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Kuwait condemns Zionist minister's racist remarks

Kuwait welcomes UN High Commissioner's report on situation in Palestine

Amir heads to Italy on private visit



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Saturday headed to Italy for a private visit. HH the Amir was seen off at the airport by HH the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and senior state officials. — KUNA

KUWAIT: Kuwait's ministry of foreign affairs condemned in strong terms a Zionist minister's racist call for "wiping out" Huwara village in the occupied Palestinian West Bank. "Such irresponsible and provocative remarks contravene all international laws and norms and constitute a blatant breach of international humanitarian law," the ministry said in a press release on Friday.

Kuwait reminds the international community of their responsibility for putting an end to Zionist campaigns of incitement against the brotherly people of Palestine and providing full protection against the Zionist entity's escalating malpractices. Kuwait supports all international efforts aiming to reach a fair, permanent and comprehensive solution based on relevant UN resolutions, the Arab initiative for peace and the two-state vision, the statement stressed.

It reaffirmed Kuwait's support to the Palestinian people until they attain their legitimate political rights, including the right to establish an independent state within the pre-1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Zionist Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich made his comments on Wednesday. "I think the village of Huwara needs to be wiped out," Smotrich said. "I think (the Zionist entity) should do it." UN



HUWARA: Zionist security forces block Palestinian and peace activists protesting at the entrance of this town in the occupied West Bank on March 3, 2023. — AFP

rights chief Volker Turk, speaking before the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva on Friday, denounced Smotrich's comments as "an unfathomable statement of incitement to violence and hostility".

Washington, a staunch ally of the Zionist entity, was even more blunt in its response to Smotrich's comments. "They were irresponsible, they were repugnant,

they were disgusting," US State Department spokesman Ned Price told reporters. A French foreign ministry statement also condemned the comments as "unacceptable, irresponsible and unworthy coming from a member of the (Zionist) government". "These comments only fuel hatred and fuel the spiral of current

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News in brief

Russian visa eased for Kuwaitis

KUWAIT: From March 6, the Russian Federation is updating its visa regime to facilitate the tourist visa application and issuance process for citizens of several countries including Kuwait. According to the new rules, Kuwaiti passport holders can apply for a single or double-entry tourist visa valid for three months by providing a hotel booking confirmation. (See Page 2)

Winter 'ends on Wednesday'

KUWAIT: Al-Ojairi Scientific Center announced this Wednesday will mark the end of winter in Kuwait, as temperatures will gradually rise during daytime with signs of the spring season. "The change of weather is connected to the beginning of the Hameem season, which comes after the Agaarib season and before the Dharaeen season, which will last until April 2," the center announced. — KUNA

Iran announces lithium find

TEHRAN: Iran has announced the discovery of a large deposit of lithium, a key component of batteries for electric vehicles and electronic devices, state media reported Saturday. "For the first time in Iran, a lithium reserve has been discovered in Hamedan", in the west of the country, state television said. This reserve is believed to hold "8.5 million tons" of lithium. — AFP

UN slams rich states' treatment of poor nations

DOHA: UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Saturday slammed the world's rich countries and energy giants for throttling poor nations with "predatory" interest rates and crippling fuel prices. Speaking in the Qatari capital, Doha, Guterres told leaders of more than 40 of the most deprived states that wealthy nations should provide \$500 billion a year to help others "trapped in vicious cycles" that block efforts to boost economies and vital services.

Lebanon paralysis grows as security chief bows out

BEIRUT: The head of one of Lebanon's top security agencies retired Friday without a replacement, a casualty of the political and institutional paralysis

Governor, five others shot dead in Philippines

MANILA: A provincial governor in the central Philippines and five other people were shot dead by unknown gunmen on Saturday, his widow said, in the latest attack against local officials. Police said six suspects carrying rifles and dressed in uniforms similar to those worn by the armed services

The summit of Least Developed Countries (LDC) is normally held every 10 years but has twice been delayed since 2021 because of the coronavirus pandemic. Afghanistan and Myanmar, two of the poorest countries, are not present at the Doha meeting of 46 LDC states because their governments are not recognized by UN members. No leader from any of the world's major economies attended.

At a leaders' summit ahead of the start of the general LDC conference on Sunday, Guterres hit out straight away at the way poor nations are treated by the more powerful. "Economic development is challenging when countries are starved for resources, drowning in debt, and still struggling with the historic injustice of an unequal COVID-19 response," he said.

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DOHA: UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres speaks during the 5th Conference on the Least Developed Countries (LDC5) on March 4, 2023. — AFP

which is stoking fears of a broader breakdown. "The country is in a state of almost total disintegration," said analyst Karim Bitar. "We are seeing the collapse of all state institutions that were still holding up."

Lebanon is navigating a devastating economic crisis that has plunged more than 80 percent of the population into poverty, according to the United Nations. Strikes and absenteeism have paralyzed public services, the state is barely able to provide a few hours of mains electricity a day, and the local currency has lost most of its

entered the governor's home in Pamplona town and opened fire. Roel Degamo, governor of Negros Oriental province, and five others were killed in the shooting, his widow said.

"Governor Degamo did not deserve that kind of death. He was serving his constituents on a Saturday," Janice Degamo, who is also the mayor of Pamplona, said in a video posted on Facebook. President Ferdinand Marcos condemned what he described as the "assassination" of his political ally and warned the perpetrators to "surrender now it will be your best option". "My government will not rest until we have brought the perpetrators of this

Continued on Page 6

value against the greenback since 2019. Largely politically rudderless, Lebanon has been run by a caretaker government with limited powers since legislative elections in May last year. Former president Michel Aoun left office at the end of October, and sectarian leaders have been squabbling over a replacement ever since. Politicians have now failed to extend the mandate of retiring spy-master Abbas Ibrahim, head of the General Security agency, or name a replacement.

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PAMPLONA, Philippines: Policemen man a checkpoint between the border of Tanjay City and Pamplona town in the province of Negros Oriental on Mar 4, 2023. — AFP



Local

Russia to facilitate tourist visa application, issuance process

Russian Embassy marks 'Defender of the Motherland Day'



KUWAIT: Russia Ambassador to Kuwait Nikolai Makarov cuts the cake with other officials during an occasion marking the Russian Federation Defender of the Motherland Day.



KUWAIT: Embassy of the Russian Federation holds a reception on Thursday on the occasion of the Russian Federation Defender of the Motherland Day. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: The Russian Embassy revealed that starting from March 6, the Russian Federation is updating its visa regime to facilitate the tourist visa application and issuance process for citizens of several countries including Kuwait. According to the new rules, Kuwaiti passport holders can apply for a single or double-entry tourist visa valid for three months by providing a hotel booking confirmation. The same measures apply to obtaining multiple-entry tourist visas, with their validity extended to six months.

Meanwhile, on the occasion of the Russian Defender of the Motherland Day, the Russian Embassy held a reception on Thursday at its premises in Daiya. "Today we celebrate Defender of the Motherland Day of the Russian Federation. This national holiday epitomizes the heroic history of our army and navy and the unbreakable link connecting all generations of defenders of the motherland.

It embodies our deep gratitude to the faithful sons and daughters of the motherland, to all those who did not spare themselves as they fought the enemy defending their native land and their people," Ambassador of Russia to Kuwait Nikolai Makarov

said in his opening remarks. "A modern army is a guarantee of the country's security, sovereignty, stable development and future. Today, the Russian army continues to develop successfully, units are equipped with modern weapons and military equipment, and the skill of our servicemen is growing," he added.

The Russian ambassador affirmed the ministry of defense of the Russian Federation is actively developing cooperation with friendly armies and joint exercises are held on a regular basis, noting Russian soldiers are fighting for the future of not only Russia, but for freedom, real independence and respecting the sovereignty and security of all coun-

tries against neo-colonialism and ideas of the superiority of some nations over others.

Commander of the Kuwaiti Naval Force Commodore Hazza'a Al-Alati has affirmed the strength and solidity of Kuwaiti-Russian relations that were embodied when Russia condemned the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and supported all Security Council resolutions, including Resolution 678 calling for the use of all available means to end the invasion and liberate Kuwait. "Today, we thank the government of the Russian Federation, and we wish the Russian people progress and prosperity," he said.

Emotional intelligence essential at workplace

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: Emotional intelligence or emotional quotient is a wide concept that can hardly be described in limited words. However, there are some remarkable factors that reflect one's high level of EQ, such as maturity, empathy and sound judgments.

What identifies an individual as emotionally intelligent?

Emotionally intelligent people have self and social awareness. Self-awareness means that they are capable of understanding their emotions (what triggers a certain feeling, desire, idea) and the way these emotions affect others (how do people view them), whereas social awareness is the skill of understanding the emotions of others (validating people's emotions even if they do not seem cogent) and treating them accordingly (listen carefully, show empathy and reach for a comfortable closure).

Business Development Manager and Lead Trainer Basil Rizvi shared his thoughts with Kuwait Times about the significance of a person's EQ in order to regulate their emotions and cope with different environments to successfully move forward. "EQ is the real key for true success. It helps a person to recognize and understand who/what they are, why they are the way they are and then how they can manage themselves within their environment," he said.

According to Rizvi, being emotionally intelligent provides a sense of security, transparency and perception of one's persona. The way of reacting to different situations and handling oneself and social relationships also reflects how emotionally intelligent a person is. For instance, controlling and/or redirecting one's anger to better behavior in a certain situation, or the ability to compromise to a reasonable degree for the sake of keeping a corresponding relationship with others, shows one's EQ level.

Why is emotional intelligence necessary at work?

EQ occupies a major role in various fields of



Basil Rizvi

individuals' lives, especially at their workplace, where people spend plenty of time interacting with others who have different backgrounds and characters, in addition to working under pressure and serious responsibility. This necessitates having a high EQ level and embracing interpersonal skills to avoid misunder-

standing and conflict.

"At the workplace, EQ helps the individual to recognize and understand stress (both active and inactive). It also helps the individual with conflict resolution, negotiation and to understand how to work effectively with different personalities at the workplace. EQ brings awareness - internally and externally," Rizvi said, emphasizing the significance of emotional intelligence at the workplace. It enables people to notice signs of others' unspoken feelings, which determines what would be appropriate or inappropriate to say or do under certain circumstances (the capability of reading the table). This ensures efficiency at work due to building healthy relationships that reciprocate among others and motivates a progressive environment.

What are the key factors to enhance one's EQ level?

Emotional intelligence can be learnt and improved. Yet, it depends on one's preparedness. Qualifications such as good listening, humanity and decency pave the way for whoever heads towards this direction.

tion tender. Dr Eo and Al-Ajmi will also discuss how to develop a smart city in Kuwait through collaboration between the governments.

The delegation also plans to meet with Dr Amani Bugammaz, Minister of Public Works and Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy and Waleed Khaled Al-Bader, CEO of KIPIC. They will examine the way to strengthen cooperation in Infrastructure development. Korea has been the key player in Infrastructure development in Kuwait. Jaber Causeway was built by Korean companies. Korean companies were also leading players in developing Clean Fuel Project and Al Zour Refinery Project. The delegation expects that this visit will further promote the cooperation in infrastructure between the two countries.

Chung Byung-ha, Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to Kuwait, mentions, "Dr Eo had worked as the first secretary for economic affairs at the Korean Embassy for three years. He understands Kuwait and has a special affection for it. He is the right person to vitalize the bilateral relationship between our two countries after the pandemic" and adds, "Through this visit, I hope that partnership between the two countries in aviation, housing, and infrastructure would be further strengthened."

Gulf Bank welcomes students from GUST

KUWAIT: As part of its various initiatives to instill the principles of sustainability in society, and in partnership with INJAZ Kuwait, Gulf Bank welcomed a group of students from Gulf University for Science and Technology (GUST) to be part of its 'Job Shadowing' training program. The Job Shadowing program is one of INJAZ's programs that align with Gulf Bank's sustainability initiatives, that aims to support the youth, by helping them better understand the actual work environment.

Throughout the training program, the Corporate Communications team at Gulf Bank provided the students with detailed explanations about the work environment at Gulf Bank, as well as the banking sector as a whole. The students had the opportunity to learn about the daily tasks and visit Gulf Bank's head office for a clearer understanding about the roles of management and of team members at the Bank.

To help the students learn and resonate with the information provided, members of the Corporate Communications team spoke of their personal post-graduation and job searching experiences, beginning with the application process, to attending interviews and making the right decision based on the available options.

The Corporate Communications team also dedicated some time to answer various questions posed by the students regarding the post-graduation period, the difference between university and work life, and how to smoothly transition from one stage to another. On this occasion, Assistant Manager of Corporate Communications at Gulf Bank, Maysoun Al-Attar highlighted: "We were very pleased with the high academic level of the students participating in the program, and with their eagerness to be well prepared for the next stage of their lives."

Al-Attar further pointed that the students' visit to Gulf Bank's head office was a unique experience for the employees to share their expertise and experiences with university students, and to listen to their ideas and future aspirations, adding: "Complimentary



Maysoun Al-Attar

to academia, the youth needs to get more involved in practical working experiences to prepare them for the work force. This is the value of our partnership with INJAZ Kuwait."

She also mentioned that the Job Shadowing program falls within the framework of the strategic partnership with INJAZ Kuwait, which has been renewed last year. The Bank's first event in 2023, following the renewal of the partnership, was the Innovation Camp workshop, which was recently held at the American Academy for Girls (AAG). The workshop aimed to expand the students' horizons towards self-employment, develop their thinking skills and contribute to instilling entrepreneurial qualities and skills.

Furthermore, the successful partnership between Gulf Bank and INJAZ led to many achievements during the year 2022 - where the Bank successfully contributed to training 8,830 male and female students, from elementary to university levels, through more than 14 international training programs. The partnership also witnessed the participation of 50 employees from Gulf Bank, who volunteered in various training activities offered by INJAZ.

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

Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining 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.

Obesity: One of the biggest challenges facing public health

KUWAIT: The head of the bariatric surgery association Dr Mohammed Al-Jarallah said obesity is one of the biggest challenges facing public health in the world today, stressing that obesity changes lives and increases the probability of getting diabetes, heart disease, blood pressure, cancer, anxiety and depression. He was speaking on the occasion of World Obesity Day, which is marked on March 4 every year under the slogan "Changing Perspectives: Let's Talk About Obesity", with the aim of highlighting the seriousness of obesity and its health, economic and social consequences.

"Data of the Global Obesity Observatory indicates Kuwait leads almost all countries in the world in the prevalence of obesity among adult women with 47 percent, followed by Qatar, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. As for men, obesity among adults constitutes 34.3 percent, after the US and followed by Qatar and Saudi Arabia," Dr Jarallah warned.

"It is important to improve policies and create a healthy environment that prioritizes combating and preventing obesity, as well as creating platforms that allow them to share experiences, in addition to inspiring and

uniting a global community to work towards this common goal and changing the way obesity is dealt with throughout society. This will encourage people to become advocates, as well as stand up and advocate for change to a healthier lifestyle," he stressed.

"Obesity affects about 1.9 billion people around the world, and a quarter of the world's population will suffer from obesity by 2035, as obesity in children will increase by 100 percent in the period from 2020 to 2035, while in adults it will increase by 60 percent in the period from 2020 to 2035," Dr Jarallah said. He indicated health and economic consequences of obesity in 2025 will total \$4.32 trillion, pointing out obesity is a complex disease with intertwined root causes, the most important of which are food, lifestyle, genetic, psychological, social, cultural, economic and environmental factors.

"People often become obese because of an imbalance between the calories they exert and the calories they intake, which is known as the energy balance. Supportive environments and communities, as well as policies for selling and marketing food in a healthy way are essential to determine people's choices that prevent them from being obese," Dr Jarallah explained.

He also stressed on the importance of preventing obesity, which is the most effective way to control the disease. It requires following a comprehensive healthy lifestyle with balanced food such as eating foods rich in vitamins, minerals and fiber, as well as reducing the intake of sugars, saturated fats and processed foods, while adhering to regular physical activity.

Korea delegation to visit Kuwait

KUWAIT: Korean delegation led by Dr Eo, Myeong-so, Vice Minister of Land, Infrastructure and Transport of the Republic of Korea will visit Kuwait from 5th March to 6th March. During their visit, the delegation will discuss the cooperation in air service, airport operation, and housing and infrastructure development. In the 1980s, there was a direct flight between Kuwait and Korea, but the operation was stopped in 1986.

The delegation will discuss the way to revitalize the air service between the two countries with Ammar Mohammed Al-Ajmi, Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs and Minister of State for Housing and Urban Development, and the acting General Manager of Directorate General of Civil Aviation, Eng Saleh Abdalla Al-fadaghi.

They will also consult the partnership on the T2 and T4 operations of the Kuwait International Airport. A Korean company, Incheon International Airport Company (IIAC), is currently operating the T4, and IIAC is also short-listed for the T2 opera-

Local

Media personnel tour helicopter air assault school at Camp Buehring

‘Day in the life of American soldiers in Kuwait’



KUWAIT: Soldiers attend military training at Camp Buehring.



By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: The US Army organized a visit for local media personnel to attend soldier training of the helicopter air assault school at Camp Buehring on Thursday, as part of a ‘Day in the life of American soldiers in Kuwait’ tour. The tour was led by 1st Lieutenant Austin May, Public Affairs Officer for the US Army (ASG-KU), while trainer SSG Fa’amu Sekonaia of Mobile Training Teams (MTT) gave a statement explaining the air assault training phases.

“The soldier training for the helicopter air assault school at Camp Buehring extends to 10 days, with Phase 0 for physical challenges, obstacle course and 4-mile run; Phase 1 for technical knowledge, different kinds of helicopters, weights and measurements, capabilities, how to set up a landing zone and hand signals for aircraft; Phase 2 is for sling load operations, moving cargo bags, water tanks and HMMWVs through air; and Phase 3 for rappelling down walls with and without weapons,” Sekonaia said.

