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Premier conveys leadership's greetings to MoI personnel

MPs call for permanent residency for children of Kuwaiti women



KUWAIT: HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah meets interior ministry officials and security personnel guarding celebrations of the national days on Arabian Gulf Street on Feb 28, 2023.

By B Izzak & KUNA

KUWAIT: HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah conveyed to interior ministry personnel the greetings and appreciations of HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, stressing their work is a source of pride.

In a press statement, the interior ministry's general department of public relations and security media said this came during the premier's visit to security personnel guarding celebrations of the national days on Arabian Gulf Street. HH Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf was received by Interior Ministry Undersecretary Lt Gen Anwar Al-Barjas and a number of security commanders. HH the PM also expressed his appreciation to the interior ministry and all bodies that secured the national celebrations.

During the visit, HH Sheikh Ahmad was briefed

on the security arrangements and the efforts of the interior ministry in securing the national celebrations. He was also briefed on the security plan and the mechanism of work of the field operations room and traffic surveillance cameras.

Meanwhile, five lawmakers submitted a draft law calling to grant children of Kuwaiti women married to foreign husbands a number of key benefits including permanent residency, in addition to free healthcare and education, a lawmaker said on Wednesday. MP Jenan Bushehri said the draft legislation also calls to grant children of Kuwaiti women the right to set up companies without a Kuwaiti partner and the right to own real estate inherited from their mothers.

Kuwaiti laws do not permit children of Kuwaiti women married to foreign husbands citizenship and treats them almost like foreigners. They also require them to have a sponsor for their residency. But Bushehri said the new proposed bill calls to grant

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News in brief

Traffic deaths at 4-year low

KUWAIT: The interior ministry's traffic department on Wednesday released statistics for 2022, which showed 322 people died in traffic accidents, a four-year low, while KD 73.5 million was collected in traffic fines. Total traffic violations reached 4.2 million, of which 1.4 million were direct and 2.8 million indirect. Moreover, 5,076 vehicles and 798 motorbikes were impounded. The number of deaths from traffic accidents was 403 in 2018, 334 in 2019, 352 in 2020 and 323 in 2021. (See Page 2)

More Iran schoolgirl poisonings

TEHRAN: Iran's president stepped in after more than 100 students were hospitalized Wednesday, the latest in a spate of poisonings at girls' schools that has gripped the country. At least 10 girls' schools were targeted in the latest suspected attacks on Wednesday, seven in the northwestern city of Ardabil and three in the capital, media reports said. The president's website said Ebrahim Raisi had assigned Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi to provide "continuous information on the results of the investigation" into the attacks. — AFP

TikTok to add screen time limits

PARIS: TikTok on Wednesday said it would introduce automatic daily screen time limits of one hour for accounts belonging to under-18s, as the social media platform faces criticism over its addictiveness among young users. Teenagers will have to enter a passcode to continue watching after 60 minutes and those aged below 13 require a parent or guardian to set or enter a passcode to release an additional 30 minutes. — AFP (See Page 8)

Head-on train crash kills 36 in Greece

LARISSA, Greece: A head-on collision between two trains in Greece killed 36 people, with many more still missing on Wednesday after the accident on a route plagued by years of safety warnings. In Greece's worst train tragedy in decades, two carriages were crushed and a third engulfed in fire when a passenger train and freight train collided in the central city of Larissa.

At least 85 people were injured in the accident, which left a tangled

mess of metal and shattered glass in a field. Six of them are in intensive care. "I've never seen anything like this in my entire life," said one rescue worker, emerging from the wreckage. "It's tragic. Five hours later, we are finding bodies." In some cases, passengers are being identified from body parts, volunteer fireman Vassilis Iliopoulos told Skai TV, warning that the death toll would rise.

"It was the train of terror," Pavlos Aslanidis, whose son is missing along with a friend, told reporters. Greece's transport minister submitted his resignation just hours after the accident. "When something so tragic happens, we cannot continue as if nothing had happened," Kostas Karamanlis said in a public statement.

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LARISSA, Greece: Aerial photo taken on March 1, 2023 shows emergency crews searching the wreckage after a train accident in the Tempi Valley. — AFP

UN chief in 'solidarity' visit to Iraq

BAGHDAD: UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres urged Iraq to "break cycles of instability and fragility" after talks with senior officials in Baghdad on Wednesday, following a drawn-out political crisis in the war-torn country. The UN chief's visit comes as Iraq, blighted by corruption and broken infrastructure, prepares to mark the 20th anniversary of the US-

led invasion that toppled longtime dictator Saddam Hussein.

Guterres said he wanted to demonstrate "solidarity" with Iraq "in the consolidation of its democratic institutions and advancing peace". He said he also wanted to express his "confidence that Iraqis will be able to overcome the difficulties and challenges they still face through an open and inclusive dialogue". "I am here in Baghdad with a measure of hope: Hope that Iraq can break cycles of instability and fragility; hope that it can set a sustainable course towards greater prosperity, freedom, and peace," said Guterres during a joint

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BAGHDAD: Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani meets UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on March 1, 2023. — AFP

Wars, poverty fuel spike in Iraq child labor

BAGHDAD: Haydar Karar spends eight hours a day tidying a carpentry shop and lugging wooden beams, forced like many other Iraqi children into work by poverty and conflict. Now 13, Karar has been working with his carpenter uncle in the capital

Baghdad since the age of eight, his childhood marred by the troubles that have ravaged his country. "I was expelled from school because of a fight," he said. "The school didn't want to take me back."

His family had decided to find work for him "to build my future and marry me", added the petite boy, who works from 8:00 am until 5:00 pm every day with a one-hour lunch break. He leans over a wooden armchair to sand it, and then moves around metal trestles before carrying large planks of wood about twice his size. Karar's weekly pay, the equivalent of less than \$20, covers his own needs as well as those of his sister. They both live with another uncle.

Children in Iraq work as apprentice mechanics and rubbish collectors, in shisha cafes or hair salons, and washing car windows and selling paper tissues by the roadside. "Child labor is constantly rising," said Hassan Abdel Saheb, in charge of the portfolio at the Iraqi labor and social affairs ministry, citing "wars, conflict and displacement".

Despite its oil riches, nearly one-third of Iraq's 42 million inhabitants live in poverty, according to the United Nations. The country has struggled to regain stability after decades of war and a brutal campaign against the Islamic State (IS) group, which Baghdad

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Interior ministry launches the 36th Gulf Traffic Week

Project to link traffic violations in Kuwait and UAE



KUWAIT: Traffic police officers observe the traffic around Kuwait. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



KUWAIT: Officers pose for a group photo after the conference on Wednesday.

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: The General Directorate of Security Relations and Media of the Ministry of Interior held a press conference on Wednesday to announce the 36th Gulf Traffic Week under the slogan "Your life is a trust". Director General of the General Traffic Department Maj Gen Youssef Al-Khadda noted that the project to link traffic violations in Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates has begun, and soon violations will be linked with the rest of the Gulf countries.

Khadda added that in 2018, the traffic department submitted a proposal to the National Assembly to amend the traffic law in line with global and Gulf updates and changes to reduce the rate of traffic violations that lead to accidents resulting in injuries and deaths. "I hope members of the National Assembly pass the law to implement a deterrent law. Since 1976, salaries have changed, but traffic tickets remain at KD 15. The deterrent



Major Abdullah Bu Hasan

Major General Youssef Al-Khadda

penalties must be toughened and amount of fines must be increased," he said.

On the other hand, Khadda said citizens are protected from unfair violations. "There are cameras on traffic officers' cars that monitor not only accidents, but also the traffic police officer, and

there are investigators to ensure the rights of citizens are upheld," he added.

Maj Abdullah Bu Hasan revealed traffic statistics for 2022, which showed traffic accidents and deaths decreased in 2022 despite the increase in the number of vehicles, and this indicates awareness among drivers in Kuwait. "The total number of valid driving licenses is 1,655,408. The total number of vehicles is 2,422,223," he said, pointing out there were a total of 4,237,454 traffic violations in 2022 and 322 deaths.

He added that in 2022, the most prominent violations were speeding violations and running red traffic lights. "There were 1,384,842 direct violations and 2,852,612 indirect. The value of the collected violations is KD 73,576,375. The total number of impounded vehicles is 5,076 and 798 bikes," Bu Hasan said.

Regarding traffic developments, he said front, inside and rear cameras were installed in traffic patrol vehicles, recording video and audio. He said

205 surveillance cameras were installed, 161 variable message signs, 18 mobile speed cameras, 7 mobile surveillance cameras, 355 monitoring cameras and 20 P2P speed cameras were also installed.

In addition, new mechanisms have been developed, where 200 new patrol cars were added, with 800 current patrol vehicles, along with new 300 motorbikes for a total of 399. Bu Hasan said traffic violations from newly-installed sixth generation cameras from Jan 1 to Feb 27 are as follows - 3,394 seatbelt violations and 2,083 for phone usage.

The conference revealed the schedule of activities for Gulf Traffic Week, whose opening ceremony will be at Shaheed Park on March 5, those injured in traffic accidents will be visited at Razi Hospital on March 6, an exhibition will be held on March 6-10 at The Avenues mall, and traffic police officers will receive travelers on March 7 at Kuwait Airways' T4 terminal. In addition, a lecture will be held at Kuwait University on March 8 and the closing ceremony will be on March 9 at Millennium Hotel.



Zain 'platinum sponsor' of Ghamanda challenge

KUWAIT: The Ghamanda (Puzzle) challenge is a joint cooperation between the Kuwait Touristic Map project and the puzzle solving game, with platinum sponsorship by Zain. The aim is to activate facilities and forgotten touristic spots in Kuwait City and instill cultural and heritage information forgotten by some people and not transferred to the new generation.

This will be through several puzzles and challenges connected with each other, linking the places with a common story. Participants must solve them in sequence to solve the puzzle, so information in the puzzles will be instilled in the minds of participants following the search for correct information.

Contestants go through eras Kuwait City witnessed, so time takes them back to the era of pearl diving, then to the boom years until our current time, so participants will gain a unique experience about Kuwait's past and present. The challenge is between 20 teams of four persons each to solve the puzzle. Their physical and mental abilities vary to solve the puzzles, as the team should not only be physically fit to win - rather there should be a balance between intelligence and fitness.

The motivational aspects to go through this challenge are several prizes to be presented to participants. As for the first three places, each will get the following: The first team will win a cash prize of KD 1,000, while second and third place teams will win valuable prizes from sponsors with an estimated value of KD 1,500.

Zain sponsors this distinguished challenge as part of its keenness on supporting various creative works in the society, especially those that augment the original patriotic identity and contribute to introducing Kuwait's history and culture to new generations through creative means. The company is interested in supporting entities that provide a suitable environment for the next generation according to the highest standards, and will not spare any effort to support any entity that has an idea and vision characterized with creativity that serves the society.

Some business owners, and organizations offer part-time opportunities

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: To develop a productive society capable of building a strong state, some business owners and organizations provide internships and part-time job opportunities for students looking forward to working at an early age. Students learn new skills and prepare themselves for the future as entrepreneurs or employees who can serve the society. Not only students benefit from taking part in such opportunities; the companies that provide these opportunities to prepare youngsters to become skillful and experienced in various fields benefit as well. This supports the company's productivity and sheds light on its social responsibility.

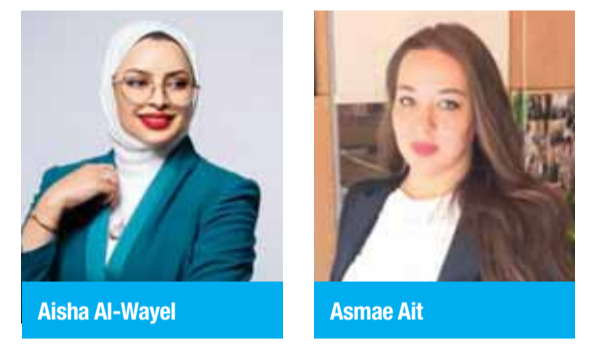
To build a promising future and prepare individuals capable of shaping an advanced society, Aisha Al-Wayel, CEO of a private company in Kuwait, shared with Kuwait Times the type of work she does to encourage hiring students for part time jobs or internships. "As a company that manages projects and human resources for other companies, we suggest providing opportunities for students. The companies usually let students work for a period of one to three months and earn work experience. Depending on the job offer during this period, the students focus on

practicing different skills such as marketing, negotiating, selling, etc," she said.

Aside from their academic degrees, which represent an essential part that prepares each individual to take part in serving humanity, Wayel suggests providing part-time jobs for students to empower their practical skills that go hand in hand with their academic knowledge. "During their time at work, students will meet people and get an idea about the work environment. As soon as they graduate, they become ready to move from their academic life as students to practical life," she said.

Public Information Officer, Program Communication and Advocacy at United Nations Resident Coordinator Office in Kuwait Asmae Ait emphasized on the significance of social responsibility to give students the opportunity to experience working and its role in preparing capable individuals. "The United Nations in Kuwait encourages internships and have always been supporting youth in developing their skills, knowledge and innovation to better serve their communities to achieve their country's aspirations and sustainable development for all," she said.

In addition to societal advantages, giving such opportunities to students eases their life journey after graduating. Finding a job or starting one's own business becomes a real challenge with many competitors in almost every field. However, success is achievable for those who have the capabilities to overcome the obstacles and have the skills and experience to stand out among others. Thus, it encourages students and fresh graduates to join a UN internship to prove their



Aisha Al-Wayel

Asmae Ait

worthiness and ability to compete with others.

"Internships give you a firsthand impression of the day-to-day working environment of the United Nations. You will be given a real chance to work in a diverse environment and dynamic workplace. As part of our team, working directly with outstanding and inspiring professionals exposes you to high-profile conferences, participating in meetings and contributing to analytical work, as well as learning about the organizational policy of the United Nations," Ait said.

After graduation, students who work at a certain company or organization have better chances of being officially hired at those places due to the skills they have acquired, unlike fresh graduates who are completely new to the work environment and are more likely to be nervous about their new job, which may badly affect their performance. According to Ait, interns are given the chance to avoid such pressure. "Initially, interns take on responsibilities they can shoulder, leading to growth potential and developing their skill," she pointed out.

KEPS denounces environmental abuses

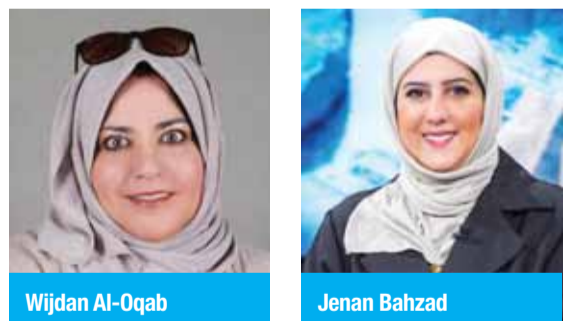
By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Environment Protection Society (KEPS) denounced environmental abuses and failure to maintain environmental discipline during the national holidays by some people. KEPS Chairman Wijdan Al-Oqab stressed in a press statement that disciplined environmental behavior protects the environment and its components, including natural habitats and fungal organisms.

She pointed out that while Kuwait is below the water poverty level, many people during the national celebrations wasted a large amount of water - sufficient for 14,000 housing units for a day, according to a recent report by the ministry of electricity and water. Oqab explained this wastage is linked to many sectors, such as pressure on drainage networks, stressing the need to pay attention to preserving these resources and not wasting them on national holidays.

"Every year during the national holidays, we face a water war on the streets, which only receives widespread criticism without the law being applied on violators. It is worth noting that the law specifies a KD 500 fine for wasting water to wash streets or cars. This can be applied to this wastage, or new laws can be enacted to regulate the celebrations of national holidays," she said.

Director of Programs and Activities at KEPS Jenan Bahzad said: "Kuwait suffers from water scarcity and faces severe pressure over water con-



Wijdan Al-Oqab

Jenan Bahzad

sumption. It relies on desalination of seawater to meet the demand for freshwater. Article 2 of the environmental protection law (42 of 2014) states the provisions of the law apply to all public and private entities and individuals. Consumption of freshwater economically based on protecting the environment and not depleting natural resources is one of the basic principles of environmental knowledge. This is because water is the backbone of life and one of the challenges facing the country, especially with the increase in population and urban growth."

Bahzad indicated the educational system must focus on sufficient awareness of all the difficulties that Kuwait faces in obtaining water, including a lack of freshwater sources and the constant need to purify seawater. "The cost of producing 1,000 gallons of freshwater amounts to about KD 6, of which the citizen pays only 800 fils, while the general budget bears the subsidy of KD 5.2," she said.

"In Kuwait, per capita consumption is estimated at about 550 liters per day, which is more than double the rate set by the United Nations, estimated at about 220 liters per person," Bahzad said, adding while Kuwait's per capita water use is considered one of the highest in the world, around 884 million people worldwide do not have access to safe drinking water.

"Work to improve environmental behavior and promote environmental citizenship needs change at the cultural and social level. Also noticeable is the amount of waste generated during the national celebrations, especially plastic waste. Unfortunately, we see that the celebration for just two days will be a huge burden on the environment for years to come," she said.

"Seawater is polluted for many years with plastic resulting from human waste on the coasts, such as water bottles, celebratory balloons, plastic bags and other consumer waste containing non-biodegradable materials. Balloons are among the most dangerous wastes that can enter the marine environment. Although balloons only take a moment to release, but they can take hundreds of years to degrade," Bahzad explained. "Over time, these balloon pieces get smaller and smaller and eventually turn into microplastics.

Even biodegradable balloons can take anywhere from six months to four years to decompose. In any case, they harm marine life because they are often swallowed by animals," she warned. Bahzad said among the manifestations of observed encroachments on the environment in recent times is pollution of seawater with plastic resulting from human waste, camping waste, overgrazing, random movement of cars, heavy military equipment and spring camps.

She pointed out that the according to Kuwait Municipality, about 140 tons of waste were lifted along Arabian Gulf Street, where municipal teams worked on cleaning celebration waste on the coastal strip, starting from the Capital governorate, passing through Hawally and Mubarak Al-Kabeer governorates until Ahmadi Governorate. It was also announced that 2,800 large bags of waste were lifted from Arabian Gulf Street, the public parking lots overlooking it and green areas in just two days.

Local



Drones adorned Kuwait's skies with HH the Amir's portrait.



The Green Island's skies lit up with the portrait of HH the Crown Prince.

Zain celebrates love for Kuwait with spectacular shows

Company shared joys of Kuwaiti people with extensive month-long program

- 2,000 drones lit up Green Island's sky with breathtaking images in collaboration with TEC
- Company sponsored 'February Kuwait' festival, featured beloved stars from GCC and region

- Exciting activities for families at Winter Wonderland in collaboration with 360 FM
- Zain family gathered in company's HQ to celebrate national holidays



Zain honors artist Nabeel Shuaib at February Kuwait Festival.



The drone show team.

