapy. But Saga and other residents of Sitanala village—where hundreds of former leprosy patients have relocated to find solace—have been treated as outcasts for years and dubbed a "leper colony" by local media. They are heavily stigmatized by pervasive perceptions around leprosy, also known as Hansen's disease, with some Indonesians believing the affliction is a curse sent by God that can be passed on by brief contact.

But in a small, dusty workshop surrounded by fake body parts hung on white walls, Saga is chipping away at that social cold shoulder, sculpting artificial limbs that have been improving residents' lives since 2005. One of the neighbors to receive Saga's creations is 70-year-old tailor Cun San, who had a leg amputated in his teens and lost another in 2007. "I once thought I would never be able to walk again... but now I am so grateful I can walk normally," said San.

### 'No longer in pain'

Nearly 500 people who had leprosy now live in Sitanala because it was located behind a hospital that for decades served as the rehabilitation center for patients across Indonesia. The hospital made headlines in 1989 when Britain's late Princess Diana visited and was photographed shaking hands with a leprosy patient, challenging the stigma against the marginalized group.

Today, many in the village cannot find formal jobs because of their disabilities, and instead have taken on roles as street sweepers or rickshaw drivers. Jamingun, a 60-year-old driver, lost his leg when he was a teenager. For years he wore a fake bamboo stump because he could not afford a prosthetic limb. "It was painful and I still had to use a walking stick to steady myself when I walked," said Jamingun, who like many Indonesians goes by one name. But his life changed after receiving a prosthetic leg for free that Saga had made through a charity. "It feels so different because now I actually have a sole, it feels like a real foot," he told AFP. "And I'm no longer in pain when I walk." — AFP



MUMBAI: In this picture taken on January 25, 2023, Indian author Tushar Gandhi, who is the great-grandson of Mahatma Gandhi, speaks during an interview at his home in Mumbai. — AFP

MONDAY, JANUARY 30, 2023

# Business

## Cooling US inflation lifts hope for smaller Fed rate hike

### The inflation fight 'is far from won': Moody

**WASHINGTON:** Slowing inflation and a cooling property sector are fueling expectations that the US central bank can adopt a smaller interest rate hike this week, as policymakers assess current efforts to rein in prices.

As consumer inflation rocketed to decades-high levels last year, the Federal Reserve raised rates seven times in an aggressive campaign to cool the world's biggest economy and lower costs.

Since then, the interest-sensitive property sector has slumped, retail sales have weakened and wage growth has started to ease, prompting some Fed policymakers to suggest it may be time to slow the pace of rate hikes further.

"A slower pace of rate hikes will give the committee time to assess the full economic effects of monetary tightening thus far," said Moody's Investors Service in a report. Markets expect the Fed to adopt a 25-basis-point hike at the end of a two-day meeting Wednesday, slowing the pace of increases for a second time in a row.

This would take the benchmark lending rate to 4.50-4.75 percent, a level last seen in 2007. In December, the Fed announced a 50-basis-point hike, stepping down from four earlier, steeper spikes. "They are seeing the desired effects of policy," Rubeeela Farooqi of High Frequency Economics told AFP. "They don't want to keep on pushing until they get the economy into a recession," she said.

#### 'Far from won'

But the inflation fight "is far from won," warned

the Moody's report.

Although demand appears to be moderating and supply bottlenecks have eased, spending has been stronger than expected.

This has prevented inflation from falling more rapidly and suggests the Fed's "terminal rate" — the level at which it will halt its increases — remains uncertain.

For inflation to come down to the Fed's target, "we will need a little bit of softening in the labor market," Madhavi Bokil of Moody's Investors Service told AFP. This could show up in a slower pace of hiring and fewer vacancies.

Wages do not appear to be driving inflation up, but they do lend some support to consumer spending as households draw down on pandemic-era savings.

Salary gains remained high last year, while employers were reluctant to shed workers they may have struggled to find since the pandemic, keeping the labor market tight.

#### 'Soft landing'

On the other hand, the fact that the labor market has not slumped in response to tightening monetary policy brings optimism for a "soft landing" of the economy, where inflation comes down without triggering significant job losses or a major downturn.

"No one ever said that arranging a soft landing is easy, but our base case remains that if the Fed stops raising rates soon, the risk of a severe recession is quite small," said Ian Shepherdson of



NEW YORK: Traders work on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) during trading. — AFP

Pantheon Macroeconomics.

If the Fed raises rates too far, a "bigger danger" would be an unnecessary recession, he said. "However much the Fed might want to be sure the

inflation demon is put back in its box," dragging inflation below policymakers' two percent target and an "accompanying rise in unemployment would represent a policy failure," said Shepherdson. — AFP

## Qatar joins Lebanon gas exploration consortium

**BEIRUT:** Qatar on Sunday announced it had entered a consortium to explore Lebanese offshore gas in waters bordering Zionist entity, following a historic border deal last year between the two foes.

The agreement greenlights Lebanon's exploration of its southern Qana, or Sidon, reservoir following the signing of the landmark deal last October demarcating its maritime borders with long-time enemy Zionist entity.

Sunday's deal will see the gas-rich Gulf country's state-run QatarEnergy receive a minority 30 percent stake in two blocks of Lebanon's exclusive economic zone, according to Lebanese caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati. French company TotalEnergies and Italy's Eni will both retain 35 percent shares in the blocks after Russia's Novatek relinquished its minority stake in 2022.

Lebanese Energy Minister Walid Fayad and his Qatari counterpart Saad al-Kaabi, who is also QatarEnergy's chief executive, signed the deal Sunday, along with the Eni and TotalEnergies chiefs.

Under a United States-brokered accord, Lebanon and Zionist entity, which are officially still at war, delimited their maritime borders in



BEIRUT: (L to R) Qatar's Minister of State for Energy Affairs and President and CEO of QatarEnergy Saad Sherida al-Kaabi, Lebanon's caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati, Chairman and CEO of Total Energies Patrick Pouyanne, Lebanon's caretaker Energy Minister Walid Fayad and CEO of Italian multinational oil and gas company ENI Claudio Descalzi arrive for a joint signing ceremony for off-shore gas exploration in the capital Beirut. — AFP

October 2022.

The accord paved the way for Lebanon to begin exploration in the Qana reservoir — which is partly located inside Zionist entity's territorial waters — in return for compensation payments.

According to energy consultant Naji Abi Aad, "Qatar's entry into the consortium is above all polit-

ically significant." He told AFP that Doha's involvement "brings a political guarantee" as Lebanon grapples with deep economic, political and social crises. Lebanon has been caught in an economic quagmire that has plunged much of its population into poverty and is described by the World Bank as one of the worst in modern history. — AFP

## US trade shifts on COVID and China tensions

**WASHINGTON:** US trade flows are realigning on the back of pandemic shocks and tensions with China, but efforts to reduce interdependence between the superpowers have not brought a swift decoupling. While security concerns have escalated and US imports from China fell after Washington and Beijing imposed tit-for-tat tariffs, trade has since climbed again.

The numbers could rise further when 2022 trade data is released next month, pointing to how interlaced the world's two biggest economies are. But experts say tensions have left their mark in other ways.

"US imports from China are well below the trend that they were on before the trade war started," said Mary Lovely, senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics (PIIE). "There is definitely a turn away from China in US imports, especially or primarily in those goods on which the US raised tariffs," she told AFP. After the trade war started, the value of America's goods imported from China dropped from \$506 billion in 2017 to around \$450 billion in 2019. Bilateral relations are not the only factors affecting trade. The pandemic took a heavy toll as well.

Last November, China saw its sharpest drop in exports since the start of COVID-19, with business activity slammed by a strict zero-COVID policy. Also weighing on imports is an "ongoing shift in the US away from spending on goods," said Ryan Sweet of Oxford Economics.

Americans spent heavily on imported products during the pandemic, but "people are going back out and spending on services" as virus concerns ease, he said. This cuts into demand for goods and can help explain why numbers have not surged more.

#### Diversification, not decoupling

For now, US government figures through to November show total US-China trade could approach or hit a high in 2022. "Going forward, you're going to see more diversification," as opposed to a complete cut-off of shipments from China, said Sweet.

Auto manufacturers, for example, experienced supply chain problems during the pandemic. Increasing climate-related disruptions are also "raising the risks of overconcentrated supply chains in one firm or one geographic area," said Robert Koopman, a lecturer at American University and a former World Trade Organization chief economist.

Meanwhile, the US is trying to be more self-reliant in specific sectors like semiconductors. "The recent (Inflation Reduction Act) and Chips Act, and related sanctions are clear indicators of the Biden administration's efforts to decouple from China" in these areas, said Koopman. — AFP

## Sudanese tighten belts as economic crisis grinds on

**KHARTOUM:** As Sudan's economic crisis drags on, grocer Hassan Omar keeps busy cleaning packaged food items that have been gathering dust for months as his dwindling customer base make fewer purchases. "People can no longer afford to buy all their needs," Omar, 43, told AFP at his grocery store in the capital Khartoum.

"Purchasing power has significantly declined over the past six months," he said, noting that his sales had plummeted from 500,000 Sudanese pounds (\$877) to 200,000 pounds (\$350) per day over that period. His plight reflects Sudan's spiralling economic crisis which has forced many households to tighten their belts as nearly one third of the 45 million population face acute hunger.

Some 65 percent of the population live below the poverty line, according to a 2020 report by the United Nations. The country's economic troubles stem from decades of government mismanagement, armed conflict and international sanctions against the government of president Omar al-Bashir, who was ousted in April 2019 following mass protests against his rule triggered by biting hardship.

The crisis further deepened following a 2021 military coup led by army chief Abdel Fattah el-Burhan, which upended a transition to civilian rule and triggered cuts to crucial international aid. "We are trying to find cheaper alternatives to the food we normally consume," said Soaad Bashir, a government employee and mother of four. "My income is very low and expenses are too high," said the 43-



KHARTOUM: A Sudanese man chooses items inside a shop in the capital Khartoum. Sudan's spiralling economic crisis has forced many households to make fewer purchases amid a looming food crisis that left nearly one third of the 45-million-strong population facing acute hunger. — AFP

year-old who makes less than 200,000 Sudanese pounds per month.

#### 'Complete recession'

North Khartoum vegetable seller Al-Nour Adam says he has suffered heavy losses over the past nine months. "Much of the produce spoilt because no one was buying it," said Adam, who now offers a smaller range of vegetables in an attempt to cut his losses.

"It can't go on like this or I will have to find another job." Inflation in Sudan has eased over the past year, falling to 87 percent in December from 318 percent in the same month of 2021 but analysts say that is not a sign of the economy improving. "Inflation has simply declined because market activity has for months been at a standstill," said

Abdalla al-Ramady, economics professor at Al-Nilun University.

"There is no demand, so prices of commodities are not going up. It's a complete recession." Grocer Omar confirmed he had not raised his prices in months. The economic crisis has hit wide sections of Sudanese society not just the poor.