“Every month, our school teaches in a different country around the world, while Kuwait is the only country in the GCC area that hosts this training



1st Lieutenant Austin May

every year, as Kuwait is the center of so much of our regional activities,” he said, pointing out this is the first training for the MTT in Kuwait since the COVID-19 pandemic.

May said this training is open for soldiers not just in the US army, but also in the air force and the navy. If they have a reason and are qualified for it, they can apply for it. The tour for media representatives included visiting a Christian chapel and an Islamic prayer tent that provide religious services



SSG Fa’amu Sekonaia

with professionals of the different religions for people, a meditation room, which is a place for soldiers and workers at Camp Buehring to have quiet time, and an escape room, which it is a puzzle that teaches army sexual harassment/assault response and prevention. Camp Buehring is designed and works primarily on training exercises and maintaining a large fleet of tanks, trucks, HMMWVs (Humvees) and related equipment for future conflicts or humanitarian disaster relief needs.

Investment in citizens’ health ‘a prime target’

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Minister of Health Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi on Saturday said that investment in citizens’ health is a prime target for everyone to reach by means of offering highly efficient health care based on sound scientific fundamentals. The minister made the remark in a keynote speech addressing the 7th Kuwait Dental Administration Conference and Exhibition (KDAC), held under the theme: “Dentistry ... Where Science Meets Art”.

He said that the ministry would attach much attention to the discussions and outcomes of the conference, which comes in the context of the government’s program designed to revamp the country’s health system. The minister voiced hope that the dental event would fulfill relevant aspired goals, reflecting the ministry’s deep keenness, sincere willingness and fervent efforts to harness all potential to attain multiple medical values in the domains of research and knowledge and to revamp health services.

The ministry’s assistant undersecretary for dental affairs and conference chairman, Dr Meshal Al-Kanderi, said dental achievements have been developed over the past years thanks to attention to the human element of medical cadres. The official boasted that several dental care clinics have been launched nationwide as part of the ministry’s efforts to develop health services in the country.

The 7th Kuwait Dental Administration



Dr Meshal Al-Kanderi



Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi

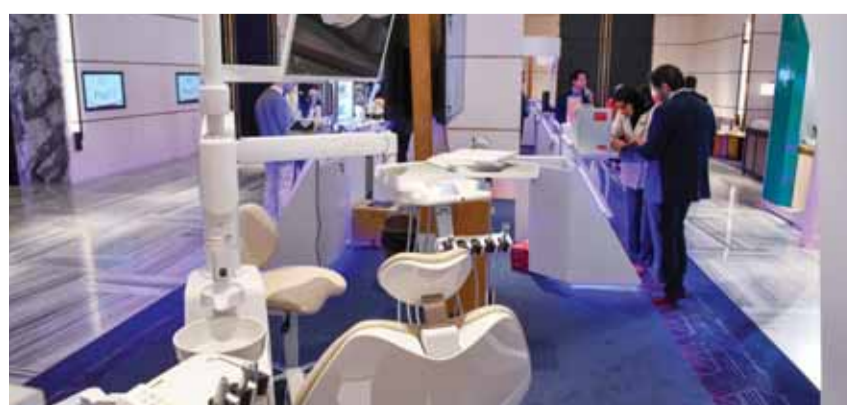
Conference and Exhibition (KDAC) is designed to target the business and educational needs of dental professionals, with more than 50 international and

regional speakers offering keynotes, symposia, lectures and hands-on workshop on a broad spectrum of dentistry. A grand exhibition welcomes international and regional brands in dentistry displaying the latest technologies and products by a huge number of exhibiting companies.

The event mainly aims to improve both oral and dental health through public education as well as continuing education of dentists, nurses, dental technicians, and allied health professionals in order to raise the standard health care delivery, safe and effective disease prevention measures for overall improvement of oral health in the country. With the vision for advancing the oral health care in the country, KDAC puts together a platform for world-class professionals to share their expertise and knowledge through lectures and workshops in various multidisciplinary topics. — KUNA



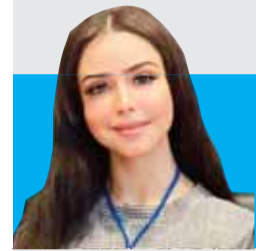
KUWAIT: Photo shows some participants at the conference.



KUWAIT: Participants attend the 7th Kuwait Dental Administration Conference and Exhibition on Saturday. —KUNA photos

In my view

Safety bill: Legal but harmful



By Atyab Al-Shatti

Local@kuwaittimes.com

A debate ensued between journalists, human rights activists and the UK government over introducing a safety bill that aims to mitigate various types of harmful content that people and children are exposed to, including cyberbullying, credit card fraud, invasion of privacy, children’s exposure to adult content, ads in games related to pornography, games encouraging suicide among children and other dangerous content that children are exposed. “Legal but harmful” is what I call it.

The bill suggests that every media company should initiate its domestic verification and security mechanisms to find harmful content, identify it and remove it. For example, YouTube is already doing this. According to the bill, algorithms are revealed to the regulator to find where the harm is happening and hold these companies liable for it. But journalists and human rights activists claim such monitoring or restriction of algorithms will threaten freedom of speech and eventually the country will breach freedom of expression instead of protecting it.

My personal take on this is that unfortunately, despite of the good intentions of both journalists and human rights activists, firstly: The main international body setting basic human rights conventions stated in the international convention on civil and political rights (article 19) that everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference, and in sub-article 3, the convention states that the exercise of the rights shall carry with it special duties and responsibilities. It may therefore be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary: (a) For respect of the rights or reputations of others. (B) For the protection of national security or public order, or public health or morals. And once handled efficiently, there will be no violation.

Secondly, child protection is not a matter to compromise or take for granted – it is a responsibility for all of us. This is why it’s important for human rights activists and journalists to know the basic human rights conventions so as to focus their efforts in the right direction. Finally, Kuwait must examine this comparative experience and execute a Kuwaiti cyber protection act in the light of the economic, political, social and cultural scenes that drew and outlined segments of the Kuwaiti community and eventually determined vulnerable communities, marginalized communities and targeted people on media outlets. This is “legal but harmful” on the Kuwaiti scene.

Despite of the huge failure that came along with the legislation process and implementation of law no. 63 for the year 2015 regarding cyber-crimes that aimed to protect people’s privacy and tackled hacking, cyberattacks and misuse of smart devices, people were sentenced, deported and sought asylum abroad; not due to committing the abovementioned crimes, but for simply expressing their respected opinion against a certain political party or criticizing a specific incident. What is even worse is that the law doesn’t protect people efficiently.

Many Kuwaiti media outlets registered at the ministry of information exploit women and subjectively publish their pictures in an inferior way, gaslighting them and turning their image from active women with purpose and a story to tell, to shallow women for the public to see how good or bad they appear, shaming and rudely commented on by the public as if we are living in a Game of Thrones. Doesn’t the government see this as a crime, hate speech or gaslighting?

Even worse, during the pandemic, uncensored social media usage exposed nasty racism against expatriates. People were called “virus carriers”, with demands they be thrown in the desert to keep the country safe, as if they were not working with their own sweat and blood and earning their own living. Doesn’t the government see this as a hate crime, racism or any kind of crime?

The abovementioned law is masked as protection in cyberspace, but never really tackles what people suffer from. Hate speech is an ugly exposure of uncensored usage of media outlets, fraudulent prizewinning ads and fake credit card checks that people lost their savings to. Cyberbullying was never protected or taken care of by the said law. The only reason I bring law to this debate is that it is the latest model of what the legislator came up with, but there is no way to compare this misery to the UK’s safety bill. Britons are first people ever to bring a regulation to hold those who run social media platforms criminally liable financially too.

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News in brief



This handout screen grab shows members of the SpaceX Dragon Crew-6 mission (in blue) Commander Stephen Bowen (left), Mission Specialist Sultan Alneyadi of the United Arab Emirates (center), Mission Specialist Andrey Fedyaev of Roscosmos (2nd right) and Pilot Warren 'Woody' Hoburg (right) as they are welcomed inside the International Space Station on March 3, 2023. — AFP

Amir congratulates UAE

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a congratulatory cable to UAE President Sheikh Mohammad bin Zayed Al Nahyan, and Vice President, Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai, Sheikh Mohammad bin Rashid Al Maktoum on the success of Crew 6 mission launch. In his cable, His Highness the Amir expressed sincere sentiments on the successful launch of the Crew 6 mission to the International Space Station, which includes Emirati Astronaut Sultan Al-Neyadi, in the longest space mission in Arab history, praising this historical and scientific achievement in the space field made by UAE as it embodies its great progress and advancement in the field. His Highness wished good health and prosperity to UAE leadership more achievements, progress and success under the wise leadership of Sheikh Mohammad bin Zayed Al Nahyan. Also, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a congratulatory cable to UAE leaders. His Highness Sheikh Mishal wished good health and prosperity to UAE under the wise leadership of Sheikh Mohammad bin Zayed Al Nahyan. — KUNA

Kuwait crude oil up

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti crude oil price rose by 48 cents during trading sessions to hit \$84.69 per barrel, compared with \$84.21 pb the day before, said Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) on Saturday. Brent also rose by \$1.08 to \$85.83 pb and West Texas Intermediate went up by \$1.52 cents to \$79.68 pb. —KUNA

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: The waxing gibbous moon rises above Kuwait City. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Kuwait society inaugurates water project in Yemeni city



Kuwait Society for Relief inaugurates water project in Yemen. — KUNA photos



ADEN: Kuwait Society for Relief (KSR) has opened the project "urgent solutions to the water problem" which will benefit over 300,000 residents in Taiz city, southwestern Yemen. The project, with a production capacity of four million liters a day, has been handed over to the local authority of water and sanitation, deputy director of KSR office in Yemen, Adel Baghesh told KUNA.

It was implemented in cooperation with Estijabah Foundation, a Yemeni NGO. Estijabah Director Tareq Lakman said the project included drilling of eight water wells with depths of up to 3,300 meters

and a total pumping capacity of 2,000 cubic meters per day. The project will be hooked up to the main water network of the city under supervision of the authority of water and sanitation, he said.

Hailing the project as vital, director of the authority office in Taiz Samir Abdul-Wahed said the authority will maximize use of the project to solve the water problem resulting from the siege laid by the Houthis militias on the city. He expressed gratitude to Kuwait, the KSR and the Kuwaiti people and government for their supportive stance towards the Yemeni people. — KUNA

HORECA Kuwait 2023

KUWAIT: The Embassy of the Republic of South Africa in Kuwait has the pleasure to announce that the Eastern Cape Development Corporation (ECDC) will be leading a delegation from the Eastern Cape Province in South Africa to showcase their high quality products at the Kuwait HORECA 2023 Exhibition from 05-08 March 2023. The com-

panies included in the delegation are: Al-Mawashi (PTY) Ltd (livestock) and Pandaroc (PTY) Ltd (Vitamin Energy Drinks). Kuwait HORECA 2023 Exhibition presents an opportunity for the Kuwaiti buyers and importers to know about the South African products and to meet their South African counterparts. The South African Embassy in Kuwait invites all relevant businessmen to visit the ECDC stand at Kuwait HORECA 2023 Exhibition at Mishref Fair Ground, Hall 4A, from 11am to 8pm.

Football 'important in student development'

KUWAIT: Director of the Kuwaiti school sports association Faisal Al-Maqseed said the return of football to schools is an important step in student development in public schools. "The first edition of the league witnessed large participation in all educational areas affiliated to the ministry. The coming period will witness the launch of the middle school league, and after that the high school league will be held," he said, explaining that the association seeks, in cooperation with the ministry, to set a special agenda during the academic year to hold these sports competitions for all schools in Kuwait.

Maqseed praised the great role of technical committees as well as technical and administrative bodies of the association. Moreover, he thanked technical guid-

ance departments for physical education in the ministry and educational regions in making this league a success, noting the unlimited support provided by the Public Authority for Sport in harnessing all possibilities to hold competitions.

General secretary of the association Ahmad Al-Hamdan said: "The launch of this league comes in implementation of the school association's strategy, which adopts the vision 'Our talents in our schools', aimed at refining student talents in football and other games. This activity comes as a continuation of the association's programs to encourage students to practice sports. The association is currently organizing the second sports tournament, which includes seven sports competitions that will continue until April." He noted the Capital education area team won the league title in the first edition, while the Mubarak Al-Kabeer educational area team came in second and the general administration for private education team third.

Arab Parliament blasts Zionists

CAIRO: The Arab Parliament (AP) has deplored its strong denunciation and condemnation of the racist inciting remarks made by Zionist minister that called for demolishing the Palestinian village of Huwara in Nablus. In a statement, the AP stressed that these statements show hatred and contribute to amounting the pace of attacks of settlers against unarmed Palestinian. The ruling of death penalty for

Palestinian prisoners and the law of withdrawing citizenship from them that was issued a few days ago threaten peace and underestimate a two-state solution, according to the statement.

The AP called on the international community and the UN Security Council as well as the US Administration to immediately interfere and press Zionists to halt violence and incitement of the extremist right-wing government against Palestinians. It underlined the necessity of stopping unilateral steps, which underestimate a two-state solution, and provocative measures, which escalate tension and violence in the region. — KUNA



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Thousands rally against Kais Saied's 'violent discourse'

Indonesians search charred homes after deadly blaze

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BAKHMUT, Ukraine: A Ukrainian serviceman gives food and water to a local elderly woman in the town of Bakhmut in the Donetsk region. —AFP

Russian official inspects front as Kyiv struggles

Ukraine gets \$400 million in security assistance from the United States

MOSCOW: Russia's defense minister has inspected the frontline in east Ukraine, after the United States offered more support to Kyiv, whose forces are struggling in eastern Bakhmut. Sergei Shoigu "inspected a command post on the front" in the direction of the southern Donetsk region, the defense ministry said, without specifying exactly where or when.

It put out a rare video of Shoigu travelling in a helicopter and talking to a soldier in front of damaged buildings. The visit came with fighting ongoing around Bakhmut, in the longest battle of the invasion that has revealed rivalries between the conventional army and the Wagner paramilitary group.

Wagner chief Yevgeny Prigozhin said Friday his fighters had "practically encircled" Bakhmut, which has seen some of the fiercest fighting of the conflict. Well-versed in social media, Prigozhin has for weeks been publicizing the advances of his men towards the eastern city, whose symbolic importance outstrips any military significance.

Prigozhin regularly posts videos of himself alongside mercenaries, on the ground or even in a fighter jet, in con-

trast with Russian generals criticized for shirking the frontline. In the latest video Friday, Prigozhin directly called on Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to abandon Bakhmut, which Russia is determined to seize as part of the wider aim of capturing the entire Donetsk region.

'As long as it takes'

Zelensky has pledged to defend "fortress Bakhmut" for as long as possible, and called on allies to whip up their support to help his men do so. On Saturday the president of the European Parliament Roberta Metsola visited Ukraine, where she called for the country to be allowed to begin its EU membership negotiations this year.

US President Joe Biden on Friday hosted German Chancellor Olaf Scholz for his first visit since the offensive, in a display of partnership after friction over supplying tanks to Ukraine. Ahead of the meeting, the Kremlin warned weapon deliveries would only "prolong the conflict and have sad consequences for the Ukrainian people".

The United States responded to Moscow's warning against further arming Ukraine by offering another \$400

million in security assistance. When Biden and Scholz last met "Russia was amassing its troops" on the border, the US president said, adding the West had vowed to respond and "together we made good on that promise."

In reply, Scholz said it was important to send a message to Ukraine that "we will continue to (support it) as long as it takes and as long as it necessary." The new security package featuring ammunition - including for the HIMARS precision rocket system that Ukrainian forces have used to devastating effect against Russian troops and supply dumps.

'Severe pressure'

Ukraine's defense minister Oleksiy Reznikov praised the package as "a solid investment in the future success of the Ukrainian army on the battlefield," where Western military aid has been key to Kyiv's ability to hold out and to even regain ground.

In the east however, Zelensky and several Ukrainian officials recognized an increasingly difficult situation around Bakhmut this week. Sergiy Cherevaty, a spokesman

for Ukrainian forces, said Saturday the situation was difficult but under control in the city that he described as "the epicenter" of the conflict.

The British defense ministry's intelligence update on Saturday said Ukraine was "under increasingly severe pressure, with intense fighting taking place in and around the city ... Ukrainian-held resupply routes out of the town are increasingly limited".

It also said Wagner and the regular army advanced in the northern suburbs of the city, now "vulnerable to Russian attacks on three sides." While the hotspot of the fighting is in the east of Ukraine, the death toll from a strike this week on an apartment block in southern Zaporizhzhia has now risen to 10.

Moscow says its regions bordering Ukraine are routinely shelled by Ukrainian forces, but on Thursday it reported a rare instance of fighting inside Russia. Russian security services said a group of Ukrainian combatants had crossed into the southern Bryansk region and opened fire on a car, killing two civilians and injuring a child. Kyiv dismissed the claims as a "deliberate provocation." —AFP

Anger boils over Greek rail tragedy amid investigations

LARISSA: The station master involved in Greece's worst-ever train disaster had his court appearance postponed by a day on Saturday as the country braced for more mass protests over the crash that killed at least 57 people.

Thousands of protesters have demonstrated across the nation since Tuesday's collision between a passenger train and a freight train, with public anger mounting over government failure to manage the rail network.

More demonstrations were expected in several major cities Saturday evening, and a large rally of students and railway employees was set for Sunday in the capital's Syntagma Square, adjacent to parliament. The emotionally charged first burials of victims of the crash began Saturday.