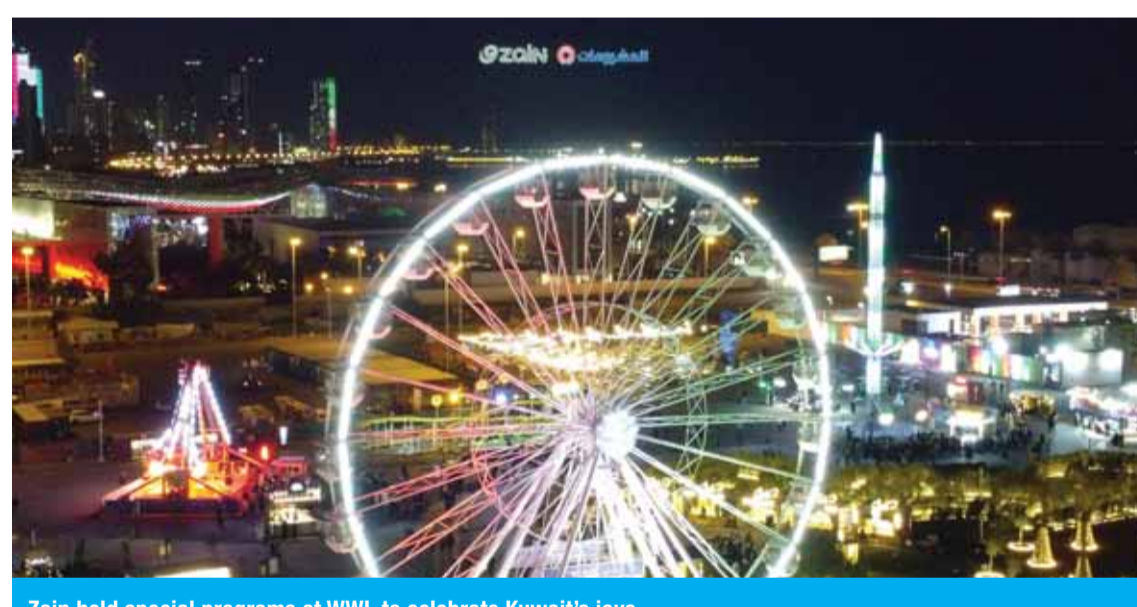
KUWAIT: Zain, Kuwait's leading digital service provider, announced that it has successfully completed an extensive, month-long program of social activities and programs to share the joys of the national holidays season with the community, echoing its love and devotion to Kuwait. Zain has always sought to be an active part of Kuwaiti people's celebrations in this cherished time of the year by launching and supporting programs that reflect the love of Kuwaitis for their nation. This year marks the 62nd anniversary of Kuwait's independence and 32nd anniversary of its liberation.

Every year, the community anticipates Zain's participation in the biggest social events, where the company adds its own flavor and reflects its brand values and identity: Zain A Wonderful World. The company has long considered itself a key partner of the Kuwaiti community, especially in such seasons of national joy. In the following report, Zain showcases some of the top activities and programs it has launched and supported during February 2023:

Drone shows on Green Island

Months before the national celebrations season officially kicked-off, Zain sought to prepare a grand celebratory project that befits Kuwait's festivities and was keen on leveraging on its investment in technology to present the project in the most spectacular fashion. This resulted in a collaboration with the Touristic Enterprises Company (TEC) to host a special aerial drone show that featured 2,000 drones from Zain, lighting up the skies of the Green Island with the most breathtaking images. In collaboration with TEC, Zain's 2,000 drones presented a total of 8 shows throughout an entire month, a technical feat that came for the first time in the MENA region. Zain is extremely proud of this accomplishment, achieved in Kuwait's name.

The drones took flight in Kuwait's skies, precisely above the Green Island, painting breathtaking images that awed the crowds below. The images depicted Kuwait's past and present identities,



Zain held special programs at WWL to celebrate Kuwait's joys.

including the Kuwait flag, the official logo of this year's national celebrations, pearl diving, desert life, and more. Next, the drones painted beautiful images of Kuwait's most prominent buildings, including Seif Palace, the National Assembly, the Grand Mosque, Kuwait Towers, and others. The shows concluded with stunning portraits of HH the Amir and HH the Crown Prince.

February Kuwait Festival

Zain was the official sponsor of the February Kuwait Festival 2023 held at the Arena Kuwait, 360 Mall. The event was organized by Rotana throughout February and featured many beloved stars from the GCC and Arab world. Zain is proud to have strategically supported this national festival since its inception as part of its commitment to being actively present in the projects that celebrate Kuwait's national holidays.

Every year, the Kuwaiti community eagerly awaits this grand event as it features some of the top artists from Kuwait, the GCC, and the Arab world. The concerts of February Kuwait Festival 2023 hosted a plethora of stars, including Nabeel Shuaib, Asala Nasri, Mohammed Abdu, Mutrif Al Mutrif, Angham, Majed Al Muhandis, Nancy Ajram, Aseel Abubaker, Nawal Alkuwaitiah, Abdullah Alrwaished, and Alissa.

Activities at Winter Wonderland

Under its strategic partnership with Winter Wonderland Kuwait, the biggest and first winter-themed carnival of its kind in the nation in collaboration with TEC, Zain held many exciting activities and competitions for visitors at WWL in collaboration with 360 FM to celebrate Kuwait's national holidays. Zain held the fun activities at its booth in WWL, where large crowds of families, children, and

young people joined to take part in the company's competitions and win special prizes. Entertainer Osama Fouda hosted the special activities, interacting with the crowds LIVE on 360 FM for a week.

Zain was keen on being one of the first strategic supporters of Winter Wonderland, which comes to Kuwait for the very first time all the way from London, as part of its belief in the vital role played by the Kuwaiti private sector in supporting entertainment and recreational venues in the nation. Winter Wonderland offers a fun, immersive, and safe setting that meets the best standards, and contributes to progressing the local economic and touristic scenes.

Zain family national celebration

As it does every year, Zain held a special event for its staff to celebrate Kuwait's national holidays. The celebration was held at Zain's HQ in Shuwaikh and attended by the company's executive management team who joined the wider Zain family in echoing their love and devotion to Kuwait. The event was attended by the company's executive management team and crowds of employees from across the company's divisions and departments, who all joined the celebration in a wonderful family setting filled with national pride.

This special celebration is one of Zain's top social programs held for employees in February of every year. The event brings together staff and senior executive management together to further strengthen the links between members of the Zain family and renew the spirit of teamwork under the national celebrations theme. The event featured many fun activities and programs that centered around celebrating Kuwait's National and Liberation Days, where the company's employees gathered in a family atmosphere filled with national pride. The event's program also included exciting competitions, prizes for winners, and a special performance by a traditional band that played wonderful traditional Kuwaiti pieces throughout the celebration.



Traditional shows at the Zain employees celebration.



Exciting activities at Zain's booth in Winter Wonderland.

News in brief

Al-Loughani assumes office

KUWAIT: The newly appointed Secretary General of the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) Jamal Al-Loughani assumed office on Wednesday. In a statement, Al-Loughani expressed his appreciation for the Council of Ministers of the organization on granting him their trust. He affirmed his willingness to do everything in his power to enhance the organization and its activity to face all the upcoming challenges in the field of energy, geopolitics and climate change issues that reflect on world economy. — KUNA



Jamal Al-Loughani

Kuwaiti oil price down

KUWAIT: Kuwait's oil barrel price went down 12 cents to settle \$82.99 per barrel in Tuesday's trading as opposed to \$83.11, said Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) on Wednesday. In the global market, the Brent crude went up \$1.44 to settle \$83.89 per barrel, the same with the West Texas Intermediate, which went up \$1.37 to settle \$77.05. — KUNA

Bolstering joint Gulf action

RIYADH: Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan and Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Jassem Al-Budaiwi discussed Tuesday strengthening joint Gulf action. They also reviewed several issues related to Gulf affairs of common interest, the Saudi Press Agency (SPA) reported adding that this came during Prince Faisal's meeting with Al-Budaiwi on Thursday at the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs headquarters in Riyadh. Prince Faisal congratulated Al-Budaiwi on his assumption of the post of Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council. — KUNA

KRCS sends relief supplies to quake-hit Turkey, Syria

Turkish official commends prompt Kuwaiti response



Kuwait Red Crescent Society distributes humanitarian aid to 2,400 family in Antakya.—KUNA photos



KUWAIT: Kuwait Red Crescent Society announced that the 13th plane of Kuwait Air Force Air Bridge took off Tuesday. It was loaded with 40 tons of tents, blankets and medical supplies for the victims of earthquake disaster that recently struck southern Turkey and Syria. The convoy is part of the assistance of the government and the people of Kuwait to the Turkish and Syrian people, KRCS General Director Abdul Rahman Al-Oun said in a statement to KUNA.

Groups of volunteers are evaluating the needs in earthquake-hit areas to take necessary actions in addition to another team which distributes humanitarian aids, tents, daily meals, in cooperation with the Turkish Red Crescent Society, Al-Oun added. He pointed out that donations received through the association's website with the approval of the Ministry of Social Affairs, stresses the keenness of KRCS to provide treatment, medi-

cines and all necessary supplies to shelter those affected by the earthquake.

He expressed his deep thanks to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defense, represented by the Kuwaiti Air Force, which worked to send the air bridge to Turkey. He stated that Kuwait, with all its official and civil institutions and bodies, was and will remain at the forefront of donor countries and initiating relief and humanitarian work to alleviate the suffering of victims and the afflicted caused by conflicts and disasters around the world.

Meanwhile, Vali of Kahramanmaraş, Bulent Tekbiyik Oglu on Wednesday commended the prompt Kuwaiti response to the destructive earthquake of south Turkey that left thousands dead and injured, and infrastructure completely ruined. On the sidelines of aid distribution to around 300 families in Kahramanmaraş, Oglu expressed his gratitude for both Kuwait and Qatar as the two Gulf

states began providing humanitarian support immediately after the quake.

Oglu added that the coordination between the two states facilitated aid distribution and its arrival in Turkey. Head of relief and international development in Qatari Red Crescent Society Dr. Mohammad Ibrahim hailed this collaboration with Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) saying that it is not the first of its kind but one of many.

Deputy Chairman of KRCS Anwar Al-Hasawi told KUNA that aid distribution included food-stuff, tents, blankets and daily meals. Al-Hasawi stated that they aspire for more collaborations as this furthers humanitarian work. On February 6, a destructive 7.7 magnitude earthquake shook the Turkish south and Syrian north followed by another measuring 7.6 on Richter scale and hundreds of violent aftershocks causing major losses in lives and property. —KUNA

Heads of Gulf journalism societies meet in Bahrain

KUWAIT: Heads of Gulf journalism societies met in Bahrain on Tuesday to discuss the means of strengthening cooperation in order to boost professional and journalistic gains. The meeting was attended by Head of Saudi Journalism Authority Khalid Al-Malik, President of Gulf Journalism Union Mohammad Al-Hammadi, Head of Journalist Association in UAE Mohammad Al-Hammadi, Bahrain Journalists Association President Essa Al-Shayji, Chairman of Kuwait Journalists Association Adnan Al-Rashid and Chairman of Oman Journalist Association Mohammad Al-Oraimi. Heads of Gulf journalism societies thanked Bahrain's Information Affairs Minister Ramzan Al-Neaimi and Bahrain Journalists Association for their support.



Bulgarian national library inaugurates 'Kuwaiti Book Corner'

VIENNA: The Ambassador of Kuwait to Bulgaria Ghazi Al-Fadhli inaugurated the "Kuwaiti Book Corner" in the Bulgarian National Library in the capital, Sofia, coinciding with the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the establishment of Kuwaiti-Bulgarian diplomatic ties. The Kuwaiti Embassy in Sofia said in a statement on Wednesday that the organization of this initiative was carried out in cooperation with the Director of the National Library Associate Professor Dr Krasimira Aleksandrova, who welcomed the strengthening of cooperation relations in the field of culture and science between both sides.

On behalf of the Bulgarian Minister of Culture, State Expert at Ministry of Culture Petar Miladinov delivered a speech at the ceremony in which he emphasized that the opening of the "Kuwaiti Corner" is not just a gift for all Bulgarians interested in the Arab world, but rather an achievement that reflects the deep-rooted ties and the keenness of both countries to develop them in various fields, especially in the cultural field.

The opening ceremony was attended by the Director of the Middle East and Africa Department at the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Ambassador Rumen Petrov, a number of Arab ambassadors and representatives of the foreign diplomatic corps accredited in Sofia, in addition to students of Arabic studies at Sofia State University and the New Bulgarian University.

The attendees expressed their gratitude to Al-Fadhli for his distinguished initiative and for the valuable and useful books, which were donated by the embassy of Kuwait to the Bulgarian National Library, which was established 145 years ago and is considered one of the most famous and important cultural and civilization landmarks in Bulgaria.

Meanwhile, Al-Fadhli said in a speech that this great attendance and interest in Kuwaiti books is part of the celebration this year of the 60th anniversary. He appreciates the efforts of the Bulgarian officials, especially the management of the National Library for opening the "Kuwaiti Corner," expressing his hope that in return, the ancient Bulgarian culture will be presented in the National Library of Kuwait, which is considered one of the distinctive cultural edifices in the Arab world.

He said he is honored to be in the Bulgarian National Library, which is one of the most crucial cultural landmarks in Bulgaria and is known for its vital enlightening role of containing hundreds of thousands of important books and rare manuscripts, including many copies of the ancient Arab heritage. He indicated the intention of the Kuwaiti and Bulgarian sides to sign a memorandum of understanding to construct cooperation between the national libraries of both countries.

The Kuwaiti ambassador also noted in his speech that Kuwait is very interested in cultural relations with countries due to its long experience in promoting Kuwaiti culture in particular and Arab culture in general through issuing magazines and periodicals specialized in culture, ideas and science of all kinds.



The Ambassador of Kuwait to Bulgaria Ghazi Al-Fadhli receives the Director of the National Library Associate Professor Dr Krasimira Aleksandrova. —KUNA

Many of those interested in culture know the Kuwaiti Al-Arabi magazine, which was published in 1958, before the independence of Kuwait as this magazine is still published until now, as well as the World of Knowledge series, which are among the most requested Arabic magazines and periodicals and are present in Arabic language centers in Bulgaria, he mentioned.

Concluding his speech, the Kuwaiti ambassador affirmed that the Kuwaiti Embassy in Sofia is fully prepared to raise the level of bilateral ties to broader levels in the future. During the ceremony, he presented a souvenir to Aleksandrova, in appreciation of her efforts and constructive role in spreading culture and knowledge in Bulgaria, and her cooperation with the Kuwaiti embassy in this regard. — KUNA



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Belarus leader 'fully supports' China's peace plan

US presses Uzbekistan to expand rights, investigate abuses as reforms advance

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ABUJA: A group of people protest the outcome of the 2023 presidential elections and the emergence of the candidate of All Progressives Congress' (APC) Bola Tinubu as the president-elect in Abuja, Nigeria on March 1, 2023. — AFP

Tinubu wins Nigeria's presidency

'We demand that this sham of an election should be immediately cancelled'

LAGOS: Ruling party candidate Bola Tinubu on Wednesday was declared winner of Nigeria's fiercely disputed presidential elections, securing the former Lagos governor his life-long ambition of heading Africa's most populous democracy.

With President Muhammadu Buhari stepping down after two terms, many Nigerians hoped Saturday's vote would usher in a leader capable of tackling widening insecurity, righting the economy and easing poverty. The final results gave Tinubu, candidate of the All Progressives Congress (APC), 8.8 million votes against 6.9 million for opposition Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) candidate Atiku Abubakar.

The Labour Party's Peter Obi notched up 6.1 million votes, confirming his success as a surprise third candidate. The Independent National Electoral Commission, or INEC, confirmed Tinubu as president-elect after he also secured the required number votes across two-thirds of Nigeria's states — a rule meant to ensure broad representation.

But the February 25 election was marked by long delays in voting and slow arrival of results that angered voters and prompted opposition parties to demand a new vote, alleging massive vote-rigging. "I appeal to my fellow contest-

ants to let us team together. It is the only nation we have. It is one country that we must build together," Tinubu said in an acceptance speech early Wednesday.

Supporters danced to Afrobeats at the APC party campaign office in Abuja and chanted "Jagaban," a local chieftain title for Tinubu. In a congratulatory message on Twitter, Buhari described the president-elect as "the best person for the job" and urged opposition parties seek peaceful means to address their grievances over the vote.

Tinubu, 70, is a long-time political kingmaker who is a Muslim from the southern Yoruba community. He campaigned on his experience as Lagos governor from 1999 to 2007, charging ahead with the slogan "It's my turn" to govern Africa's largest economy.

But his promise of reviving hope was attacked by rivals, who questioned his health, past graft accusations and ties to Buhari, criticised for failing in his vow to make Nigeria safer. Mixed reactions greeted his election victory on Wednesday.

In Lagos, Tinubu's home turf, the streets were calm, with the usual traffic flowing, while businesses were open after the long wait for the results. "Tinubu might be old... he is the best to govern, because he is very open-minded and

will promote unity between north and south," said Abiola Adesina, a 47-year-old driver.

But other younger voters were angry, expressing concerns over how INEC managed the tallies. "The INEC chairman has failed to make the results transparent... Nobody is happy... we are definitely going to court. Tinubu can't be the president," said Orisa Omega, 23, an Abuja student.

Tight race

The election was a tight race for the first time since Nigeria ended military rule in 1999, after Obi, 61, drew younger voters with a message of change. He scored a major victory in Lagos, the state with the largest number of registered voters and Tinubu's traditional bastion. Abubakar, a 76-year-old businessman and former vice president, lost his sixth attempt at the presidency.

Saturday's voting was mostly peaceful, but was troubled by long delays at many polling stations and some intimidation by thugs. Technical hitches disrupted the uploading of results to INEC's central website, fuelling concerns over vote rigging. "The election is irretrievably compromised," Labour Party chairman Julius Abure told

reporters on Tuesday. "We demand that this sham of an election should be immediately cancelled."

Hitches

INEC introduced biometric voter identification technology for the first time at the national level and its IReV central database for uploading results to improve transparency. But opposition parties said failures in the system to upload tallies allowed for ballot manipulation and disparities in the results from the manual counts at local polling stations. Nigerian elections have often been marred by vote-rigging, ballot buying, violence and clashes between rival parties. INEC dismissed opposition allegations. "Contrary to the insinuation by both parties, results emanating from the States point to a free, fair and credible process," INEC said.

It said parties should allow the process to run its course and then take their claims to court. But international observers, including from the European Union, noted major logistical problems, disenfranchised voters and a lack of transparency by INEC. The expectations facing Nigeria's next leader are huge, and they start with the country's security crisis. —AFP

Macron set for four-nation tour of Africa

PARIS: President Emmanuel Macron kicks off a tour of Central Africa on Wednesday in a diplomatic drive to test out a new "responsible relationship" with the continent as anti-French sentiment runs high in some former colonies.

He will first stop in Gabon for an environmental summit, before heading to Angola then the Republic of Congo — also known as Congo-Brazzaville — and finally neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo. Macron's trip comes as alarm grows in Paris over Russia's rising influence in French-speaking African countries, alongside Chinese jockeying for position, which has been visible for some years.