In recent weeks, hundreds of students staged protests over increases to university fees. "I was asked to pay 550,000 pounds (\$964) and my family cannot afford to pay," said Mohamed Hussein, a first-year engineering student, noting that fees had last year stood at around 50,000 pounds (\$87). Meanwhile, hundreds of Sudanese professors have been on an open-ended strike since January 10 to protest low salaries. — AFP



Business

# Boubyan Bank's net profits grow by 19% in 2022 to reach KD 57.8 million

## Recommendation to distribute 6 fils in cash dividends and 6% in bonus shares

KUWAIT: Boubyan Bank reported KD 57.8 million in net profits for the year 2022 with a growth rate of 19%, with an earnings per share of 14.2 fils along with a recommendation to distribute 6 fils in cash dividends and 6% in bonus shares. Moreover, the bank continued its precautionary approach by allocating KD 43.6 million in provisions.

The Chairman, Mr Abdulaziz Abdullah Al-Shaya, stated: "Thanks to Almighty Allah, we recorded outstanding results in 2022 despite the domestic and global challenges that affected the performance of banks and other business sectors in general."

Mr Al-Shaya stated that all of the bank's key indicators witnessed a remarkable growth in 2022, where the total consolidated assets of Boubyan Bank Group increased to KD 7.9 billion at a growth rate of 7%. Moreover, the total of customers' deposits grew by 6% to reach KD 6 billion, while the financing portfolio grew by 7% to reach KD 5.9 billion, and operating income grew by 7% to reach KD 201 million.

Mr Al-Shaya stressed the Board's full and ongoing support to the efforts of the bank's highly-professional executive management, stating that he valued their efforts towards achieving the good results, which could not have been achieved without the sincere efforts of the management and all employees of the bank.

### A Great Year of Achievements

Mr Adel Abdul Wahab Al-Majed, Vice-Chairman & Group Chief Executive Officer of Boubyan Bank, stated: "Last year was marked by many milestones and successes achieved by the bank in pursue of its expansion plans, aiming for further local expansion in addition to expanding regionally and internationally."

"The bank's market share and its ongoing growth reflect the high levels in customer service and digital excellence, which are the fruit of the bank's clear strategy, professional executive team, and continued investment in our human resources with special focus on our national cadres.", Al-Majed added.

Moreover, Al-Majed highlighted Boubyan Bank's achievements during 2022 and its success in earning many awards from renowned regional and international institutions in addition to the ongoing improvement of its credit ratings from international rating agencies, reflecting the positive role played by the bank along with its outstanding contributions to the Islamic banking industry in various areas.



Abdulaziz Al-Shaya Adel Al-Majed

Last year, Boubyan Bank made a significant achievement by receiving an upgrade of its credit rating from Moody's and Standard & Poor's, where the bank's "long-term issuer credit rating" received an upgrade to A2 and A respectively; such ratings placed Boubyan Bank in the lead of local banks and ahead of all Islamic banks rated by Standard & Poor's in Kuwait, while ranking second at the level of all local banks rated by Moody's and Fitch. Al-Majed stressed that this actually increased our challenges and made us more persistent to continue our achievements.

Moreover, Global Finance named Boubyan Bank the "World's Best Islamic Digital Bank" for the eighth consecutive year, owing to the bank's continuous achievements in this area as well as the role Boubyan plays in offering the highest levels of digital services in Kuwait, and its market shares. Additionally, Boubyan Bank received another 3 awards, namely, the Best Islamic Digital Bank in Kuwait, the Best Islamic Digital Bank in the Middle East, and the Most Innovative Bank in the Middle East.

Moreover, Boubyan Bank joined the list of Forbes Top 100 Listed Companies in the Middle East, which recognizes a decade full of achievements and successes that took the bank to the top of the pyramid of the Kuwaiti banking industry. This list, which is prepared on an annual basis by Forbes, is prepared against a set of financial criteria, the most significant of which are market valuation, sales, total assets, and net profits of 2021.

Furthermore, Euro money International named Boubyan Bank the "Best Bank for SMEs in Kuwait" in recognition of the bank's achievements over the past years in supporting SMEs, in addition to the bank's outstanding contribution to giving SMEs a foothold in the local economy by offering them many services that cater for their business needs.

### Products and Services

In 2022, Boubyan concluded its "Boubyan Accelerator" program, the first of its kind in Kuwait in collaboration with DIFC FinTech Hive. The program aims to accelerate the growth and expansion of all types of Kuwaiti tech startups, and aims to help them launch and accelerate their ideas. This came as a part of the bank's strategy to support them in their marketing efforts, accounting, and finance management, thereby enhancing entrepreneurship in the promising technology sector.

The bank continued offering special products and services to its customers, and launched many campaigns for the youths' special account, PRIME, along with many promotions, benefits, and experiences that are of interest to this segment. The bank also launched the National Day Prepaid Card with a special and unique design, accompanied by exclusive discounts and offers for this card. Additionally, the bank launched the limited edition of FIFA World Cup Prepaid Card, with many exclusive benefits and promotions throughout the year.

Furthermore, for the first time in Kuwait, the bank took steady steps towards reinforcing its sustainability approach by launching its "Go Green" initiative. This became the first initiative of its kind among institutions in Kuwait that allows customers to own electric cars in collaboration with BNK Agency for Hybrid Cars in Kuwait.

### Corporate Social Responsibility

During 2022, Boubyan Bank reiterated its prominent CSR leadership position and sustainable role in supporting the development and growth journey in Kuwait through several events and initiatives that highlighted the bank's local leadership; one of the most prominent initiatives was the "Speak Up and We Will Listen" campaign which highlighted the importance of mental health for the society, and its role in maintaining the health of individuals and their physical safety.

The bank concluded 2022 with the bank's organization of one of its most iconic CSR initiatives to support the youths, namely, "Kuwait Coffee Festival", which was organized for the fifth consecutive year. Additionally, the bank organized many sports events for both genders, the most prominent of which was "Boubyan Cycling Tournament" in memory of one of the bank's employees, engineer Alaa Maeen Al-Otaibi,

who passed away while biking almost one year ago. Also, the bank entered into a partnership with Padelln Courts for one year in order to help promote the game among Kuwaiti youths as the game is gaining grounds globally and regionally.

The 5th Noor Boubyan Campaign organized by Boubyan Bank in collaboration with the International Islamic Charitable Organization and the Dinarain Initiative succeeded in confirming the renowned charitable and humanitarian role of Kuwait worldwide, by achieving the campaign's goals of successful removal of cataract, along with other charitable activities.



### Boubyan Bank's Key Financial Indicators In KD Million

Indicator	In 2022	In 2021	Growth %
Net profits	57.8	48.5	19%
Operating income	201.4	187.8	7%
Customers' deposits	5,962	5,619	6%
Financing portfolio	5,914	5,513	7%
Assets	7,881	7,352	7%

### The Bank's Human Resources... Our Real Strength

Speaking of the Human Resources Group, the bank continued supporting its human resources and national cadres and was able to reach the highest percentage of manpower across the private sector which now exceeds 80%, and continued its enablement approach for women who now account for 26% of the bank's employees, with many of them occupying leadership positions.

In 2022, Boubyan Bank invested in its human cadres to improve their competence and sharpen their skills by offering them training programs and courses in cooperation with top companies specialized in human resources' consulting and development. This came out of Boubyan Bank's keenness to adopt leading international standards to ensure that the bank is ready for future challenges by qualifying its leaders and providing them with the necessary tools to sufficiently compete in the market.



شركة الصفاة للاستثمار  
AL SAFAT INVESTMENT COMPANY

## KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON 26 JANUARY 2023

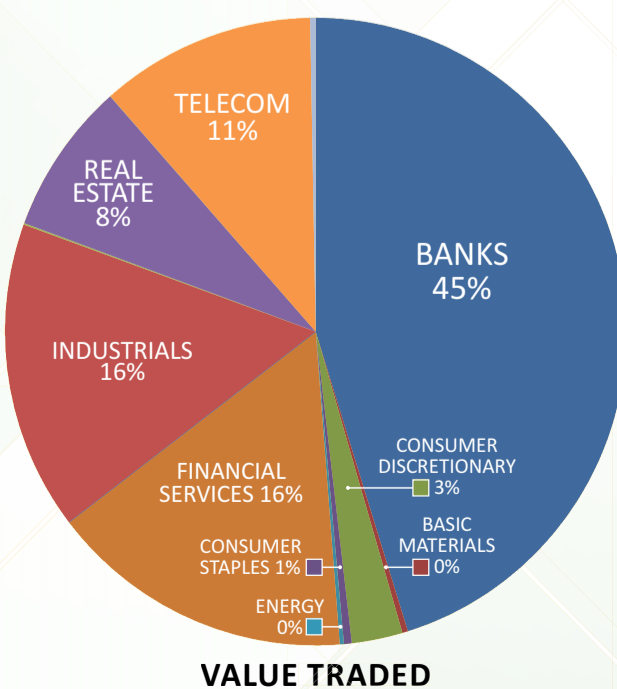
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Market	M. Cap (KD ml)	Last Close	WTD %	MTD %	YTD %	Quantity Traded	Value Traded	No. of Trades	P/E	P/B	% of Total M. Cap
Premier Market	37,781	8,113.10	0.7%	0.0%	2.1%	465,080,485	194,570,664	28,395	21.9	2.3	78.7%
Main Market	10,199	5,678.08	1.0%	1.5%	2.0%	565,758,296	78,677,989	23,680	46.2	1.4	21.3%
All Share	47,979	7,311.43	0.8%	0.3%	2.1%	1,030,838,781	273,248,653	52,075	27.1	2.1	100%

Sector	M. Cap (KD ml)	Last Close	WTD %	MTD %	YTD %	Quantity Traded	Value Traded	No. of Trades	P/E	P/B	% of Total M. Cap
BANKS	30,606	1,818.26	0.6%	1.4%	3.2%	251,780,869	123,518,532	12,993	23.7	2.3	63.79%
BASIC MATERIALS	767	860.67	2.0%	-0.5%	0.5%	1,018,133	794,880	335	5.2	1.0	1.60%
CONSUMER DISCRETIONARY	946	1,410.94	1.2%	-5.1%	-0.8%	36,630,624	7,231,050	2,675	27.7	10.6	1.97%
CONSUMER STAPLES	151	495.01	0.3%	3.1%	5.0%	2,753,422	1,109,761	307	0.0	1.2	0.31%
ENERGY	240	1,149.14	3.1%	0.9%	-2.4%	19,475,350	599,392	511	9.9	1.1	0.50%
FINANCIAL SERVICES	4,430	1,266.73	0.6%	0.8%	2.4%	386,464,274	43,294,304	12,747	76.0	1.7	9.23%
HEALTH CARE	220	443.69	0.0%	-3.9%	-3.9%	105	66,490	5	13.6	5.8	0.46%
INDUSTRIALS	3,469	984.02	1.7%	-8.8%	-6.0%	91,672,661	43,543,608	8,836	30.6	1.4	7.23%
INSURANCE	643	1,564.01	0.9%	0.9%	0.7%	559,616	197,486	92	9.5	1.0	1.34%
REAL ESTATE	2,557	1,184.27	0.7%	-2.0%	-0.5%	191,883,466	21,519,017	5,753	19.9	1.3	5.33%
TECHNOLOGY	10	691.12	-5.7%	-0.7%	-5.9%	244,220	24,846	50	0.0	0.8	0.02%
TELECOMMUNICATIONS	3,743	1,220.22	0.6%	3.3%	4.4%	44,079,126	30,635,496	7,317	13.7	2.1	7.80%
UTILITIES	200	478.95	0.6%	-3.2%	-1.1%	4,276,915	780,214	454	15.0	1.7	0.42%