Relatives of the dead were also expected to gather for a memorial outside a Larissa station on Sunday. "What happened was not an accident, it was a crime," said Sophia Hatzopoulou, 23, a philosophy student in Thessaloniki. "We can't watch all this happen and remain indifferent."

The train was carrying many students returning from a holiday weekend and at least nine young people studying at Thessaloniki's Aristotle University were among the dead, while another 26 others were injured. The station master at Larissa, central Greece, has admitted responsibility for the accident, which saw the two trains run along the same track for several kilometers.

The 59-year-old had been due to appear in court on Saturday where he could face charges of negligent homicide but will now appear on Sunday, his lawyer said. He risks life in jail if found guilty, but his lawyer has argued that other factors were at play. "In the case, there are important new elements that need to be examined," his lawyer Stefanos Pantzartsidis said.

Public broadcaster ERT reported the station master had been appointed to the post only 40 days earlier - and after just three months' training. The man, whose identity has not been made public, was apparently alone at the station with-



GIANNITSA, Greece: Mourners hug each other during the funeral of Ifigenia Mitska, 23, who died in the Greek train crash. —AFP

out any supervisor, according to the Kathimerini Daily, despite it being a holiday weekend with high demand and heavy rail traffic.

Police raid

Legal sources suggested that investigators were also considering criminal charges against members of the management of train operator Hellenic Train, which took over network operations in 2017. Police seized audio files and other items during a raid on the Larissa train station in central Greece, where the crash happened, a judicial source told AFP.

The government has set up a committee to investigate the causes of the accident. Hundreds of people observed a minute of silence outside the Greek parliament Friday, but riot police and a small group of protesters later clashed in central Athens.

At the rally in Syntagma Square, officers fired tear gas and stun grenades at protesters throwing stones and Molotov cocktails, an AFP reporter said. A similar number demonstrated in Thessaloniki - Greece's second largest city - where police had reported clash-

es on Thursday with demonstrators throwing stones and petrol bombs.

Greece's train services were paralyzed on Thursday by striking workers arguing that successive administrations' mismanagement of the network had contributed to the fatal collision. That strike continued into Friday and was set to last another 48 hours.

'Complete evaluation'

Survivors described scenes of horror and chaos. Some relatives were still desperately awaiting news of missing loved ones. The clean-up operation continued Saturday with technical crews sifting through scattered debris and removing train carriages from the site.

Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, who is seeking re-election this spring, has blamed the disaster on "tragic human error". But rail unions say safety problems on the Athens-Thessaloniki railway line had been known for years. For decades, Greece's 2,552-kilometre (1,585-mile) rail network has been plagued by mismanagement, poor maintenance and obsolete equipment. —AFP

'If you're tired of losing': Haley digs at Trump's age

NATIONAL HARBOR: Republican White House contender Nikki Haley on Friday stepped up attacks on Donald Trump over his age - without naming the ex-president directly - calling on conservatives at a national forum to trust a "new generation" of leaders.

The former South Carolina governor sharply criticized Republican losses in recent elections, during which 76-year-old Trump tried to serve as kingmaker. "If you're tired of losing, put your trust in a new generation," Haley urged attendees at the annual Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) held just outside Washington.

Haley, 51, who Trump tapped in 2017 to serve as United Nations ambassador, is the first candidate of note to challenge the billionaire for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination. She has so far centered her attacks on her competitor's age, calling again Friday for a "competency test" for politicians older than 75.

Trump and Haley are giving dueling addresses at the conference, with the former president scheduled to take the stage late Saturday afternoon. More than two years after leaving the White House, Trump's hold on the party is still evident, with the prestigious closing speech reserved for him once again. —AFP



NATIONAL HARBOR: Republican presidential hopeful Nikki Haley speaks during the 2023 Conservative Political Action Coalition (CPAC) Conference. —AFP

International

Indonesians search charred homes after deadly blaze

Officials call for investigation into fuel storage depot fire

JAKARTA: Residents searched through the remains of their charred homes Saturday as Indonesian state energy firm Pertamina apologized for a fire at a Jakarta fuel storage depot it said killed at least 18 people, including two children.

Dozens were also injured and police said three people were still missing after Friday night's blaze at Pertamina's Plumpang depot in north Jakarta. Officials called on Saturday for an audit of "all fuel facilities and infrastructures" in Indonesia.

Pertamina, which controls the majority of Indonesia's fuel and energy distribution, publicly apologized for the fire. "The management and I would like to convey our deepest apology for this incident. None of us expected this incident to happen," Nicke Widyawati, Pertamina's director, told a televised news conference.

Thirty-five people were still being treated, with many suffering severe burns, while more than 1,300 people living in residential areas near the depot had to be evacuated. The death toll had risen by one during the day. "What I saw was smoke travelling from the left to the right, about 10 minutes later there was an explosion and the fire spread catching the houses," witness Selamat, who like many Indonesians only has one name, told AFP.

Vice President Ma'ruf Amin visited the scene on Saturday and suggested the depot should be moved away from residential neighborhoods. "I hope this depot can be relocated... so it will be safer and this area will be rearranged so it meets the requirements of a proper neighborhood in the capital," he told reporters.

National Police chief Listyo Sigit Prabowo said the fire happened while fuel that had just arrived from another refinery was being reloaded. "There was a technical disruption that caused excessive pressure

and, after that, the fire happened. The source of the fire is currently being investigated," he said.

Top officials have called for a probe into the fire's cause and an audit of Indonesia's energy facilities after several recent blazes. "After we had multiple fires... it is clear that we must audit all fuel facilities and infrastructures, especially tanks and refineries," Sugeng Suparwoto, head of the parliament's energy commission, told local broadcaster Metro TV on Saturday.

A massive blaze broke out in 2021 at the Balongan refinery in West Java, also owned by Pertamina and one of Indonesia's biggest such facilities. That same depot saw fires in 2009 and again in 2014, when the flames spread to 40 houses nearby. No casualties were reported in either of those cases.

"I instructed Pertamina to immediately investigate this case and we are now focusing on helping the people. There must be an operational evaluation in the future," Minister of State Owned Enterprises Erick Thohir said in an Instagram post late Friday.

Homes stacked up against the barbed wire fences of the Pertamina facility were gutted and blackened the morning after the blaze, with rows of cars burned out. One child stood in the middle of the debris, surveying the scorched scene as emergency workers evacuated one of the dead in a body bag. "It was like a bomb, it was like a mini apocalypse. It was unimaginable," said witness Jamilul Asror, 45, who called on authorities to relocate residents farther away. "Pertamina is being reckless. This depot is way too close."

'Completely destroyed'

Footage broadcast Friday night showed people screaming and fleeing through narrow roads with an inferno lighting up the sky behind them. A fireball



JAKARTA: A boy stands in the remains of a burnt house in a residential area in Plumpang, north Jakarta on March 4, 2023. — AFP

could be seen across the skyline of north Jakarta, with sirens wailing in the background.

Pertamina's Widyawati said Indonesia's fuel supply had not been disrupted. Jakarta's acting governor, Heru Budi Hartono, said the government would pay for the treatment of the injured. The North Jakarta Red Cross said they helped 342 evacuees,

with four tents set up for the displaced.

Linda, a mother of one, said she had lost everything after fleeing with her family and just the clothes on her back. "I can't return home because it is completely destroyed," she told Metro TV. "I don't even know what state it is in, and I don't know where to go now." — AFP

Black Vietnam veteran honored after 60-year wait

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden on Friday awarded the nation's highest military honor to a Black special forces hero who saved his men from an enemy raid 60 years ago in the Vietnam War.

The exploits of Paris Davis, now 83, were largely forgotten by a US military bureaucracy that failed to process his paperwork, effectively denying him the Medal of Honor, the country's highest military distinction.

Davis is "a true hero of the nation," Biden said at a White House ceremony. Biden said that the now retired Green Beret colonel had grown up in a racially segregated US South, where "in the eyes of the law he was less than a person."

Despite the challenges, Davis was among the first Black Special Forces officers after he overcame efforts to dissuade him from fighting among the

US army's elite, Biden said. "But Paris didn't listen to them, and thank God he didn't," the president said, describing in detail how Davis saved two of his countrymen from a Viet Cong ambush in the early days of the war.

In June 1965, Davis and the three Green Berets under his command were pinned down by relentless enemy fire as they returned from a raid.

Heavily outnumbered, Davis, who was 26 at the time, braved the enemy to rescue his fellow soldiers, who nominated him for the Medal of Honor immediately following the battle.

Invoking the long delay between his acts of bravery and the Medal of Honor, one of the battle's veterans wondered, in an interview with the New York Times, if Davis had been a victim of racial discrimination.

Davis told CNN on Thursday that he wasn't "going to spend 50 years thinking" about the medal that never was. The "country has been pretty damn good to me," he said. After leaving the army in 1985, Davis started a small newspaper in the US state of Virginia. — AFP

All sides support ceasefire in DR Congo: Macron

KINSHASA, DR Congo: Brussels said Saturday it was setting up a "humanitarian air bridge" to deliver aid to conflict-hit eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, as the visiting French president said all sides had given support to a ceasefire next week.

The air bridge will link with Goma, the capital of DR Congo's eastern North Kivu province, where fighting with the rebel group M23 has displaced more than 600,000 people. The operation will "deliver humanitarian support in the form of medical and nutritional supplies along with a range of other emergency items", a European Commission statement said.

Meanwhile French President Emmanuel Macron, visiting the country on the last leg of his African tour aimed at renewing frayed ties, said that all sides would support a ceasefire in the fighting. During talks with Angolan President Joao Lourenco and DRC President Felix Tshisekedi, as well as

Rwandan President Paul Kagame, Macron said all had "given clear support" to a ceasefire next Tuesday, as envisaged in the timeline mediated by Angola.

The EU said it was also releasing some 47 million euros to be channeled through humanitarian partners for immediate needs such as nutrition, healthcare, shelter and water. "The EU stands ready to mobilize all the necessary means to support humanitarian workers, including logistics and air, to meet the needs of the population in Democratic Republic of Congo," said the EU's commissioner for crisis management Janez Lenarcic.

The DRC government has accused Rwanda of backing the militia group M23, which re-emerged from dormancy in late 2021, subsequently occupying swathes of territory in North Kivu. Independent UN experts, the United States and other western countries - including France - agree with Kinshasa's assessment, but Rwanda denies the charge.

Anti-French sentiment runs high in some former African colonies as the continent becomes a renewed diplomatic battleground, with Russian and Chinese influence growing. On Thursday Macron said the era of French interference in Africa had ended and there

was no desire to return to the past.

The French President met on Friday with President Denis Sassou-Nguesso of the neighboring Republic of Congo, after visiting Angola and Gabon. In the Angolan capital Luanda, Macron held talks with his counterpart Joao Lourenco, calling the oil-rich country a "strategic partner in the region".

Macron, who chaired an economic forum attended by more than 50 French companies, said the "heart of this visit is the strengthening of agricultural partnerships" with Angola. France has for decades been involved in the petroleum industry in the Portuguese-speaking southern African country, which is one of the continent's top crude producers.

Before leaving Luanda, the French president thanked Lourenco for his work to restore stability to the region, highlighting his diplomatic efforts in conflict-ridden eastern DRC. He added that there are "legitimate hopes" for a de-escalation in the turbulent region. Macron also met with Central African Republic President Faustin-Archange Touadera in Gabon on Thursday, after relations had deteriorated as Russian influence increased in Bangui and French troops left the troubled country last year. — AFP

Kuwait condemns Zionist minister's...

Continued from Page 1

violence," the statement added, appealing for calm. The Saudi foreign ministry expressed its "complete rejection of such racist and irresponsible statements, which reflect the massive violence and extremism the (Zionist) occupation entity is exercising against the brotherly Palestinians". Qatar described Smotrich's comments as "hateful and provocative" and said it considered them "a serious incitement to a war crime".

An attack on Huwara last Sunday saw hundreds of settlers set homes and cars ablaze and hurl stones, while a Palestinian man was killed in the nearby village of Zaatara. More than 350 Palestinians were injured, most suffering from tear gas inhalation, the Palestinian Red Crescent Society said.

Presenting his office's latest report on the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, Turk warned the council Friday that the "increasing violence is condemning innocent people on all sides to further tragedy". He called on "decision-makers and people on all sides... to step back from the precipice to which increasing extremism and violence have led".

The upsurge in violence comes after last year saw the highest number of Palestinians killed by Zionist security forces in 17 years, Turk pointed out. "I condemn the violence that has killed and harmed so many people on both sides, and which generates overwhelming despair," he said. Many country representatives echoed Turk's concerns Friday, while Palestinian ambassador Ibrahim Khraishi took the rights council floor to urge the international community to take "punitive steps" against the Zionist entity.

Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the UN

Office in Geneva Nasser Abdullah Al-Hayen also welcomed the report, stressing the need of accountability for all acts of unlawful violence and human rights abuses in the occupied Palestinian territories. Addressing the 52nd session of the UN Human Rights Council on the state of human rights in Palestine on Friday, Hayen denounced the flagrant violations being committed by the Zionist against defenseless Palestinians. On behalf of Kuwait, he urged the international community to ensure respect for the principles and rules of the international laws on the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem.

The High Commissioner's report shows a clear and constant deterioration of the state of human rights in the Palestinian territories as well as a surge in violence and hostile acts in the northern part of the West Bank, Hayen pointed out. He cited as example the increasing use of live ammunition by Zionist security forces and Zionist settlers against defenseless Palestinian civilians. He commended the report for holding the Zionist entity accountable for the new spate of serious and systematic abuses, disproportionate use of lethal force and extrajudicial executions.

The Zionist entity's persistence in using unjustifiable lethal force against civilians is tantamount to a war crime, Hayen stressed. Kuwait and the international community are profoundly worried about the persistence of the atmosphere of evasion of punishment, and underscore the need of accountability for all reports of disproportionate use of lethal force.

Kuwait supports the call of the High Commissioner for the Zionist entity, the occupying power, to fulfil its obligations under international law, Hayen added. He reaffirmed Kuwait's support to the Palestinian people until they reach their aspirations for ending the Zionist occupation and establishing an independent state with East Jerusalem as its capital in keeping with the UN resolutions, the Arab initiative for peace and the two-state vision. — Agencies

in two SUVs and a pickup truck before abandoning the vehicles in a nearby city. Interior and Local Government Secretary Benjamin Abalos appealed for witnesses to come forward and help police "get justice" for Degamo.

Degamo, 56, is the latest target in the Philippines' long history of attacks on politicians. He is at least the third to be shot since last year's general election. The Supreme Court last month declared him the rightful winner of the contest for the Negros Oriental governorship following a recount that unseated his local rival, who had previously been proclaimed the victor. — AFP

Lebanon paralysis grows as security...

Continued from Page 1

During more than a decade in the job, Ibrahim had to tackle numerous thorny challenges including the Syrian war's spill-over into Lebanon, and was seen by many as a political mediator between the country's divided political barons. He also successfully mediated in the release of hostages held in Syria.

The current crisis "is probably the most serious in Lebanon's history", said Bitar of a country that endured civil conflict from 1975 to 1990 amid other shocks. "The state cannot even manage to collect taxes," Bitar said, while simple things such as vehicle registration have become almost impossible. The failure to appoint a successor to Ibrahim is symptomatic of much deeper gridlock. With parliament split between supporters of the Iran-backed Shiite movement Hezbollah and its opponents - neither of which has a clear majority - Lebanese lawmakers have made 11 unsuccessful attempts to elect a new head of state. Two independent lawmakers have been camped out in

parliament since the last failed vote in mid-January, saying they will stay until a new president is elected.

"The status quo is unsustainable. It is paralyzing the state at all levels," said the International Support Group for Lebanon on Thursday. The group, which includes the United States, several EU member states, Gulf countries, Russia and China, urged politicians to elect a new president "without further delay", saying it was "gravely concerned about the ramifications of a prolonged presidential vacuum". By convention, Lebanon's presidency goes to a Maronite Christian, the premiership is reserved for a Sunni Muslim and the post of parliament speaker goes to a Shiite Muslim. Bishops from Lebanon's Maronite Christian community have called for "a day of prayers" on March 10, hoping divine intervention will help elect a new president. Lebanon has also yet to enact most of the reforms needed to access billions of dollars in loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to help dig itself out of the economic crisis.

As part of international efforts to resolve the political impasse, France on Feb 6 hosted a meeting with representatives from the United States, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Egypt. They agreed Lebanon's next president must be a unifying figure who is "capable of regaining the confidence of the international community", a Western diplomatic source told AFP on condition of anonymity. — AFP

UN slams rich states' treatment...

Continued from Page 1

The LDCs have complained that they did not get a fair share of the COVID vaccines that went mainly to Europe and North America. "Combating climate catastrophe that you did nothing to cause is challenging when the cost of capital is sky-high and the financial help received "is a drop in the bucket", said Guterres. "Fossil fuel giants are raking in huge profits, while millions in your countries cannot put food on the table."

Guterres said the poorest nations were being left behind in the "digital revolution" and the Ukraine war had fueled their food and fuel prices. "Our global financial system was designed by wealthy countries, largely to their benefit," he said. "Deprived of liquidity, many of you are locked out of capital markets by predatory interest rates," the UN leader said.

A host of presidents and ministers hit out at financing conditions for LDCs, whose debt has more than quadrupled in a decade to an estimated \$50 billion in 2021. East Timor's President Jose Ramos-Horta called

interest rates "rapacious" and "insensitive". Malawi's President Lazarus Chakwera, the summit chairman, highlighted "broken promises" and said that aid was not "an act of charity" but a "moral responsibility".