In Gabon, he will attend the One Forest Summit on preserving forests worldwide, including along the vast Congo River basin. Covering 1.62 million square kilometres (more than 625,000 million square miles), the forests of Central Africa represent the planet's second-largest carbon sink after the Amazon.

They are also home to huge biodiversity including forest elephants and gorillas, and bear traces of the settlement of early humanity. But they face threats such as poaching, deforestation for the oil palm and rubber industries, and illegal logging and mineral exploitation.

Distraction

Macron in a speech on France's Africa policy on Monday called for a "mutual and responsible relationship" with the continent of more than 50 countries, including on climate issues. He reiterated a pledge to

break with former post-colonial policies. "To measure our influence through a number of military operations, to rest on exclusive privileged ties with certain leaders, or to consider that certain economic markets are rightfully ours because we were there before — these are things of the past," he said.

But Gabonese environmental activist Marc Ona Essanguie told AFP he was worried Macron's visit would detract from the rainforest summit's main goal of environmental conservation. Gabonese people would instead likely view his presence as giving a political boost to President Ali Bongo Ondimba in the run-up to presidential elections later this year, he said.

"What people are registering is Emmanuel Macron coming to back his candidate," he said. Bongo, 64, has been president since succeeding his long-ruling father in 2009. Macron has insisted Africa is a priority of his second term, and in July he went to Cameroon, Benin and Guinea-Bissau.

After Gabon, he heads to the former Portuguese colony of Angola as part of a drive to enhance French ties with English- and Portuguese-speaking parts of Africa. Stopping in Congo-Brazzaville, another former French colony, he will end his trip in the neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo-ruled by Belgium during the colonial era — on Friday and Saturday.

Macron's tour follows disruption in the Sahel region further north. Paris has fallen out with new military authorities in former colonies Mali and Burkina Faso and withdrew its troops from both countries following years of helping them to battle jihadists. —AFP



Emmanuel Macron

Ukraine 'survived the most difficult winter' in history

KYIV: Ukraine said it had survived a months-long winter onslaught of Russian strikes on water and energy infrastructure, as it marked the first day of spring Wednesday. But Kyiv was under fierce pressure in the eastern town of Bakhmut while Moscow said it had downed a "massive" barrage of Ukrainian drones launched at the Crimean peninsula, annexed by the Kremlin in 2014. Since October Russia has been pummeling key facilities in Ukraine with missiles and drones, disrupting water, heating and electricity supplies to millions of people.

Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said Ukraine had overcome "winter terror" brought against his country by Russian leader Vladimir Putin and hailed the first day of spring as another "major defeat" for the Kremlin.

"We survived the most difficult winter in our history. It was cold and dark, but we were unbreakable," Kuleba said in a statement. Aid organisations had warned at the beginning of winter that the targeted campaign would force a new wave of migration to Europe and that Ukraine's priority would be "survival"

through the months of freezing temperatures.

The Kremlin said Kyiv was responsible for civilians' suffering stemming from the massive outages because it had refused to capitulate to Moscow's war demands.


'Choke on your missiles'

But the grid has been stabilising and Ukrainian energy provider Ukrenergo said Wednesday there had been "no power deficit" for more than two weeks. "Engineers are also continuing repairs at all power system facilities that were previously damaged by Russian missile and drone attacks," it said.



The war in Ukraine has seen Europe shirk its deep reliance on Russian oil and gas amid waves of sanctions aimed at stemming Moscow's ability to fund its military through energy revenues. "The EU also won, and contrary to Moscow's laughter, it did not freeze without Russian gas. One piece of advice to Russia: choke on your gas and choke on your missiles," Kuleba added in the statement.

The foreign minister's comments came as fighting in eastern Ukraine appears to be reaching a precarious moment for Kyiv around Bakhmut in what has become the longest and bloodiest battle of Russia's invasion.

AFP journalists near Bakhmut saw Ukrainian forces close roads towards the embattled salt-mining town, raising the spectre of a possible Ukrainian withdrawal. But Sergiy Cherevaty, a spokesman for Ukrainian forces deployed in the east of the country, said that "no such decision had been taken so far." —AFP



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Kuwait Airways Company
02 March 2023

International

US presses Uzbekistan to expand rights, investigate abuses as reforms advance

Blinken hail Uzbekistan's support in Afghanistan since invasion as well as after the 2021 withdrawal

TASHKENT: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Wednesday pressed Uzbekistan to expand rights and investigate abuses as it pursues nascent reforms, on a trip to woo Central Asia amid tensions with Russia.

A day after joining counterparts from all five former Soviet republics in Central Asia in Kazakhstan, Blinken held talks in Uzbekistan, with US officials seeing the two countries as especially eager for closer ties. Blinken met Uzbekistan's President Shavkat Mirziyoyev and discussed the economic, as well as limited political reforms, that he has pledged since succeeding the autocratic Islam Karimov in 2016.

The top US diplomat hailed Mirziyoyev's efforts to address forced and child labour in cotton harvests. "It's a model for countries around the world facing similar challenges," Blinken told a news conference.

"We look forward to working with the government to promote similar efforts in other sectors as well as fully implementing the president's reform agenda," he said. "That includes delivering on commitments to defend religious freedom and press freedoms and strengthen protections for vulnerable populations," Blinken said.

Human rights

Blinken said he spoke to Mirziyoyev about human rights as well as a controversial proposal for constitutional reform that could prolong the president's time in office. Blinken said that he also raised last year's deadly unrest that was sparked by a proposed reform that would have under-

mined autonomy in the impoverished Karakalpakstan region. The violence prompted a rare backtracking by Mirziyoyev.

He said he highlighted the importance of investigating abuses by law enforcement officers and "holding accountable those responsible." Foreign Minister Bakhtiyor Saidov, meeting Blinken earlier in the day, cast the trip as a sign of support for the reforms which he said were aimed at "ensuring good governance, rule of law, human rights."

Blinken also hailed Uzbekistan's support in Afghanistan. The country has played a key role supporting the United States since the 2001 invasion as well as after the 2021 withdrawal. Mirziyoyev last month said that officials were pressing him "to restrain the media, but I'll never do this." But rights groups say the media is still heavily controlled despite some loosening, and that critics of the government still face jail.

'Enthusiastic'

Blinken a day earlier pledged another \$25 million to help reduce Central Asia's economic dependence on Russia, which has long been the dominant player in the region but whose invasion of Ukraine has rattled other former Soviet republics.

With Uzbekistan, Blinken said he saw a "mutual and enthusiastic commitment" to expanding relations with Washington. In Tashkent, Blinken toured a university where US funding is backing instruction in English-part of Washington's push to expand connections with Central Asia.



TASHKENT: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken speaks during a press conference at the Hyatt Regency in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, on March 1, 2023. — AFP

Blinken said US support has trained some 10,000 English-language teachers in Uzbekistan. "One of the realities now in this moment in history-and it was different before and it will probably be different in the future-but at least right now, English is probably the international language,"

Blinken told students as he described his own experience learning French.

Pointing to the English language's role in business and the internet, Blinken said, "In many ways, English is the most important export from the United States to other countries." — AFP

Iran expels two German diplomats

TEHRAN: Iran ordered the expulsion of two German diplomats Wednesday in a tit-for-tat move after Berlin took similar action in response to a death sentence handed down against a dual national. Foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani said the two diplomats had been ordered out in response to "interference... by the German government in the internal and judicial affairs" of Iran.

Germany announced last week that it was expelling two Iranian diplomats in response to the death sentence handed down against dual national Jamshid Sharmahd, who is also a US resident. "The Iranian regime is fighting its own people in every way possible and shows no respect for human rights," Chancellor Olaf Scholz said at the time.

Sharmahd, 67, had been convicted of playing a role in a 2008 mosque bombing in the southern city of Shiraz, which killed 14 people and wounded 300. His family has rejected the charges in the strongest terms and asked Berlin to "act immediately" to save "his life".

The Iranian courts do not recognise dual citizenship. The judiciary said Sharmahd had planned to commit 23 "terrorist" acts, of which he succeeded in five. Prosecutors charged that he had established contact with "FBI and CIA officers" and had "attempted to contact Israeli Mossad agents".

He is accused of leading the Tondar group that aims to topple the Islamic republic and is outlawed as a terrorist organisation by the government. Iran is holding at least 17 Western citizens, most of them dual nationals, including Sharmahd. Human rights groups say they are part of a policy of hostage-taking by Iran to extract concessions from foreign governments. — AFP

Election to go ahead despite quake: Erdogan

ISTANBUL: President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Wednesday ruled out any delay in elections after the devastating quake that killed tens of thousands in Turkey, saying the vote would push ahead on May 14 as planned.

After the massive 7.8-magnitude quake that killed more than 45,000 people in Turkey, speculation mounted on whether the polls-which could keep Erdogan's Islamic-rooted government in power until 2028 — would be able to proceed. Last month, Erdogan declared a three-month state of emergency across 11 quake-hit provinces, and the region is still suffering from strong tremors that make the likelihood of campaigning in the area extremely unlikely.

But Erdogan told his ruling party lawmakers in the Ankara parliament that



ANKARA: Turkish President and Leader of the Justice and Development (AK) Party, Recep Tayyip Erdogan attends his party's group meeting at the Turkish Grand National Assembly in Ankara, Turkey, on March 1, 2023. — AFP

"(Turkish) people will do what is necessary on May 14." A delegation from Turkey's Higher Election Board started a mission on Monday to the quake zone to report on the voters' situation and election security.

Erdogan's government has come under

fire for failing to deploy sufficient humanitarian aid and relief teams in several locations in the days following the earthquake. Survivors in several provinces told AFP they had to pull out people with their bare hands, and complained of the absence of help in initial days. — AFP

Premier conveys leadership's...

Continued from Page 1

children of Kuwaiti women permanent residency from birth, in addition to a civil ID valid for five years, which can be renewed regardless if the passport is valid or not.

Bushehri said this provision is specifically designed to benefit stateless children of Kuwaiti women, many of whom do not have passports. The lawmaker said based on statistics by the Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI), 15,716 Kuwaiti women are married to foreigners, 90 percent of whom are Arabs. These women have a total of 43,766 children based on statistics from June last year.

Kuwaiti women married to stateless people, locally known as bedoons, are not included in these statistics, otherwise the number will be much higher, said Bushehri. Under the proposed law, children of Kuwaiti women are not required to transfer their residency permits to their employers. The draft law also stipulates retirement benefits for children of

Kuwaiti women, and priority to get jobs immediately after Kuwaiti nationals. They also have the right to get government jobs after Kuwaitis and get the same wages as their Kuwaiti counterparts.

Also, a number of activists and former lawmakers issued a statement on Wednesday in which they called on MPs to hold National Assembly sessions without the presence of the government after the formation of the government is taking a long time. The Assembly has not held any session since Jan 11 following a standoff with the government which resigned two weeks later. So far, no one has been appointed as prime minister to form the new Cabinet.

Some experts say Kuwaiti law forbids MPs to hold sessions without the presence of the government, while others say the constitution allows MPs to hold sessions without the need for ministers to be present. The statement said the Kuwaiti people voted in September in a historic election and elected a National Assembly with the hope to achieve their aspirations.

But the government has acted like the previous ones, sparking yet another political crisis that is preventing the Assembly from meeting and working to serve the Kuwaiti people. MP Faisal Al-Kandari called on Wednesday for accelerating the process of forming the new government in order not to block serving the interests of the Kuwaiti people.

Shiite, Kurdish and Sunni Arab officials under the sectarian power-sharing system established after the US-led invasion toppled Saddam's Sunni Arab-dominated regime.

On Thursday, Guterres is due to visit a camp for displaced people in the north of the country, before heading to Kurdistan regional capital Arbil for talks with Kurdish officials. At the news conference, Guterres discussed the numerous challenges facing Iraq which he said "did not arise overnight" but were products of "decades of oppression, war, terrorism, sectarianism and foreign interference".

He also praised the prime minister who has pledged to combat graft, saying corruption was among "the most pressing challenges facing the country". "There is a real window of opportunity to achieve progress," Guterres said, calling on the government, approved a year ago following a year of political wrangling, to push with reforms. He also praised Iraq's role to mediate between longtime regional rivals Iran and Saudi Arabia.

The prime minister, meanwhile, said his government was determined to create jobs for unemployed youths and battle poverty in Iraq where four out of 10 young people are unemployed. Iraq's parliament approved Sudan's government in October, ending more than a year of political gridlock and deadly violence since the country last went to the polls. After Iraq, the UN chief will travel on to Qatar, where he will attend the summit of the Least Developed Countries. — AFP

UN chief in 'solidarity'...

Continued from Page 1

news conference with Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani.

Guterres arrived late Tuesday in Iraq, which has been battered by decades of war, conflict and corruption that have devastated infrastructure and impoverished its people. Despite its immense oil and gas reserves, about one-third of Iraq's 42 million population now lives in poverty, while some 35 percent of young people are unemployed, according to the UN.

The country also ranks near the bottom of Transparency International's corruption perceptions index, at 157 out of 180 countries. It suffers from water and power shortages, as well as drought and desertification, with the UN saying Iraq is one of the five countries most exposed to impacts of climate change.

Guterres, who last visited Iraq in 2017, also met Wednesday with Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein and is due to hold talks as well with President Abdel Latif Rashid and parliament speaker Mohammed Al-Halbusi, the foreign ministry said. The three leaders are respectively Iraq's top

Head-on train crash kills 36...

Continued from Page 1

The passenger train, carrying over 350 people, had been travelling from the capital Athens to the northern city of Thessaloniki. The 59-year-old station master of Larissa was arrested several hours after the accident and charged with negligent homicide. Government spokesman Yiannis Economou said the two trains were left running on the same track for "several kilometers".

But train unionists said the station master was likely a scapegoat as the safety shortcomings of the Athens-Thessaloniki railway line had been known for years. In an open letter in February, train staff said track safety systems were incomplete and poorly maintained. A safety supervisor had resigned last year, warning that infrastructure upgrades pending since 2016 were incomplete and that train speeds of up to 200 km an hour were unsafe.

"We will do whatever we can so that nothing like this ever happens again," Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, who was expected to announce an early election date next week, said at the scene. Health Minister Thanos Plevris said most passengers were "young people", with the train carrying many students returning to Thessaloniki after a long holiday weekend.

"It was a nightmare... I'm still shaking," 22-year-old passenger Angelos told AFP. "Fortunately we were in

Wars, poverty fuel spike in...

Continued from Page 1

declared defeated in late 2017. Iraq still suffers from instability coupled with endemic corruption, and crumbling infrastructure and public services.

Abdel Saheb noted a rise in child labor - officially banned by law before the age of 15 - "specifically in provinces that had been invaded by IS". Employing children is punishable by prison time or a fine, he said, but "with many families left without a breadwinner, mothers have been forced to let children work".

The labor ministry official said a study conducted by his office showed a rise in child labor in the northern provinces of Kirkuk and Nineveh - whose capital Mosul was once a jihadist

stronghold - as well as Baghdad itself. To counter that trend, the government distributes aid to some of Iraq's poorest families, with monthly allowances of between \$96 and \$250, depending on the number of children.

Miguel Mateos Munoz, spokesman in Iraq for the UN children's agency UNICEF, said poverty and "economic inequality" are among key factors contributing to the rise in child labor in the country. "The last years have created an environment that is leading many children to child labor," he told AFP.

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) aid group noted in late 2022 an "alarming spike" in child labor in Iraq, particularly in war-ravaged Mosul. Some 90 percent of households in the city had "one or more children engaged in labor", according to an IRC survey of 411 families and 265 children. And about 75 percent of these children "reported working in informal and dangerous roles" such as rubbish collection and construction, the group said. — AFP

International

Belarus leader 'fully supports' China's Ukraine peace plan

China criticised for failing to condemn Moscow's invasion of its European neighbor

BEIJING: Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko told his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping his country "fully supports" Beijing's proposals for ending the Ukraine war when the two leaders met Wednesday. The state visit to the Chinese capital by Lukashenko—a staunch ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin—comes after Beijing published a position paper on Moscow's war in Ukraine insisting it is a neutral party and calling for dialogue.

China has been criticised by Western countries for failing to condemn Moscow's invasion of its European neighbour, and has reacted furiously to recent claims by the United States and NATO that it may be contemplating arms transfers to Russia. The position paper was met with scepticism from Ukraine's allies, while Russia acknowledged the proposal but said the conditions for a peaceful resolution of the conflict were not in place "at the moment". But on Wednesday Lukashenko threw his weight behind the plan.

"Today's meeting is taking place at a very difficult time, which calls for new, unorthodox approaches and responsible political decisions," Lukashenko said, according to remarks released by his aides.

"They should be aimed at first and foremost preventing a slide into a global confrontation that will see no winners," he told Xi. "That is why Belarus is actively coming up with peace proposals, and fully supports the initiative on international security you have put forward." He also said Belarus wanted to increase technological cooperation with China.

'Cooperate in all avenues'

Lukashenko met Chinese Premier Li Keqiang earlier on Wednesday. He said Beijing and Minsk "have no closed topics for cooperation", according to a readout published on the official website of the Belarusian



BEIJING: Belarus' President Alexander Lukashenko (3R) meets with Chinese President Xi Jinping (2L) in Beijing on March 1, 2023. — AFP

presidency. "We cooperate in all avenues. Most importantly, we have never set ourselves the task of being friends or working against third countries," Lukashenko said.

In an accompanying video clip, Li could be heard telling Lukashenko that the meeting with Xi would help "further plan the development of bilateral relations". "We are confident that relations between Belarus and China will continue to move forward, building on the friendship between the

two countries," Li said. In a jovial run-up to the three-day trip, Beijing lauded its "all-weather and comprehensive" strategic partnership with Minsk, while Lukashenko said he was looking forward to meeting his "old friend" Xi.

The Belarusian leader also called China's position on the Ukraine crisis "a testimony to its peaceful foreign policy as well as a new and original step that will have a far-reaching impact all over the world", according to Chinese state news agency Xinhua. Xi has spo-

ken to Putin several times since the war began, but he has not talked with his Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelensky.

Belarus shares a border with both Ukraine and Russia, but is financially and politically dependent on the Putin administration. Lukashenko allowed Russia to use Belarus as a staging ground for its Ukraine offensive, and Kyiv has expressed concern that Minsk may provide further support in Moscow's war effort. — AFP

Moldova offers Ukrainians refuge despite struggles

NISPORENI: Tatiana Bellayar was among tens of thousands of Ukrainians who fled Russia's invasion a year ago, rushing to find a safe haven by crossing into tiny, impoverished neighbour Moldova. The nation, one of the poorest in Europe, ended up becoming one of the largest recipients per capita of Ukrainian refugees despite being buffeted by its own crises even before the war. "Here, we are provided with everything we need and... the sky is peaceful, we are not afraid for our children" said Bellayar, 62, who fled with her daughter and two-year-old granddaughter. Yet the arrival of some 100,000 Ukrainians to the country of about 2.6 million has brought new attention and a push for resources to crisis-battered Moldova.