Top Gainers					Top Losers						
Stock	last Close	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades	Stock	last Close	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
AGHC	386	15.57%	4,919,494	1,858,942,052	634	SENERGY	39.7	-10.38%	518,013	19,839	89
ABAR	129.0	15.18%	2,511,132	308,070,569	184	TAAMEER	22	-6.87%	1,534,388	34,209	78
TAHSSILAT	22	9.45%	122,142	2,284,457	9	ASC	95	-5.66%	244,220	24,846	50
NOOR	183	8.93%	4,939,191	856,104,459	353	ALDEERA	151.0	-5.63%	71,635	10,758	57
COAST	90	7.78%	3,026,030	261,966,462	160	ARGAN	87.8	-5.59%	137,884	12,288	47

Top Volume					Top Value						
Stock	Last	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades	Stock	Last	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
KIB	203	4.64%	99,423,827	20,316,962	1,594	KFH	833	1.59%	87,026,114	72,613,064	5,742
GFH	78.5	1.29%	88,105,542	6,950,692	2,226	AGLTY	594	1.71%	52,576,891	31,636,021	5,366
KFH	833	1.59%	87,026,114	72,613,064	5,742	STC	723	4.18%	30,648,622	23,075,356	5,296
KRE	110	2.80%	71,930,616	7,920,015	1,374	KIB	203	4.64%	99,423,827	20,316,962	1,594
AAYAN	142	-2.74%	64,116,343	9,486,284	1,055	NBK	1,101	0.09%	12,022,092	13,257,189	1,895



### Market Summary:

- Premier Market's weekly volume increased by 11% while its value dropped by 11%. Main Market volume and value increased by 27% and 38%, respectively.
- Premier and Main indexes continued the good performance during the week with a slight profit taking at the end. If this behavior continues we might witness restoring of previous peaks.
- Technically, the All Share index closed at 7311, with support levels at 7286, 7214, and 7162, and resistance at 7379. The Premier index closed at 8113, with support levels at 8064, 8013, and 7977, while resistance at 8184. The Main index closed at 5678, with support levels at 5675, 5641, and 5616, while resistance at 5696.

## Business

# French PM says no dice on pension age as strikes loom

## Unions and government both see Tuesday's protests as a major test

PARIS: France's prime minister on Sunday ruled out backtracking on a plan to raise the retirement age as unions prepared for another day of mass protests against the contested reform.

An increase in the minimum retirement age to 64 from the current 62 is part of a flagship reform package pushed by President Emmanuel Macron to ensure the future financing of France's pensions system.

After union protests against the change brought out over a million people into the streets on January 19, the government signalled there was wiggle room on some measures, including the number of contributing years needed to qualify for a full pension, special deals for people who started working very young, and provisions for mothers who interrupted their careers to look after their children.

But the headline age limit of 64 was not up for discussion, Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne said Sunday. "This is now non-negotiable," she told the FranceInfo broadcaster.

While unions have welcomed the government's readiness for negotiation on parts of the plan, they say the proposed 64-year rule has to go.

Calling the reform "unfair" France's eight major unions, in a rare show of unity, said they hoped to "mobilise even more massively" on Tuesday, their next scheduled protest day, than at the showing earlier this month.

### 'Even more people'

"It's looking like there will be even more people", said Celine Verzeletti, member of the

hardleft union CGT's confederation leadership.

Pointing to opinion polls, Laurent Berger, head of the moderate CFDT union, said that "the people disagree strongly with the project, and that view is gaining ground".

It would be "a mistake" for the government to ignore the mobilisation, he warned. Unions and the government both see Tuesday's protests as a major test.

Some 200 protests are being organised countrywide, with a big march planned for Paris, culminating in a demonstration outside the National Assembly where parliamentary commissions are to start examining the draft law on Monday.

The leftwing opposition has submitted more than 7,000 amendments to the draft in a bid to slow its path through parliament. Macron's allies are short of an absolute majority in parliament and will need votes from conservatives to approve the pensions plan.

The government has the option of forcing the bill through without a vote under special constitutional powers, but at the risk of triggering a vote of no confidence, and possibly new parliamentary elections.

In addition to protest marches, unions have called for widespread strike action for Tuesday, with railway services and public transport expected to be heavily affected.

Stoppages are also expected in schools and administrations, with some local authorities having already announced closures of public spaces such as sports stadiums. Some unions have called for further strike action in February,



PARIS: French CGT trade union General Secretary Philippe Martinez (C), next to Solidaires union co-delegate general Murielle Guillbert (C-L) and French Force Ouvriere (FO) union general secretary Frederic Souillot (C-R), speaks during a press conference on pension reform. —AFP

including at commercial ports, refineries and power stations.

Some observers said the unions are playing for high stakes, and any slackening of support

Tuesday could be fatal for their momentum. "They have placed the bar high," said Dominique Andolfatto, a professor for political science. "They can't afford any missteps." —AFP



BUENOS AIRES: German Chancellor Olaf Scholz (L) and Argentine President Alberto Fernandez shake hands during a joint presser at Palacio San Martin in Buenos Aires, on January 28, 2023. —AFP

## Scholz heads next to Chile, Brazil on Latam tour

BUENOS AIRES: German Chancellor Olaf Scholz headed to Chile on Sunday, part of a Latin America tour that also includes Argentina and Brazil, where Berlin and the EU are seeking a reset following the election of Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva. Accompanied by a delegation of business leaders, Scholz arrived at his first stop, Buenos Aires, on Saturday and met with President Alberto Fernandez. The two leaders affirmed the importance of concluding a trade agreement between the EU and trade bloc Mercosur, comprised of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay. "We agree to deepen bilateral trade relations and for this the EU-Mercosur agreement is of special importance," Scholz told reporters after the meeting. "Our goal is to reach a quick conclusion."

With Lula's inauguration to the presidency earlier this month in Brazil, "we are in a better position" to reach an agreement, Fernandez said. Germany wants to boost cooperation with Latin America and the Caribbean on "renewable energies, green hydrogen and responsible trade in raw materials," Scholz said in an interview Saturday with the Grupo de Diarios America (GDA) consortium of South American newspapers.

The visit comes as German business seeks new opportunities overseas following the economic shock caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and as concerns grow about a heavy reliance on China. All three countries—Argentina, Chile and Brazil—are rich in natural resources and "very interesting partners" for Europe's top economy, a government source in Berlin said. But the Brazilian leg of the trip will be the most closely watched. Germany, and more broadly the European Union, are seeking to reset relations now that Lula is back in power, following the divisive administration of far-right leader Jair Bolsonaro. On Monday, Scholz will become the first Western leader to meet with Lula since his inauguration. He will first meet on Sunday, however, with Chilean President Gabriel Boric and visit the Museum of Memory and Human Rights commemorating the atrocities committed during the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet from 1973 to 1990.

Although a deal was reached with Mercosur in 2019 following 20 years of talks, it has not yet been ratified, and has faced a wave of criticism in Europe, particularly among the agriculture and ecological sectors. This week however, Lula signalled a renewed focus on finalizing the accord, saying it was "urgent and extremely important" to reach agreement.

"We heartily support the efforts of the European Commission regarding the swift reaching of an accord with the Mercosur partners," said Scholz in his GDA interview. Ahead of the trip, Germany's powerful machine tool makers' federation called for the deal "to finally be implemented after years of going nowhere." "Time is pressing," the federation said. Germany will also be trying to ensure it does not lose ground to China, which is increasingly becoming a trade rival for European powers and the United States in Latin America. —AFP



## LuLu Hypermarket launches 'LuLu India Utsav'

KUWAIT: Lulu Hypermarket, the unchallenged retailing leader in the region, launched the 'Lulu India Utsav' promotion on 25 January at the Al-Rai branch. The promotion was inaugurated by the First Secretary of Politics and Commerce at the Indian Embassy, Smita Patel, in the presence of LuLu Hypermarket's top management in Kuwait, sponsors of the event, and a large gathering of shoppers and well-wishers of the brand.

The week-long promotion that ran from 25 to 31 January in all outlets of the hypermarket, offered unprecedented bargain discounts on all Indian products, including fresh fruits, vegetables, meat, fish, groceries, and other items. Wide ranges of Millets from the brand BLISS TREE was officially launched by the chief guest during the Event and announced the introduction of its range of products available in Lulu for its loyal customers. During the launch, Mr Mohamed Haris, Director, briefed dignitary about the new product and its benefits. The new products launched will be available in all the Lulu Hypermarkets for the shopping, he added further. In addition, special prices and offers were available on all Indian branded garments. A highlight in the garment section was a special stall dedicated to indigenous handloom garments.

Adding to the enthusiasm surrounding the 'Lulu-India Utsav' (Festival) were several exciting events and competitions aimed at attracting maximum interaction with shoppers and visitors. These included patriotic musical performances by students from various Indian schools, and a



lively music performance by the Indian music band, Bhangra. A special 'Indian Arts and Crafts' competition for students of Indian schools in Kuwait was also held during the promotion period. The competitions were divided into three categories - Drawing Seniors, Drawing Juniors and Crafts. The first, second, and third place winners of each category in the 'Arts and Crafts' competitions were presented with LuLu Gift Vouchers worth KD100, KD75 and KD50 respectively, as well as LuLu Merit certificates. In addition, each participant in the competitions received consolation prizes and participation certificates.

Another impressive attraction for all visitors to the hypermarket outlets was the 'India Wall', where an entire wall of the hypermarket was dedicated to exhibiting the artistic drawings and creative crafts of students from the 25 Indian schools participating in the Arts and Crafts competition. Also, as part of the promotional event, there were large cutouts and images of traditional Indian mon-

uments, as well as special selfie counters that allowed visitors to click images against iconic Indian backdrops.

However, the major highlight of the seven-day long event was the Indian Food Festival that highlighted the amazing variety of Indian foods and the diversity of Indian cuisines. Special Indian food counters and sampling kiosks were available at all branches of the hypermarket, allowing lovers of Indian food to relish the tastes of Indian cuisines from various states. Among the major suppliers and sponsors of the promotion were major Indian food brands, Eastern, Kitchen Treasures and Double Horse.

The LuLu-India Utsav once again underlines the hypermarket's keenness to highlight foods and products from various countries of the world, and its unwavering commitment to provide shoppers with the widest selection of quality products from around the world at highly competitive prices.

## Italy's Eni signs \$8bn gas deal as Meloni visits Libya

TRIPOLI: Italian energy giant Eni signed an \$8 billion gas deal with Libya's state-run National Oil Corporation Saturday as Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni visited Tripoli. European governments have been scrambling to find alternatives to Russian gas since last year's invasion of Ukraine saw deliveries slashed to less than half their pre-war levels, sending prices soaring to record highs and triggering costly state subsidies to protect consumers.