Wealthy nations had failed to keep a promise to give 0.15-0.20 percent of their Gross National Income to LDCs, the UN chief said. With poorer states trapped in a "perfect storm for perpetuating poverty and injustice", Guterres said LDCs required a "minimum" \$500 billion a year to overcome their problems, build up job creating industries and repay debts. He added that the United Nations would also "keep pushing" richer countries to hand over hundreds of billions of dollars promised separately to help poorer states battle climate change.

Under proposals a so-called Doha Program of Action, a food stockholding system, will be set up to help countries facing hunger crises through drought and high prices. It also calls for new efforts to help LDCs attract foreign funding and lower interest rates to ease the impact of their debts. Bhutan will this year become one of seven countries - along with Bangladesh, Laos, Nepal, Angola, Sao Tome and Principe and the Solomon Islands to "graduate" out of LDC status by 2026. But they will gradually lose trade and aid privileges. — AFP

Governor, five others shot dead...

Continued from Page 1

dastardly and heinous crime to justice," Marcos added. The condition of four other people who were shot in the incident was not disclosed. The politician was distributing aid to constituents when he was shot, provincial police spokesman Kym Lopez told AFP. Police said they were searching for 10 suspects, including the six gunmen, who fled the scene

International

Thousands rally against Kais Saied's 'violent discourse'

Trade union slams president for crackdown on critics, migrants

TUNIS, Tunisia: More than 3,000 people demonstrated against Tunisia's government on Saturday at a rally organized by the powerful UGTT trade union, which called on President Kais Saied to accept "dialogue".

Saied has pushed through sweeping changes to the political system in the sole democracy to have emerged from the Arab Spring uprisings, concentrating near-total power in his office since he froze parliament and sacked the government in July 2021. In the biggest crackdown since the president's power grab, police have arrested around 20 prominent political figures over the past two weeks, primarily Saied's opponents.

"Freedom, freedom, down with the police state," demonstrators chanted as they marched in Tunis on Saturday, also calling for "a halt to impoverishment" in the North African country. UGTT chief Noureddine Taboubi accused the president of targeting the powerful union as part of a wider crackdown against critics.

Taboubi condemned the latest wave of arrests and the imprisonment since February of Anis Kaabi, a top UGTT official for highway workers, who had been detained after a strike by toll barrier employees. "We will never accept such arrests," Taboubi told the protesters.

The UGTT has around one million members and shared a Nobel Peace Prize in 2015 with three other civil society groups for promoting national dialogue in the country of about 12 million inhabitants. AFP journalists said that more than 3,000 people took part in the rally.

Taboubi called on Saied to embrace "dialogue" and "democratic" ways, slamming the president for pursuing a "violent discourse... that is dividing the country". The UGTT chief also defended "the rights of migrants, regardless of their nationality or the color of their skin". "Tunisia is a country of tolerance, no to racism," he told the crowd. Saied last month ordered officials to take "urgent measures" to tackle irregular migration, claiming without evidence that "a criminal plot" was underway "to change Tunisia's demographic make-up".

Taboubi also criticized negotiations between the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Tunisia, which is struggling under crippling inflation and debt worth around 80 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP). Tunisia is seeking a bailout package worth nearly \$2 billion from the IMF, which conditions any aid on a series of reforms. Taboubi said the UGTT is unaware of the "details of the proposals" made by the Tunisian authorities but stressed that the union is totally opposed to any lifting of government subsidies on basic goods such as foodstuff and fuel. — AFP



TUNIS: Demonstrators lift placards and national flags during an anti-government rally called for by the UGTT union. — AFP

Migrants flee Tunisia after Saied's order

TUNIS, Tunisia: More than 100 Malians left Tunisia Saturday, a diplomat told AFP, the first of two repatriation flights carrying West African migrants fearful of a wave of violence since a controversial tirade by the president.

In February, President Kais Saied ordered officials to take "urgent measures" to tackle irregular migration, claiming without evidence that "a criminal plot" was underway "to change Tunisia's demographic make-up".



TUNIS: A girl waits by luggage as Sub-Saharan migrants board a bus taking them to a repatriation flight, leaving Tunis for their countries of origin on March 4, 2023. — AFP photos

Saied charged that migrants were behind most crime in the North African country, fueling a spate of sackings, evictions and physical attacks against the community. The African Union expressed "deep shock and concern at the form and substance" of Saied's remarks, while governments in sub-Saharan Africa scrambled to organize the repatriation of hundreds of fearful nationals who flocked to their embassies for help.

A first group of 50 Guineans were flown home on Wednesday. A plane carrying 133 nationals of Mali departed from Tunisia on Saturday at around midday, a Malian diplomat said. The group included "25 women

and nine children as well as 25 students", the diplomat added on condition of anonymity.

Ivory Coast prepared to repatriate some 145 people on a special flight later on Saturday, diplomats and community organizers said. An AFP photographer saw the Malian group leave their embassy in Tunis in the early morning, boarding buses to the airport where a chartered plane awaited.

"The Tunisians don't like us, so we are forced to leave," Bagresou Segou told AFP before boarding the bus. Adrahmen Dombia, who arrived in Tunisia four years ago, said he had to stop mid-year his university studies. "I'm going back because I'm not safe."

Another Malian migrant, Baril, said he had a permit to stay in Tunisia but joined the repatriation flight. "We ask President Kais Saied with great respect to consider our other brothers and treat them well," he told AFP. According to official figures, there are around 21,000 undocumented migrants from other parts of Africa in Tunisia, a country of about 12 million inhabitants.

Vigilante violence

Since Saied gave his speech, rights groups have reported a spike in vigilante violence including stabbings of sub-Saharan Africans. Jean Badel Gnabli, head of an association of Ivorian migrants in Tunisia, told AFP from the airport that "145 people are leaving this morning after having spent the night in hotels."

He had said earlier that the whole community was living in fear. "They feel like they've been handed over to mob justice," Ivorian ambassador Ibrahim Sy Savane said 1,100 Ivorians out of some 7,000 in Tunisia have applied to be repatriated.

Michael Elie Bio Vamet, head of an Ivorian student association, said 30 students signed up for the repatriation flight despite having permits to stay. "They don't feel comfortable," he told AFP by phone. "Some of them were victims of racist acts. Some are at the end of their studies, but others discontinued." "There are attacks almost every day, threats, they are even being kicked out by landlords or physically attacked," he added. Many African migrants in Tunisia lost their jobs and homes overnight. Dozens were arrested after identity checks, and some are still being detained.

Migrants whose countries have embassies in Tunisia rushed to them seeking assistance. The embassies of Ivory Coast and Mali provided emergency accommodation this week for dozens of their citizens who had been evicted from their homes, including young children. Those with no diplomatic representation in Tunisia set up makeshift camps outside the Tunis offices of the International Organization for Migration. Among those heading home are dozens of fee-paying or scholarship students who were enrolled in Tunisian universities and in the country legally. — AFP



TUNIS: Migrants queue to board a bus with their belongings as they head to their repatriation flight.

New poisonings among Iranian schoolgirls

TEHRAN: Dozens of Iranian schoolgirls across five provinces were hospitalized Saturday in a new wave of suspected poisoning attacks, local media reported. Hundreds of cases of respiratory distress have

been reported over the past three months among schoolgirls mainly in the holy city of Qom, south of Tehran, with some needing hospitalization.

Tasnim and Mehr news agencies reported the latest spate of poisonings in the western Hamedan province, as well as Zanjan and South Azerbaijan in Iran's northwest, Fars in the west and Alborz province in the north. Dozens have been transferred to local hospitals for treatment, the reports said, adding all students were in generally good condition.

On Friday, President Ebrahim Raisi said he had

'Greater cooperation': UN nuclear chief hopeful of Iran talks

TEHRAN: UN nuclear watchdog chief Rafael Grossi said Saturday he had "constructive" talks with Iranian officials in Tehran after the discovery of uranium particles enriched to near weapons-grade level. The two-day visit by the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) chief director general comes as the Vienna-based organization seeks greater cooperation with Iran over its nuclear activities.

"By having a constructive discussion ... and having good agreements, like I am sure we are going to have, we are going to be paving the way for important agreements," Grossi told a news conference alongside Iran's top nuclear official Mohammad Eslami.

In his series of meetings with Iranian officials, Grossi met President Ebrahim Raisi. Raisi acknowledged that "cooperation is a two-way street... (and) can continue based on maintaining the agency's independence and the rights of the Iranian nation," the political deputy of Iran's presidency, Mohammad Jamshidi tweeted.

A diplomatic source earlier told AFP that the meeting with Raisi was aimed to "re-launch the dialogue" on Iran's atomic work and to "reset the relationship at the highest level". Grossi arrived Friday in Iran amid deadlock in negotiations on reviving a landmark 2015 accord on Iran's nuclear activity, known formally as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA.

Uranium particles enriched up to 83.7 percent - just under the 90 percent needed to produce an atomic bomb - had been detected at Iran's underground Fordo plant about 100 kilometers (60 miles) south of Tehran, according to a confidential IAEA report seen by AFP this week.

Iran denies wanting to acquire atomic weapons, and says it had made no attempt to enrich uranium beyond 60-percent purity. Iran's government has said, however, that "unintended fluctuations... may have occurred" during the enrichment process. The discovery came after Iran had substantially modified an interconnection between two centrifuge clusters enriching uranium, without declaring it to the IAEA.

Authorities ban Women's Day rally in Pakistan

LAHORE: Authorities in Pakistan's eastern city of Lahore have refused permission for a rally to mark International Women's Day, which regularly meets a fierce backlash in the conservative, patriarchal country. Marches have been held in major cities all over Pakistan since 2018 to bring attention to women's rights.

Lahore city authorities cited the "controversial cards and banners" commonly displayed by participants in the march and security concerns as reasons behind the decision, which were laid out in a notification to march organizers late Friday. Counter-protests dubbed "Haya (modesty)" marches are commonly staged by religious groups to call for the preservation of Islamic values.

"It's a violation of our rights. This raises questions about the state's ability to manage the right to freedom of assembly for both groups," Hiba Akbar, an organizer for Aurat (women's) March Lahore, told AFP. Lahore authorities have allowed this year's Haya March to be held despite the ban on the Aurat March.

asked the ministers of intelligence and interior to follow up on the poisonings cases, dubbing them "the enemy's conspiracy to create fear and despair in the people".

Foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani said a probe into the poisonings was "one of the immediate priorities of the government, to alleviate the concerns of the families and to hold perpetrators accountable".

On Wednesday, at least 10 girls' schools were targeted with poisoning attacks, seven in the northwestern city of Ardabil and three in the capi-

'Obligations'

On Saturday, Eslami, who heads the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, called on all parties to the 2015 deal to fulfil their "obligations". "Three European and some other countries are just focusing on Iran's JCPOA obligations," he told the news conference. "They too have obligations that they need to adhere to."

"We came to an arrangement (with Grossi) to define our cooperation within the framework of the safeguards" on nuclear activity, he added. "The relevant authorities will make a decision" if a resolution is reached, and Iran's atomic agency will adhere to that decision, he said.



TEHRAN: Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran Mohammad Eslami (R) and International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) chief Rafael Grossi hold a press conference. — AFP

"Iran never sacrifices its national interests for anything else," Eslami said. Depending on the outcome of Grossi's trip, the US as well as Britain, France and Germany will decide whether to submit a draft resolution censuring Iran to the IAEA board of governors, which is due to convene next week in Vienna. Grossi also met on Saturday with Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, the official news agency IRNA reported. And during his visit he aimed to secure "more access to the (Fordo) site, more inspections," the diplomatic source said.—AFP

Organizers of the Aurat March in Pakistan have frequently had to resort to legal action to counter attempts to ban it. The Aurat March rallies have courted controversy because of banners and placards waved by participants that raise subjects such as divorce, sexual harassment and menstruation.

Organizers and participants have been accused of promoting Western, liberal values and disrespecting religious and cultural sensitivities. Much of Pakistani society operates under a strict code of "honor", systemizing the oppression of women in matters such as the right to choose who to marry, reproductive rights and even the right to an education.

Hundreds of women are killed by men in Pakistan each year over "honor". Rights group Amnesty International said the Lahore decision "amounts to an unlawful and unnecessary restriction of the right to assembly".

Authorities in the capital Islamabad, citing security concerns, have relegated the Aurat March to a city park where a woman was gang raped in February. "We are a feminist movement, we will not be in parks but rather on the streets," a statement by march organizers there said. In 2020, groups of hardline Islamist men turned up in vans and hurled stones at women participating in the Aurat March. Women have long fought for basic rights in Pakistan, where activists say men commit "pervasive and intractable" violence against them. — AFP

tal Tehran, according to media reports. Last week, Iran's deputy health minister, Younes Panahi, said the poisonings were aimed at shutting down education for girls.

The string of poisonings come more than five months into nationwide protests following the death in custody of Iranian Kurd Mahsa Amini, 22, who had been arrested for an alleged breach of strict dress rules for women. Tehran says hundreds of people have been killed and thousands arrested in connection with the protests, which the authorities generally describe as "riots". — AFP

Business

SUNDAY, MARCH 5, 2023

Chaos as Paris airports hit by border control IT outage

Glitch causes long queues for passengers at airport checkpoints

PARIS: A computer glitch at Paris' main Charles de Gaulle and Orly airports hobbled border controls on Saturday, causing long queues for passengers. "A national breakdown of border police currently affects checkpoints at the departure and arrival of Paris-CDG and Paris-Orly. An extension of the waiting time is to be expected," Paris Airports tweeted.

It was not immediately clear if other airports or sectors were affected.

Images posted on social media showed large queues of passengers waiting at Paris airport checkpoints, with some sitting on the floor. By 2 pm (1300 GMT), the computer system in question was working again, the interior ministry told AFP.

A woman travelling from Martinique told AFP she had spent nearly two hours in the queue at Orly where "1,500-2,000 people" were not moving at all. "It's shameful, people are starting (to wilt), especially parents with children. No one from Paris Airports came to tell us anything," Anouk, who declined to give their surname, told AFP by telephone.

Travellers then began banging on the glass doors of the eGates, they later reported. Border police officers then opened them and carried out passport checks manually to ease congestion. "Everything is being done to make the situation as easy as possible for travellers. Water supplies are being put in place and officers have been deployed to answer travellers' questions," a Paris Airports spokesman said.

Meanwhile, top airlines including KLM, Delta and EasyJet said Friday they are taking the Dutch government to court over plans to limit flights at Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport for environmental reasons. The Netherlands said in June that it would

cut flights at Schiphol to 440,000 annually by 2024, down from a pre-COVID level of 500,000, to stem noise pollution and emissions.

The airlines, along with TUI and Corendon, were taking legal action "to keep the Netherlands connected to the rest of the world via Schiphol Airport", KLM said in a statement.

They accused the Dutch government of breaching local, EU and international law with the "incomprehensible" decision, and of ignoring their efforts to be more environmentally friendly. "As the government appears not to hear our call, unfortunately we find ourselves compelled to take legal action," KLM chief executive Marjan Rintel said.

The Dutch flag carrier and its subsidiaries account for some 60 percent of air traffic at Schiphol, one of Europe's busiest hubs. US-based Delta said it "strongly objected" to the Schiphol limits while Britain's EasyJet branded the Dutch government move "arbitrary".

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) said it too would take legal action over the "job-destroying hostile approach to aviation". "The dangerous precedent that this illegal approach creates left no choice but to challenge them in court," IATA chief Willie Walsh said.

Flights at Schiphol had already been limited over the past year by severe post-pandemic staff shortages that caused massive queues, lost luggage and cancellations. But the Dutch government then said it would restrict flights to 460,000 annually by November 2023 and 440,000 the following year.

It said at the time that it was "prioritizing noise pollution" but acknowledged that it was "sending



ROISSY-CHARLES DE GAULLE AIRPORT, France: This photograph shows departures terminal 1 panels following a technical failure, which impact all border controls at Roissy Charles de Gaulle airport, in the northeastern outskirts of Paris, on March 4, 2023.— AFP

a difficult message to the aviation sector". Residents of the area around Schiphol, a densely populated zone, have regularly complained about

the airport's noise nuisance, and expressed concerns about the effects of aviation on their health, nature and climate.—AFP

CMA launches 11th edition of its electronic education magazine

KUWAIT: The Capital Markets Authority (CMA) launched the 11th edition of its electronic education magazine in March. The magazine, similar to previous issues, is rich in topics ranging from legal, investment and awareness issues, in addition to featuring the authority's news and most prominent activities carried out during this period.

The edition opens with the statement of the Chairman of the Board of Commissioners Prof Dr Ahmed Al-Mulhim, in which he presents the most prominent regulatory and legislative frameworks adopted by the authority since the beginning of the year, which he considered the basis for strategic directions for securities activities. They are considered the most influential, as is the case with the joint regulatory framework for inter-registration of financial products in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

The regulatory framework for financial technologies includes provisions regulating the financial services to be provided through these technologies, and finally, investment advisor controls and licensing the activity of a one-person company.

Dr Mulhim considers these directions as some of the features of the authority's next strategy, which is expected to be announced very soon, aiming to transform Kuwait's financial market into an emerging and developed financial market in the first stage. This is in addition to directions related to developing the financial industry, enhancing sustainability and financial inclusion and contributing to the realization of the development plan in accordance with the New Kuwait vision.

The "Fragrance of Pioneering" corner deals with the biography of late Muhammad Youssef Al-

Adsani, one of the pioneers of the first generation who contributed to the renaissance of Kuwait. Adsani was distinguished by a unique mark of success in various positions he occupied inside and outside Kuwait.

As for the 'Legal Angle,' it is devoted to 'The Capital Markets Authority's position on sustainable financing', where it presents the authority's adoption of the issue of sustainable financing and the efforts it made in the course of its implementation, in addition to implementing more relevant recommendations of the International Organization of Securities Commissions (IOSCO).