Twenty percent of its population lives below the poverty line and the former Soviet republic has seen a massive exodus, which has worsened over the past ten years. Inflation currently hovers around 27 percent after it peaked at more than 34 percent in August. "The priority now is to help the country progress economically, because it was already a fragile environment" a year ago, said Francesca Bonelli, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees representative in Moldova.

As time goes on, "the situation becomes more difficult because the inhabitants feel forgotten and begin to see the refugees as a problem," Bonelli added. Only if humanitarian aid "benefits both the refugees and the

local community" in bolstering hospitals, border protection and ministries, "will solidarity last over the long term," she noted. The arrival of thousands of additional people in a nation with an already "strained public health system" further boosts demand. Doctors of the World coordinator in Moldova Liz Devine said. "Imagine if three million people were to arrive in France and they needed medical services overnight," she said, to illustrate Moldova's situation.

'Everything we need'

About 40 NGOs are present in Moldova, in addition to the five United Nations agencies. "When the war began and the refugees started arriving, we immediately set everything in motion and offered our resources," said Eduard Tatarov, head of a refugee centre accommodating Ukrainians.

Tatarov oversees a boarding school that also serves as an accommodation centre in Nisporeni about 75 kilometres (45 miles) west of the capital Chisinau. Bellayar, who fled her home near Odessa, lives with 54 other Ukrainians and 160 students of the nearby vocational school, they live at the centre. "I chose Moldova because it is not very far from my village and I hope to return as soon as possible," she said. Despite being homesick, Bellayar expresses constant gratitude to Moldova for allowing her to live without fear that her family would be harmed. Pro-Western Moldova, wedged between Ukraine and Romania, became independent from the Soviet Union in 1991. The country has two breakaway regions—Transnistria bordering Ukraine and Gagauzia in the south, which both seceded in the 1990s. While Gagauzia hosts a Turkish minority, separatist Transnistria is populated by Russian speakers and Moscow's 1,500 soldiers still deployed there, repeatedly fuelling fears of an invasion.—AFP

Indian firm sold artillery barrels to Myanmar

BANGKOK: An Indian state-owned arms manufacturer has shipped artillery barrels to military-ruled Myanmar, an activist group said Wednesday, warning they could be used by the junta in its crackdown on dissent. Myanmar has been in turmoil since the generals toppled Aung San Suu Kyi's civilian government two years ago, ending a brief democratic experiment and sparking mass protests. The army has used artillery barrages as well as air strikes against opposition groups as it struggles to crush resistance, according to rights organisations, sparking international calls to stop supplying weapons to the junta.

In October, state-owned arms manufacturer Yantra India Limited sent 20 gun barrels to Myanmar measuring 122 millimetres, shipping data obtained by activist group Justice for Myanmar shows. The consignee for the cargo, which was valued at \$330,000, was Innovative Industrial Technologies Company Limited, based in the commercial hub Yangon, according to the data shared with AFP.

Last year, the same company won a junta tender to install and configure security appliances at a data centre, according to documents seen by AFP. The barrels

were likely used to make artillery for the military, Justice for Myanmar said.

Yantra India Limited has "state-of-the-art steel-making" facilities for gun barrels and "other components of artillery and tank guns", according to its website. Yantra and Innovative Industrial Technologies did not respond to emailed requests for comment.

AFP has contacted India's foreign ministry for comment, but has not yet received a response. "India is directly supporting the junta's indiscriminate attacks against civilians by allowing the export of barrels," said Justice For Myanmar spokesperson Yadanar Maung.

More than 3,000 people have been killed in the military's crackdown on dissent, according to a local monitoring group. Diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis have floundered, with the junta shielded at the United Nations by close allies Russia and China.

In December, India abstained along with Moscow and Beijing from the UN Security Council's first resolution on the crisis, which called for the release of all "arbitrarily detained" prisoners, including Suu Kyi. Indian Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar has defended New Delhi's ties with the junta, saying India cannot avoid dealing with its neighbour because of cross-border issues such as organised crime.

In January, Norway's sovereign wealth fund said it had divested its shares in Indian state-owned company Bharat Electronics over an "unacceptable risk" that it was selling weapons to the Myanmar junta. — AFP

UK missing person highlights rise of Tiktok sleuths

LONDON: The tragic case of a British woman's disappearance and death has shone a disturbing light on the rise of so-called online sleuths and amateur detectives who believe they can do the police's job. When mortgage advisor Nicola Bulley, 45, went missing in late January—apparently vanishing "into thin air", leaving her phone on a bench still dialled into a work call—the initial news coverage was low-key.

By the time her body was found just over three weeks later, the case was generating saturation coverage and had descended into a ghoulish social media free-for-all. Detectives had focused on the theory that Bulley, a married mother of two young daughters, had fallen into a nearby river and drowned.

But with officers and other specialist divers initially failing to find her body, the online true crime world quickly became awash with speculation about what might have happened to her, to the distress of her family. The coverage reached its nadir when one TikTok user had himself filmed digging up potential burial sites and then captured the moment the woman's body was pulled from reeds in the river.

David Schmid, associate professor of English at the US's University of Buffalo, said the Nicola Bulley investigation had attracted the sort of attention from would-be detectives that is now common in US cases.

"People are trying to become more invested in these cases, becoming these amateur sleuths and trying to investigate and provide different takes and lenses on the crime," he told AFP.

'In the gutter'

The amateur interest has spawned from the true crime phenomenon of the past decade that included the 2014 podcast "Serial" and the 2015 documentary series "Making a Murderer" about wrongful convictions, according to Schmid.

Both "signalled a new kind of public interest in crime that's specifically directed towards either working on cold cases or intervening in cases where people feel there has been a miscarriage of justice," he noted.

Other films, documentaries and television dramas have helped fuel the trend. A judge last year ordered the immediate release of Adnan Syed, who had spent



LONDON: File photo shows the logo of video-focused social networking service TikTok, at the TikTok UK office, in London. — AFP

23 years behind bars for the murder of his ex-girlfriend, after "Serial" drew worldwide attention to his case. Much true crime output had dealt with their subjects sensitively and ethically by avoiding the temptation to sensationalise, Schmid said. It had also avoided over-focussing on or mythologising the perpetrator and acknowledged the impact on the victims, their families and the wider community.

But he warned that the true crime world is now moving into uncharted waters. "I think people recognise that the era of ethical true crime is going to come to an end and that people want their true crime in the gutter," he said. Last year's Netflix crime drama "Dahmer-Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story" turned his crimes into a massively successful series but also sparked an angry backlash.

"We're all one traumatic event away from the worst day of your life being reduced to your neighbour's favourite binge show," commented Eric Perry, a relative of Errol Lindsey, one of Dahmer's victims.

'Disappointed not a murder'

The involvement of amateurs-aided by new technology, online databases and operating outside mainstream media norms—has also raised concerns about the potential destruction of evidence and harm caused to people wrongly highlighted as suspects. Amanda Keeler, who teaches digital media at Marquette University in the US state of Wisconsin, said the dangers were clear to see in the notorious case of the four University of Idaho students murdered last November. "We watch a lot of crime fiction, we get really wrapped up in it, and part of the pleasure of it is thinking about the cases and solving it," she said.—AFP



CHISINAU: Refugees Ukrainian children attend a lesson about hygiene with Cristina Raileanu (R), a Moldovan nurse who works for Medecins du monde, at the Refugee Accommodation Center of Cazanesti, near Chisinau, on February 7, 2023. Around 30 Ukrainian refugees, including 20 children, are living in the same building in Cazanesti after they fled Ukraine. — AFP

Philippines medical helicopter missing with 5 on board

MANILA: A search was underway in the Philippines Wednesday for a missing medical evacuation helicopter with five people on board, authorities said. The aircraft was flying a patient from the remote Mangsee Islands to a hospital on the western island province of Palawan, the Civil Aviation Authority of the Philippines (CAAP) said.

It took off Wednesday morning to Brooke's Point municipality, but never arrived, CAAP said. Most of the 150-kilometre (93-mile) journey is over the Sulu Sea.

The Philippine Coast Guard said it had deployed a vessel to search waters between Balabac island, off southern Palawan, and Brooke's Point.

The nationalities of those on board have not been released. The helicopter was operated by the Philippine Adventist Medical Aviation Services, a non-profit organisation providing medical evacuation services in Palawan, the southern island of Mindanao and the main island of Luzon.

The group was started by American helicopter and fixed-wing pilot Dwayne Harris in 2007 and has five pilots and five aircraft, according to its website. It describes itself as an "independent ministry that supports the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church". Less than two weeks ago, a Cessna plane carrying four people, including two Australians, crashed on an active volcano in the central Philippines. All four died. — AFP

Business

THURSDAY, MARCH 2, 2023



Solar energy has become the new oil that does not pollute the environment, and it is strongly present in the countries of the Middle East and the Gulf, despite these countries being at the forefront of the list of global oil and gas exporters.

More GCC green energy projects may tap into capital markets: S&P

Saudi, UAE set up public-private partnerships for renewable energy projects

ABU DHABI: More renewable energy projects, including solar plants, in the GCC are expected to tap into capital markets for financing, S&P Global Ratings has said.

The UAE and Saudi Arabia - the Arab world's two largest economies - have already set up public-private partnership frameworks, making project financing an "obvious choice" for funding, the rating agency said in a report on Tuesday. Gulf countries including Bahrain, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia have also set up wind farms as part of efforts to diversify their energy mix.

"The governments of Saudi Arabia and the UAE have announced their intention to continue to invest in this space. We believe plans to establish a renewables sector could help them in their efforts to achieve their climate goals," S&P said. The issuance of green bonds to finance climate-related projects grew by 38 per cent in the Middle East during the five-year period to the end of 2020, according to a Boston Consulting Group report. Middle Eastern governments accounted for about 97 per cent of green bond issuances in 2020 alone, compared with 13 per cent four years earlier, the report said.

The global sustainable finance market, which was valued at \$3.65 trillion in 2021, is set to grow further, hitting \$22.48 trillion by 2031, growing at a compound annual rate of more than 20 per cent

between 2022 and 2031. Allied Market Research shows. Green bond and sukuk issuances from the GCC hit a record in 2022 at \$8.5 billion from 15 deals, compared with \$605 million from six deals in 2021, data from Bloomberg's Capital Markets League Tables showed last month.

The UAE, which is home to some of the biggest solar projects in the world, is investing Dh600 billion in clean and renewable energy initiatives over the next three decades as it aims to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050. It is building the Mohammed bin Rashid Solar Park in Dubai with a capacity of five gigawatts. Abu Dhabi, which is developing a two-gigawatt solar plant in its Al-Dhafra region, has set a target of 5.6 gigawatts of solar PV capacity by 2026.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia, the world's largest crude exporter, is developing several new renewable energy projects as it aims to boost its clean energy capacity and become carbon neutral by 2060. In September, the kingdom launched five new renewable energy projects with a total capacity of 3.3 gigawatts. Solar projects, which account for nearly all the renewable energy generation in the GCC, are "more predictable" and carry lower operational risk than other power-generating assets, S&P said.

"Maintenance needs are relatively straightforward, and the technology is not complex." As of

2021, solar power accounted for 97 per cent of installed renewables capacity in the GCC, according to the International Renewable Energy Agency. S&P said it expects investment in renewable energy for hydrogen production to ramp up in the region.

In January, Abu Dhabi's clean energy company Masdar signed an initial agreement with four companies from the Netherlands to explore the development of a green hydrogen supply chain between Abu Dhabi and Amsterdam.

Saudi Arabia is building the world's largest green hydrogen-based ammonia production plant in the kingdom's planned futuristic city. The green hydrogen project within Neom will use four gigawatts of renewable power from solar, wind and storage to produce 600 tons a day of hydrogen.

Hydrogen, which can be produced from both renewable energy and natural gas, is expected to play a key role in the coming years as economies and industries transition to a low-carbon world to mitigate climate change. The rising share of solar in electricity generation will ease the burden of power subsidies for many GCC countries, S&P said.

The planned move to increase the share of renewable assets will not only reduce the cost of domestic power generation, but also free up oil and gas resources for export, it said. — Agencies

World Cup airlift helps flydubai to record profits

DUBAI: Low-cost airline flydubai announced record profits for 2022 on Wednesday helped by nearly 1,300 shuttle flights to neighboring Qatar during the football World Cup. Profits soared 43 percent to 1.2 billion dirhams (\$327 million) despite higher oil prices as the United Arab Emirates carrier bounced back strongly from a COVID-hit 2021.

The year ended with a mass airlift of World Cup fans to and from Qatar, with 1,290 flights-up to 30 a day-ferrying 133,000 people of 171 different nationalities, a statement said. "2022 has been an exceptional year, with accelerated demand, booked by the final few months of Expo 2020 and the unprecedented efforts to support travel to and from the World Cup in Doha," said CEO Ghaith Al-Ghaith.

"Navigating through challenging times characterized by continued fluctuating fuel prices, disruption to supply chains, rising global inflation and geopolitical unrest did not dampen our strong performance last year," flydubai, which has been operating since 2009, reported a 72 percent rise in annual revenues and an 89 percent increase in passengers to 10.6 million.

The airline, based in the Middle East financial hub of Dubai, hired a record 1,300 employees and took delivery of 17 aircraft, another new high. Fuel remained the biggest cost, rising to 33.9 percent of total operating costs from 21.9 percent in 2021. Last month Dubai's airport said passenger traffic more than doubled to 66 million in 2022, partly because of a large number of Russian travelers following the invasion of Ukraine. — AFP

Inflation: Its causes and impact

By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: Most people are complaining of price increases of consumable products and daily purchases, in addition to services. Meanwhile, financial experts repeatedly explained that "inflation" is the main cause of these price hikes. But many people do not know what this word means, and how it affects prices.

Inflation is the price rise in the cost of products and services during a certain period of time, while the money that you have in your pocket is not enough to make you buy the same number of things that you used to buy before. Some people might think controlling product prices depends on decisions by traders and producers. This is true in some cases, but mostly it is not the main factor, as the market is the main controller, as prices depend on demand and supply.

According to a report by BBC, demand-driven inflation begins with a rise in consumer demand, as traders try to meet demand by increasing supply, but when there are not enough additional goods to increase supply, traders raise their prices, which leads to demand-driven inflation, which is also called "price inflation".

The report also explained the cost of raw materials of consumable products increases due to global issues such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, which hinder the supply chain and make it hard on companies to provide produce products and deliver them. Prices will then increase due to the shortage of stocks.

INFLATION TYPES

Inflation is divided according to specific categories based on the price ratio and the cost of production due to the situation the country suffers from, while the type of inflation depends if the

country is affected by global or local issues, according to the business website Rowwad.

Creeping or aggressive inflation

It occurs when prices rise by 3 percent or less annually, and this type of inflation benefits economic growth, because it makes consumers expect prices will continue to rise, which reinforces current demand.

Accelerated inflation

This type of inflation occurs when prices rise by 3-10 percent per year and is harmful to the economy, because consumers start buying more than they need, which leads to producers not being able to provide the required quantity.

Wild inflation

As prices rise by more than 10 percent per annum, money quickly loses its value, causing instability in the economy.

Hyperinflation

This occurs when prices rise more than 50 percent per month. This is very rare in practice and is usually when governments print money to pay for wars.

Inflationary depression

This type of inflation occurs when economic growth and production are stagnant, accompanied by price inflation.

COMMON EFFECTS OF INFLATION

According to the business platform Arqaam, the first thing affected by inflation is the purchasing power of the currency, which means that people's ability to buy specific items is no longer strong as it used to be due to price rises and fixed incomes.

Encouraging spending and investment

Inflation and decreased purchasing power encourage people to buy goods now rather than later because the currency will lose its value by time. In addition, consumers will fill up their cars



with gas, stock up on food and buy shoes for their children in larger sizes to fit them next year. The platform also mentioned companies will invest capital and investors will buy gold and other precious metals. In the long run, stocks have proven to be the best hedge against inflation.

Hyperinflation

Whenever the rate of spending and investment increases due to inflation, the rate of inflation increases and turns into hyperinflation, which enters the economy into a vicious circle.

High cost of borrowing

There is a relationship between inflation and interest rates - when interest rates are low, individuals and companies are encouraged to borrow. When central banks raise interest rates, they make people and companies refrain from borrowing, and some even prefer to put their money in banks to earn interest, while many projects could be affected due to the lack of borrowing that finances project movements.

Decreased job opportunities and growth

The report explained that when inflation rates rise to the point that the economy enters a state of cumulative inflation (fast and wild inflation), there will be an economic recession, which leads to a slowdown in growth and a steady rise in unemployment.

TikTok to add screen time limits for young users

PARIS: TikTok on Wednesday said it would introduce automatic daily screen time limits of one hour for accounts belonging to under-18s, as the social media platform faces criticism over its addictiveness among young users. Teenagers will have to enter a passcode to continue watching after 60 minutes and those aged below 13 require a parent or guardian to set or enter a passcode to release an additional 30 minutes, TikTok said. The short-form video-sharing app said the changes would be implemented "in the coming weeks".

If a young person's access to TikTok is via a family pairing account, parents can set a maximum screen time for their child based on the day of the week, TikTok added. The Chinese version of TikTok, Douyin, is restricted to 40 minutes of daily use for under-14s and is inaccessible for them between 10 pm and 6 am. The new feature adds to existing measures to control young people's screen time such as a prompt introduced last year that encourages teenagers to enable screen time management and a weekly inbox notification summarizing a user's screen time. — AFP

Business

Boubyan launches Google Pay for its customers using Android & Wear OS

Bank offers best digital payment solutions to all its customers in Kuwait

KUWAIT: Boubyan Bank announced the launch of Google Pay to all its customers who are using Android and Wear OS in Kuwait as a part of the bank's efforts to offer the best digital payment solutions to all the bank's customers and to ensure that they enjoy better and more inclusive payment services.

Boubyan Bank's Chief Private Banking and Consumer Banking A Abdullah Al-Mejhem stated: "Today, we have a new announcement about the launch of Google Pay to all our debit, credit, and prepaid cardholders, which comes in line with the bank's keenness on promoting innovative digital payment solutions and providing customers with state-of-the-art payment technology for a seamless, secure, and convenient banking experience."

Google Pay will allow customers to make easy payments as they can simply add their Boubyan Bank's debit, credit, or prepaid cards to the Google



Wallet, and then swipe their device near the payment reader for a few seconds to complete the transaction. Security and privacy are built into every part of Google Pay, and when cardholders use their credit or debit cards through Google Pay, their banking information will not be stored on the device; rather, transactions are made using a token, which is device-specific and associated with a dynamic security code that changes with each transaction, providing an extra layer of protection and security.

Google Pay can be used at stores, restaurants, cafés, hotels, as well as several other places around the world as it is considered the most secure and private payment method that enables Android and Wear OS customers to use their devices in making payments at stores, online or in-App.

"Google Pay provides a fast, easy and safe way

for users in more than 60 countries. Users can feel confident that all their transactions are made using the highest security standards," said Jenny Cheng, Vice President and General Manager, Google Wallet.

Google Pay will help customers make payments easily for in-App or online purchases without the physical card and without having to create an account or fill out credit card's information every time.