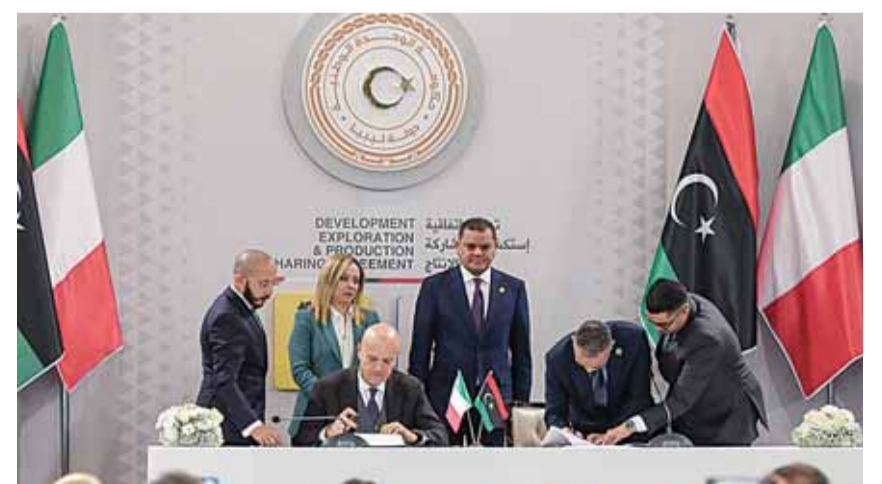
Eni said it was the first major project in Libya since early 2000 and involved the development of two offshore gas fields. "The combined gas production from the two structures will start in 2026 and reach a plateau of 750 million of standard gas cubic feet per day," Eni said in a statement. "Production will be ensured

through two main platforms tied in to the existing treatment facilities at the Mellitah Complex," 80 kilometres (50 miles) west of the capital, it added. "The project also includes the construction of a carbon capture and storage (CCS) facility at Mellitah, allowing a significant reduction of the overall carbon footprint," the company added.

"The overall estimated investment will amount to \$8 billion, with significant impact on the industry and the associated supply chain, allowing a significant contribution to the Libyan economy," Eni has an 80 percent share of Libya's gas production.

The agreement was signed in the presence of Meloni and her host Abdulhamid Dbeibah, who heads the UN-brokered Government of National Unity which is contested by a rival administration in the east.

Her visit is the first by a European leader to war-battered Libya since her predecessor Mario Draghi's visit in April 2021. Meloni also visited Algeria this week seeking supply deals from Africa's top gas exporter. During her trip to Libya, she was



TRIPOLI: Italian multinational oil and gas company ENI's CEO Claudio Descalzi (front L) and Libyan National Oil Corporation chief Farhat Bengdara (2nd R) sign a bilateral agreement during a ceremony attended by Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni (back 2nd L) and Libya's Tripoli-based Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibah (C) in the Libyan capital. —AFP

expected to discuss the issue of migration amid rising numbers of irregular migrants from Libya to Italy. Libya is a conduit for thousands of people each year fleeing conflict and poverty across Africa,

seeking refuge across the Mediterranean in Europe. Meloni's far-right government took office in October, vowing to stop migrant landings in Italy, which reached more than 105,000 in 2022. —AFP



Saudi conductor Raneem Azzouz, drives a high-speed train ferrying pilgrims to Makkah, in Saudi Arabia's Red Sea coastal city of Jeddah. — AFP photos



Saudi conductor Tharaa Ali, is pictured in one of the wagons of a high-speed train ferrying pilgrims to Makkah, in Saudi Arabia's Red Sea coastal city of Jeddah.



Saudi conductor Tharaa Ali, opens the door of a high-speed train ferrying pilgrims to Makkah.

# Women drive fast train to Makkah as Saudi workforce evolves

Driver Tharaa Ali takes her seat at the helm of a high-speed train ferrying pilgrims to Makkah, a beneficiary of conservative Saudi Arabia's bid to employ its booming female workforce. Saudi women only gained the right to drive in 2018, and until recently 25-year-old Ali's transportation experience was limited to cruising around her native Jeddah in the

was like a dream for me-entering the train, entering the cabin," she told AFP. "When you are in the cabin, you see things heading towards you at a very high speed. A feeling of fear and dread came over me, but thank God, with time and intensive training, I became confident in myself."

The proportion of Saudi women in the

cants for the driver positions, highlights an urgent task facing Saudi policymakers: creating jobs for all the women newly interested in participating in a changing economy. "The challenge has shifted," said Saudi economist Meshal Alkhowaiter, "from encouraging women to join the workforce, to creating a sufficient number of jobs to employ the thousands of Saudi

nated by foreigners, a boon to the government's "Saudiization" agenda.

Social mores don't always keep up with changing regulations, however, something the women train drivers have seen firsthand. Raneem Azzouz, a recent recruit, said that at the end of one trip to Medina, a woman passenger explained that she didn't believe women could do

vice president of the Saudi Railway Company. "This is evidence that Saudi women have full capacity when they are empowered to perform tasks like their brothers."

### Passengers 'thank me'

Not everyone is convinced. Mohammed Issa, an Emirati civil servant who recently rode the high-speed train to Jeddah airport, said women should focus on homemaking. "If the woman devotes herself to her home, there is no doubt that it will be a successful family," he said. "But if the woman is absent from home, and work certainly keeps her away from the home, who will play her role?"

Such statements appear to represent a minority view among Saudis, said Sussan Saikali of the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington. "There have been some comments from men claiming that women are now taking their jobs, but those comments are few and far between," she said. "We can't expect a whole population to support every policy in the country," said Najah Alotaibi, associate fellow at the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies. "But the majority of people are supportive of change."

As they settle into their new jobs, the women conductors are focusing on the positive feedback they receive, including from passengers who request selfies at the end of each trip. "Every time I finish my journey, when I get off the train and meet the passengers, they greet me saying, 'Thank you, thank God for safety,'" Ali said. "They thank me that it was a smooth journey." — AFP



Saudi conductor Tharaa Ali, is pictured at the train station.



Saudi conductors walk beside a high-speed train ferrying pilgrims to Makkah.

family sedan. But last year she joined some 28,000 applicants vying for just 32 slots for women drivers on the Haramain High Speed Railway, which plies the 450-kilometre (280-mile) route between the holy cities of Makkah and Medina at speeds of up to 300 kilometers (186 miles) per hour.

To her astonishment, the former English teacher was among the lucky few selected, and she completed her first trip last month. "The first day working here

workforce has more than doubled since 2016, from 17 percent to 37 percent. The statistic feeds a narrative of expanding women's rights under Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, even amid ramped-up repression of activists, making it a reliable applause line at events like the World Economic Forum in Davos.

Yet unemployment among Saudi women is high — 20.5 percent last year, compared to 4.3 percent for Saudi men. That figure, much like the flood of appli-

women entering the workforce every quarter."

### Winning over skeptics

Saudi women have traditionally thrived in select fields like education and medicine. Yet rules introduced in recent years barring workplace gender discrimination and easing dress code restrictions have created new opportunities. That includes positions as waiters, baristas and hotel receptionists that were previously domi-

the job until she saw it with her own eyes. "She said: 'Frankly, when I saw the (job) advertisement, I was totally against it. I said that if my daughter was going to drive me, I wouldn't ride with her,'" Azzouz recalled.

With the journey safely completed, the woman gushed that Azzouz had "proved herself" and that she "didn't feel any difference". The women drivers are "highly qualified and proved their worth during training," said Rayan al-Harbi, executive

## Montrealers shrug off the cold to dance and party at Igloofest

Snow may have been falling on Montreal's Old Port, with temperatures in the bone-chilling category, but that didn't stop the exuberant dancers during the city's first Igloofest after a Covid pause. In their bright-colored snowsuits, woollen caps on their heads and glasses of hot wine in hand, celebrants turned out for the first festival in two years. So what, they seemed to say, if temperatures were on the wrong side of zero. "The atmosphere is really cool, like being in a nightclub; you have to do it at least once in your life," said 34-year-old Laurent Maurenas, a Frenchman living in Quebec. "Yes, it's a bit cold at first, but you dance and you forget."

Zoe Charbonneau, 29, was attending her 13th Igloofest. "For me," she said, "the Igloofest is Montreal, and Montreal is my great love. "The Igloofest is the biggest event in my city, and I'm proud of it," she added, dancing the whole time. For this 15th edition of the festival, taking place every weekend through February 11, a



Fans enjoy a snowball fight after Igloofest 2023 in Montreal, Quebec, Canada.



Fans enjoy a snowball fight after Igloofest 2023 in Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

record 85,000 tickets have been sold.

Festival co-founder Nicolas Cournoyer said that shows that people need to get out. "It's therapeutic for everyone to come together like this," he said. "When we started Igloofest, it was to get people outdoors, to get them to stop complaining about winter and start enjoying it," said the 50-year-old Cournoyer, a big fan of electronic music. "When we started hearing people saying they couldn't wait for winter to arrive because Igloofest was coming up, we knew we had succeeded," he added.

### 'Surviving the cold'

"People come to any festival in a festive spirit, but with the Igloofest it's even more than that," said Heidi P., a Canadian DJ on the stage Thursday evening for a sold-out event. "From the moment people arrive, they start dancing to warm up. To come here despite the weather, they must really want to be here... It's great to see!" she said. Other DJs are just as enthusiastic about the crowd, Cournoyer said, adding, "The interaction between the performers and

the public is terrific."

Wearing a triple layer of clothing, bringing spare socks, downing strong drinks or eating a nice hot raclette, Montrealers embrace anything that wards off the cold. The best tactic, according to 22-year-old Xavier Gagnon: wearing his mother's old neon-pink ski jacket.

Montreal is known for the numerous festivals that enliven its streets and parks during the summer. Igloofest helps fill in the other end of the calendar. In December 2021, the festival sold 60,000 tickets. But in the end, a province-wide

lockdown owing to a surge in the Omicron variant of COVID brought a sudden halt to cultural events. This year, festivalgoers are making up for lost time, grilling marshmallows over fires in open barrels, dancing or taking toboggan rides under strobe lights. One elderly attendee, Armelle Milin-Yvinec, said she was thoroughly enjoying herself. "I think this is great," she said with a huge smile. "I came with my daughter and we're having a ball!" — AFP



DJ Dabeull plays music during Igloofest 2023 in Montreal, Quebec, Canada.



Fans warm their hands and roast marshmallows during Igloofest 2023 in Montreal.



DJ Heidi P poses during Igloofest 2023 in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. — AFP photos

## Lifestyle | Features



Suleyman Onur, owner of herbal shop "Joseph the Blind", established in 1891 is at work on December in Diyarbakir. — AFP photos



Suleyman Onur, owner of herbal shop "Joseph the Blind", established in 1891 poses during an interview in Diyarbakir.

## Joseph the Blind's healing balms for Turkey's troubled city

The Kurdish herbalist reaches for a sachet as fragrant as a wild meadow, garnished with linden, rosehip, slivers of dried ginger, cinnamon stick and a touch of mystery. It is the tea his mother, Hacı Nahide, makes to fight flu and colds. "It's the mixture she made for me when I was a kid. Winters were harsh," Suleyman Onur recalled with a smile, surrounded by hundreds of herbal teas, spices and aromatic herbs.

Each is bagged or tied in bouquets piled high on the shelves of the oldest herbal shop in Diyarbakir, a restless predominantly Kurdish city in Turkey's southeast, not far from Syria, Iraq and Iran. The shop "Joseph the Blind" established in 1891 has kept the nickname of its founder, a Chaldean Catholic of the Syriac rite whose descendants moved to Istanbul in the 1950s, ceding the shop to Onur's parents.

Its black lacquered cabinet drawers are from that period but its walls are relatively new. "The first store was

destroyed in 1977," said Onur. The Turkish government of the time decided to open up the streets of the historic quarter to traffic, which once had to wind through a mesh of alleys hugging the ancient black basalt wall running along Diyarbakir's central Sur district. The city centre had to be rebuilt yet again in the wake of violent clashes between Kurdish militants and government forces in 2015-16.