The 'Event Issue' corner deals with the authority's survey of the reality of financial inclusion in Kuwait. It also provides coverage of a ceremony held by the joint Gulf awareness program 'Mulim' in honor of the winners of its smart investor competition awards.

As for the 'Opinion and Vision Angle', it includes two topics: The first is a review of the role of economic and financial policies in causing the phenomenon of "stagflation" and its role in addressing it as well. As for the second, it presents the services of the financial analyst and investment advisor for a one-person company, which was recently approved by the authority.

Sarah Akbar is the guest speaker of the issue, in which she presented her opinion on many economic and national issues, especially in the oil sector and her participation in dealing with one of the disasters of the ominous invasion represented by the burning of oilwells. She also praised the role of the Capital Markets Authority in terms of privatizing the capital market and reaching the ranks of emerging markets.

The authority's preparations to start the era of financial technologies is the subject of the 'Issue File' corner. As for the 'Prospects and Directions Angle', it deals with the topic of establishing a specialized platform for listing and trading shares of small and medium companies and work procedures and operational performance indicators of

lecting income tax will rise from 24,000 to 30,000 pounds per annum. Monthly stipends for the most vulnerable of Egypt's 104 million people under a state program called Takaful and Karamah will be raised by 25 per cent.

"I would like to clearly state that I have the interest of the Egyptian citizen constantly before my eyes, with the goodness of his life a specific target we never steer away from," said El Sisi in his address, delivered at a ceremony to open development projects in Minya, a province south of Cairo.

"As much as I realize the magnitude of pressure citizens have to endure at present, I also have confidence in their ability and self-denial as they face challenges," said El Sisi, a former army general in office since 2014. The package, the latest in a series over the past year, was announced as the most populous Arab state is reeling from a deep economic crisis significantly worsened by the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war a year ago. The crisis led Egypt to devalue its currency by nearly 50 per cent and sparked a foreign currency crunch that has curbed imports, including vital materials



the authority aimed at raising the efficiency of its work. In the same way, the topics of "Free Corner" varies between good governance and its role in achieving sustainable development and prosperity and the authority's launch of its electronic billing system. It also discusses international financial reporting standards (IFRS No 16) leases.

It is remarkable that the magazine created a corner dedicated to studies, which presented in its first episodes the legal and technical aspects of mortgaging securities. The most prominent events and activities of the authority between December and February were summarized in the 'Events' section.

In the 'In Conclusion' section, the editor-in-chief of the magazine presented the educational directions to be put into practice within the framework of the authority's third strategy, whether related to the development of educational goals or tools for their application or awareness of the initiatives established within the framework of this strategy, such as digital transformation, financial inclusion and the development of the finance industry in conjunction with an integrated media policy into practice.

The Capital Markets Authority's magazine is a quarterly electronic education magazine concerned with economic affairs and securities activities aiming to cover the authority's news and activities, and contribute to the required awareness by addressing financial, investment and legal issues. Its first issue was published in early September 2020, and all its publications can be followed on the main page of the authority's website.



needed for domestic industries. Earlier on Thursday, the state's fuel pricing committee raised domestic fuel prices by 0.75 Egyptian pounds (\$0.025) for 80-octane petrol to 8.75 pounds a liter, and by one pound to 10.25 pounds for 92-octane fuel.—Agencies

News in brief

Saudi on top of G20 in worker productivity growth: ILO

PARIS: The International Labor Organization announced that Saudi Arabia became the top-performing among the G20 countries in the worker productivity growth rate for the year 2022, as it achieved the value rate of 4.9 percent. The ILO said that this figure represents the highest rate achieved by the Kingdom for productivity growth. This rate rose from 3.6 percent in 2019 to 4.4 percent in 2021 before reaching its highest level in 2022. It is noteworthy that the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development, in partnership with the relevant government agencies, has contributed to realizing this accomplishment through its initiatives in developing and organizing the Saudi labor market. It has also achieved this in enhancing its attractiveness and improving its productive efficiency in accordance with the labor market strategy.—Agencies

Oman to offer offshore oil, gas concessions this year

MUSCAT: Oman is in the preparation process to offer a new batch of oil and gas concession areas by the end of the first quarter of 2023, the energy ministry said in a tweet on Thursday. While the first batch will target offshore blocks, the Gulf-state will also offer offshore oil and gas blocks by the end of the second quarter of 2023, the ministry added. Oman is also in the preparation process to offer a new batch of mining concession areas in the first quarter of 2023, the Oman Energy and Minerals Ministry said in a tweet on Thursday. This process would also include new concession areas targeting commodities like chromite, copper, limestone and others, the ministry added.—Agencies

Lebanese lira bounces back on parallel market

BEIRUT: The Lebanese pound bounced back on Wednesday night on the parallel market after the central bank said it would begin selling US dollars in cash at the improved rate of 70,000 pounds on its Sayrafa trading platform from March 2. The announcement by central bank Governor Riad Salameh came as the parallel market exchange rate for the local currency hit yet another all-time low of 90,000 to the US dollar on Wednesday. But after the move by the much-criticized Banque Du Liban, the local currency quickly recovered to about 79,000 to the dollar in less than an hour on the parallel market. The central bank has undertaken similar moves previously to stem the collapse of the local currency, although such measures have previously only worked temporarily to slow the plummet.—Agencies

Egypt raises fuel prices; minimum wage, pensions to rise

CAIRO: Egypt on Thursday announced a package of wage and pension increases in its latest bid to cushion the effect of soaring prices only hours after authorities raised domestic fuel prices by more than 10 per cent, a move that is likely to increase inflation. The package, announced by President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi in a televised address, will come into effect on April 1.

It raises the minimum monthly wage for entry-level government employees to 3,500 pounds (\$116) and to 5,000 pounds for mid-ranking employees. The minimum wage for government workers with a master's degree will now be 6,000 pounds, while those who hold a doctorate will receive 10,000 pounds. Pensions will be raised by 15 per cent and the threshold of col-

Business

US services activity cools less than expected in Feb: Survey

Fed official warns of more rate hikes on 'too hot' data

WASHINGTON: The US services sector remained resilient last month, helped by healthy demand and as employment picked up, according to survey data released Friday. The Institute for Supply Management's (ISM) services index, which measures the health of a major sector of the American economy, logged a reading of 55.1 percent in February, down slightly from a month earlier.

A figure above 50 signals the services sector is expanding, and the latest number was higher than analysts expected. The indicator, marking the second straight month of growth, is also the latest sign of ongoing demand in the services industry while the labor market remains hotter than policymakers hope.

The continued growth of the dominant services sector adds to the positive economic news that has been complicating attempts by the Federal Reserve to bring inflation back under control.

February's reading was driven by growth in more than a dozen industries including agriculture and real estate, said the ISM report. Respondents to the survey "indicated that they are mostly posi-

tive about business conditions," said ISM survey chair Anthony Nieves.

With February's data, the services sector has grown in 32 out of the last 33 months. Fed Governor Christopher Waller warned on Thursday that the central bank may have to raise rates even higher than previously predicted if "data reports continue to come in too hot."

Waller pointed to an unexpected recent rise in job gains, and revised figures indicating that inflation slowed less than previously reported. "Overall, the survey is signaling ongoing expansion in service sector activity, not yet responding to more restrictive monetary policy," said Rubeeela Farooqi, chief US economist at research consultancy High Frequency Economics.

The Fed has been raising rates consistently, she noted, referring to the central bank's eight consecutive interest rate hikes over the past 12 months. The manufacturing sector, which forms a much smaller part of the American economy, continued to contract last month, according to data released by ISM.



The US Federal Reserve may have to raise interest rates to a higher level than earlier anticipated if "data reports continue to come in too hot," Fed Governor Christopher Waller warned Thursday.

This comes as data released in February showed that job gains surged unexpectedly, while revised figures indicated that inflation slowed less than previously reported, he said in prepared remarks at the Mid-

Size Bank Coalition of America. "Although inflation has been coming down since the middle of last year, the recent data indicate that we haven't made as much progress as we thought," said Waller.

Recent numbers underscore the view "that the fight to bring inflation down to our two percent target will be slower and longer than many had expected just a month or two ago," he added.

Among other issues, policymakers have been concerned about wage growth, as it feeds into inflation via labor costs. If job creation falls to "a level consistent with the downward trajectory seen late last year" and inflation pulls back significantly, Waller said, he would endorse raising the federal funds rate to a target range between 5.1 and 5.4 percent.

In December, Fed officials pegged the median rate at 5.1 percent this year, a figure already higher than earlier expected. If reports "continue to come in too hot," the range will have to be raised even more this year, Waller said. This is "to ensure that we do not lose the momentum that was in place before the data for January were released," he added. — AFP



NEW YORK: In this file photo taken on February 16, 2023, FTX Founder Sam Bankman-Fried leaves the US Federal Court in New York. — AFP

Swiss Crypto Valley eyes 'major reset' after FTX debacle

NEW YORK: Crypto Valley, Switzerland's answer to Silicon Valley for all things blockchain, is hoping for a "major reset" after the spectacular and sudden downfall of the high-profile crypto exchange FTX.

Switzerland has seen an influx of cryptocurrency and blockchain start-ups in recent years, drawn by advantageous tax rates and rules along with a welcoming political and legal infrastructure. Well over 1,000 such companies have set up shop in the wealthy Alpine country, most of them south of Zurich in the canton of Zug, which even accepts tax payments in Bitcoin and Ether.

But the dramatic bankruptcy last November of FTX, once the world's most prominent crypto exchange, followed by that of crypto lender Genesis, put a damper on the frenzied enthusiasm that long characterized the sector.

"A lot of things happened in 2022," Dirk Klee, head of Bitcoin Suisse, told AFP. In addition to the FTX debacle, he pointed to the crash last May of so-called stablecoin Terra/Luna, which was supposed to be pegged to the US dollar; the liquidation of the Singapore-based cryptocurrency hedge fund Three Arrows Capital; and the collapse of cryptocurrency investment platform Celsius.

Billions evaporated

"These developments have exposed weaknesses of some institutions (that) are not following the regulatory processes yet," Klee said, but he emphasized it was still a "young sector". "What happened was not due to a fault in the technology, but due to poor managerial handling of centralized financial institutions," he said.

Around \$450 billion evaporated in the market turmoil that followed the Terra/Luna crash, while another \$200 billion disappeared after FTX went belly-up, according to the Bank for International Settlements. The downfall of FTX's co-founder and wunderkind Sam Bankman-Fried "was very bad incident for our space," said Mathias Ruch, founder and chief of CV VC, a venture capital fund focused on blockchain start-ups.

"This will set us back by at least one or two years," he predicted. Last year, 1,135 cryptocurrency and blockchain companies were based in Switzerland and Liechtenstein, up 0.6 percent from 2021, according to a CV VC survey. But at the same time, the number of so-called unicorns—young companies valued at over \$1 billion—dropped to just nine in 2022 from 14 a year earlier, while employment in the sector shrank by four percent to under 6,000 jobs.

History repeating itself?

As the crypto winter sets in, most concerns centre around financing. While the large Taurus crypto platform managed last month to raise funds from large banks including Credit Suisse and Deutsche Bank, smaller start-ups could have a harder time getting "through this difficult period", warned Jerome Bailly, Vice President of the Crypto Valley Association. Both Bailly and Ruch compared the upheaval in the sector with the bursting of the dot-com bubble in 2000.

"I think it's a very similar phase to the internet bubble," Ruch said. "People got greedy, neglected due diligence, and it's the small investors... that got hurt." "History is repeating itself." But this might not be a bad thing for the sector, he suggested, pointing out that tech giants like Google and Amazon had emerged from the dot-com ashes. "I think the opportunities are huge," he said.—AFP

EU eyes trade deal with US to access green benefits

WASHINGTON: The European Union is seeking a trade agreement with the United States that will allow the EU to access some benefits under President Joe Biden's ambitious climate plan, an EU official said Friday. Officials are hoping to make progress on this as early as next week, when Biden hosts European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen at the White House. In those talks next Friday, Western support for Ukraine, relations with China, and transatlantic trade friction are expected to top the agenda.

During the visit, both sides plan to try and reach an in-principle agreement on issues such as access to raw materials, the EU official said, speaking on condition of anonymity. European leaders are concerned that Biden's landmark Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) — a vast climate plan aimed in part at reducing dependence on Chinese imports—could come at the expense of European jobs, especially in the energy and auto sectors. While the IRA allows "certain alleviations when it comes to partners who have a Free Trade Agreement-like status," the EU does not have such an accord with the United States, the official said. "The good thing is, of that description in the Inflation Reduction Act... you can also have



something else which looks like an FTA, which can be more limited," the official added.

"That is exactly what we're working on," he said. The IRA includes \$370 billion that goes towards reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The act involves tax cuts for companies that invest in clean energy, along with subsidies for electric vehicles, batteries and renewable energy projects—if they are manufactured in the United States.

But the climate action plan also allows some exceptions for countries which have free trade agreements with the US. For now, the EU official said the aim is to avoid a "subsidy race" which he called "a lose-lose situation for both sides." Noting that the US and EU have the same objective of fighting climate change and of keeping certain non-market economies under control, "with all these shared objectives, let's not step on each other's toes," he said. — AFP

Is biodegradable better? Making sense of 'compostable' plastics

PARIS: Skittles sweet wrappers and designer water bottles—a bevy of companies are developing biodegradable plastic packaging they say is better for the environment than traditional plastics.

While experts agree we should use less plastic in any form, some say as long as plastics are here to stay, we should be using degradable materials—and also pushing governments to help us dispose of them.

But amid confusion about what is or isn't biodegradable, and in the absence of proper disposal facilities, some fear these "magical" solutions could lead to further environmental havoc and even encourage more wasteful consumption.

"People tend to believe they're contributing to the protection of the planet while buying these products, but it's not at all the case," Gaelle Haut, EU affairs coordinator at Surfrider Foundation Europe, told AFP. Synthetic petrochemical plastics can linger in the environment for hundreds of years.

Biodegradable plastics generally break down quicker but they do need to be disposed of correctly, whether it's in an industrial compost facility or a home compost, Haut said. But most people don't have access to such facilities, meaning biodegradable plastics generally end up in recycling centers or landfills—or worse, the environment.

'A lot of confusion'

From the United States to Europe to China, supermarket shelves are increasingly stocked with items

packaged with "bioplastic" or "biodegradable", "compostable" or "sustainable" plastics.

Some companies even claim to have developed edible plastics. Many governments don't regulate such claims, and most consumers don't know what they mean. Bacardi says its biodegradable bottle for spirits will hit the shelves this year. Confectionery giant Mars-Wrigley has announced the roll-out of biodegradable Skittles packaging in the United States. And late last year, California start-up Cove launched what it said was the world's first biodegradable plastic water bottle.

None of the firms responded to requests for interviews. Several companies have emerged in recent years to help certify biodegradability claims and help consumers make sense of the terminology.

"There is a lot of confusion on the market," said Philippe Dewolfs, business manager at TUEV Austria, one of the world's leading certifying agencies for biodegradable plastics, which is paid by companies to assess materials. Counterintuitively, bio-based plastics are not necessarily compostable or biodegradable, he said. These plastics contain at least some biomass feedstock like corn, potato starch, wood pulp or sugarcane—but may also contain fossil fuel-derived materials.

Conversely, biodegradable plastics may contain no biomass, but are designed to break down into CO₂, water and biomass—usually in an industrial or home compost facility. Compostable items can either break down in industrial or home compost. In some cases they may biodegrade in landfill, but it depends on moisture, microorganisms, and the composition of the product. In November, the European Commission proposed new rules on packaging to tackle waste and also clarify terms used to describe plastics presented as environmentally friendly.

"Biodegradable plastics must be approached with caution," it said. "They have their place in a sustainable future, but they need to be directed to specific applications where their environmental benefits and value for the circular economy are proven."

'Eternal pollutants'

Some fear that confusion could lead to littering, adding to the world's plastic pollution problem. "You will think 'okay, so if I forgot my biodegradable plastic bag in the forest after a picnic, it's not a problem because it will be biodegraded sitting in nature'," said Moira Tourneur, advocacy manager at Zero Waste France. She said some consumers might not think twice about overconsuming biodegradable plastic products, believing they're less polluting. "This is encouraging single plastic production," she told AFP.

Experts say consuming less plastic should be prioritized, opting for other materials such as glass or metal or reusing plastic as much as possible. Activists like Tourneur say companies and governments should focus on standardizing glass packaging for things like yoghurt and milk, so they can be returned to shops to be sterilized and reused. That could also help to reduce the mountains of plastic that end up in the environment every year, which break down into microparticles and enter our food chain ultimately to be ingested by humans and other animals.

Microplastics have been found in soil, oceans, rivers, tap water and even in the blood, breast milk and placentas of humans. "They are eternal pollutants," said Nathalie Gontard, research director at France's national agriculture research institute (INRAE). "Once these particles are dispersed... it's impossible to take them back and separate them," she added. "It's too late."

'It's a jungle'

But in a world where plastics are so pervasive, aren't biodegradables better than "eternal pollutants"? "We can make an active decision as a society to choose a material that won't persist," said Phil Van Trump, chief science and technology officer at Danimer Scientific, a US-based firm mainly producing PHA biodegradable plastic, largely for food packaging and consumer goods.