Abdullah Al-Mejhem

US drugmaker Eli Lilly slashing insulin prices

NEW YORK: US pharmaceutical giant Eli Lilly announced Wednesday it would cut the cost of its insulin by 70 percent, with President Joe Biden calling on others to follow suit to tackle soaring drug prices. Manufacturers have ratch-

eted up insulin prices in recent years, hitting millions of Americans living with diabetes - and drawing sharp political criticism. "Insulin costs less than \$10 to make, but Americans are sometimes forced to pay over \$300 for it. It's flat wrong," said Biden, hailing Eli Lilly's price cut as "huge news". "It's time for other manufacturers to follow," he added.

Indianapolis-based Lilly announced a series of steps to rein in prices of the life-saving drug, such as capping out-of-pocket costs at \$35 per month for people with insurance. "Lilly is taking these actions to make it easier to access Lilly insulin and

help Americans who may have difficulty navigating a complex healthcare system," the drugmaker said in a statement. While the \$35 cap takes effect immediately, other measures will be implemented in the course of 2023. A centerpiece is the 70 percent price drop in Humalog, Lilly's most commonly prescribed insulin.

The incidence of diabetes in the United States in adults has doubled over the last 20 years, afflicting 37.3 million people, according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Insulin prices have soared in the US, costing over eight times more than in 32 comparable high-

income countries, a 2020 Rand Corporation study found. The unaffordability of insulin - particularly to uninsured Americans - has become a rallying cry for pharmaceutical industry critics. The cost of a five-pack of Humalog is currently \$530.40, although the out-of-pocket price to a user varies depending on one's insurance plan. An average monthly use varies by user, Eli Lilly says on its website. Drug pricing in the United States is affected not only by the cost of producing and distributing the pharmaceutical, but also other players such as insurers and pharmacy benefit management companies. — AFP

Tesla to invest about \$5bn in Mexico plant

MEXICO CITY: American electric car maker Tesla will invest about \$5 billion in a massive new factory in the northern Mexican city of Monterrey, a senior government official said Tuesday. The move, which has yet to be confirmed by Tesla, would be a major boost to Mexico's hopes of benefiting from US companies choosing nearby countries over Asia for their manufacturing operations.

"We brought to Mexico an investment of more or less \$5 billion for the construction of the largest electric vehicle plant in the world," Martha Delgado, undersecretary for multilateral affairs and human rights, said in a video posted on Twitter. "I'm going to Austin, Texas, to witness the announcement @Telsa CEO @elonmusk will make about their investments in 2023," she added in a text accompanying a video from the Mexico City airport.

Earlier Tuesday, Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador announced that Tesla was going to open a plant in Monterrey, northern Mexico, about 200 kilometers (120 miles) from the US border.

The factory was expected to be "very big" and would bring "a considerable investment and many jobs," he said. Lopez Obrador said Tesla would give more details on Wednesday, including addressing the problem of water scarcity in Monterrey, an industrial powerhouse home to transnational firms.

In discussions with Elon Musk, the Tesla chief "was very receptive, understanding our concerns," with measures expected to include the use of recycled water, the president said.

Mexico declared a drought emergency in July last year and authorities in parts of the country, including Monterrey, were forced to ration water use due to depleted reservoirs. Tesla, which already has plants in China and Germany as well as the United States, is due to hold its 2023 Investor Day on Wednesday, live-streamed from its gigafactory in Texas. Tesla faces increasing competition in the electric vehicle sector, with a growing number of Chinese makers as well as traditional auto firms such as General Motors and Volkswagen.

Mexico sees its lithium deposits as central to its goal of playing a major role in the production of batteries for electric cars and other technology. Last year, lawmakers approved a plan to put exploration and mining of the metal under state control. The auto industry is already a key pillar of the Mexican economy—the second-largest in Latin America behind Brazil—home to US, European and Asian manufacturers. Mexico is the world's seventh-largest automobile producer, having produced three million vehicles in 2021, according to the latest available figures from the Mexican Automotive Industry Association. The automotive industry represented 3.5 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) and 930,000 jobs in 2021, with foreign investment in the sector amounting to \$5.3 billion that year, according to the organization. German manufacturer BMW recently announced a \$870 million investment to produce electric cars in Mexico. — AFP



QINGDAO, China: Employees work at an assembly line of a Wuling Motors factory in Qingdao, in China's eastern Shandong province on March 1, 2023. — AFP

Manufacturing activity surges in China in Feb

BEIJING: China's manufacturing activity surged to its highest reading in more than a decade in February, official figures showed Wednesday, as factories began to return to normal following years of COVID-19 disruption.

The world's second-largest economy is stirring back to life after Beijing's decision in December to abruptly drop its strict health measures, which mandated strict lockdowns, travel restrictions and mass testing. February's figures reflected the subsiding of case numbers after a surge that began in December, coupled with the return to work after the Lunar New Year holiday.

The official manufacturing purchasing managers' index (PMI) — a key gauge of Chinese factory output — stood at 52.6 in February, compared with 50.1 a month earlier, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) announced. The reading, the highest since 2012, surpassed expectations, with analysts surveyed by Bloomberg having predicted a much less marked increase to 50.6.

"With the effect of the holidays... and the repercussions of the epidemic fading away, the recovery

of production by manufacturing companies accelerated and demand continued to rise," said NBS statistician Zhao Qinghe. "The strong PMI confirms the economic recovery is on track," Zhiwei Zhang from Pinpoint Asset Management wrote in a note, adding he expected to see macro data further improve over the next few months.

"The strong rebound of domestic demand may lead to inflationary pressure in the next few months, but I don't expect it to be a persistent problem," he said. The growth trend was confirmed Wednesday by the independent PMI index by IHS Markit for China's Caixin media group, which stood at 51.6 in February, compared with 49.2 the previous month. The Caixin survey, which covers small and medium-sized enterprises, is seen by some as a more accurate reflection of China's economic situation than official figures, which more closely track large state groups.

It said employment rose, pressure on supply chains eased and delivery times improved for the first time in eight years. "The return to a more normal business situation and the expected increase in customer demand means that business confidence for the year ahead is at its highest level for 23 months," it added.

More clues about China's economic health are expected to be revealed on Sunday when the annual session of the National People's Congress (NPC), China's parliament, opens in Beijing. Premier Li Keqiang will present the last government report of his term in office. — AFP



Carmaker Aston Martin's losses almost triple

LONDON: British luxury carmaker Aston Martin Lagonda on Wednesday said annual losses almost tripled on soaring costs and supply strains, but shares surged on rebounding sales and a bright outlook.

Losses after tax ballooned to £528.6 million (\$637.9 million) from £191.6 million a year earlier, it said in a results statement. But sales of the brand-loved by fictional British spy James Bond-zoomed 26 percent higher to £1.38 billion as its top-end customers shrugged off a cost-of-living crisis.

That was helped by an 18-percent jump in the average car selling price to £177,000. The group's performance "was negatively impacted by higher supply chain and logistics costs" which plagued the sector, ramping up costs and delaying deliveries, it added. The carmaker was hit also by a weaker pound that made dollar-denominated debt more expensive.

Aston's share price nevertheless rallied 14.2 percent to 226.69 pence Wednesday as investors focused on a forecast of "significant" growth in profitability this year. "Despite the operating environment, we... (exited) 2022 with the strongest order book in many years," said chairman Lawrence Stroll. The group aims to increase sales volumes to about 7,000 cars this year, up from 6,412 in 2022.

"Aston Martin has been held back by logistics and supply issues, like many of its automotive peers," said Sophie Lund-Yates, equity analyst at stockbroker Hargreaves Lansdown.

"That's kept a lid on volumes, but the engines are now firing." The average car price "shows how untouched Aston Martin's core customer base is from income pressures and tough inflationary conditions". Aston had suffered vast losses in 2019 as it crashed on weak global demand linked to China's economic slowdown and Britain exiting the European Union.

Losses then deepened further on fallout from the deadly coronavirus pandemic. But it was saved from bankruptcy in early 2020 by Canadian billionaire Stroll, who is the top shareholder. The automaker plans to shift gear into fully electric vehicles from 2025. — AFP

Global dividends hit new highs in 2022: Study

NEW YORK: Companies around the world paid their shareholders \$1.56 trillion in dividends last year, according to a study published on Wednesday. The total is up 8.4 percent from 2021, the previous record year, after rebounding from the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a report by asset manager Janus Henderson.

Oil and gas producers and financial firms accounted for half of that growth, according to its Global Dividend Index, which tracks the 1,200 biggest firms by market capitalization. As skyrocketing energy prices boosted profits, oil and gas producers increased their payouts by more than 66 percent in the form of ordinary or extraordinary dividends, the asset manager said.

It said 88 percent of companies increased or held their dividends steady in 2022. Eurozone banks used their renewed ability to pay dividends, after the European Central Bank froze them at the start of the pandemic. Banks and other financial firms contributed to a quarter of last year's dividend growth, the report said.

Soaring freight costs gave a boost to the transport and shipping sectors, but lower commodity prices meant mining dividends fell from their record 2021 high. As the global economy struggles and inflation puts a strain on households around the world, the news of huge corporate profits and payouts has reignited debate about windfall taxes. "For the year ahead, there is more uncertainty over the prospects for dividends," said Jane Shoemake, portfolio manager at Janus Henderson.

It still expects a record \$1.6 trillion in dividends paid out, but with a slower growth rate of 2.3 percent. "Inflation, the extent of further rate hikes, and geopolitical risks all cloud the horizon," Shoemake said. — AFP

Business

Gabonese village fights to save forest from logging

Communities want to protect tropical forests, a treasure chest of biodiversity

MAKOKOU, Gabon: Under the green canopy of the ancient Massaha forest in northeastern Gabon, Arsene Ibahe leads a group of visitors towards a tree that he says is sacred and speaks to his people.

Red clay is daubed on everyone's foreheads enabling them "to connect to the ancestors, and warn them of our coming," says Ibahe. With that accomplished, the 43-year-old conducts a ritual at the foot of the precious kevazingo tree, reciting words in the local language, Kota.

Ibahe is one of around 200 inhabitants in Massaha, a village in the vast province of Ogooué-Ivindo more than 600 kilometers (375 miles) from the capital Libreville. The sacred tree is also embedded in folklore as the bringer of good luck for fishermen during the mid-year dry season, said Ibahe.

Rituals at the tree enabled fishers to fill a 15-metre (50-feet)-long boat with a bounty of fish, "and all the village could tuck in," Arsene said. Beatrice Itsesame, 69, recounted her trips into the forest, where she collected nkumu, a small edible vine, and also bushmeat for ceremonies. "The forest is rich, it supports us", she said, wrapped in a blue boubou robe with a yellow motif.

Debate

Massaha, lying on the Libumba, a tributary of the Ivindo River, finds itself at the heart of a passionate debate about the future of logging and conservation in Gabon. The central African state is hosting a two-day summit starting Wednesday on how to protect tropical forests—a treasure chest of biodiversity and buffer against carbon emissions. Loggers were given authorization to exploit trees in the Massaha area covering 11,300 hectares (28,000 acres) — a territory nearly the size of Paris.

Ibahe said the loggers set up a lumber yard in

a forest clearing where there once had been a village. Their bulldozers gouged a swathe through the area, making it impossible to identify the location of three graves, he said, wielding a machete to clear undergrowth.

"They had no idea where the old villages were now our history has been cut in half," said Serge Ekazama-Koto, a community spokesperson.

Protected status?

Angry and fearful, the local community three years ago asked the government to scrap the logging license on the grounds of suspected violations and a threat to "biocultural heritage." In March 2022, their activism garnered a visit from Lee White, the minister of water, forests and the environment.

White, a British-born conservationist, subsequently stopped the logging, ordered the company to withdraw its machines and floated the theory of creating a new status of protected area.

The idea is being discussed as part of an overhaul of the logging code. White, in an interview with AFP, acknowledged there had been problems. "The fact that bulldozers came to a sacred forest close to a village means that we failed at every stage," he said.

That's why, he said, "we are currently asking-do we need a stronger status?" Local people say they have been heartened by recent progress since White's visit. Last month, a government team went to the area to geolocate the coordinates of sacred sites—a key step in the process of protection. The authorities, representatives of the community and NGOs are looking at the status options.

They include a model inspired by West African countries that aims to protect traditional sites, permits sustainable harvesting of resources and facilitates participation by local people.



MAKOKOU, Gabon: Arsene Ibahe (right) explains where their great grandparents were once buried, while standing in front of the sacred Kevazingo tree near Makokou on February 14, 2023. —AFP

Communities "want to be at the heart of governing the area" yet current protection status reflects "a model of state management," said Alex Ebang Mbele, head of an NGO called Nsombou Abalge-Dzal Association (NADA), which is calling for new conservation laws. "Often, it's the state that imposes the creation of protected areas," said Lucien Massoukou, director general of wildlife and protect-

ed areas at the forest and environment ministry. But "when a community has the will to preserve its space, it starts to take on ownership of the concept of conservation," he said.

Ibahe said local people had already chosen a name for the site in the Kota language-Ibola Dja Bana Ba Massaha, meaning "the reserve for all the children of Massaha." —AFP

Airline websites swamped as HK ticket giveaway takes off

HONG KONG: People hoping to take advantage of a Hong Kong scheme to give away half a million free airline tickets faced hours-long online queues on Wednesday, as the Asian financial hub bids to woo tourists back. The city government last month launched a campaign to reboot its reputation as "Asia's world city", after years of strict pandemic-related travel restrictions and a crackdown on political dissent.

On Wednesday, Hong Kong became one of the last places in the world to drop its outdoor mask mandate, which city leader John Lee said was a sign it was "resuming normalcy". Tourism once accounted for nearly five percent of the city's economy, but visitor figures plunged last year to 600,000 — less than one percent of 2018 levels.

Hong Kong-based carriers Cathay Pacific and Hong Kong Airlines were the first companies to launch the government-backed "Hello, Hong Kong" ticket giveaway, which will roll out over several months.

Social media users complained of long online queues to register, and an AFP reporter encountered wait times of more than two hours on the Hong Kong Airlines website. More than 55,000 users were waiting to access the offer on the Cathay Pacific website, according to the reporter. Cathay Pacific said it had allocated all 17,400 round-trip tickets from Thailand to Hong Kong within the first hour of the giveaway, despite it being scheduled to last seven days.

"We are very encouraged by the enthusiastic response," the airline told AFP, adding that its website had functioned well during the registration period. The first stage of the giveaway offered round-trip flights from Southeast Asia. Hong Kong residents will be eligible for a separate campaign for 80,000 tickets to be rolled out in July. Hong Kong once had one of the globe's busiest and best-connected airports, but travel came to a virtual standstill when the city imposed strict travel restrictions and quarantine requirements as part of China's zero-COVID doctrine. The restrictions helped the city remain largely virus-free, until a deadly Omicron outbreak at the start of 2022 that killed more than 9,000 people. The city has now lifted most curbs, but, as of January, about 20 regional Asian airlines were unable to restart services to the city due to labor shortages. —AFP

No respite for UK consumers as inflation soars

LONDON: New figures show UK shop price inflation has reached a record high amid warnings that consumers are unlikely to see prices drop again for months. According to the British Retail Consortium-NielsenIQ Shop Price Index, prices in shops are now 8.4 percent higher than they were a year ago, up from an 8 percent increase in January and well above the three-month average of 7.8 percent.

Gulf Bank launches Google Pay to its customers

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank has launched the Google Pay service, which provides customers with the latest digital payment revolutions and enables them to make contactless payments using Android, and Wear OS devices, with ease and security. Every purchase via Google Pay is secured with an authentication through Face ID, Touch ID, or device passcode; and is compatible with all sales outlets that accept 'contactless' card payments using smart devices. Security and privacy are an integral part of Google Pay - as card numbers are not saved on the device or Google's servers when customers use their Gulf Bank credit or debit cards, but rather a unique encrypted number is assigned to the device's account.

Google Pay is accepted at millions of retailers worldwide and anywhere 'contactless' payments are

accepted; just like you would with a physical card. Transactions with Google Pay are simple and can be done with ease following an authentication using Face ID, Touch ID, or device passcode. Customers simply hold their smart devices near a payment terminal to make a contactless payment. In addition, Gulf Bank cardholders using Google Pay will continue to receive the same exclusive rewards and benefits offered on the Gulf Bank cards.

On this occasion, Gulf Bank's General Manager of Consumer Banking, Mohammad Al-Qattan, said, "The digitization of banking services at Gulf Bank is witnessing great development, and this falls within the Bank's digital transformation plan that is continuing successfully. This includes launching the new application on smart phones, which has simplified the customers' experience with the Bank, and helped provide our services to everyone, everywhere and at any time; through a simple, fast, and secure interface. Gulf Bank also topped the list of banks that launched Apple Pay and updated the Easy Pay service."

Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the Future. The Bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employ-



ee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience.

Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining robust developments in sustainability at environmental, social and governance levels through diverse sustainability initiatives, strategically selected to benefit the Bank both internally and externally. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with various parties to achieve it.



Al-Rashed Shipping joins national day celebrations

KUWAIT: Al-Rashed International Shipping Co followed its tradition this year as well with its annual inter-department office decoration competition as part of Kuwait's national celebrations. Various departments located on the 10th floor of Al-Rashed complex reflected the festive mood of

the country. This is the occasion when the staff display their creativity and artistic skills every year through the decorations. Staff members came to the office dressed up in traditional Kuwaiti attire while music, sweets and food added to the festive spirit.

Chairman Bassim S Al-Rashed and CFO Pradeep Menon visited each department as judges of the competition which was organized as part of the celebration. Accounts department with its uniqueness won the cash prize for the second year in a row. Awards were given away by Senior Shipping Manager Valtor Gonsalvez and Vice President, Corporate Affairs, C P Rajiv Menon.



chief executive Helen Dickinson said.

"While we expect to see the annual inflation rate reduce in the second half of this year, retail prices will remain high over the coming months." Mike Watkins, head of retailer and business insight at NielsenIQ, said: "With more than half of UK consumers (56 percent) feeling they are in a worse financial position compared to a year ago and inflation still stubbornly high, many households are trimming back on non-essential spending."

"And as volume sales are down on last year, some retailers are having to work even harder to encourage customer spend, including additional price cuts or promotional activity. This is likely to continue until consumer confidence starts to improve." —Agencies



Business

Nigerian gas fuels Morocco, Algeria pipeline power struggle

Long-stalled projects being revived amid bid to wean away from fossil fuels

RABAT: Adversaries Morocco and Algeria are each racing to build a conduit pumping Nigerian gas to European markets, even as the continent aims to wean itself off fossil fuels. Both countries have moved to revive long-stalled projects in light of a gas supply crunch following Russia's invasion of Ukraine a year ago. Prices surged and Europe—which was heavily reliant on Russian gas—had to look elsewhere for energy.

Rabat is hoping the Nigeria-Morocco Gas Pipeline, which would skirt the coastlines of 13 West African countries, could pump billions of cubic meters of natural gas to the kingdom. From there, the gas would flow through the Maghreb-Europe gas pipeline (GME) into Spain and Portugal.