### Herbal treasures

Now 57 years old, Onur no longer remembers the original shop. When he took over with his brother Seyyaf after their father's death, the shop was already here, reinstalled in a new alley, far too cramped for its wealth of herbal treasures. A window counter serves customers directly on the street, saving space for Onur-belly tucked and shoulders hunched-to scoot around piles of thyme and jars of chilli paste. But the shopkeeper is expansive about

the virtues of the potions made from the herbs collected around Diyarbakir.

The region, framed by mountains and bathed by two rivers that defined ancient Mesopotamia—the Tigris and the Euphrates—was attached to the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century. Its granaries, along with those of Egypt, fed Ottoman armies in wars fought over the centuries against the Persian shahs and Russian tsars. "Diyarbakir has rich flora thanks to its geographical location, geomorphologic structure and influence of various climate types," according to Alevcan Kaplan, a pharmacological botanist at Turkey's southeastern Batman University.

A study by his university of the region's medicinal plants discovered 406 species and 226 genera, 56 of which are endemic to the lands around Diyarbakir. Many of them offer relief for respiratory, dental and urinary infections, as well as high blood pressure and stomach problems.

### 'Tested and proven'

"We have our own pickers," Onur proudly explained, adding that he sells "nothing that has not been tested and proven" to work. From morning to night the shop is bustling with activity.

Among the first customers, an elegant sexagenarian, sent by his wife, unfolded an impressive shopping list. A young man walked in to ask about the price of saffron (\$1,350 per kilo) and left shocked. Then an elderly woman waddled in to ask about a kidney problem.

The neighborhood's young and impeccably dressed butcher, Hurrem Yalcin, came in to pick up spices for her sucuk—a dry Turkish sausage. "We come here because we trust them. They are the only ones who know our recipe," she laughed. — AFP



Suleyman Onur poses during an interview in Diyarbakir.



Clients shop at the herbal shop "Joseph the Blind", established in 1891 is at work in Diyarbakir.

## Nigeria indie films seek acclaim in Nollywood's shadow

In an abandoned print works in a scruffy but bohemian Lagos neighborhood, an improvised cinema has opened, gigantic black drapes blocking out the light. Dozens of young people crowd round the screen on plastic chairs, ready to discover the new wave of Nigerian cinema. The

second edition of the S16 film festival, which took place late last year, brought together Nigerian filmmakers looking to do things differently. They are determined to break away from Nollywood, the powerful and influential film industry that has inundated Africa's market with blockbusters that generate millions of dollars.

Nollywood is driven by two things—entertainment and profit, according to Abba T. Makama, cofounder of the indie film festival S16. The films on show are far from typical Nollywood productions, boasting underground, political and innovative credentials. "With S16, we want to celebrate cinema as an art form, spotlight the new voices of independent cinema and screen movies that we would not see

anywhere else," said Makama.

### 16 rules

Disillusioned by his work in Nigeria's TV industry, Makama co-founded a creative collective called Surreal 16 with two filmmakers, C.J. Obasi and Michael Omonua. The collective, launched in 2016, seeks to promote diversity in filmmaking and storytelling. They are in stark contrast to Nollywood films which tend to be comedies and dramas about love and betrayal.

Makama was inspired by the Dogme 95 movement of Danish filmmakers Lars Von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg, who sought to counter Hollywood's dominant position in the 1990s. Surreal16 has

established a list of 16 rules to guide aspiring filmmakers. Among them: no marriage plotlines, no melodrama, no stereotypes, no religious propaganda or censorship.

Other rules concern technique, including a ban on shots of the bridge linking Lagos' wealthy Ikoyi island and Lekki, seen in almost all Nollywood films. It was initially "a joke" he said, but it was retained "to show that (Nollywood) films all look the same". The rules have been a helpful guide for this year's festival. The short film "A Japa tale" by Dika Ofoma is a deep and intimate dive into the life of a couple caught between family obligations and their desire to emigrate.

"It's a breath of fresh air," said 23-year-old festival goer Zee. "I feel represented here... I see more of myself in those movies than in the mainstream productions." Not all films are of equal quality or budget but the festival aims to be thought provoking and spark debate. "Ixora" celebrates blossoming love between two women—a taboo topic in the highly religious country where homosexuality is criminalized.

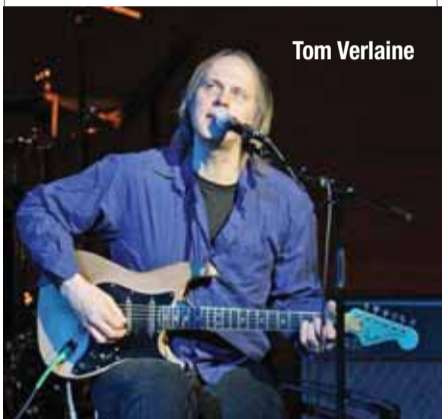
### Growing community

When the two women kiss on screen, the crowd bursts into cheers—a scene that would be unimaginable in a traditional cinema where films have to be approved by a censorship board. "The community of indie filmmakers and their audience is growing in Lagos and other cities in Nigeria," said Aderinsola Ajao, a film critic and founder of Screen Out Loud, a club that stages viewings in the city.

Away from the print works, more and more alternative locations opening their doors for screenings, from bars to residential buildings and rooftop venues. The community is also active online, uploading films to YouTube and creating groups for cinephiles on WhatsApp.

## Tom Verlaine, frontman of US punk band Television, dies at 73

Tom Verlaine, the influential frontman of the band Television which emerged from the New York punk rock underground in the late 1970s with seminal album "Marquee Moon," has died at the age of 73, his family said Saturday. The singer and guitarist died in New York "after a brief illness," Jesse Paris Smith, the daughter of Verlaine and punk-poet laureate Patti Smith, told The New York Times, without specifying a cause of death. "This is a time when all seemed possible," Smith wrote in an Instagram post on Saturday, alongside an old photo of her with Verlaine. "Farewell Tom, aloft the Omega."



Born Thomas Miller, Verlaine adopted his last name from the French poet Paul Verlaine, whose lyricism he tried to infuse into his songwriting, while playing guitar in a style both ethereal and aggressive. He went to high school with fellow punk icon Richard Hell, and together they founded Television in 1973 alongside guitarist Richard Lloyd. Its 1977 debut "Marquee Moon" is "one of the greatest albums of the punk era," according to Rolling Stone magazine. Almost 10 minutes long, the album's eponymous single illustrated the richness of a musical movement that inspired many groups, from the Ramones to the Talking Heads, through Blondie.

All went to the same punk rock citadel, CBGB, a feverish club on New York's Lower East Side where the best hours of punk rock were lived. Though "Marquee Moon" received critical acclaim from the likes of Rolling Stone, NME and Pitchfork, Television was only a minor commercial success. After two albums, the band dissolved and Verlaine released a dozen solos, while collaborating with many artists, such as Smith and David Bowie.

Tributes have poured in on social networks from fellow artists remembering Verlaine. "Went by the book stalls outside Strand yesterday thinking I'd see you as usual, have a smoke, talk about rare poetry finds for a couple of hours," tweeted Thurston Moore of Sonic Youth. "Gonna miss you Tom. TV Rest In Peace." Red Hot Chili Peppers' Flea said he listened to "Marquee Moon" 1,000 times and "will listen 1,000 more". — AFP



Cast and crew of "Mami Wata" attend the 2023 Sundance Film Festival "Mami Wata" Premiere at Library Center Theatre in Park City, Utah. — AFP photos



Director CJ Obasi poses with the World Cinema Dramatic Special Jury Award: Cinematography on behalf of DP Lili Soares for "Mami Wata" during the 2023 Sundance Film Festival Awards Ceremony.

Film Festival. This year, "Mami Wata" by C.J. Obasi, a film that pays homage to a water goddess venerated in West Africa, was selected for the prestigious Sundance festival. C.J. Obasi hopes his avantgarde, black-and-white production offers "a new way of looking at what African cinema could be". — AFP

Lifestyle | Features



Prize recipients gather on the stage during the 50th Angouleme International Comics Festival, in Angouleme, western France. — AFP photos



Swiss comic book author Martin Pauchaud poses after being awarded with the best book Fauve d'or prize for "La Couleur des choses".



Argentinean comic book author Sole Otero receives The Fauve Prix du public France Televisions for 'Naphtaline'.

# SWISS ARTIST PANCHAUD WINS BEST COMICS ALBUM PRIZE AT ANGOULEME



Japanese comic book author Hajime Isayama poses after being awarded with a Fauve of Honour during the 50th Angouleme International Comics Festival, in Angouleme.

Swiss artist and writer Martin Panchaud won the Fauve d'Or for the best album of the year at France's prestigious Angouleme International Comics Festival on Saturday. His book, "The Color of Things", tells its story using the codes of video games, with characters represented by colored circles. It was originally published in German.

Earlier this week, Franco-Syrian cartoonist Riad Sattouf picked up the festival's highest accolade, the Grand Prix, for his autobiographical series "The Arab of the Future". With the festival this year celebrating its 50th edition, a special prize

went to Japan's Hajime Isayama, author of the global bestselling manga series "Attack on Titan".

The 34-volume series has sold more than 100 million copies worldwide since the first album appeared in 2009. Fellow Japanese manga creators Ryoichi Ikegami and Junji Ito received honorary awards at the festival, which featured exhibitions of their work. Comic books are booming in France. Market research firm GfK said sales in 2022 for the first time accounted for more than 25 percent of the total book sales market. — AFP



Belgian scenarist author Thierry Smolderen receives the Goscinnny Award for 'Cauchemars ex Machina'.



Japan comic book author Junji Ito receives the Fauve of Honor during the 50th Angouleme International Comics Festival.



French comics writer Riad Sattouf poses on stage after receiving the 'Grand Prix' for his all work during the 50th Angouleme International Comics Festival.



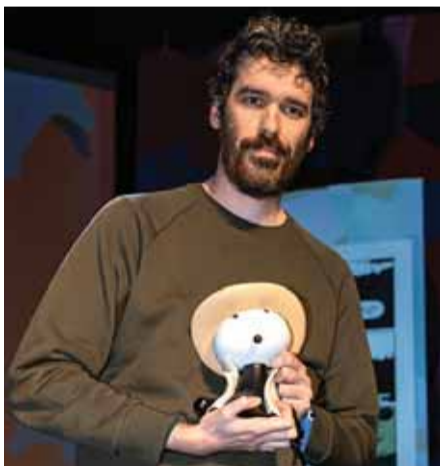
French journalist Philippe Manoeuvre (center) presents to French comic book author Mezzo (left) and French scriptwriter Jean-Michel Dupont the Elvis d'Or award for the best rock music-themed comic book for "Kiss the Sky".



French comic book author Manon Debaye poses after being awarded with the Philippe Douillet prize for "La Falaise".



French comic book author Anouk Richard poses after being awarded with the Fauve special du jury prize for "Animani".



French comic book author Nicolas Pegon poses after being awarded with the Fauve Polar SNCF prize for "Hound Dog".



Spanish comic book collective author receives The Fauve of alternative comics for 'Forn de Calc'.