But plastics remain an important part of our industrialised economies, he said: "We need them." Plastics are crucial, for example, in the healthcare and transport sectors. But once plastic products reach the end of their life, we should be able to biodegrade those not easily recycled or where waste infrastructure is absent or lacking—from coffee pots to ketchup packets to baby nappies, Van Trump said. Experts on all sides of the biodegradable battleground agree that beyond reducing use, governments need to set up better disposal infrastructure to ensure biodegradable plastics don't end up in oceans and on forest floors. Setting up industrial compost facilities and collection is a crucial first step. Governments also need to educate the public and punish companies that make misleading claims, said Haut of Surfrider Europe. "Otherwise it's a jungle if we leave it to the companies to decide what they do." — AFP



Business

'It's hard to survive': UK Amazon workers

Dozens of disgruntled workers stage strike outside US tech warehouse

LONDON: "Amazon won't give you anything if you don't fight for it," a union organizer shouted through a bullhorn as dozens of disgruntled workers staged a strike outside the US tech warehouse in Coventry, central England. "We're asking for a raise. One of my children has eczema, I told him to take a bath every other day, I can't pay for the hot water," Kaur, who declined to give her first name, told AFP.

The 40-year-old mother of three, wearing a red hat and dark puffer jacket to protect against the cold winter air, works mostly at night and on her feet. She earns £10.50 (\$12.58) an hour—more than the national minimum wage—plus a small night premium. As well as facing a surge in her energy costs, her grocery bill has more than doubled during the crisis, making it "hard to survive". Overall inflation in the UK is running at around 10 percent.

While energy prices are starting to fall, food inflation still sits at 17 percent. Amazon worker Valentina, 37, said staff were underpaid given the arduous nature of the work. "Everyday we lift heavy boxes of 15, 17, 20 and 25 kilos. So you're hurting yourself," she said. Antonio Daniel, 22, has a daily drive of 120 kilometers (74 miles) and often works at night—severely disrupting his sleep.

Health at stake

"During COVID we risked our health, our lives and they made a huge profit," said colleague Dan, 29. Now "we have to work 60 hours a week to pay

our expenses. We don't have time for our family and that's exhausting". Amazon's global sales rose nine percent to \$514 billion in 2022 but operating profit halved to \$12.2 billion on hefty cost increases. It has launched a savings drive and plans to cut 18,000 jobs worldwide. A company spokesman told AFP that employees receive benefits such as product discounts, subsidized meals and health insurance.

An Amazon spokesman told AFP that only "a tiny proportion of our workforce are involved" in this week's strikes. GMB trade union official Stuart Richards said Coventry was the only Amazon site in the country where there was genuine employee representation. Around 400 employees joined in walkouts held between Tuesday and Thursday, Richards said.

The site employs a total of about 1,200 staff. A class action lawsuit has also been filed by a law firm on behalf of Amazon delivery workers, seeking to have them recognized as employees and not as subcontractors. Referring to the strikers gathered on Thursday evening under orange tents, Richards noted that "very few of them are from the UK" and do not always know their rights and are often uncomfortable in defending them. Dialogue with management is non-existent, added Richards, claiming that the company makes it "incredibly hard" for the union. He also criticized the pressure put on employees by the company's "constant" measurement of performance, which he claimed leads to a "huge amount of injuries". —AFP



COVENTRY, UK: Stuart Richards from the GMB Union stands with Amazon workers outside the Amazon fulfillment centre in Coventry, central England on March 2, 2023, in a continuation of their industrial action at the depot. —AFP

Clones, noseprints, flying taxis: Sci-fi meets reality at expo

BARCELONA: The Mobile World Congress (MWC) is primarily a pow-wow for the big-wigs of the telecom industry, but far from the main thoroughfares of the vast conference there are always hidden tech gems. Here are some of the most offbeat products spotted by AFP.

Eternal clone

As advertising slogans go, "you can live forever" is up there with the best. That is how Memori Yamato explains the "personalized AI clone" from her Japanese company Alt Inc.

"Your descendants can continue to speak and interact with you, even after your death," Yamato told AFP. The idea is to upload as many videos, images and audio samples as you can while alive. The system will use it to generate an AI mirror, cloning you forever in the digital world.

"It will look like you, it speaks in your voice, and it even thinks like you," she said. The idea has been nine years in the making, she said, and feedback from early users suggests the technology has nailed appearances and voices.

Noseprint ID

A dog's nose carries similar identifying traits as a human fingerprint. South Korean start-up Petnow took this info and ran with it—like a dog after a stick—to create a biometric database of pets based

on noseprints rather than microchips. "Since the 1940s, we've known that dogs' noses worked a little like fingerprints," the firm's Peter Jung told AFP.

He explained that around 100,000 animals are abandoned each year in South Korea, often because owners cannot afford vet bills. "Less than 10 percent have chips because people don't like the process," he said. Petnow just requires a photo and AI does the rest, ensuring the photos are good enough for identity purposes.

Jung says 50,000 pet owners have signed up since last year and he hopes the government will change the rules to allow his system to replace chips. And cat lovers need not worry. Their noses may be too petite to be identifiable, but each feline face is unique and can be used in the system.

Flying taxi

A staple from the pages of science-fiction and the dream of the super-rich, flying taxis could be with us as soon as 2025, according to SK Telecom. At the MWC, some attendees got an early taste, thanks to VR headsets and a real-life prototype complete with juddering seats.

Halfway between a helicopter and a drone, the craft has six electric motors that allow vertical take-offs and landings. It can carry up to four passengers and move at speeds of up to 320 kilometers (198 miles) per hour. South Korea's biggest telecoms provider developed it with Californian start-up Joby Aviation and hopes it will solve congestion in South Korea's cities without costing the earth.

"In Korea, in urban areas, we have severe traffic congestion, but constructing a mass transportation system like a highway or subway needs many social costs," said the firm's Ken Wohn. "Using this UAM (Urban Air Mobility) serv-



BARCELONA: South Korean telecom company KT's president and CEO Hyuen-Mo Ku gives a press conference at the Mobile World Congress (MWC), the telecom industry's biggest annual gathering, in Barcelona. —AFP

ice can shorten our customers' travel time without making so much infrastructure."

Never alone

In the future, we may live our later years in the company of "socially intelligent" robots capable of "building an emotional relationship" with us. That is the vision of Spanish technology outfit Eurecat, which has developed a robot called NHOA—or "never home alone".

It is designed to reduce the loneliness of older people living at home. The orange and white robot stands 160 cm tall and can be controlled with a touchscreen and by voice. Eurecat's David Mari said the aim was not to replace human relationships but to "humanize" the applications and connected objects used by older people. —AFP



Volkswagen shares jump as supply chain woes ease

BERLIN: German auto giant Volkswagen on Friday unveiled an optimistic forecast for 2023 on expectations that global supply chain woes will ease, sending its shares soaring. In results released ahead of schedule, the Wolfsburg-based group reported a net profit of 15.8 billion euros (\$16.7 billion) for 2022, up 2.6-percent on the previous year. Sales for the 10-brand group climbed by almost 12 percent to 279 billion euros, driven by demand for more expensive models.

Europe's largest carmaker said it delivered a "robust performance" in 2022 "despite ongoing supply disruptions and headwinds from higher raw material and energy costs". The group expects vehicle deliveries to rise to around 9.5 million this year, up from 8.3 million in 2022. "We expect the supply chain bottlenecks to gradually ease in the current year, allowing us to service the high order backlog," said chief financial officer Arno Antlitz. Revenues are seen growing by 10-15 percent year-on-year, VW added. Investors welcomed the positive outlook, which surpassed analyst expectations. Shares in VW jumped 10 percent to 141.60 euros in late afternoon trading in Frankfurt. Volkswagen's main rival Toyota sold more than 10 million vehicles last year, holding on to the title of the world's top-selling automaker for the third year running.

Electric shift

A lingering shortage in semiconductors and other COVID-related supply chain issues hobbled automakers around the world in 2022. Surging energy costs in the wake of Russia's war in Ukraine added to the challenges confronting the industry.

Although VW's vehicle deliveries fell seven percent year-on-year in 2022 as a result of the difficult environment, the group said electric cars bucked the trend. VW delivered more than 570,000 all-electric vehicles to customers, a 26-percent increase on a year earlier.

The company said it was "on track" to meet its goal of having e-vehicles account for half of all deliveries in 2030, as part of an industry-wide shift towards zero-emissions engines.

Among the challenges listed for the year ahead, VW cited an uncertain economic outlook, volatile prices for materials and energy "and stricter emission-related requirements". The European Union is planning landmark legislation that would ban sales of new petrol or diesel-engine cars from 2035.

But the issue has run into opposition from economic powerhouse Germany, which wants assurances from Brussels that synthetic fuels could still be used in engines after 2035. EU countries on Friday delayed a crucial vote on the legislation, which was due to take place next week. —AFP

Foxconn says no deal yet for new India investment

TAIPEI: Taiwanese tech giant Foxconn confirmed on Saturday that its chairman had visited India, but denied it had "entered into any binding, definitive agreements" after reports saying it was planning new investments in the country. Also known by its official name, Hon Hai Precision Industry,

Foxconn is the world's biggest contract electronics manufacturer and a principal assembler of Apple iPhones. Both companies are seeking to diversify away from China, where much of their manufacturing is based, after strict COVID policies last year and ongoing diplomatic tensions with the United States hurt production.

Foxconn said in a statement on Saturday that no deals had been finalized during chairman and CEO Young Liu's visit to India from February 27 to March 4. "Foxconn has not entered into binding, definitive agreements for new investments during this trip," the statement said.

"Negotiations and internal review are ongoing.

China to unveil lowest growth goal in years

BEIJING: China will likely set one of the country's lowest growth goals in decades at the annual National People's Congress next week, experts told AFP, hit by long-running property woes, a sluggish global economy and geopolitical tensions. Thousands of party delegates from across China will converge on Beijing for a rubber stamp convocation set to confirm key personnel appointments and make policy for the coming year.

Among the first declarations is expected to be a target for gross domestic product growth over the coming 12 months, announced by outgoing Premier Li Keqiang at Sunday's opening ceremony. Last year, the economy expanded just three percent, one of its weakest in decades on the back of the COVID-19 pandemic, lockdowns and a real estate crisis. And economists surveyed by AFP predicted goals for 2023 will be conservative, expecting policymakers to aim for 5.3 percent, one of the lowest targets in decades.

China's housing market, which along with construction accounts for more than a quarter of GDP, remains in a slump, having been dealt a hefty blow since Beijing started cracking down on excessive borrowing and rampant speculation in 2020. Real estate sales have since fallen in multiple cities and several developers are struggling to survive, while many homebuyers last year refused to pay mortgages on incomplete properties. "Sales, commencements and prices are all lower," Moody's economist Harry Murphy Cruise said. "Property developer defaults in late 2021 left more than a million pre-sold homes unfinished, spooking households, and prompting many to turn their back on the market." An ailing international outlook was also likely to drag on growth, with economists warning of a slump in the world economy as countries battle soaring costs and central banks simultaneously hike interest rates to cool demand. "We see empty containers



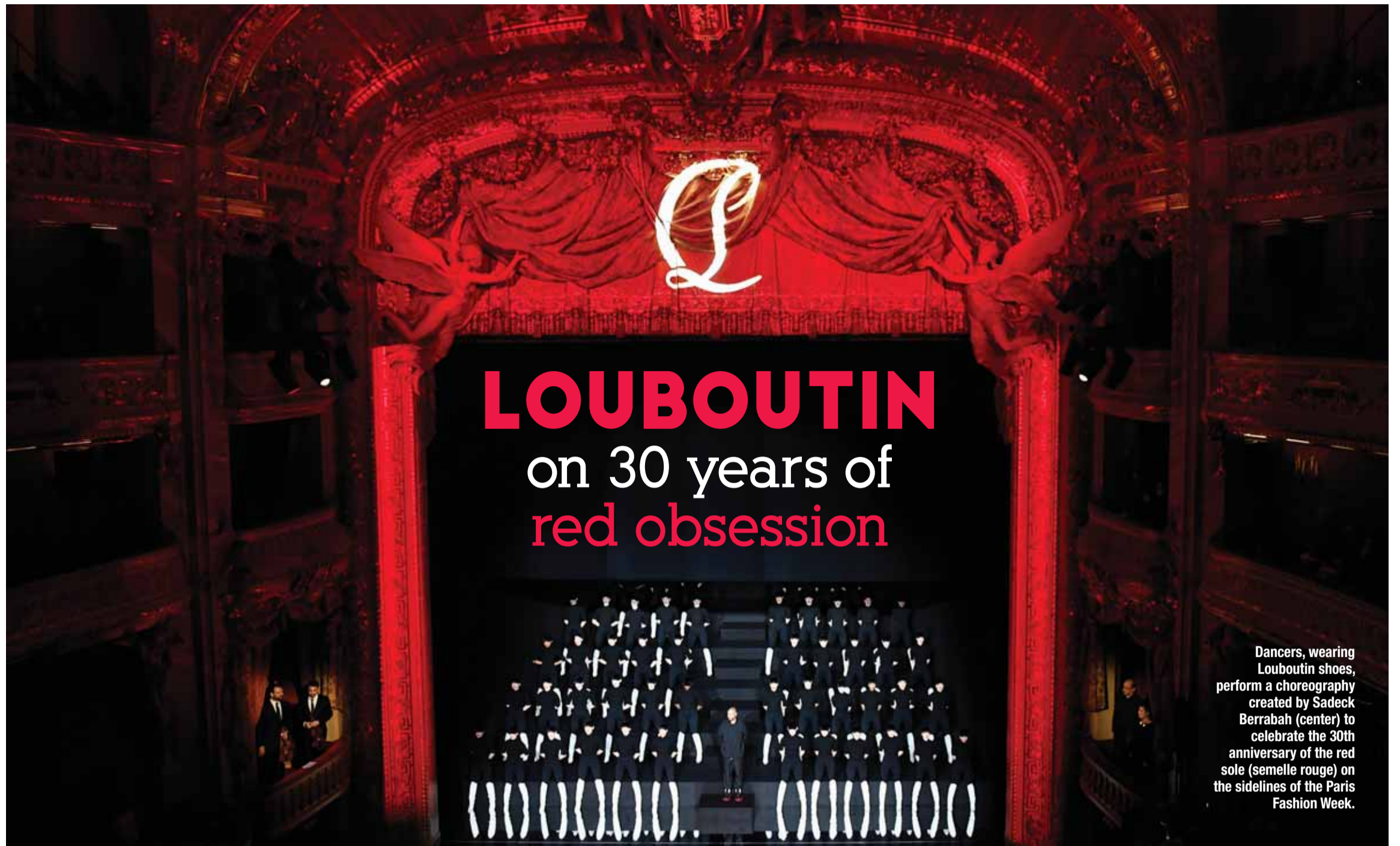
Employees work on a micro-motor production line at a factory in Huaibei, in China's eastern Anhui province. —AFP

piling high at Chinese ports," Gene Ma, head of China research at the Institute of International Finance, told AFP. "Export demand is rapidly disappearing due to weaker global growth and supply-chain migration."

Meanwhile, commentators warned that geopolitical tensions posed a threat to China's economic prospects—particularly if Beijing chooses to further involve itself in Russia's war in Ukraine. "One big risk (if not the biggest) would be China actively supporting Russia with weapons and ammunition," Teeuwe Mevissen, China economist at Rabobank, said. "This would almost certainly lead to Western sanctions."

What growth does come will be driven by a surge in consumption demand, economists said, as the coun-

try emerges from almost three years of COVID restrictions. "With signs of a recovery in consumer confidence, pent-up demand amid normalization, and stronger economic activity supporting the labor market, we think services consumption stands to benefit the most," Jing Liu, Greater China Chief Economist, HSBC Global Research, wrote in a recent report. The Institute of International Finance's Ma, agreed, telling AFP his group expected a surge in household consumption, from a 0.2 percent contraction last year to nine percent growth in 2023. "Considering household consumption is about 40 percent of GDP, household consumption alone can push GDP higher by 3.5 points," he said. —AFP



LOUBOUTIN

on 30 years of red obsession

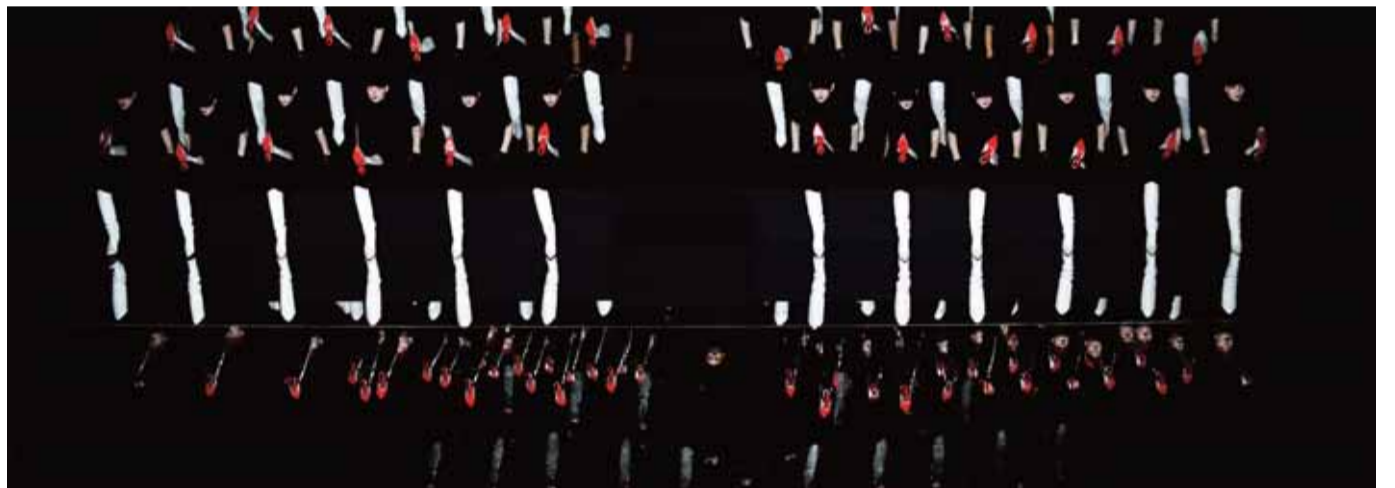
Dancers, wearing Louboutin shoes, perform a choreography created by Sadeck Berrabah (center) to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the red sole (semelle rouge) on the sidelines of the Paris Fashion Week.