Nigeria's Oil Minister Timipre Sylva told AFP that a feasibility study was underway and some countries had already signed up to the project, but a start date has yet to be set. To the east, Morocco's neighbour and arch-rival Algeria is pushing to relaunch plans for a Trans-Saharan Gas Pipeline linking Nigeria to Algeria's Mediterranean coast via Niger.

Last July, Algiers signed a memorandum of understanding with Abuja and Niamey to bring the 4,128-kilometre (2,565-mile) pipeline to fruition, at a cost of up to 18 billion euros (\$19 billion).

From Algeria the gas could be pumped via the Mediterranean undersea Transmed pipeline to Italy through Tunisian territory, or loaded onto liquefied natural gas tankers for export.

Complex

The renewed momentum on both projects follows months of heightened tensions between Algeria and Morocco after the collapse of a decades-old ceasefire in the Western Sahara and Morocco's normalization of ties with Zionist entity in late 2020. In August 2021 Algiers cut diplomatic links with Rabat altogether, accusing it of "hostile acts", which Morocco denies.

Later that year, Algeria declined to renew a 25-year deal to pump gas through Moroccan territory to Spain in exchange for gas that covered almost all of Morocco's needs. The loss of that gas helps explain Morocco's drive to make its 6,000-kilometre pipeline project, launched in 2016, a reality.

Morocco's deal with Nigeria and their West African neighbors is set to cost 23 billion euros, but Sylva noted that the project would involve complex negotiations. "There are certain agreements that you must sign with every country" on the route, he said. Rabat and Abuja did make progress last year, signing MoUs with seven of the 13 countries in question as well as with the Economic Community of West African States, a regional bloc. Rabat is hoping the pipeline, combined with Nigeria's vast hydrocarbon reserves, can create "a stable, predictable and mutually profitable gas market", said Moroccan researcher Jamal Machrouh. Europe has a "strategic interest" in the project, Machrouh added. At the same time, Algeria is pursuing anew its own similarly challenging pipeline, started in 2009. The project would have to pass through thou-

sands of kilometres of desert including some areas where jihadist groups have waged a long insurgency.

'Hugely vulnerable'

Algeria is Africa's biggest gas exporter and the third-largest gas provider to Europe. Algerian expert Ahmed Tartar said the pipeline project could be finished within three years and would "meet an important part of Europe's future needs". But Maghreb geopolitics expert Geoff Porter told AFP in September that "a pipeline like this would be hugely vulnerable, not just to attacks by jihadists but also by local communities if they feel they're getting exploited by a project from which they derive no benefit". "Then there's the bureaucratic element, which is extremely complex," he added. "Then, who's going to finance it?"

Algeria's Energy Minister Mohamed Arkab said on February 18 that technical studies were underway. He insisted that "this African project will benefit the countries it crosses", and even neighbouring ones.

Both pipelines could be viable for Europe, as the continent would not want to overly rely on "a single player" for its energy supplies, Machrouh said. But they would also come online as Europe engages in longer term efforts to wean itself off fossil fuels—including gas. During a January visit to Rabat, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said of the pipeline: "You have to consider when it will be finished. Will we still want to use gas, methane?"



A gas pipeline at a power plant in Nigeria.

Borrell suggested Morocco could focus efforts on its enormous wind and solar energy potential as well as selling hydrogen to Europe. A senior European diplomat, speaking to AFP on condition of anonymity, put it more bluntly: "In the future, we won't be buying gas anymore." —AFP



CEDENO, Honduras: Picture of beach houses destroyed by sea-level rise in Cedeno, municipality of Marcovia, Choluteca Department, in the Gulf of Fonseca in the Pacific southern coast of Honduras. — AFP

Rising seas eating away at Honduran fishing village

CEDENO, Honduras: The coastline of Cedeno, a fishing village in southern Honduras, looks like it was hit by an earthquake. Houses, businesses and clubs stand in ruins. Forsaken. But it was not a quake. Nor a tsunami. A much slower, but equally destructive force is at work in Cedeno and other villages on the Pacific Gulf of Fonseca: sea level rise. The creeping ocean has claimed ever more of the protective mangrove forest off Cedeno's coast, and claws away at the land with increasingly violent sea surges.

Inhabitants of Cedeno and other fishing villages on the Gulf of Fonseca—shared by Honduras, El Salvador and Nicaragua—are at the forefront of one of the more visible symptoms of climate change: sea level rise caused by melting glaciers and ice sheets. "The sea is advancing," said Telma Yadira Flores, a 40-year-old homemaker from Cedeno who lost her house in a storm surge last year and now lives in a rickety shack with her son and daughter-in-law. The sandy beach is their kitchen floor.

"If the sea comes again, we will have to move. We will have to see where," Flores told AFP. According to the NGO Coddeffagolf (Committee for the Defense and Development of the Flora and Fauna of the Gulf of Fonseca), the sea has advanced 105 meters (344 feet) into Cedeno, a settlement of some 7,000 people, in 17 years. Apart from numerous homes and small businesses, a marine laboratory, police headquarters and a park were also abandoned to the waves.

The Michel Hasbun primary school, which once served about 400 children, now stands empty. "There was a soccer field, it was lost," Sergio Espinal, a 75-year-old fisherman, told AFP, pointing to where it once stood. "There were good restaurants, good hotels..." But no more.

Sri Lanka workers defy strike ban to protest rescue plan

COLOMBO: Sri Lankan workers went on strike Wednesday in defiance of a government ban to protest a rescue plan for the bankrupt island nation, forcing the closure of hospitals, banks and ports. President Ranil Wickremesinghe is facing a public backlash over steep tax hikes and spending cuts imposed to secure a sorely needed International Monetary Fund bailout.

Around 40 trade unions, including government hospital staff and bank employees, called work stoppages. Doctors at the National Hospital of Sri Lanka in Colombo said only emergency cases were being treated, while appointments were cancelled at private clinics and hospitals. Electricity workers and bank tellers

'Entire countries could disappear'

The community has also had to contend with dwindling fish numbers. The mangroves whose roots act as nurseries and hunting grounds for crustaceans, shellfish and many other species that in turn serve as food for bigger animals, are under attack from sea levels rising too fast for them to adapt. "Before there were schools of dolphins, there were sharks, swordfish... and now everything has been lost," boat operator Luis Fernando Ortiz, 39, said as he pointed out the broken and abandoned mansion of a former president overlooking the idyllic turquoise waters. The community's hopes now rest on a Coddeffagolf project, still in the planning phase, to improve coastal surge protections and reforest the battered mangrove. Earlier this month, UN chief Antonio Guterres warned that global warming-induced sea level rise could force a mass exodus "on a biblical scale" as people flee low-lying communities.

"The danger is especially acute for nearly 900 million people who live in coastal zones at low elevations—that's one out of 10 people on Earth," Guterres told the UN Security Council. "Low-lying communities and entire countries could disappear forever," he said.

Honduras is already a mayor source of US-bound undocumented migrants. The UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) says sea levels rose by 15-25 centimeters (6-10 inches) between 1900 and 2018. And if the world warms by just two degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) compared to the pre-industrial era, those levels will rise again by 43 centimeters by the year 2100. According to the IPCC, all mangrove forests could be lost in the next 100 years. Mangroves not only sustain sea life but also help trap planet-warming carbon dioxide and protect coastlines from storms and surges. Central America's Atlantic and Pacific coasts "are some of the most endangered on the planet with regard to mangroves, as approximately 40 percent of present species are threatened with extinction," according to the IPCC. On Thursday and Friday this week, leaders of government, the private sector, civil society and academics will gather in Panama for the "Our Ocean" conference to discuss how to save under-pressure marine resources. — AFP

were also on strike while dock workers staged lunchtime protests at the capital's port. Wickremesinghe used his executive powers on Tuesday to effectively outlaw strikes by compelling "essential services" to remain at work, and government workers defying the order risk losing their jobs.

Union leaders said they were told by Wickremesinghe on Saturday that he cannot reduce income taxes as it was a condition of the IMF to release a bailout package. Haritha Aluthge of the Government Medical Officers' Association told reporters in Colombo that his union planned to continue its industrial action. "A token one-day protest is not going to sway the authorities," he said. "We will have to take stronger action."

Sri Lanka sought IMF help after defaulting on its \$46 billion foreign government debt last April but is waiting for financial assurances from China, its largest single bilateral creditor, that it is willing to take a haircut on loans to the South Asian nation. — AFP

How 5G disappointed 'pretty much everybody'

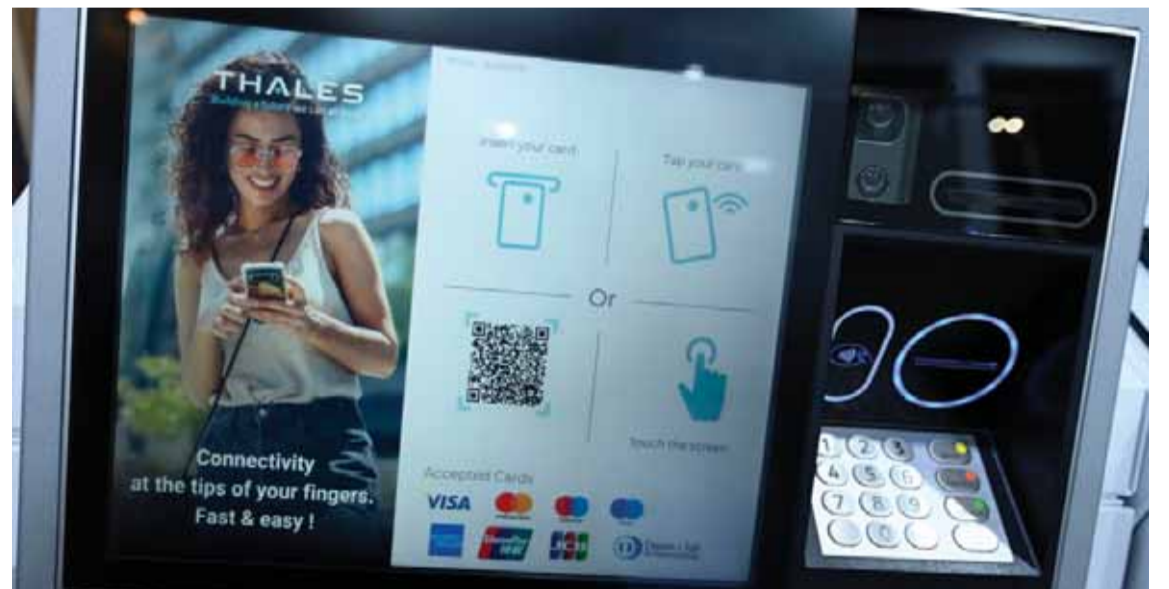
BARCELONA: Driverless cars, fridges that talk to toasters, breathtaking immersive reality, mind-blowing gaming experiences — 5G was going to enable it all, and telecom companies were going to make a packet. But the reality is not so neat. The network that promised to be "not just another G" in Ericsson's advertising has left many customers wondering what they are paying for.

However, 5G was once again the central plank of the phone industry's annual get-together, the Mobile World Congress (MWC) in Barcelona. The event's organizers proclaimed that 5G was "unlocking untapped value for all players across the entire ecosystem" and "redefining how the world connects".

The hype came with a dose of reality from Christel Heydemann, boss of French network Orange.

Network operators were in peril, she told the MWC, because "massive network investments of almost 600 billion euros in Europe in the last decade happened to be hard to monetize".

"And consumers expect to pay always less and get more," she added. Networks are not the only ones who might be rueing their big bet. Ericsson, which supplies the equipment for 5G networks, has just laid off 8,500 people after profits slumped. "5G has disappointed pretty much everybody—service providers and consumers, and it has failed to excite businesses," Dario Talmesio of research firm Omdia told AFP.



BARCELONA: An ATM for buying SIM cards is pictured at the stand of French multinational company Thales at the Mobile World Congress (MWC), the telecom industry's biggest annual gathering, in Barcelona on March 1, 2023. — AFP

German inflation holds steady in February at 8.7%

BERLIN: German inflation stabilized in February, preliminary figures showed Wednesday, as government support measures helped keep the lid on high energy costs. Germany's annual inflation rate held steady at 8.7 percent, the same level as in January, according to federal statistics agency Destatis. Food prices showed "above average growth" in February, Destatis said, but energy prices "eased slightly" year-on-year.

Inflation remains at a high level overall, and well above the European Central Bank's two-percent target. Price pressures are proving persistent in other leading eurozone economies as well, other data showed this week. Inflation ticked up in France in February to reach 6.2 percent, fuelled by higher prices for food and services. Consumer price growth in Spain also inched up for the second straight month, to 6.1 percent.

Eurostat will publish its February inflation data for the 20-nation eurozone on Thursday, after the rate eased to 8.6 percent in January. In Germany, Destatis

recently revised the way it calculates the inflation rate in Europe's biggest economy, as part of a regular review of the consumer price basket.

The change has made it harder to make direct comparisons with previous months. Under the old calculation, German inflation peaked at 10.4 percent in October. Using the new method, the October figure stood at a more modest 8.8 percent. The ECB prefers to look at the inflation rate using the Harmonized Index of Consumer Prices (HICP).

By that measure, inflation in Germany reached 9.3 percent in February, up from 9.2 percent in January.

Regardless of the different calculations, "we probably left the peak of inflation behind us last autumn", said KfW chief economist Fritzi Koehler-Geib. Increases in food and energy costs, pushed up by the war in Ukraine, have started to lose momentum in part thanks to massive government interventions.

But prices for goods and services "still have room to rise", Koehler-Geib said, suggesting the ECB should "stay on course" with its rate hikes. The ECB has lifted interest rates at an unprecedented pace since last July in a bid to cool prices and return inflation to target. The bank plans to raise rates by another 50 basis points at its next meeting in March. Germany's Bundesbank president Joachim Nagel on Wednesday said the March increase "won't be the last". —AFP

Lifestyle | Features



A restaurant staff member weighs a plate as prepares a diet meal for a customer in Riyadh. —AFP photos



A customer eats a meal at a diet restaurant in Riyadh.

SWAPPING KABSA FOR KALE: SAUDIS EMBRACE HEALTHY EATING

Long partial to heavy lunchtime platters of meat and rice, Asim Al-Shammari has recently turned to lighter fare from a self-described diet restaurant, swayed by Saudi Arabia's anti-obesity push. Roughly one in five Saudi adults is obese, accord-

sity and diabetes by decade's end.

The effort is being helped by a raft of new restaurants offering healthier alternatives to some traditional Saudi fare, including the spot where Shammari, a financial analyst, tucked into a plate of chicken, rice

ping malls, and food was a chief source of entertainment, where high temperatures limit outdoor activities for much of the year. In 2019, the health ministry started requiring restaurants to include calorie information on menus to encour-

places, makes it easier to stick to healthy eating," he told AFP as he dined on salmon and grilled potatoes. A growing number of restaurants are offering meal plans that send salads and other healthy meals to clients' homes and workplaces.

One such plan provides a meal a day for a month for 450 Saudi riyals (\$120). Basil Chehayeb, a Lebanese national who runs a restaurant called Reshape in the Saudi capital Riyadh, said he had opened two new branches in the past 18 months to keep up with demand. The restaurant provides meals each day to about 500 subscribers, most of whom are Saudis. "Saudis have changed their lifestyle and are now attending sports clubs and eating healthy foods," he said.



A restaurant staff member prepares a diet meal for a customer in Riyadh.

ing to an in-depth study published by the World Bank last year that described the problem as "alarming".

The Global Obesity Observatory places the kingdom at number 17 in its international rankings of obesity prevalence, three slots below the United States and near neighbors Qatar and Kuwait. But the Vision 2030 reform agenda spearheaded by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman includes goals for bringing down both obe-

and carrots one recent afternoon. "I used to eat burgers, shawarma or kabisa while I was at work," said the 28-year-old, referring to a rice dish usually served on large shared plates. "This increased obesity, especially with eight-hour office work and lack of movement."

Lifestyle change

For decades, Saudis spent much of their free time in restaurants and shop-

age healthy eating.

Fast food options remain ubiquitous in the kingdom's main cities, but they are starting to face more varied competition. Saad Al-Hader, a 25-year-old doctor, said he used to bring meals from home in order to eat something besides junk food, but the proliferation of new health-conscious eateries has made his life easier.

"The popularity of these restaurants, and the fact that they are close to work-

Targeting the youth

Efforts by restaurants and other private sector businesses to promote healthy eating have been supplemented by other health-minded interventions. The Saudi Sports for All Federation now organizes regular events like the Riyadh Marathon, which this year drew thousands of runners to the streets of Riyadh. Officials have also begun work on a 135-kilometre (85-mile) Sports Boulevard in the capital featuring foot, cycle and horse-riding paths.

Beginning with the current academic year, the Saudi health ministry has banned the sale of soft drinks in schools. The message seems to be getting through, at least among young people, said public health consultant Lamia Al-Brahim. "Obesity is a serious health problem" but "it is very noticeable now that health awareness is increasing among the young generation," she said. "Societal behavior changes need a long time, and these efforts start from within the home, then the school and then the government agencies." — AFP



Slap chat? Chris Rock live Netflix special to air week before Oscars

Chris Rock's live Netflix special will air just a week before the Oscars, the streamer said Tuesday, raising expectations that the comedian will address the shocking moment he was slapped by Will Smith during last year's Hollywood award show. This Saturday evening "Chris Rock: Selective Outrage" will become the first-ever event shown in real time on Netflix, accompanied by pre- and post-show entertainment featuring celebrities from Jerry Seinfeld and Amy Schumer to Sir Paul McCartney and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar.

Netflix did not comment on the material of Rock's main show, but the comic has spent much of the last year touring stand-up venues around the world with a routine that has included jokes about "The Slap." Last March, Smith climbed onto the Oscars stage and slapped Rock

across the face in response to a joke the comic made about the closely cropped hair of his wife Jada Pinkett Smith, who has alopecia.

Rock was asked by Los Angeles police at the time whether he wanted to file a report against Smith, but he declined, and he has not publicly addressed the incident outside of his stand-up shows since. "March 4 will be a hilarious evening, with an incredible set from Chris Rock—one of the greatest stand-ups of all-time—and contributions from an amazing lineup of special guests," said Netflix comedy vice-president Robbie Praw. "Our goal is to deliver the best stand-up comedy to our mem-



Chris Rock attends the Tom Ford fashion show during September 2022 New York Fashion Week: The Shows at Skylight on Vesey in New York City. — AFP

bers and this live streaming event further reinforces all the ways we continue to invest in the genre."

Netflix, the world's leading streaming platform, has lured millions of viewers away from traditional broadcast television, but it lost subscribers for the first time last year. The company, which has since returned to growth, has been experimenting with various new models, including live content.

The streaming company already hosts a live comedy festival at more than 35 venues in Los Angeles, though those shows have not yet been available in real time on its platform. From next year Netflix will air the Screen Actors Guild awards—an important pre-Oscars Hollywood award show-live on its platform.