Belgian scriptwriter author Mieke Versyp and Belgian comic book author Sabien Clement receives the Rene-Goscinnny Young Scriptwriter Award for 'Peau'.



Swedish comic book author Linnea Sterte receives The Fauve Prix du public France Tele Televisions for 'Une Rainette en automne'.



Japan comic book author Ryoichi Ikegami poses after being awarded with the Fauve of Honor.



People attend the Lollapalooza India music festival in Mumbai.

## India rocks to Asia's first Lollapalooza festival

One of the world's longest-running festivals kicked off in Mumbai Saturday for the Indian financial hub's biggest music extravaganza since the end of the pandemic. Lollapalooza's arrival in Mumbai is the first time the festival has been staged in Asia after branching out from its American origins in the past decade. Crowds thronged the Mahalaxmi racecourse near the centre of a city that, before the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, was increasingly becoming a popular tour stop for leading international artists. "I think it's huge-it's the first major American festival to come to India, I couldn't miss it," Narayani Anand, 29, told AFP.

"The live music scene is really bouncing back," she said. "It's almost like signifying the end to the dark days." Not everyone was impressed by this year's lineup, despite months of anticipation, when the festival's Mumbai debut was announced last year. The Strokes, Diplo and Imagine Dragons headline the inaugural concert

and Binjal Shah, 30, was among those who decided to skip it.

"The tickets were exorbitant considering the lineup. I couldn't justify spending that much," she told AFP. "There was mad hype before the lineup dropped. But the lineup was really sad. My friends who bought early-bird tickets were really disappointed." Around 60,000 people are expected at the festival over two days, organizers say.



Indian-born Canadian singer AP Dhillon performs during the Lollapalooza India music festival in Mumbai. — AFP photos

Lollapalooza was launched in the early 1990s by Jane's Addiction frontman Perry Farrell during the US boom of alternative music. It was originally conceived as a travelling festival that would explore non-mainstream music and culture. —AFP

## Sports

# Jamaicans ask after Bolt fraud case: Where's the money gone?

**KINGSTON:** It is the question on the lips of every Jamaican - and none more so than the country's most famous athlete, eight-time Olympic gold medal sprinter Usain Bolt. "Where's the money gone?" The investigation into a multi-million dollar fraud at the Kingston-based investment firm Stocks and Securities Limited (SSL), which has reportedly seen Bolt's \$12 million account left almost empty, is dominating discussion in the Caribbean nation.

So much so that one of the country's top dance hall artists, Gage, quickly released a song "SSL", whose chorus repeatedly asks the above question in Jamaican patois. True to the traditions of Jamaica's vibrant and straight-talking music scene, Gage's lyrics highlight the division between Kingston's affluent and influential "uptown" residents and the young people hustling in the city's poorer areas.

The song points out government efforts to clamp down on telephone and lottery scams from what he calls "ghetto youth", but notes those young people never engaged in such large-scale fraud as what is suspected in the SSL investigation. Finance Minister Nigel Clarke

appeared to acknowledge that sentiment when he said he wanted to see tough sanctions on the fraudsters.

"The discrepancy between sanctions for white-collar crime and other forms of crime must be erased. If you rob depositors, or you defraud investors and you put our financial system and our way of life at risk, the Jamaican society wants you put away for a long time - a long, long, time," he told AFP. Bolt is one of around 40 people whose accounts may have been impacted by the fraud. While his status as a national hero means his situation has dominated the news, there is concern that elderly investors may also have been left penniless.

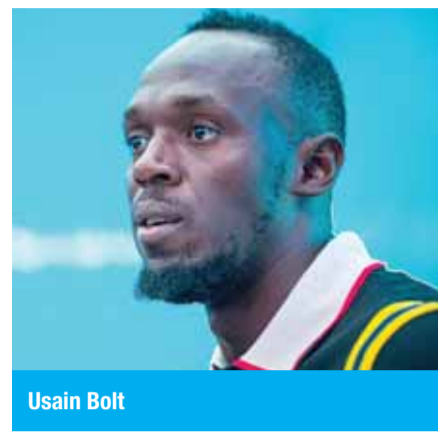
Clarke said he will ask the FBI and other foreign agencies to help with the investigations after replacing members of the Financial Services Commission (FSC) board. The FSC has taken over temporary management of SSL and appointed a special auditor. Jamaican police raided the home of a former employee of the company and took away documents, but no suspect has yet been charged. Those in the financial world are hoping that confidence in the country's banking and investment institutions will

not be damaged.

Business executive Dennis Chung, also general secretary of the Jamaican Football Federation, is confident the country can withstand the shock. "What we have seen initially is an emotional reaction, and that is understandable, given that it is people's money and it shook the confidence in the financial systems, but... the government moved quickly to ensure that regulatory confidence is restored," he said. Chung believes that there will be "no long-term ramifications" from an isolated case. "People will now continue to invest in stocks, bonds and securities and have confidence in the financial system," he said.

Prominent journalist and commentator Abka Fitz-Henley believes the fall-out will have limited political impact on the government of Prime Minister Andrew Holness. "The fraud at SSL appears to have taken place at the private sector entity while different political administrations were in charge of government," he said. Fitz-Henley says what is not in doubt, however, is the widespread sympathy for Bolt's plight.

"The majority of the population is rightly disgusted by the criminal act



Usain Bolt

which has seen an injustice meted out to a man who globally is the most popular Jamaican alive and there is extensive hope that he gets back his money," he said. "Bolt is box office in Jamaica and across many sections of the globe and he's regarded as a kind human being," he added.

### 'Embarrassing' for Jamaica

Bolt came from humble beginnings in Trelawny Parish in northwest Jamaica to become a global superstar, after smashing world records in 100m and 200m

sprints and dominating the Beijing, London and Rio Olympics. While his popularity is enormous in Jamaica, some, like two-time Grammy nominated reggae singer Etana, wonder if his lack of connections with the elite left him exposed.

Etana said that the case was "embarrassing for the nation," and said her attitude to investment would take into account the affair and the lessons she has drawn from it about Jamaica's class system. "Bolt is 'new money.' He was merely trying to fit in when he should have just joined up with the wealthy and connected, then no one would have touched his money," she said. "I would only invest in Jamaica if I could do so in partnership with a member of the aristocrats, and the moneyed class, no would dare mess with their money," she added.

Bolt has said little about the details of the case - only that the affair won't lead him to abandon his homeland. "I just want to say to Jamaica that no matter what's going on right now, Jamaica is my country and it will never change. I will always love my country and always do everything in my power to uplift this country no matter what's going on," he said. — AFP

## Iran Olympic skier flees to Germany

**PARIS:** Iranian Olympic skier Atefeh Ahmadi has quit her home country and applied for asylum in Germany, a Persian-language media outlet outside Iran reported Saturday, publishing an emotional interview with the athlete. Ahmadi, in her early 20s, was the only Iranian woman to qualify for last year's Beijing Winter Games. "I left Iran to reach my goal, but my heart is with Iran. I love my Iran. I love my people," she told London-based Iran International. "If I could, I would stand by the people so that we can reach freedom together," she said.

Iran erupted into protests in September last year following the death in custody of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini, an Iranian woman of Kurdish origin, after she was arrested for allegedly violating the Islamic republic's dress rules. Hundreds have been killed in the ensuing security crackdown, according to Norway-based group Iran Human Rights, while authorities say thousands have been arrested.

Ahmadi said she applied for a visa independently, and that applying through Iran's ski federation required "a house deed as the security deposit to the federation." "I don't think that putting the document (the house deed) in the federation's mortgage is the right thing for a national sportsman or woman" to do, she said in the interview.

She also cited discussions about prioritizing the men's team over women skiers. "They said because of this uprising and these recent events, the dispatches are reduced to a minimum," she said. "Priority is given to the men's team," Ahmadi also



Atefeh Ahmadi

Islamic requirements.

Iran ski federation chief Abbas Nazarian said Ahmadi's move "was a personal decision and seems to have been planned for a while". "She was one of the best in Iranian skiing and we supported this athlete in every way," he said Saturday, according to the Tasnim news agency. "Ahmadi could have been in the competitive environment for at least another decade," he lamented in the report, adding: "Federations cannot manage the personal decisions of individuals."

Ahmadi vowed to "come back strong" in a post sharing the video interview on her Instagram page. "My family suffered a lot for my skiing... I promise them that I will reach the goal for which I left Iran," she said in tears. "We must always be strong and fight for our goals," she added. Ahmadi is not the first female athlete to leave Iran recently. Prominent chess player Sara Khadem, 25, fled to Spain after taking part in an international tournament in December without Iran's mandatory hijab. In 2020, Iran's first ever female Olympic medalist, taekwondo athlete Kimia Alizadeh, left Iran in 2020 for the Netherlands. — AFP

complained of heavy Iranian security surveillance for overseas visits. "The security people who took our passports most of the trips always followed us, they even looked at the juices in our hands to see what we drink... what kind of meat do we have," Ahmadi said, alluding to



## Kharafi wins showjumping championship

By Abdellatif Sharaa

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Riding Center and national team rider Ali Jassem Al-Kharafi gave an outstanding performance and won the Kuwait International Show Jumping Festival after going through a differentiation round at 145 cm height with Masayel club rider Abdullah Al-Awadhi, as both went through the first round without faults.

Kharafi started the differentiation round first and completed it in 49.37 seconds and 4 penalty points. Awadhi on the other hand ended the round in 57.62 seconds and 6 penalty points, which enabled

Kharafi to become champion of the first international tournament in the current season. Deputy director general for sports for all sectors at the Public Authority for Sport Hamed Al-Hazem handed the winners their trophies, along with Administrative Director of Kuwait Equestrian Federation Safyan Bugammaz.

Ghanim Al-Marzouq won first place at a height of 135 cm, while Abdullah Al-Hamad won first place at 125 cm. Hazem said the tournament was highly competitive, and he was happy with the level of Kuwait riders in such an important international tournament in which riders from Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Jordan, Britain and host country Kuwait participated.

Bugammaz said Kuwait succeeded in organizing the "two-star" event, adding an international tournament will be held on Feb 2 in the 3-star category. The tournament witnessed the participation of more than 100 riders and around 150 horses, with KD 21,000 allocated as prize money.

## 10th Asian youth training camp held

**KUWAIT:** In cooperation with Kuwait Shooting Federation (KSF), the Asian Shooting Confederation (ASC) conducted the 10th Asian Youth Training Camp (Skeet) from Jan 20-27, 2023. The sole aim of this camp is to elevate and improve the theoretical and practical skills of youth shooters and national coaches in Asia. A total of 10 participants (7 shooters and 3 coaches) registered from four member federations benefited from this camp. The 10th Asian Youth Training Camp is sponsored by the Asian Kuwait Fund and International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF) Development Fund.

The 10th Asian Youth Training Camp was instructed by Jan Henrich from Germany and Carlos Benedict as assistant instructor. The youth training camps not only offered an opportunity to get world class shooting training to the participants, but also provided theoretical knowledge. An anti-doping course given by Dr Ali Al-Melhai and Mohammad Theyab from Kuwait anti-doping agency.

Other courses were Sport Science (Psychology)



by Dr Ahmad Alqallaf and Sport Science (Training Science) given by Dr Abdullah Akbar, whom both are academic professors from the Public Authority for Applied Education and Technology (PAAET).