French shoe designer Christian Louboutin poses with two of his creations during a photo session in Paris. — AFP photos

It was 30 years ago that Christian Louboutin borrowed his assistant's nail varnish to fix a problematic sole and inadvertently created a design that would make him globally famous. It was 1993 and Louboutin, then 30, was examining a pink and purple shoe prototype. The black sole was too dominant, he felt, and so called for his assistant. "I took the nail polish and erased the black. I wasn't thinking to add the red," he recalled to AFP in his brightly decorated Paris apartment. "But suddenly it was a revelation!"

The earlier idea of releasing a different color sole each season never materialized. "People who don't like to wear colors still like red," he said. "The obsession began with the fact that red is more than just a color for me. I have very early memories of women dressed in black but already with red nails and lips. It began with cinema, the actresses of the 1950s like Sophia Loren." He marked the 30th anniversary of his famous red sole this week with a dance performance at the Opera Comique and will soon open his first hotel in Portugal named "Vermelho" (Red).



The black stiletto with the red sole remains his best-selling model, despite the range of flats and mid-heels. He rejects the idea of heels as anti-feminist, saying he delights in seeing customers put on a pair of stilettos and admire themselves "front, profile and back" without caring what their "husband, boyfriend or girlfriend will think".

Or little girls trying on their mother's heels without anyone telling them to: "There is a kind of infantile pleasure in seeing life from a little higher up." For him, heels are a symbol of female empowerment. He thinks of Tina Turner in her heyday, or Beyonce now, teetering on heels but incarnating "feminism, much more than someone who lets themselves go". With the passing of

lockdowns and lounging around in pyjamas, it is time to celebrate, he added.

His new collection, inspired by flamenco, sees him collaborate with Rossy de Palma, the flamboyant Spanish star of many Pedro Almodovar movies. "I like singular people, and there is only one Rossy," he said. "Someone who exudes amusement, pleasure, laughter, everything." — AFP



Sadeck Berrabah performs a choreography.



Dancers, wearing Louboutin shoes, perform to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the red sole (semelle rouge) on the sidelines of the Paris Fashion Week.



Balenciaga's Demna seeks redemption after scandal

Having fled war as a child, Georgian designer Demna made fashion a sort of battleground of provocative ideas at the helm of Balenciaga. It was tremendously successful-until it wasn't. The 41-year-old, who dropped his last name Gvasalia in 2021, returns to the catwalk at Paris Fashion Week on Sunday for the first time since his hot streak was brought to a screeching halt late last year by a spectacularly ill-considered publicity campaign.

The ads featured children with teddy bear bags that had studs and harnesses-supposedly meant to evoke a punk aesthetic but looking a lot like bondage gear. It coincided with another ad campaign that included a strange background detail-a print-out of a US Supreme Court judgment about child pornography.

Demna apologized profusely in the pages of Vogue, denying any intention to

reference child abuse, but the damage was done, with a slump in fourth-quarter sales and criticism from celebrity friends such as Kim Kardashian. He vowed to drop the provocations. "I have decided to go back to my roots in fashion as well as to the roots of Balenciaga, which is making quality clothes-not making image or buzz," he told Vogue.

'Unbridled creation'

It is an unexpected moment of contrition for a designer who was named among the world's 100 most influential people by Time less than a year ago. Demna is on thin ice: "We are allowed to make a mistake in a group like Kering," said the boss of Balenciaga's parent company, Francois-Henri Pinault. "We don't have the right to make two."

He also barely escaped contagion from the controversies around his friend Kanye West, who opened Balenciaga's last show in Paris in September. The label cut ties with the rapper after his outbursts about Jews. Before then, Demna's playful and inventive campaigns had made Balenciaga one of the hottest brands around.

A 2021 show saw guests arriving along a red carpet and then presented with a film of their entrance that revealed the models had been secretly mingling among them, wearing the new collection. One campaign was done in the style of a dystopian newscast;

another playing with the tropes of reality TV. His daring designs included the head-to-toe black shrouds worn by Kardashian at the Met Gala in 2021. "The unbridled creation has worked well but he will have to tame it down a little bit," said Arnaud Cadart, of fashion consultancy Flornoy Ferri.



In this file photo Fashion designer for Vetements, Demna Gvasalia looks on at the end of his men and women's Spring/Summer 2019 collection fashion show, in Paris. — AFP

Ugly luxury

It will be a tough reinvention, not least since one of Demna's tricks has been to turn the ugly into luxury, from his pimped-out Crocs to his notorious \$1,500 garbage bags. "Demna uses his radical approach to overturn stereotypes of what is normal and what is luxury," said Serge Carreira, a fashion expert at Sciences Po University in

Paris. It is an approach that worked, attracting all kinds of stars from cerebral French actor Isabelle Huppert to brash US rapper Cardi B. There was a fascinating backstory, too.

A year ago, Demna's Paris show fell just after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, recalling his traumatic departure from Georgia at the age of 12, forced to flee ethnic cleansing by pro-Russian separatists. The show saw under-dressed models walking out in an artificial snowstorm, carrying those infamous trash bags.

Some found it distasteful but it was deeply felt. The invasion "triggered the pain of a past trauma I have carried in me since 1993, when the same thing happened in my country and I became a forever refugee", he said.

Trained at the Beaux-Arts Royal Academy in Belgium, Demna worked for Maison Margiela and Louis Vuitton before creating his own label, Vetements, with his brother in 2014. He was named creative director at Balenciaga in 2015. For many years, his trauma affected his work but he told Vanity Fair in 2021 that counseling, meditation and exercise had helped exorcise some demons. "Fashion used to feel like a battle for me. That is why there was a lot of aggression and darkness in what I did. Today I feel at peace with the system," he said. — AFP

Denmark's Little Mermaid vandalized with Russian flag

The Little Mermaid statue in Copenhagen, one of Denmark's most iconic landmarks, was vandalized overnight Thursday with a Russian flag painted across the statue's base. The colors of Russia's flag had been painted on the stone where the statue rests of the heroine from Danish storyteller Hans Christian Andersen's famous novel, an AFP journalist saw. Copenhagen police told AFP they had been at the scene in the morning and recorded "a case of vandalism." "Investigations have been carried out in the area in order to find traces," police added.

An investigation had been opened into act, an apparent sign of support for Moscow in the midst of its war in Ukraine. A few puzzled tourists photographed the vandalized statue on Thursday morning. The Little Mermaid-inspired by a character in Danish poet and author Andersen's 1837 fairytale of the same name-is a 175-kilogram (385-pound) statue by sculptor Edvard Eriksen.—AFP

Lifestyle | Features



A handout picture shows oils from the Mount of Olives being mixed with essential oils and blessed in Jerusalem by the Patriarch of Jerusalem, His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III, to become Chrism Oil, which will be used in the Coronation of King Charles III. — AFP photos



A handout picture shows a silver urn containing the Chrism Oil - oils from the Mount of Olives mixed with essential oils and blessed in Jerusalem.



A handout picture shows oils from the Mount of Olives being mixed with essential oils and blessed in Jerusalem to become Chrism Oil.



A handout picture shows the Patriarch of Jerusalem, His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III (center), holding the Chrism Oil in a silver urn, and the Anglican Archbishop in The Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem, The Most Reverend Hosam Naoum (third right), in Jerusalem.



A handout picture shows the Anglican Archbishop in Jerusalem, The Most Reverend Hosam Naoum, kneeling at the Stone of Unction in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem, where Jesus' (PBUH) body was laid and prepared for burial.

Coronation oil for Charles III consecrated in Jerusalem

Olive oil, fragrant rose and orange blossom: the special "chrism" or holy anointing oil for the coronation of Britain's King Charles III has been blessed in Jerusalem's Old City. Friday's ceremony was carried out at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, where Christians believe Jesus (PBUH) was buried. "The chrism oil which will be used to anoint His Majesty The King on May 6 2023 has been

consecrated in Jerusalem," Buckingham Palace said in a statement. The unique mix was "perfumed with essential oils", and also included extracts of sesame, jasmine and cinnamon, it added.

Based on the same ingredients as the oil used at the 1953 coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, it is based on a formula "which has been used for hundreds of years", the palace said Friday. The oil,

which will also be used to anoint Queen Consort Camilla, the wife of King Charles III, was consecrated in a special by the Patriarch of Jerusalem, Theophilos III, and the Anglican Archbishop in Jerusalem, Hosam Naoum. Now stored in an ornate silver flask, the oil came from the Mount of Olives, the ridge overlooking the walled Old City.

The olives were harvested from two

groves, the Monastery of the Ascension and the Monastery of Mary Magdalene, where Charles III's grandmother is buried, Princess Alice of Greece. The olives were pressed just outside the Palestinian city of Bethlehem, in the Zionist-occupied West Bank.

The Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, the head of the Anglican church, said the coronation oil reflects Charles

III's "personal family connection with the Holy Land", the palace statement added. Welby, who will carry out the coronation service, said the oil signified the "deep historic link between the coronation, the Bible and the Holy Land". "From ancient kings through to the present day, monarchs have been anointed with oil from this sacred place," he said. — AFP

Horseback riding may have begun 5,000 years ago in Europe

Who were the first people to ride horses? Researchers believe they have found the earliest evidence of horseback riding, by the ancient Yamnaya people in Europe some 5,000 years ago. Their conclusions, based on an analysis of human skeletal remains found in Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania, were published on Friday in the journal *Science Advances*. Domestication of horses for milk is widely accepted to have begun around 3500 BC to 3000 BC, the study said, but the "origins of horseback riding remain elusive."

The researchers from the University of Helsinki and other European institutions date the earliest horsemanship to 3000 BC to 2500 BC among members of the Yamnaya culture. "Our findings provide a strong argument that horseback riding was already a common activity for some Yamnaya individuals as early as 3000 BC," the researchers said.

Horse bones have been discovered in Yamnaya settlements but they are not as well preserved as human skeletons, which were given proper burials in earth-covered mounds known as "kurgans." The researchers said the human skeletons provided the best source of information about horse riding because any riding tack used by early riders would have been made using perishable materials.

The researchers said some of the human skeletons they analyzed bore skeletal traits indicative of what they called "horsemanship syndrome." "A skeleton of a living person is reacting," Martin Trautmann, a postdoctoral

researcher at the University of Helsinki and one of the authors of the study, told AFP. "If you sit on horseback you need to balance with every step of your mount, you need to cling tightly with your legs."

Doing that repeatedly leaves tell-tale changes in bone morphology, Trautmann said, including "stress-induced vertebral degeneration," a common ailment among avid horse riders. "We know that saddles and stirrups dated much later," Trautmann said, and the early horse riders were probably riding bareback and gripping the mane of the horse.

'Cowboys, not warriors'

Volker Heyd, a professor of archeology at the University of Helsinki, said the findings "fit very nicely into the overall picture" of Yamnaya culture. "We were already suspecting them of using horses," Heyd said, and it could help explain the "exceptional" geographic expansion of their society in a few generations.

"It is difficult to envision how this expansion could have taken place without improved means of transport," the researchers said. "Using horses for transport was a decisive step in human cultural development," they said. "Trade and cultural exchange as well as conflicts and migrations leapt with the increase in speed and range provided by horsemanship."

The researchers said the Yamnaya were probably not initially using horses for warfare. "They were cowboys, not warriors," said Trautmann. Heyd said the early horse riders "were probably helping the Yamnaya people in guarding their animals, their cattle and sheep mostly."

According to the researchers, the earliest figurative evidence of horse riding comes from the Mesopotamian Ur III period shortly before 2000 BC through depictions of a horse and rider. Images and mentions in cuneiform texts of horseback riding are also found in the Old Babylonian period from around 1880 BC to 1595 BC. — AFP



This image released by the University of Helsinki shows details of the horse rider discovered in Malomirovo, Bulgaria. — AFP

King size? Long-lost bed might finally serve UK monarch

Although a little larger than king size, an unusual bed stored in Britain's Palace of Westminster with a remarkable history could see its first royal sleepover ahead of Charles III's coronation in May. The regal crib, which has its origins in a thousand-year-old tradition observed up to the time of Henry VIII in the 16th century, was lost for decades but is ready for service after a remarkable journey. On the night before coronation, the sovereign traditionally spent the night at the Palace of Westminster, then the Royal Palace.



The decorative canopy above the bed is pictured in the State Bedroom at the Palace of Westminster in London.

After falling out of favor, the tradition was revived two centuries ago for the coronation of George IV in 1821. But that bed was destroyed in the fire that ravaged Parliament in 1834. So another one, finished in 1858, was made but has "actually never been used the night before the coronation", parliamentary historian Mark Collins told AFP.

Discovery in mill

It was not ready for Queen Victoria's coronation in 1838 and subsequent monarchs chose not to spend the night at Westminster. The bed was dismantled and stored away during World War II, forgotten as the Victorian era fell out of fashion. Its whereabouts were unknown at the time of Elizabeth II's coronation in 1953 and it was not until the late 1970s that a V&A Museum expert, Clive Wainwright, launched an appeal to try to find the bed.

His efforts proved successful, with a family coming forward to reveal it was located at a woollen mill in Wales. It had been bought at an auction for £100 (\$119) in the 1960s by the parents of Richard Martin, now 70. "They knew it



The State Bedroom, with its bed, is pictured at the Palace of Westminster in London.

was a special item, they knew that it was something important, but they didn't know where it had come from at all," said historian Collins. And for about 20 years, the bed had a very busy life. One of the family's children, Benedict, was even born there in 1965.

'Night-time throne'

The fantastical piece stirred the imagination of a young Richard Martin on his way to the land of nod. "When I was a child... we thought that whoever lived in the bed, who slept in the bed, would put their cigarette" in little holes carved in the wood, while reading or drinking tea, he told AFP. "Nobody else had a bed like that", he said, calling it "a night-time throne".

The bed was bought back from the family and then restored. The original royal red and purple hangings, adorned with the rose for England, the thistle for Scotland and the clover for

Ireland, had long disappeared and were recreated in 1984. The public can now see the piece following Speaker Lindsay Hoyle's decision to open the rooms up for tours, but it will be hidden from view during the King's coronation weekend, starting May 5.

The "State Bed" lives a stone's throw from Big Ben in a dedicated room in parliament's Speaker's quarters, with windows overlooking Westminster Bridge and the London Eye. The upper part of the bed, which has a walnut frame with gilding and royal symbols, is over three meters (about 10 feet) high. The question now remains whether Charles will captain its maiden royal voyage. Collins said it will be ready for action, whatever the decision. "I don't think it'd be too long before we actually find out whether it'll be used again. "The bed the bed is definitely ready, just in case." — AFP



A portrait of the Speaker of the House of Commons, Robert Harley, is seen in the State Bedroom in the Palace of Westminster in London. — AFP photos

Lifestyle | Features

ChatGPT turns to manga in
'One Piece' author experiment

The AI program ChatGPT has passed exams, penned news articles and produced code. So perhaps no surprise that "One Piece" author Eiichiro Oda has turned to it for inspiration. The man behind the record-breaking manga often referred to as one of the best-known in the world seemed to have found himself struggling with writer's block last month.

"Hello. This is the author. I cannot come up with a story for One Piece next week. Would you think of a story? A super good one, please," he prompted the program, according to a video his staff posted on their Twitter account. In seconds, ChatGPT spun a story in which heroes meet new friends and battle it out with new enemies, including "Shadow King".

The program attempted to sell the story to Oda, telling the creator that the proposed plot offers a mistrial tribe, new comrades and a renewed focus on one existing character to showcase her intellect and behaviors that his readers would enjoy. But Oda's immediate review was unreti-



cent: "Sorry. It's boring," he typed, demanding a better idea.

The second time around the program was rewarded for producing a storyline in which an alien joins "One Piece" characters and "pirate king" Luffy to fight a witch and rebuild its home star that had been destroyed by an evil spaceship. "Thank you. I will draw as it

is," wrote Oda in response, quipping that his next installment in the saga will be based on the new storyline.

"One Piece" follows straw hat-wearing Luffy and his team as they hunt for the titular treasure coveted by all pirates. The last installment began on July 25 in Japanese weekly manga magazine Shonen Jump. The series

has racked up more than 100 volumes and smashed sales records since the first installment appeared in 1997.

Oda landed a Guinness World Record for having the most copies published for the same comic book series by a single author. The 100th volume of the series came out in France last year with 250,000 copies, a number rivaling works that have won the prestigious Prix Goncourt literature prize. The "One Piece" universe includes cultural and geographical references that give it a universal dimension, including Ancient Egypt, Venice and medieval Japan.

Engaging characters and modern themes of breakneck industrialization, racism, slavery and geopolitical intrigues add to the appeal of the series. Producers hope the upcoming release of a Netflix series adapted from the "One Piece" universe will help it conquer new territory, bringing the story to the global streaming platform's more than 200 million subscribers.—AFP

US-made cheese
can be called
'gruyere', too

A US appeals court ruled Friday that in America the word "gruyere" is a common label for cheese and cannot be reserved just for the kind made originally in France or Switzerland. The United States does not have the same strict rules as Europe on the designation of origin for foods, said judges in the Richmond, Virginia-based US Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit.

The US Food and Drug Administration does set some standards for gruyere cheese, such as the existence in it of "small holes" or that such cheese is aged at least 90 days. But it does not establish criteria on geographic origin. "Cheese-regardless of its location of production has been labeled and sold as gruyere in America for decades," the court said.