According to multiple reports the company is also looking into offering live sports on its platform. Rivals including Disney+ and Amazon Prime Video already offer live events including sports and musical events. Saturday's comedy show will be Rock's second for Netflix, after the pre-recorded 2018 "Chris Rock: Tamborine." The 95th Academy Awards take place this year on March 12. — AFP

Linda Kasabian, member of 'Manson family' cult, dies at 73

Linda Kasabian, a member of the notorious cult led by Charles Manson that murdered film star Sharon Tate in 1969, has died at the age of 73, US media reported Tuesday. Kasabian played the role of lookout as the so-called "Manson family" carried out the murder of Tate, the eight-month pregnant wife of film director Roman Polanski, and three others in a rented house in an exclusive neighborhood of Los Angeles in August 1969.

During the trial of the cult members, Kasabian became a witness for the prosecution and received an immunity deal. Manson and four of his followers were jailed after the trial, and Manson died in detention in 2017. Kasabian died in hospital in January in Tacoma, Washington at the age of 73, according to the media site TMZ, citing her death certificate. According to the death cer-

tificate, Kasabian had changed her name to "Chiochios" to protect her identity after testifying against the murderous cult. — AFP



Linda Kasabian

Doll's world: Japan's Barbie casts spell over grown-ups



This photo shows some of Ryoko Baba's, a 33-year-old graphic designer, Licca-chan dolls at her home in Tarui.



This photo shows one of Minami Murayama's Licca-chan dolls at her home in Yokohama.



This photo shows some Licca-chan dolls belonging to an anonymous creator during an interview with AFP at her apartment in Saitama.



This photo shows Ryoko Baba sewing a costume for her Licca-chan dolls.

With her wide eyes and demure smile, Licca-chan is known as "Japan's Barbie". And her appeal is spreading to all ages, with adults turning the doll into a social media superstar. One fan posts wry videos of the plastic poppet to over a million Instagram followers, while others painstakingly craft miniature clothes and share photos of their fashion shoots. Minami Murayama, a 34-year-old homemaker who once had ambitions of becoming a fashion designer, told AFP that her "dream has come true at one-sixth of the size" thanks to Licca-chan.

"If I see a stylish woman wearing something that I couldn't wear because of my age or body size, Licca-chan can still wear it and look good," said Murayama, who owns around 40 dolls and has hand-made over 1,000 outfits for them. Licca-chan has been a favorite of Japanese children since she appeared in toy shops in 1967, and manufacturer Takara Tomy has sold over 60 million of them. The company's official biography casts her as an 11-year-old girl with a Japanese designer mother and a French musician father.

At 22 centimeters (8.5 inches) tall, she is smaller and less glamorous than Barbie, who Murayama describes as "a supermodel" compared with Licca-chan's more "familiar" look. Murayama spends hours making clothes for her dolls and favors denim, which her husband helps her bleach and tear to achieve the "distressed" look.

She has built a series of intricate sets, using tiny props to decorate mini cafes and fashion studios. "There are lots of different jobs I would like to do, such as running a cafe or a bakery or being a fashion designer," she said. "Of course, there's no way I could do them all in real life, but I can do them all in a doll's world."



This photo shows Minami Murayama's Licca-chan dolls at her home in Yokohama.

'She makes mistakes'

Murayama is a fan of a popular social media channel whose name translates as "Licca-chan's Real Life". It features tongue-in-cheek videos and photos of the doll in mundane situations such as struggling with an over-stuffed rubbish bag or relaxing at home in pyjamas. The channel offers an antidote to the idealized lives that people project online, said its creator,

comfortable with themselves." Takara Tomy is not keen on "Licca-chan's Real Life", saying the videos have "a different worldview" from their fiercely protected official image of the doll. But the channel has struck a chord with Licca-chan's adult fans, who form an online community and swap home-made garments and accessories.

Ryoko Baba, a 33-year-old graphic designer, played with Licca-chan as a

desire by dressing up dolls instead", said Baba, who often recreates outfits from her own wardrobe for her dozens of dolls to wear. Takara Tomy is aware of its growing adult fan base and has launched a "stylish doll collection" aimed at older customers.

Maruyama said "there are lots of adults who play with kids' toys" in Japan where "there's not really a separation" between the two, with train



This combination of photographs shows Ryoko Baba (top row), a 33-year-old graphic designer, posing with her Licca-chan dolls while wearing matching outfits, at home in Tarui, Gifu Prefecture. — AFP photos

who has over a million Instagram followers but prefers to remain anonymous so her videos don't get her into trouble at work. "The Licca-chan in Licca-chan's Real Life doesn't live a glamorous life—she lives a real life in a messy room and she makes mistakes," she told AFP.

"If you show people that even someone like Licca-chan lives like that, it gives them the courage to be

child and revived her interest around two years ago as a way to relieve stress. She thinks the lingering effects of the COVID pandemic have given people more time to spend at home with their hobbies and less chance to leave the house. "When you want to go out but you can't, you have far fewer opportunities to buy new clothes," she said.

Many people have "satisfied that

set collectors being one example. Baba, who describes Licca-chan as a "national icon", believes the doll's appeal will only grow. "Recently I've seen a lot of comments from people saying they didn't know that this world existed," she said. "I hope I can help spread the word." — AFP



This photo shows an anonymous creator arranging Licca-chan dolls during an interview with AFP at her apartment in Saitama.

Britain's Prince Harry loses home on royal estate

Prince Harry and his wife Meghan are being evicted from their home on the British royal family's Windsor estate, leaving them without a UK base, reports said on Wednesday. Frogmore Cottage, which they refurbished at a reported cost of £2.4 million (\$2.9 million), had been a wedding present from the late Queen Elizabeth II in 2018. It has now been offered to Prince Andrew, King Charles III's disgraced brother, reports in the The Sun and Daily Telegraph said.

Harry and Meghan, also known as the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, were reportedly told to vacate the property in January just days after the publication of the prince's tell-all memoir "Spare". Charles, who has long favored a slimmed down monarchy, is currently undertaking an overhaul of funding.

A possible axing of Andrew's £250,000-a-year grant could see him forced out of his current residence, the 30-room Royal Lodge, also on the Windsor estate, due to its massive upkeep costs. Harry and Meghan moved to California in 2020 after

dramatically quitting royal life. Since then, they have taken part in a string of projects—from an interview with Oprah Winfrey to a Netflix documentary—airing grievances about their experiences as members of the British royal family. Harry's autobiography "Spare" smashed sales records when it was published in January, but also saw his popularity ratings slump.

Andrew was forced out of public life over his friendship with the late convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein. Last year Andrew settled a US civil case for sexual assault with accuser Virginia Giuffre. — AFP



Britain's Prince Harry and his wife Meghan, the Duchess of Sussex wave from the balcony of the Grand Pacific Hotel in Suva, Fiji. — AFP

Peru police find pre-Hispanic mummy in ex-delivery man's bag

Police in Peru have seized a mummified human, between 600 and 800 years old, from a former food delivery man who claimed to have had it at his home for three decades. The mummy was in the isothermal bag the man had once used to deliver food to people's homes. The man, 26-year-old Julio Cesar Bermejo, will remain in detention while investigators look into the case, a government official told AFP on Tuesday.

Bermejo told local media the mummy, who he called "Juanita," was "like my spiritual girlfriend." "At home, she's in my room, she sleeps with me. I take care of her," he said in a video that went viral on social media. Bermejo said his father brought the mummy home almost 30 years ago.

According to the Ministry of Culture, the pre-Hispanic relic was a "mummified adult male individual, presumably from the eastern area of Puno", a region in the Peruvian Andes some 1,300 kilometers (more than 800 miles) southeast of Lima. "It's not a Juanita, it's a Juan," a

specialist at the ministry affirmed, adding the mummy was of a man at least 45 years old. The body was wrapped in bandages in the fetal position.

Police found the remains in Bermejo's bag on Saturday while patrolling a park in the city of Puno, where he had been hanging out with friends. He denied he was trying to sell the mummy and said he was carrying it around because "my friends

wanted to see it." The culture ministry said it had taken possession of the mummified remains "with the aim of protecting and preserving this heritage." Peru is rich in archaeological sites and objects. Its most visited tourist destination is the Inca citadel of Machu Picchu, built in the 15th century near Cusco. — AFP



This handout picture shows a mummy found inside a cooler box used by a delivery service worker in Puno, Peru. — AFP

Sports

Nadal to miss Miami Masters, Indian Wells

Grand Slam champion suffers hip flexor injury

LOS ANGELES: Rafael Nadal will miss the ATP 1000 events at Indian Wells and Miami, the 22-time Grand Slam champion confirmed on social media on Tuesday. "I am sad that I won't be able to compete at Indian Wells nor Miami," Nadal said in a tweet which came after Indian Wells officials announced he had withdrawn from the tournament in the California desert that starts next week.

"Very sad not to be there. I'll miss all my US fans but I hope to see them later this year during the summer swing." The news comes after the Spaniard said in late January he expected to miss six to eight weeks with the hip flexor injury he sustained at the Australian Open.

"We wish Rafa continued healing, and hope to see him back at the BNP Paribas Open next year," Indian Wells tournament director Tommy Haas said in a statement. Nadal, who said on January 26 that tests had confirmed a moderate muscle tear in his left hip, posted video on Twitter showing him training in the gym. "Took my time off, started rehab, gym and physiotherapy as instructed by the doctors," he said. "Getting

ready to come back the in the best conditions."

That likely means for the clay-court season that starts in mid-April and leads into Roland Garros, where he would be chasing a 15th French Open title in May. Nadal, who made history as the first man to win 21 Grand Slam singles titles at the 2022 Australian Open, hobbled out of this year's edition in January after just two matches. He said in Melbourne he had had the problem for "a couple of days" but at that point had not received a diagnosis. Nadal, whose stellar career has been marked by injuries, was adamant that he would continue playing.

Last year Nadal was undefeated heading into Indian Wells, having posted victories in an Australian Open tune-up in Melbourne before rallying from two sets down to beat Daniil Medvedev in the Australian Open final. He won the ATP tournament in Acapulco and reached the final at Indian Wells, where he was stunned by American Taylor Fritz in the final as he battled a rib injury. He returned to win his 22nd Grand Slam title at Roland Garros, a record that Novak Djokovic has since matched. —AFP



Spain's Rafael Nadal

Time 'not right to readmit Russians': German Olympics

MUNICH: Germany's National Olympic Committee is opposed to letting Russian and Belarusian athletes compete internationally, the body's chief executive said on its web site on Tuesday. "Now is not the right time to allow athletes with a Russian or Belarusian passport to compete in international competitions again," Torsten Burmester said in an interview conducted just after the anniversary of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

"The acts of war have intensified in recent weeks, especially the attacks on the civilian population." The International Olympic Committee (IOC), which is led by a German, Thomas Bach, has said it is exploring a "pathway" to allow Russian and Belarusian competitors to take part in the Paris Games, under a neutral flag.

That sparked fury from Ukraine and questions from many western nations. Burmester said he took part in a conference call with the IOC in January. "In a so-called Consultation Call by the IOC on January 19, a majority of the National Olympic Committees spoke out in favor of examining re-admission," he said. "In this call, we clearly expressed our position and said that we can only imagine a re-admission - if it is decided - under very strict conditions."

He said allowing Russians to compete under a neutral flag during their country's recent doping ban had not worked. "True neutrality would have to be guaranteed. No flags, national symbols or colors should really be worn and anthems played. It remains to be seen how something like this could be guaranteed. Scenes like those in Pyeongchang, Tokyo or Beijing must not be allowed in Paris," he said. He added that there would need to be guarantees from athletes from nations not currently allowed to compete had undergone thorough dope tests.

In a letter earlier this month, more than 30 countries, including France, Great Britain, Sweden, Poland, the United States and Canada, expressed concern about how the athletes could be neutral, particularly given the "strong links and affiliations between Russian athletes and the Russian military". "It would have to be ensured that no athletes from Russia or Belarus who actively support the war start," Burmester said. The letter asked the IOC for "clarifications" on the neutrality required for Russian and Belarusian athletes at the 2024 Olympics in Paris. The IOC responded that the letter ignored the human rights of Russian and Belarusian athletes. —AFP

Just Fontaine, France's WCup record breaker, dies

PARIS: Just Fontaine, the legendary France striker who died on Wednesday at the age of 89, will forever be remembered for scoring 13 goals at the 1958 World Cup, a remarkable feat that seems unlikely ever to be matched. To this day, only three players have scored more World Cup goals than Fontaine, even though the Reims player appeared at just one tournament and played only six matches. Lionel Messi matched his tally on Argentina's recent run to glory in Qatar, but it took him five World Cups to get there.

That 1958 World Cup in Sweden is best remembered as the coming of age of a 17-year-old Pele, who inspired Brazil to victory after netting a hat-trick in their 5-2 semi-final win over France. However, it was a personal triumph for Fontaine, whose four-goal haul in the third-place play-off win over West Germany ensured he had scored in every game. Part

Djokovic defeats Machac in Dubai

DUBAI: Novak Djokovic was made to work in his first match since winning the Australian Open last month, needing three close sets to move past world No 130 Tomas Machac in Dubai on Tuesday. Undefeated so far in 2023, and carrying a 17-match winning streak coming into the UAE, dating back to last year's ATP Finals, Djokovic showed signs of rustiness in his 6-3, 3-6, 7-6 (7/1) win over the Czech qualifier.

Djokovic, who this week has broken Steffi Graf's all-time record of 377 weeks at world number one, recently recovered from a muscle tear in his left hamstring, which he sustained in Australia on his way to a record-equalling 22nd Grand Slam title. It was an impressive performance from Machac, who was facing a top-10 opponent for just the fourth time in his career.

The two players hit a combined 78 winners during the two-hour 27-minute affair. But it was Djokovic's 28 unforced errors that at times proved costly. "Tomas definitely didn't play like 130 in the world today," said the 35-year-old Djokovic. "He was giving me all kinds of trouble, but I guess when it mattered, I found another gear."

Alcaraz, Norrie withdraw from Acapulco ATP 500

ACAPULCO: Top-seeded Carlos Alcaraz withdrew from the ATP 500 tournament in Acapulco on Tuesday with a right hamstring strain as fifth-seeded Cameron Norrie pulled out citing fatigue, organizers said. Both had been on the order of play for Tuesday, just three days after Britain's Norrie rallied to beat an ailing Alcaraz 5-6, 6-4, 7-5 in the Rio Open final. That result had left world number two Alcaraz with fresh fitness concerns after he was repeatedly seen by the physio.

"I have a grade 1 strain in my right hamstring that will keep me out for several days, according to the tests we did this morning," Alcaraz said in a

tweet. "I'm really sad I can't compete here, but now it's time to think about recovering and being ready as soon as possible. I hope to see you all soon!" The 19-year-old had returned to competition with a victory in Buenos Aires a week earlier, ending a four-month injury layoff. He needed heavy strapping on his right thigh midway through the second set of the final in Rio, when he collapsed from a 3-0 lead as Norrie stormed back.

Norrie, who had fallen to Alcaraz in the Buenos Aires final, claimed the biggest clay-court title of his career in Rio. The left-hander leads the ATP Tour in match wins this season with 18, compared to three defeats. "Unfortunately I have to withdraw from Acapulco," Norrie said on Instagram. "It's one of my favorite tournaments, so it's really tough for me to withdraw." Each player will be replaced in the draw by a lucky loser as they turn their attention to getting fit for the prestigious ATP 1000 event at Indian Wells, which starts on March 8. —AFP

of a wonderful attacking trident alongside Roger Piantoni and Raymond Kopa, Fontaine might never have gone to Sweden at all. Only injuries to Thadee Cisowski and his Reims teammate Rene Bliard saw him make the squad and then the starting line-up. "It was only at the airport before leaving for Sweden that Paul Nicolas (part of the national team staff) and Albert Batteux (the France coach), who didn't really want me, told me I would be playing as centre-forward," Fontaine told AFP in 2013. Only Germany's Miroslav Klose (16), Brazil's Ronaldo (15) and Gerd Mueller, the West German hero of the 1970s who scored 14 times, have netted more World Cup finals goals. Just two other players - Mueller with 10 in 1970 and Hungary's Sandor Kocsis with 11 in 1954 - have reached double figures at a single World Cup. Yet Kopa is remembered as the biggest French star of the era. When he died in 2017, Fontaine remembered fondly his "big brother". "Raymond had character," he said. "So did I, and that made us a magical duo." Born in Marrakech in August 1933 to a French father and Spanish mother at the time of the French Protectorate in Morocco, Fontaine went to school in Casablanca, and began his football career there.

'Raise my level'

"Physically, you can always be better. I did struggle with injury for several weeks and it took me a bit of time to get used to holding the racquet. I haven't played much tennis coming into Dubai, so I'm hoping as the tournament progresses, I can raise my level of tennis." Djokovic and Machac traded breaks in games four and five before the top seed struck again and consolidated his advantage for a 5-2 lead. It was all the Serb needed to wrap up the opening set in 37 minutes. That didn't deter Machac, who outlasted Djokovic in a lengthy exchange to break early in the second set to open up a 3-0 gap.

The 22-year-old qualifier valiantly covered all corners of the court and benefitted from 16 unforced errors off the Djokovic racquet to force a decider against the five-time Dubai champion. A smooth volley winner from Machac gave the Czech an early look at the Djokovic serve but the world number one survived the scare and held. Machac received treatment for a right wrist problem mid-game at 0-1, deuce, in the final set, before successfully holding serve, but soon fell behind 1-4 to an opportunistic Djokovic.

Back-to-back errors off both wings from Djokovic helped Machac narrow his deficit and they were soon on level terms at 4-4. The match fittingly went to a deciding tiebreak, which Djokovic comfortably secured to set up a second-round meeting with Dutchman Tallon Griekspoor. Earlier, third



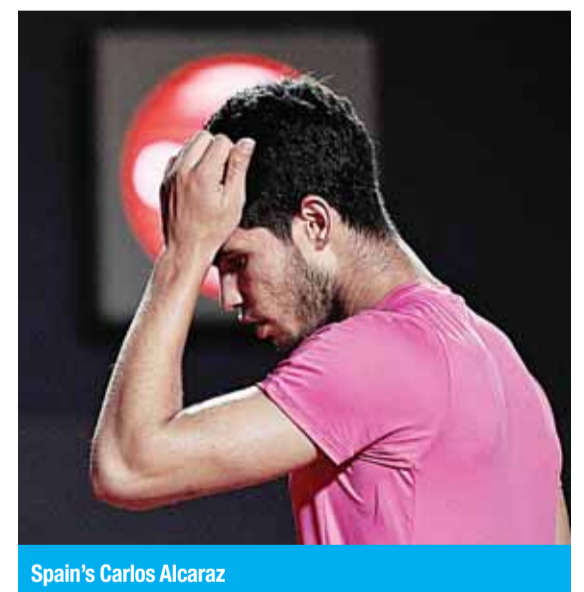
DUBAI: Novak Djokovic of Serbia serves against Czech Republic's Tomas Machac (not pictured) during their Dubai Duty Free Tennis Championship match in Dubai on February 28, 2023. —AFP

seed Daniil Medvedev extended his winning streak to 10 consecutive matches as he began his quest for a third title in as many weeks with a 6-4, 6-2 victory over Italian lucky loser Matteo Arnaldi.