Finally, all participants and ASC staff were invited by Sheikh Salman Al-Sabah and ASC Secretary General Duaij Al-Otaibi to Babel Restaurant for lunch.



## Tadhamon and Fatat in finals

By Abdellatif Sharaa

**KUWAIT:** Tadhamon and Fatat women futsal clubs qualified for the final of the URC league for the



2022-2023 season after Tadhamon defeated Kuwait club team 5-3 in an exciting and competitive match, while Fatat had an easy win against Fatayat Al-Oyoun team. The semifinal was attended by Kuwait Football Association member Fatima Hayat along with club officials.

The match between Tadhamon and Kuwait was highly exciting and competitive as Francisca Valeria from Kuwait Club scored first, but Tadhamon equalized through Maria Isabel, who scored again in the

first half. The second half was more exciting, as Kuwait's coach gave his players freedom to attack as he looked for an equalizer, while Tadhamon relied on fast breaks and moves as Isabel scored a third for Tadhamon and followed with a fourth. Kuwait cut the lead after Valeria scored. Tadhamon will play in the final for the first time.

Fatat did not face any difficulty in their match as they scored four goals by Dina Ali, Christina and Natalya Carolina.

## Christie, An win Indonesia titles

**JAKARTA:** Badminton world number three and home hero Jonatan Christie secured his first Indonesia Masters title Sunday, as South Korean star An Se-young roared back to win her second women's championship in Jakarta. Christie calmly dispatched unseeded compatriot Chico Aura Dwi Wardoyo 21-15, 21-13 in the 44-minute final in front of a roaring hometown crowd. It was an impressive victory for Christie, who last won a major singles title at the 2018 Asian Games.

He was aided by the absence of Danish world number one Viktor Axelsen and the early elimination of Japanese star Kento Momota, both previous winners in Jakarta. "Dwi Wardoyo is a good and persistent player. We trained hard together for this kind of moment," said the 25-year-old Indonesian ace, adding that winning in his home country made the victory even more special. "We are hoping that we can make more historic events."

In the women's singles final, world number two An made a stunning comeback to beat Spain's three-time world champion Carolina Marin 18-21, 21-18, 21-13. The 20-year-old South Korean jumped for joy and let out a triumphant shout after the winning point that secured her recovery from one game down in a tight match against the world number nine. "In the third game, I felt that I still had some energy. So I tried as best as I could for the remaining time," said An, thanking badminton-crazy Indonesian spectators that loudly cheered for her.

She last won the Indonesia Masters in 2021, held on the resort island of Bali in a bio-secure bubble because of the pandemic. Earlier this month An also won the India Open title but could only finish runner-up in the Malaysia Open. — AFP

Sports

# Mitoma magic inflicts more Brighton misery on Liverpool

**BRIGHTON:** Liverpool's disastrous season suffered another blow on Sunday as the holders were dumped out of the FA Cup by a 2-1 defeat at Brighton. Kaoru Mitoma's brilliant control and finish in stoppage time earned the Seagulls a place in the fifth round. Liverpool had led at the Amex through Harvey Elliott, but have now won just once in their last six games.

Lewis Dunk levelled before the break for Brighton and they were well worthy of the victory given to them by a moment of magic from Mitoma. The Japanese winger cushioned Pervis Estupinan's cross into his path, flicked the ball over Joe Gomez and fired high past Alisson Becker in the 92nd minute. Liverpool are languishing in ninth in the Premier League, 21 points behind pacesetters Arsenal.

Their FA Cup exit leaves the Champions League as their only remaining shot at a trophy this season. Last season Jurgen Klopp's men were on the brink of a historic quadruple, which included their first FA Cup triumph in 16 years. But Klopp is still searching for answers to halt their decline after a second defeat on the south coast in 15 days.

The German described Brighton's 3-0 win when the sides last met as the worst performance of his managerial career. Liverpool did at least put up a fight this time and will rue two big early chances missed by Mohamed Salah. The Egyptian did at least have a hand in Liverpool's goal as he released Elliott, whose strike had too much power for Steele to keep out.

Brighton hit back within nine minutes when Tariq Lamptey's powerful shot was deflected past the helpless Alisson by Dunk. The hosts were without Moises Caicedo after the Ecuadorian took to social media on Friday to try and force through a move to Arsenal. Brighton have already lost Leandro Trossard, who scored a hat-trick against Liverpool earlier in the season, to the Gunners this month.

But those absences did not show as Liverpool were left riding their luck for most of the second period. Ibrahima Konate and Fabinho were extremely fortunate to escape red cards for challenges on Alexis Mac Allister and Evan Ferguson. Alisson threw himself in front of Solly March to make a brilliant save from Mitoma's inventive cross and Konate did likewise to block from Ferguson. But Brighton's pressure finally got its reward when Mitoma struck his fourth goal in six games.

Meanwhile, Casemiro scored twice as Manchester United turned on the style to beat 10-man Reading 3-1 and reach the FA Cup fifth round on Saturday as Tottenham forward Son Heung-min ended his recent goal drought. On a day lacking major shocks, there were wins for Premier League strugglers Leeds, Leicester and Southampton but Fulham were held by Championship side Sunderland. — AFP



**BRIGHTON:** Liverpool's Brazilian midfielder Fabinho fouls Brighton's Irish striker Evan Ferguson at the Amex stadium on Jan 29, 2023. — AFP

## Pedri earns Barca nervy derby win at Girona

**GIRONA, Spain:** Barcelona midfielder Pedri Gonzalez earned his side a tense 1-0 Catalan derby victory at Girona on Saturday, opening a six-point gap ahead of Real Madrid at the top of La Liga. With Carlo Ancelotti's side hosting high-flying Real Sociedad on Sunday, Barca put their rivals under pressure to get a result and keep up with them in the title race.

Pedri netted the only goal from close range after an hour at an icy Montilivi on his 100th appearance for Barcelona, after replacing the injured Ousmane Dembele. The French forward limped off in the first half, pulling up after a sprint and asking to be replaced, a blow for Barcelona considering his superb recent form. Barca coach Xavi Hernandez said the winger appeared to have a quadriceps injury.

Despite the narrow margin of victory, Xavi believes his team is significantly stronger than when he took over in November 2021. "We have to be self-critical and improve in many ways, but we are happy, we have to look at where we came from," Xavi told reporters. "The change to the team and a lot of players is big, we have many things to improve on, but we're on the right path. "I think the (biggest difference) is the confidence of the players - when we arrived their confidence was on the floor."

Defensively the Catalans have been strong, conceding just six league goals this season and winning their last three matches 1-0 - they are unbeaten in 13 consecutive matches across all competitions. "I think at grounds like this you have to win, however you do it," Barcelona defender Jules Kounde told DAZN. "We can play better, but in these away games, against opponents playing well, winning is vital. I think keeping a clean sheet is key. The whole team works defensively, not just the back four. Everyone is working well."

The league leaders were still without suspended Polish striker Robert Lewandowski, missing his final game after a three-match ban. Dembele, who fired Barcelona into the Copa del Rey semi-finals against



**GIRONA:** Barcelona's Uruguayan defender Ronald Araujo heads the ball against Girona at the Montilivi stadium on Jan 28, 2023. — AFP

Real Sociedad midweek, was forced off injured after 25 minutes. His first years at Barcelona were hampered by injuries but since Xavi's arrival, the forward had been able to stay fit and firing. — AFP

## Bayern held at home to Frankfurt after Muani goal

**BERLIN:** Bayern Munich saw their lead in the Bundesliga cut to just one point on Saturday after Randal Kolo Muani's equalizer held the German champions to a 1-1 draw with Eintracht Frankfurt. The result was Bayern's third consecutive 1-1 draw, with the reigning German champions still looking for their first win of 2023.

Union Berlin's 2-0 derby win over city rivals Hertha earlier on Saturday meant Bayern's three-point cushion on top of the table had been erased by kick-off. Bayern lacked fluency early in a testy opening half, which saw both center-back Matthijs de Ligt and goalkeeper Yann Sommer pick up yellow cards. With 34 minutes gone, former Man City forward Leroy Sane settled his team's nerves by hammering a cross from veteran forward Thomas Mueller past the outstretched hand of Frankfurt keeper Kevin Trapp.

After the goal, Bayern rekindled their early season form and produced their best spell of the match, with France defender Dayot Upamecano going close to doubling their lead just three minutes later. Bayern continued to push for a second goal after the break but Frankfurt, who had only lost once in their previous 11 games in all competitions dating back to early October, looked dangerous on the break.

Eintracht coach Oliver Glasner brought on Japan international Daichi Kamada just past the hour and the change had an almost immediate impact, Kamada exchanging passes with Kolo Muani before the latter struck the ball past Sommer and into the net. — AFP

## Madagascar, Niger make CHAN history by reaching semis

**ALGIERS:** First-time qualifiers Madagascar and outsiders Niger reached the African Nations Championship (CHAN) semifinals for the first time on Saturday with convincing victories in Algeria. Madagascar defeated Mozambique 3-1 in Constantine before Niger shocked two-time runners-up Ghana 2-0 in Oran to complete the last-four line-up.

Hosts and title favourites Algeria face Niger in Oran on Tuesday afternoon and Senegal play Madagascar in Algiers three hours later. When the biennial tournament confined to footballers playing in their country of birth kicked off on Jan 13, no pundit mentioned Madagascar or Niger as potential semifinalists. But Madagascar shocked Ghana and hammered Sudan to win Group C before proving too creative for sluggish Mozambique in the quarter-finals.

Niger did not impress in a dour draw with Congo Brazzaville, but they then upset Cameroon to top Group D before scoring early in each half to see off Ghana. Algeria and Senegal will be favored to contest the Feb 4 final at an Algiers stadium named after South African political icon Nelson Mandela, but they dare not underestimate their rivals. — AFP

## Lens miss chance to go level with PSG, Marseille held

**PARIS:** Lens missed the chance to go level on points with Paris Saint-Germain at the top of Ligue 1 on Saturday as they needed a late equalizer from substitute Adrien Thomasson to draw 1-1 at Troyes, while Marseille had to come from behind to draw with Monaco. Lens appeared to be heading for just their second defeat of the campaign after a goal from former Liverpool youth Yasser Larouci put Troyes - coached by the ex-Australia international Patrick Kisnorbo - ahead five minutes into the second half.

Yet Thomasson, a January signing from Strasbourg,

came off the bench to prod in a rebound two minutes from time and earn Lens a draw at the Stade de l'Aube. Marseille could have moved above Lens on goal difference when they played Monaco in Saturday's late game but they also dropped points in a 1-1 stalemate. Outclassed in the first half, Marseille were fortunate not to be more than one goal behind at the interval, with Jordan Veretout heading Aleksandr Golovin's set-piece delivery into his own net.

The former Champions League winners were much improved after the restart and got their leveller within 90 seconds of the second half starting. Arsenal loanee Nuno Tavares saw his shot spilled by Monaco goalkeeper Alexander Nuebel, and ex-Gunner Alexis Sanchez pounced to convert the loose ball. Marseille could then have won it after that as a Leonardo Balerdi header came back off the crossbar, but their eight-game winning run in all competitions came to an end.

They were left furious at the officials' decision not to award a penalty for a challenge on Sead Kolasinac in the box in the second half. Coach Igor Tudor called it "unacceptable" and "inexplicable" that the VAR did not intervene. While they also missed the chance to increase the pressure on PSG, Tudor's team did at least keep Monaco at arm's length in the race for Champions League qualification.