Medvedev, competing in Dubai for the first time since 2019, picked up trophies in Rotterdam and Doha coming into the tournament. The Russian former world number one had voiced his concerns over the Dunlop ball in use at tournaments like the Australian Open, Doha and Dubai this year. "Last two games before they change the balls, the balls are like apples," said Medvedev. "They are so, so big. You're kind of playing like padel. You hit the ball. Whoever hits it with

angle... You don't feel like you're controlling the game anymore."

Medvedev will next take on Kazakhstan's Alexander Bublik in the second round on Wednesday. Fourth seed Felix Auger-Aliassime made a successful tournament debut, avenging his defeat to Maxime Cressy from Wimbledon last year by overcoming the American 7-6 (7/4), 3-6, 6-3. Cressy, a Paris-born serve-and-volleyer, fired 27 aces but also committed 25 double faults throughout the three-hour contest, which saw Auger-Aliassime convert just one of 14 break point opportunities. The Canadian world No.9 will next take on Italian Lorenzo Sonego for a place in the quarter-finals. —AFP



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz

Career cut short by injury

In 1953 the stocky penalty-box poacher moved to France, joining Nice. His three years there were spent combining football with military service, but Fontaine still won the French Cup in his first season and a league title in 1956. He then moved to Reims, the great French side of the 1950s who had just been beaten by Real Madrid in the first European Cup final and that summer lost Kopa to the Spanish giants. Fontaine won three league titles at Reims and another French Cup, and appeared in the 1959 European Cup final, when they again lost to Madrid, this time going down 2-0 in Stuttgart. He scored 10 goals in that European campaign, but 1958 was his crowning glory - in his second season with Reims, they won a league and cup double and he was the league's top scorer with 34 goals.

However, his career ended in 1962 aged just 28. He had hardly played for two years after suffering a double leg fracture. In all he won 21 caps for France, scoring 30 goals. "We talk a lot about my record but I would definitely have swapped it for another five or six years, because football was my passion," he said. "I was at the very top, and I was earning a lot of money at the time. It was not the money you see nowadays, it was five times the minimum wage, whereas now it would be more like



TOULOUSE: Former French international football player Just Fontaine poses with a trophy for the 1958 football World Cup top-scoring record at his home in this file photo. —AFP

one hundred times that." Fontaine went into coaching and in 1967 took charge of France. However, he lasted just two games, both defeats in friendlies. A spell with Paris Saint-Germain was more successful, as "Justo" took the side from the capital into the top flight in 1974. His career in football ended back where it began, in Morocco, as he led the national team to third place at the 1980 Africa Cup of Nations. —AFP

Sports

Man City cruise into FA Cup quarter-finals, crush Bristol

2021 winners Leicester suffer shock defeat

LONDON: Phil Foden struck twice as Manchester City eased into the FA Cup quarter-finals with a 3-0 win against Bristol City, while 2021 winners Leicester suffered a shock 2-1 defeat against second tier Blackburn on Tuesday. Pep Guardiola's side were never in danger of a giant-killing in the fifth round tie at Ashton Gate thanks to Foden's brace and a late strike from Kevin De Bruyne.

Guardiola saluted the impact of England forward Foden, who is starting to recapture his peak form after an inconsistent season. "His career was always up, up, up. This season he struggled a bit and was a bit down. But now he's back for the best bit of the season," Guardiola said. "His impact has been amazing. Football pays off when you work like he does." City will hope for another boost on Wednesday when Premier League leaders Arsenal, two points ahead of the champions, face Everton in their game in hand.

"We're still alive in three competitions. We'll see what happens in the future," Guardiola said. City took a seventh minute lead when Riyad Mahrez crossed to the far post, where Foden fired into the roof of the net. Foden doubled City's lead after 74 minutes as Julian Alvarez flicked towards Foden, who produced another clinical finish past Max O'Leary. De Bruyne got the visitors' third from long-range in the 81st minute to ensure the smoothest of nights for the six-time FA Cup winners.

Leicester were booed off after Blackburn ended the Foxes' bid to reach a second FA Cup final in three seasons. Brendan Rodgers led Leicester to the club's first ever FA Cup triumph in 2021, but Rovers punished woeful defending from the Premier League side to shatter their hopes of emulating that run. With Leicester 14th in the top-flight, just three points

above the relegation zone, Rodgers made six changes to the side beaten by Arsenal at the weekend and paid the price for his gamble.

"If there's anyone to blame it's me. I made the changes and sadly it didn't work," Rodgers said. "We brought four players into the starting line up who won the FA Cup a couple of seasons ago. But they were better than us and we have to worry about that." Rovers, into the last eight for the first time since 2015, took the lead when Tyrhys Dolan curled home from the edge of the area in the 33rd minute. Sammie Szmodics made it 2-0 seven minutes after the break following good work by Sam Gallagher. Kelechi Iheanacho netted from Harvey Barnes' pass in the 67th minute, but Blackburn held on.

Solomon strikes again

Manor Solomon scored for the fourth time in four game as Fulham beat Leeds 2-0 at Craven Cottage to make the last eight for the first time since 2010. Fulham, who have exceeded all expectations to climb to sixth place in the Premier League this year, took the lead through Joao Palhinha's superb 25-year curler in the 21st minute.

Solomon, on loan from Shakhtar Donetsk, finished off Leeds in the 56th minute, curling in from the edge of the area after playing a one-two with Aleksandar Mitrovic. Fulham can still dream of a first FA Cup final appearance since 1975. But it was a first defeat for new Leeds boss Javi Gracia, whose side won 1-0 against fellow strugglers Southampton in the Premier League last weekend.

Brighton won 1-0 at second tier Stoke to reach the quarter-final for the third time in the last six seasons. The Seagulls, who beat holders Liverpool in the



BRISTOL: Manchester City's Dutch defender Nathan Ake (left) vies with Bristol City's English striker Sam Bell during the English FA Cup fifth round football match between Bristol City and Manchester City at Ashton Gate in Bristol on February 28, 2023. —AFP

fourth round, remain in the hunt for a first FA Cup final appearance since 1983. Brighton landed the decisive blow in the 30th minute when teenage forward Evan Ferguson met Kaoru Mitoma's pass with a

close-range finish. Among the four remaining fifth-round ties on Wednesday, League Cup winners Manchester United host West Ham, while Tottenham travel to Sheffield United. —AFP



Pochivalov wins gold as shooting Grand Prix ends

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah Annual Shooting Grand Prix came to a conclusion on Wednesday along with the Asian Shotgun championship, which was organized by Kuwait Shooting Federation at Sheikh

Sabah Al-Ahmad Olympic Shooting Complex. The juniors trap singles gold medal went to Kazakhstan's Danil Pochivalov; silver medal went to his teammates Bogdan Konchenko and bronze went to Kuwait's Dhari Al-Mutairi.

Meanwhile, Oman's Said Al-Khatiri won the gold medal of the trap event of IHH the Amir Championship, while Kuwait's Nasser Al-Mealid won silver and Kazakh's Victor Khasganyan bronze. In the women's trap, Kazakh's Mariya Dimitriyenko won gold while Lebanon's Ray Bassil and Lea Korban won silver and bronze respectively. In the Asian Championship trap event, Chinese Taipei's Kun-Pl Yang took gold; Jordan's Ahmad Al-Tarabeishi won silver while Kazakh's Alisher Aisalbayer won bronze.



Osaimi thanks Amir

Secretary General of Kuwait and Arab Shooting Federations, Tournament Director Obaid Al-Osaimi thanked HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for his care and support. He also, thanked HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah and Public Authority for Sport. Al-Osaimi said the tournament witnessed very strong competitions.

The event was attended by President of ISSF Luciano Rossi, ISSF Secretary General Willy Grill and President of African and Egyptian Shooting Federations. Al-Osaimi said Kuwait Shooting Federation is preparing for training camps for the qualifying tournaments ahead of Paris 2024 Olympics.



The Kuwaiti team participating in the Winter Championship in Russia.

Kuwait shine in children's sports games in Russia

MOSCOW: Kuwait's national team have accomplished a distinguished level in the second Winter Children of Asia International

Games, taking place in Kemerovo, Russia. In a statement to KUNA, Assistant Secretary of the Kuwaiti Winter Games Club, Mubarak Al-Omani said that Kuwait's team could achieve advanced levels among 13 participating countries from Asia and Europe.

Player Sama Jaragh and Joori Al-Mulla won the fourth and fifth places, respectively, in the ice show competition (figure) for girls, while the player Ali Al-Ali achieved fifth place in the 500-meter speed competition for boys, in light of



Members of the Kuwaiti sports team Sama Jaragh and Joori Al-Mulla.

wide participation from the various countries. Al-Omani considered that participation in this strong championship would develop the players' skills and talents at an early age.

The tournament is witnessing the participation of the teams of Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Thailand, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Armenia, Afghanistan, Lebanon and Nepal, in addition to Kuwait and the host Russia, represented by several teams representing a number of Russian provinces. —KUNA

LA County agrees \$29m settlement with Bryant's widow

LOS ANGELES: Los Angeles County has agreed to pay the widow of Kobe Bryant nearly \$29 million after first responders shared photos taken at the site of the helicopter crash that killed the NBA superstar. Bryant, the couple's teenage daughter Gianna, and seven others were killed when their chopper smashed into a hillside near Los Angeles in January 2020. Sheriff's deputies and firefighters who rushed to the scene snapped pictures of the carnage, including the mangled remains of the Los Angeles Lakers legend and his daughter.

Bryant's widow Vanessa sued for emotional damages over the pictures, which she feared would one day surface on the internet. Los Angeles County agreed Tuesday to pay \$28.85 million to settle all crash-related litigation. "Today marks the successful culmination of Mrs. Bryant's courageous battle to hold accountable those who engaged in this grotesque conduct," Vanessa Bryant's attorney Luis Li said in a statement quoted by US media.

"She fought for her husband, her daughter, and all those in the community whose deceased family were treated with similar disrespect. We hope her victory at trial and this settlement will put an end to this practice." Mira Hashmall, attorney for Los Angeles County, called the settlement "fair and reasonable." "We hope Ms. Bryant and her children continue to heal from their loss," Hashmall said in a statement quoted by CNN.

The settlement includes the \$15 million damages awarded to Bryant by a Los Angeles jury in August 2022. The trial had heard how some of the first responders to the crash showed the photographs to members of the public including a bartender, while one sheriff's deputy texted them to a friend as the pair played video games. Chris Chester, whose wife and daughter also died in the crash, separately settled for nearly \$20 million, US media reported. —AFP

Classifieds

Change of Name

I have changed my name from (old name) SHAB HABIB IRFAN HABIB AMAR to (new name) IRFAN HABIB AMAR BINSHAHAB. (C#3174) — 1-03-2023

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

Clinics

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

Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

Bucks rally to overpower Nets

Grizzlies hammer Lakers 121-109



MEMPHIS: Ja Morant #12 of the Memphis Grizzlies takes a shot during the first half against the Los Angeles Lakers at FedExForum on February 28, 2023. — AFP

LOS ANGELES: Ja Morant produced a second-half scoring spree as the Memphis Grizzlies exploited the absence of LeBron James to beat the Los Angeles Lakers 121-109 on Tuesday. After being restricted to six points as the Lakers took a 49-46 lead into the break, Grizzlies star Morant erupted with 28 points in the third quarter to tip the contest decisively in Memphis' favor.

The Memphis win snapped the Lakers' three-game winning streak and put another dent in the team's recent resurgence following the injury to James on Sunday. James, who is reportedly facing multiple weeks on the sidelines after injuring his right foot in a Lakers victory over Dallas, was seen wearing a protective boot on the sidelines on Tuesday as his depleted team-mates slipped to defeat.

The Lakers were also without the injured D'Angelo Russell, and the absence of the team's two most assured ball-handlers was keenly felt, with the Lakers coughing up 26 turnovers for 41

points. Morant received scoring support from Xavier Tillman with 18 points, while Jaren Jackson Jr. and Desmond Bane added 16 points apiece for the home side. Morant said he had been determined to produce a big second half after a wayward first-half shooting performance.

"I was locked in," Morant said. "The shots I missed early in that first half were the shots that I made in that third quarter. I told my team-mates at half-time I wasn't going to miss too many more of those. I got it going, and the rest is history." Anthony Davis led the Lakers scoring with 28 points while Lonnie Walker IV added 21 off the bench. "We've got some guys out of the lineup obviously but we have capable players, and we have to be conscious of making the simple play," Lakers coach Darvin Ham said. "You turn the ball over, it's hard to get your defense set."

Bucks rally, Jokic century
Elsewhere, Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 33

points as the Milwaukee Bucks stretched their winning streak to 15 games with a come-from-behind 118-104 victory over the Brooklyn Nets. The Nets, who are rebuilding after the departures of Kyrie Irving and Kevin Durant, sprinted into a 28-13 first-quarter lead and remained in front for the remainder of the half to lead by 10 points at the break.

But a third-quarter scoring blitz from Milwaukee-outscoring Brooklyn by 39-23 - saw the Eastern Conference leaders finally edge clear 91-85 heading into the fourth quarter before closing out the win. "Right now we're playing great basketball, we're playing together and guys are making shots and defending," Antetokounmpo said. "We're out there competing, doing whatever it takes to win, building good habits. It's fun." Antetokounmpo said the Bucks' unflappable temperament had helped them recover from their double-digit half-time deficit.

"When we're winning and making shots, it's easy," Antetokounmpo said after a win that saw the

Bucks improve to 44-17. "But sometimes when you're down it's a little harder. But at the end of the day, as a team we kept our composure. "We know we have to be able to win games like this." In Houston, Nikola Jokic brought up a century of triple-doubles as the Western Conference-leading Denver Nuggets downed the Rockets 133-112. Nuggets star Jokic, the two-time reigning NBA Most Valuable Player, finished with 14 points, 11 rebounds and 10 assists.

The Serbian star is only the sixth player in NBA history to collect 100 or more triple-doubles, joining Russell Westbrook (198), Oscar Robertson (181), Magic Johnson (138), Jason Kidd (107) and LeBron James (106). In San Francisco, Damian Lillard finished with 25 points following his 71-point masterpiece on Sunday but was unable to stop the Golden State Warriors, who cruised to a 123-105 victory over the Portland Trail Blazers. Jordan Poole led the Golden State scoring with 29 points while Klay Thompson added 23. — AFP

Juventus fight back to win Turin derby

PARIS: Paul Pogba made his first appearance of the season as Juventus twice came from behind to win the Turin derby 4-2 on Tuesday. Earlier in the evening, Cremonese, who had not won all season, upset Roma 2-1 as Jose Mourinho received a red card, and the visitors missed a chance to finish the 24th round inside the Serie A top three. Pogba played for the first time since returning to Juventus last summer when he came on as a 68th-minute substitute against Torino.

Another Frenchman, Yann Karamoh, gave

visiting Torino the lead after a first-minute corner. Juan Cuadrado levelled with the help of a deflection after 16 minutes. Antonio Sanabria restored the Torino lead after 41 minutes when he met a cross with a sharp first-time shot that surprised Wojciech Szczesny at the near post. Danilo levelled in added time, his powerful header from a corner bouncing across the line off the post.

Pogba replaced Enzo Barrenechea with 22 minutes left. Three minutes later, Bremer gave Juventus the lead for the first time with another header from a set piece. French midfielder Adrien Rabiot completed the scoring with 10 minutes left. Pogba's last competitive appearance was for Manchester United in the Premier League in April. He

went off injured early in the first half of a 4-0 loss to Liverpool and did not play again last season. He rejoined Juventus in the summer but injured his right knee in July.

The return of Pogba last summer generated great enthusiasm among Juventus supporters, delighted to see the return of a player whose first spell at the club (2012-2016) was punctuated by four league titles. He initially resisted surgery because he hoped to make the France squad at the World Cup Qatar tournament, but later changed his mind. Juventus, who have been penalized 15 points, climbed a place to seventh, still 10 points behind fourth-place Lazio who occupy the last Champions League spot.

Earlier, Cremonese's first league victory of the season lifted them off the bottom, one point above Sampdoria, but still eight points below Spezia, just above the relegation zone. Roma started the weekend in third and could have returned there with a win, but instead ended the round in fifth, pushed out of the Champions League places by neighbors Lazio. Frank Tsadjout gave the home team the lead with a 17th minute missile. Roma monopolized possession but struggled to breach a compact defense.

Mourinho was shown a red card for vehement protests at the half-time whistle. The coach made five changes just after the hour, among those were attackers Tammy Abraham, Stephan El Shaarawy and Ola Solbakken. Wingback Leonardo Spinazzola leveled with a cool finish after a well-worked move in the 71st-minute. In the 83rd minute, Roma goalkeeper Rui Patrício threw himself at the feet of David Okere, taking down the striker and conceding a penalty converted by Daniel Ciolfani (83rd). — AFP

Lakers battle on despite LeBron James' injury

LOS ANGELES: The Los Angeles Lakers offered no firm timeline on Tuesday for LeBron James' return from a right foot injury, but coach Darvin Ham said their "mission is still the same" with their superstar sidelined. The Lakers, 12th in the Western Conference, are trying to claw their way into the post-season, with the 10th placed team in each conference gaining a spot in the play-in tournament.

Ham said he'd met with players on Tuesday morning and emphasized three things: "We've got to continue to play the right way, we've got to continue to be together, and we've also got to continue on with the mission. "The mission hasn't changed for us. The goal of securing a playoff spot is still very much alive," Ham said as the Lakers prepared to take on the Grizzlies in Memphis.

Their chances of turning things around in the closing stretch of the season took a big hit on Sunday, when James went down hard

in the third quarter but stayed in the game as the Lakers completed a remarkable rally from 27 points down to beat the Dallas Mavericks. James limped out of the American Airlines Center in Dallas that night, and the Lakers had already confirmed that the NBA's all-time leading scorer wouldn't play on Tuesday, listing him as out due to "right foot soreness."

While several US media outlets reported the Lakers feared James would be sidelined multiple weeks, Ham said only that diagnostic tests were ongoing. ESPN reported Tuesday that he would likely be re-evaluated in two weeks. "It's unfortunate that Bron went down, but injuries are a real part of our sport," Ham said. "We've got to step up and hold down the fort until he returns."

James' injury came less than three weeks after he eclipsed Kareem Abdul-Jabbar as the most prolific scorer in NBA history, breaking a 39-year-old record that many thought would never fall. The four-time NBA champion said prior to a record-equalling 19th All-Star Game appearance that the final stretch of the regular season was "23 of the most important games of my career for a regular season," and he hoped he could find a way to be available every night. Instead the Lakers will be scrambling to find a way to win without him. They are 5-9 in games he has missed this season. — AFP



TURIN: Juventus' Serbian forward Dusan Vlahovic (center) heads the ball during the Italian Serie A football match between Juventus and Torino on February 28, 2023. — AFP



MEMPHIS: LeBron James #6 of the Los Angeles Lakers looks on during the first half against the Memphis Grizzlies on February 28, 2023. — AFP