The principality club, who sit fourth, remain five points adrift of OM with only the top three qualifying for Europe's elite club competition next season. Earlier on Saturday, Marseille announced that they had reached an agreement to sign Moroccan World Cup star Azzedine Ounahi from Ligue 1 rivals Angers. The fee for the midfielder is expected to be in the region of 10 million euros (\$10.9 million). Reims, whose Belgian-born English coach Will Still is only 30, will be defending a 13-game unbeaten run when they go to PSG on Sunday. — AFP

## Martinez fires Inter past Cremonese, Atalanta in top four

**CREMONA, Italy:** Lautaro Martinez shot Inter Milan into second place in Serie A with both goals in Saturday's 2-1 win at winless Cremonese, while Atalanta cruised past Sampdoria 2-0 and into the Champions League spots. Argentina striker Martinez made sure Inter bounced back from losing to Empoli last Sunday and David Okereke's 11th-minute wonder strike with goals in each half at the Stadio Giovanni Zini in Cremona.

The 25-year-old took his league tally for the season to 11 and moved Inter two points above fourth-placed Atalanta and champions AC Milan, who host Sassuolo in Sunday's opening match before the Milan derby next weekend. Simone Inzaghi's side, who were without suspended stars Milan Skriniar and Nicolò Barella and injured Marcelo Brozovic, are still 10 points behind runaway league leaders Napoli ahead

of Sunday night's clash with fierce rivals Roma in Naples.

"Today we needed to take three points back to Milan and we did that," Martinez told DAZN. "I want as many as I can get, and if I do that it means I'm helping the team. "We can only look at what we need to do because we've lost a lot of points and we need to claw some back, not look above us because 13 points was a big gap." Both Martinez's strikes came following great work from Edin Dzeko. Inter drawing level in the 21st minute when Martinez pounced to net after the Bosnia forward's fine first-time strike was pushed out by Marco Carnesecchi. And it was Dzeko's neat pass to Martinez in the 65th minute which allowed his strike partner to move to within two goals of leading scorer Victor Osimhen and secure a deserved three points.

Cremonese remain rooted at the bottom of Serie A after failing to win any of their 20 matches in their first season in Italy's top flight since 1996. The all-time record of matches without a win from the start of a season is 28, set by Varese in 1971/72 and Ancona in 2003/04. Davide Ballardini took charge earlier this month in an attempt to avoid relegation back to Serie B, but the veteran coach has his work cut out despite

another spirited display from his team.

Cremonese have lost 12 times this term and are nine points from safety with two of the four teams within closest reach yet to play this weekend. "We're a competitive team," insisted Ballardini. "When we manage to obtain results that match our performances we'll be happy."

### Lookman strikes again

One point above Cremonese are Sampdoria who were comfortably dealt with by Atalanta thanks in part to yet another goal from red-hot Ademola Lookman. Nigeria forward Lookman took his total in his debut Serie A season to 12 when doubling the hosts' lead in the 57th minute in Bergamo, nutmegging Nicola Murru before spending towards goal and rifling home a low strike.

Lookman is in the most prolific period of his career and has scored seven times in league and cup in January. "I've put more focus into the things that are more important, it's working for me," said Lookman to DAZN when asked why he had suddenly starting scoring so frequently. "Different circumstances, different situations... I'm in a good moment, scoring goals, helping the team, it's just the way it is." — AFP

# Classifieds

### Hospitals & Clinics

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300

Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9

### Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144

Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088

Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Ayba	22459381
Qibou Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

### Change of Name

I, Hojafa, holder of passport no P6320762 do hereby change my name to Huzaifa (as given name) Bohra (as surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name Huzaifa Bohra and also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. (C #2843) 30-1-23

## Djokovic equals Slam record



This combination photo created on Jan 29, 2023 shows Serbia's Novak Djokovic posing with his 22 men's singles Grand Slam titles. — AFP

**MELBOURNE:** An emotional Novak Djokovic called it "the biggest victory in my life" after sweeping past Stefanos Tsitsipas to win a 10th Australian Open title and equal Rafael Nadal's 22 Grand Slam crowns on Sunday. The Serb will return to world number one as he overcame a hamstring injury and off-court drama to defeat the Greek third seed 6-3, 7-6 (7/4), 7-6 (7/5) on Rod Laver Arena.

The 35-year-old climbed to his player's box afterwards to embrace his mother and broke down in uncontrollable tears, collapsing to the ground sobbing. His father Srdjan was again missing after he sparked controversy by posing with a fan carrying a Russian flag featuring Vladimir Putin's face following his son's quarterfinal win.

The emphatic victory over Tsitsipas capped a remarkable return for Djokovic to Melbourne Park, having missed last year's tournament when he was deported over his Covid vaccination stance. "I have to say this has been one of the most challenging tournaments I've ever played considering the circumstances, not playing last year, coming back this year," he said, wearing a jacket with 22 emblazoned on it.

"I want to thank all the people that made me feel welcome, comfortable, to be in Melbourne. "I try to pinch myself and really live through these moments, it's a long journey," added Djokovic, who was more emotional than usual. "Only my team and family know what we have been through in the last four or five weeks and this is why I'd probably say this is the biggest victory in my life considering the circumstances."

### 'Not going anywhere'

There had been an air of inevitability about Djokovic triumphing once more. After his three-year ban from Australia was lifted, he won the lead-up Adelaide International before reinforcing his status as an all-time great in Melbourne. His dominant win drew him level with Nadal on a record 22 Slams, two clear of now-retired Roger Federer.

The Spanish great made a second-round exit with a hip injury, one of a series of shocks which upended the men's and women's draws during the first major of the year. "I guess we always find the A-game on the Slams," Djokovic said of equaling his old rival Nadal. "This is what I feel both Nadal and myself probably still fight for. It is still what motivates us the most, winning the biggest titles in our sport and trying to keep up with the young guns. Tennis is in good hands," he added. "But we're still not going anywhere."

Nadal and Djokovic have won 16 of the last 19 Slams. The 36-year-old Spaniard though is set to slide down the rankings when they are released on Monday, in contrast to Djokovic. The Serb will dethrone Spanish teenager Carlos Alcaraz and return to the top for the first time since June. Tsitsipas will climb one place to three.

### Tsitsipas 'step forward'

Both men were back on a court that helped them rise to stardom. Djokovic won his first Grand Slam in 2008 on Rod Laver Arena while Tsitsipas burst on the scene in 2019 when he stunned defending champion Federer in the last 16. Moving freely with only minimal strapping on his troublesome left hamstring, Djokovic opened with a comfortable hold after being greeted by huge cheers.

He worked two break points on Tsitsipas's opening serve, to no avail, but kept probing and the Greek handed him a break for 3-1 with a careless double fault. Tsitsipas, 24, in only his second Grand Slam final to Djokovic's 33rd, appeared nervous, losing the first set. But he battled back into contention in a much closer second set as his confidence grew, earning his first break point - and set point - when Djokovic blasted a backhand wide.

But the Serb clung on to keep the set on serve and it went to a tiebreak, where his greater experience roared to the fore. Against the odds, Tsitsipas broke for the first time on Djokovic's opening serve in set three, only to relinquish the advantage immediately after a gripping rally. It again went to a tiebreak, where Djokovic once again raised a level. "I've had the privilege to play a lot of difficult, high-intensity matches, but I would like to say one more time Novak brings the best out in me," said Tsitsipas, who is still yet to win a major. "He's the greatest that has ever held a tennis racket, for sure. "I don't think there's any reason for me to be affected by today's loss," he added. "It is a step forward. I'm looking forward to scoring more points during this season, making bigger results, fighting for bigger trophies." — AFP

## Celtics edge Lakers amid controversy, Embiid outduels Jokic

**LOS ANGELES:** The Boston Celtics edged the Los Angeles Lakers 125-121 in an overtime battle tinged by controversy on Saturday as Philadelphia 76ers big-man Joel Embiid out-duelled Denver's Nikola Jokic as NBA rivalries took center stage. The league-leading Celtics came out on top in a game that featured 19 lead changes, snapping a three-game skid.

The Lakers led by seven midway through the fourth quarter, but Jaylen Brown converted a three-point play to tie it up at 105-105 with 4.1 seconds left. He went on to score 11 points in the extra session after LeBron James's drive to the basket at the end of regulation ended in a miss, with James and the Lakers pleading for a foul call after Jayson Tatum brushed his arm.

The call didn't come and Boston prevailed, withstanding a 41-point performance from James - who jumped up and down in frustration at the non-call before kneeling on the court. "The best player on Earth can't get a call - it's amazing," said Lakers coach Darvin Ham, who spoke of the

"agony" of losing such a huge game. "I don't understand it," James said, adding that he didn't think it was the first time a non-call proved costly to the Lakers this season.

Los Angeles star Anthony Davis said the Lakers were "cheated," and officiating crew chief Eric Lewis told reporters after the game that the crew had "missed the play." "There was contact," Lewis said. "At the time, during the game, we did not see a foul." Brown preferred to focus not on officiating or the rivalry but on Boston's quest to remain the dominant team in the East. "It was a much-needed win," he said. "We lost the last three, so we wanted to come out and get a win today."

Ham noted that any game between the Celtics and Lakers - who have faced each other a record 12 times in the NBA Finals-is "always hotly contested". Brooklyn Nets coach Jacque Vaughn said that "generational" rivalry made his team's crosstown rivalry with the New York Knicks look puny-an impression that only increased when the Nets notched a ninth straight win over the Knicks, 122-115.

With superstar Kevin Durant and teammate Ben Simmons sidelined by injury, Kyrie Irving scored 32 points, coming alive with 21 fourth-quarter points as the Nets held on, even after the Knicks - who trailed by as many as 19 - cut the deficit to three points with 3:07 to play. Irving posted his sixth straight game of 30 or more points.

Things were perhaps more personal in Philadelphia, but Embiid, who finished runner-up to Jokic in voting for Most Valuable Player honors the past two seasons, insisted there was no "rivalry" between him and the Nuggets star. "I love the big fella," Embiid told broadcaster ABC after pouring in 47 points to lead the 76ers to a 126-119 victory. Embiid also grabbed 18 rebounds to help the Sixers erase a 15-point halftime deficit on the way to a seventh straight win.

Embiid, who also missed out on selection as an All-Star Game starter this week, said the contest was about the 76ers testing themselves against the Western Conference's top team. "I think he's more of a motivation to go out and try to win the whole thing," Embiid said of Jokic, who led the Nuggets with 24 points, eight rebounds and nine assists. "I guess that's the only way I'm probably going to get that respect."

Elsewhere, Chris Paul scored 31 points and Mikal Bridges added 25 as the Phoenix Suns spoiled San Antonio coach Gregg Popovich's 74th birthday with a 128-118 overtime victory over the Spurs. Phoenix never trailed, but the Spurs forced overtime with a late surge in regulation before Bridges and Paul scored eight points apiece in the extra session and the Suns escaped. In Atlanta, Kawhi Leonard scored 32 points and Paul George added 23 to lead the Los Angeles Clippers to a fifth straight victory, 120-113 over the Hawks. —AFP



BOSTON: Jayson Tatum of the Boston Celtics defends LeBron James of the Los Angeles Lakers at TD Garden on Jan 28, 2023. —AFP