And this concerns cheese produced in Wisconsin or as far away as the Netherlands, Germany or Austria, they added. The Interprofession du Gruyere, which represents milk producers, cheesemakers and refiners in the gruyere industry in Switzerland, and its counterpart in France, had asked to have the term recorded in the US registry of trademarks.

When the US Patent and Trademark Office refused to do this, the industry groups filed suit and lost in early 2022. Judges with the appeals court have upheld the lower court ruling. The Swiss and French plaintiffs "cannot overcome what the record makes clear: cheese consumers in the United States understand 'GRUYERE' to refer to a type of cheese, which renders the term generic," the court said.

US dairy groups welcomed the ruling while the Swiss and French cheese federations are disappointed, their lawyer said. "We think the actual situation in the US market is different than as stated by the Court of Appeals, and we will continue to pursue vigorously our efforts to protect the certification mark for the high-quality Gruyere PDO (protected designation of origin) product in the US," attorney Richard Lehv said in a statement.—AFP



In this file photo taken on September 5, 1998 (from left) US actors Tom Sizemore, Tom Hanks, US film director Steven Spielberg and actor Edward Burns pose for the presentation of Spielberg's last movie 'Saving private Ryan' during the 24th Deauville American movie Festival.

'Saving Private Ryan' actor
Tom Sizemore
dies at 61

Tom Sizemore, a talented but troubled actor who made a career of playing tough guys, but struggled to stay on the right side of the law, has died at the age of 61, his manager said Friday. He suffered a brain aneurysm in February and on Friday was removed from life support, days after doctors concluded no more could be done for him, Charles Lago said. "It is with great sadness and sorrow I have to announce that actor Thomas Edward Sizemore ('Tom Sizemore') aged 61 passed away peacefully in his sleep today at St Joseph's Hospital Burbank," a statement said.



In this file photo actor Tom Sizemore arrives at the Paramount Vantage premiere of Babel at the FOX Westwood Village theatre in Westwood, California.—AFP photos

"His brother Paul and twin boys Jayden and Jagger (17) were at his side." The actor worked with some of Hollywood's biggest names over a decades-long career, but away from the screen he led a frequently troubled life, struggling with addiction and enduring spells in jail. Born in Detroit in 1961, Sizemore worked as an actor in New York in the 1980s, and first came to prominence with a role in Oliver Stone's 1989 film "Born on the Fourth of July."

Throughout the 1990s, he appeared in movies including the star-studded "True Romance," written by Quentin

Tarantino, and Stone's violent cult hit "Natural Born Killers." But it was for his role in Steven Spielberg's 1998 World War II epic "Saving Private Ryan" that he came to wider public attention, playing the second-in-command to Tom Hanks in a small group of soldiers sent to bring home a serviceman whose three brothers had already died.

The movie received a Best Picture nomination at the Oscars and the stars, who also included Matt Damon, were nominated for outstanding cast by the Screen Actors Guild. A few years later, he was part of an ensemble that included Ewan McGregor and Tom Hardy in Ridley Scott's "Black Hawk Down," about a botched military operation in Somalia. His acting won frequent plaudits, and his craft was widely admired by fellow professionals.

Personal troubles

But off-screen Sizemore's life kept unraveling. He blamed prolific drug use, including of crystal methamphetamine, heroin and cocaine, for some of his darker episodes. In 2003 he was convicted of attacking his then-girlfriend and spent eight months in jail. Drug possession landed him in trouble with the law several times over the following years, at least once resulting in more jail time. In 2017 he pleaded no contest to more domestic violence charges.

Despite his personal troubles, he continued to work, appearing in TV standards including "Hawaii Five-O" and "Law & Order: Special Victims Unit." On February 18, he collapsed at his Los Angeles home after suffering a stroke and subsequent aneurysm. He had been in intensive care since. Lago said he would miss his "great friend." "Tom was one of the most sincere, kind and generous human beings I have had the pleasure of knowing. His courage and determination through adversity was always an inspiration to me."

The actor's brother, who was with him when he died, said he was "deeply saddened." "He was larger than life. He has influenced my life more than anyone I know. He was talented, loving, giving and could keep you entertained endlessly with his wit and storytelling ability. I am devastated he is gone and will miss him always."—AFP

How a German war film disarmed
Oscar voters despite woes at home

When "All Quiet on the Western Front" first premiered back in September, there was little to suggest it was about to wage an all-out campaign for Oscar votes. The German-language World War I film comes from Netflix, which had a roster of far more expensive "prestige" movies primed for Academy Award pushes, from Oscar-winning director Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu's "Bardo" to the star-studded "Glass Onion: A Knives Out Mystery."

But while those have largely fallen by the wayside, with one nomination each, "All Quiet" has emerged from the crowded trenches of awards season hopefuls as an Oscars frontrunner, with nine nods, including for much-coveted best picture honors. "It really feels like a wave of joy and luck that has come over us," director Edward Berger told AFP, days before his film won seven prizes at Britain's BAFTAs, including best film. "We're very grateful for that... it's a German war movie!"



Indeed, Berger's film is the third screen adaptation of Erich Maria Remarque's seminal novel about naive young German soldiers confronted with the horrors of war—but the first shot in the author's native language. Had he been asked, the director "would have immediately said no" to making another English-language version.

Luckily, the decision to flip the script was helped by Netflix's wildly successful expansion into new global markets with recent subtitled hits such as South Korean series "Squid Game" and Oscar-winning film "Roma." The movie's eventual \$20 million price tag was comparatively small change for the streaming giant, but a huge sum in the German film industry. "We wouldn't have gotten the type of budget that you need to make this film five years ago," said Berger. The film's best picture Oscar nomination is the first for any German-language movie.

Creative license

Ironically, the film has been far better received outside of the German-speaking world than it has at home, where

many reviewers savaged it. In particular, critics slammed Berger's decision to depart from Remarque's text, which—with 50 million copies sold worldwide, and the legacy of being banned by the Nazis—holds hallowed status in Germany today.

Unlike the novel, the film portrays tense armistice peace talks with French generals. It also omits a section in which one of its war-hardened heroes visits home but cannot readjust to civilian life. "I don't follow it very closely... that's part of the journalist's job-to observe, criticize," shrugged Berger.

"I felt licensed to make those changes" because "why make it the same?" he added. To encapsulate the "physical difference" between the film's reception at home and overseas, Berger pointed to one especially harrowing scene towards the end of the movie.

A key character is fatally bayoneted through the back—a moment which Berger intended to be heartbreaking and brutal, but not necessarily unexpected, given the novel's fame and the war's unfathomable death toll. Yet at the film's world premiere in Toronto last year, "there was a loud gasp in the audience," he recalled.

"I was so surprised, because I didn't plan on this... In Germany, that didn't happen," said Berger. "As Germans, we expect-in a German movie about war-you cannot have a hero. You cannot have people be successful in the mission. You almost cannot have a soldier survive," he said. By contrast, "in America, you're used to the hero. You want them to come out positively, and you cling on to the hope that your hero is going to change the world."

"Shame and responsibility and guilt" In any case, Berger did not sign up out of any sense of patriotic duty. The film and the original anti-war novel are both stridently against jingoism of any stripe. "We wanted to make a very German movie-but we are not making it for the country," he said. "I'm not a patriot. Germans have a difficult relationship with patriotism, or pride or honor, about their history or country. So I'm not in that business."

Instead, filming in German offered "an outer stamp of authenticity" and a deeper sense of the "shame and responsibility and guilt" many Germans feel about history, said Berger. Whatever happens at the Oscars ceremony on March 12, "All Quiet" clearly left an indelible impact on voters at the US-based Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

It is seen as a shoo-in for the best international feature statuette, a strong possibility for best picture, and its nine Oscar nominations are one short of the all-time record for a foreign-language movie. "Were we surprised? Of course," said Berger. "I mean, you can't count on something like that.—AFP

New Zealand
dancer among two
new 'stars' of Paris
Opera Ballet

The Paris Opera Ballet named New Zealand's Hannah O'Neill and France's Marc Moreau on Thursday as their two new star dancers, the former a rare non-French dancer in the world's oldest ballet company. O'Neill, 30, is the one of a handful

of foreigners to reach the highest "etoile" status at the elite and world-renowned company, which has only in recent years opened up their ranks to non-French dancers.

Unlike the Royal Ballet in London or the New York City-based American Ballet Theatre, the vast majority of the 154 dancers at the 354-year-old Paris Opera Ballet are locals. It was not until 2012 that a dancer from Latin America—Argentina's Ludmila Pagliero—became an etoile, and not until 2021 that South Korea's Sae Eun Park became the first Asian awarded the honour.

As is customary, the promotion of O'Neill and Moreau was announced

without warning at the end of a performance—in this case, George Balanchine's "Ballet Imperial" at the Opera Garnier.

O'Neill is the daughter of a New Zealand rugby player and Japanese mother who is passionate about ballet. Her teacher was Marilyn Rowe, who worked with Rudolf Nureyev, a former director of the Paris Opera Ballet. She has won some of the biggest prizes in international dance, including the Prix de Lausanne and Youth American Grand Prix, before joining the Paris Opera at 18. Moreau, 36, joined at 17 and became a "premier danseur" in 2019.—AFP



In this file photo New Zealand's ballet dancer and first soloist of the Paris Opera Ballet Hannah O'Neill, poses during a photo session in Paris.—AFP

Rafael Vinoly,
architect known
for unique
structures, dies at 78

Rafael Vinoly, a Uruguayan-born and New York-based architect known for designing landmark buildings around the world, has died at the age of 78, his family announced Friday. Vinoly's death Thursday was announced by his son Roman on the website of the family firm, Rafael Vinoly Architects. "He was a visionary who will be missed by all those whose lives he touched through his work," the son's statement said.

Vinoly's sometimes controversial work features more than 600 structures around the world, including office and residential buildings, hotels, concert halls, stadiums and airports. One of his better known works is the so-called Walkie Talkie building in London—an almost cartoonish skyscraper that is broader at the top than the bottom and looks like it is sagging. Britain's Manchester City football team, for which Vinoly designed its training ground, called City Football Academy, expressed its condolences on Twitter. One of Vinoly's projects have drawn criticism.

One is 432 Park Avenue, an 85-floor residential building in Manhattan, some of whose multi-millionaire tenants have sued over what they say are banging and creaking noises and vibrations coming from the building. In London, the Walkie Talkie building at 20 Fenchurch Street raised eyebrows in 2013 because sunlight reflected off its mirrored concave side melted various parts on a Jaguar car parked nearby.—AFP

Sports

Medvedev ends Djokovic win streak, sets up Rublev's final

Daniil Medvedev storms back into elite ranking bracket

DUBAI: Daniil Medvedev appears to have returned to his best form as he ended Novak Djokovic's undefeated 15-0 start to the season with a 6-4, 6-4 victory over the world number one on Friday. After briefly dropping outside the top 10 for the first time since July 2019, Medvedev has stormed back into that elite ranking bracket, winning his last 13 matches - within an 18-day period - to set up an all-Russian Dubai final against defending champion Andrey Rublev.

Medvedev had lost his last four meetings with Djokovic, who was on a 20-match win streak stretching back to last year's ATP Finals, coming into the contest. The 27-year-old is looking to win a third title in as many weeks, having picked up trophies in Rotterdam and Doha in the build-up to Dubai. "Every time I beat Novak is an amazing feeling. He's probably the greatest tennis player of all time," said Medvedev. "Every time it gives you an extra boost of confidence, like, 'Wow, I was able to beat Novak, I can for sure beat anybody'."

Djokovic lamented his 14 unforced errors, twice as many as his opponent, but said he walks away from Dubai with lots of positives, feeling strong physically after recovering from a tear in his left hamstring. His participation at Indian Wells which starts on March 8 remains in doubt as the Serb, who has not been vaccinated against coronavirus, waits to hear if he has been granted a visa waiver to the US. "I'm still waiting for the news from America," he said. "If there's no America, I guess I'll play clay. Monte Carlo is probably the next tournament. If that's the case, I'll take some time off, I'll prepare."

Djokovic will know one way or the other on his chances of playing in the United States on Monday when the draw for the Indian Wells event takes place. In front of a full house in Dubai, Medvedev opened up a double-break lead and despite Djokovic slowing him down by getting one of the breaks back, the world number seven successfully served out the 39-minute set on his second attempt. Djokovic repeatedly overhit his forehand, which helped Medvedev claim an early break in the second set.

Rublev 'happy'

Medvedev maintained his advantage and got his first match point with a drop shot that sent the crowd to its feet. The ex-world number one capitalised on his first opportunity to book his place in the final. He takes a 4-2 head-to-head record lead over Rublev into their Saturday showdown. This week, Rublev is trying to successfully defend one of his 12 career titles for the first time.

The Russian second seed punched his ticket to the championship match with his first-ever victory in six tour-level meetings with Alexander Zverev. Benefiting from 39 unforced errors off the Zverev racquet, Rublev needed six match points to defeat the former US Open finalist 6-3, 7-6 (11/9) in just under two hours. The pair traded breaks early on before Rublev consolidated for 4-2 and the Russian fired a brutal forehand winner to close out the opening set in 47 minutes.

It was the first set Rublev had ever taken off Zverev at tour level. He was 0-11 in sets against the German coming into the clash. The second set



DUBAI: Russia's Daniil Medvedev serves to Serbia's Novak Djokovic (not pictured) during their ATP Dubai Duty Free Tennis Championship semi-final match in Dubai, on March 3, 2023. —AFP

witnessed no breaks of serve as Zverev saved match point in the 12th game, and struck back-to-back aces to hold for 6-all. The No7 seed saved five more match points in the breaker but Rublev

converted his sixth to reach a second consecutive Dubai final. "I'm happy that I was stable today mentally, especially on the tiebreak that I was able to be there, to play well," said Rublev. —AFP

News in brief

Five-star Shiffrin crowned

OSLO: American ski star Mikaela Shiffrin was assured of winning a fifth overall World Cup title on Saturday with seven races of the season remaining. The 27-year-old finished fifth but crucially ahead of her only rival for the crown, Swiss racer Lara Gut-Behrami, in the women's downhill at Kvitfjell. With 700 points still available, two-time Olympic gold medalist Shiffrin holds a 796-point lead. Shiffrin has dominated the season, posting 14 podium finishes, including 11 victories, in 25 races. "For me it's quite special to have it now already," she said. "And I can take a little bit of weight off my shoulders. In the middle of the season I was always thinking 'oh, I just have to keep pushing because it's not done yet'. And so now at least that's done and I can enjoy myself more." The American's tally of five overall titles equals Luxembourg's Marc Girardelli. Just two Austrians, Annemarie Moser-Proll, who won six overall titles, and eight-time winner Marcel Hirscher are ahead of her. —AFP

Wydad go from bottom to top

JOHANNESBURG: CAF Champions League title-holders Wydad Casablanca of Morocco went from the bottom to the top of Group A on Friday after a 1-0 home win over V Club from the Democratic Republic of Congo. A superb long pass set substitute Mohamed Ounajem free inside the box and his low cross was deflected past goalkeeper Farid Ouedraogo by defender Guy Magema on 55 minutes. It was the second straight home victory for the three-time African champions after a Yahya Jabrane penalty brought a 1-0 win over Petro Luanda of Angola last weekend. The visit of V Club to the Moroccan commercial capital was set for last month, but had to be delayed because Wydad were playing in the Club World Cup, which the north African kingdom hosted. Victory over the Kinshasa outfit lifted Wydad to six points at the halfway stage of a mini-league which also includes JS Kabylie of Algeria. Petro and Kabylie have four points each and V Club three in a section where all four clubs have hopes of a top-two finish and a quarter-finals place. —AFP

Ko takes charge in Singapore

SINGAPORE: South Korea's Ko Jin-young put up a stout defense of her HSBC Women's World Championship title in Singapore on Saturday as she posted another seven-under-par 65 to take the third-round lead. World number two Nelly Korda of the United States trailed the defending champion by two shots after carding her third consecutive 68. Her compatriots Elizabeth Szokol and Allisen Corpuz will head into the final round tied for third place after signing for matching 70s. Ko signaled her intent by charging out quickly with four birdies in her opening five holes on another rainy day, with weather disrupting play for more than two hours at the US\$1.8 million LPGA event. Her bogey on the par-three seven proved to be the only blemish as another four birdies on eight, 13, 16 and 17 would take the 27-year-old to the top of the leaderboard with a three-day total of 14-under-par 202. —AFP

McIntosh tops Ledecy

MIAMI: Canadian teen Summer McIntosh beat Katie Ledecy in the 200m free at the Fort Lauderdale Pro Swim on Friday, ending the seven-time Olympic gold medalist's nine-year winning streak in home waters. Ledecy, whose four gold medals at the 2016 Rio Olympics included the 200m free, hadn't been beaten in a domestic freestyle long course final of 200m or longer since 2014. McIntosh's 1min 54.13sec lowered her own world junior record and gave her the victory 83-hundredths of a second ahead of Ledecy. Hong Kong's Siobhan Haughey took third in 1:55.53. —AFP

KEF congratulates Endurance riders

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Chairman of Kuwait Equestrian Federation (KEF) Masoud Jouhar Hayat congratulated the Endurance riders for their outstanding performance at the World Endurance Championship that was held in Butthab village in Abu Dhabi, UAE. Rider Heba Al-Ya'eesh ended in tenth position, while rider Khalid Al-Emran was able to complete the race.

Hayat said "the achievements did not stop here as rider Ali Jassim Al-Kharafi was able to win the Grand Prix title in the two star Show Jumping Category at the Shaqb range in Qatar, while Kuwait's team won the Amir of Qatar Sword 2023 competition for Endurance. Rider Mohammad Torqi Al-Mutairi took the third place; Essa Al-Shatiri (fifth) and Essa Al-Shilahi grabbed the seventh position. Meanwhile, Hayat refuted statements, about the federation's lack of support for the Equestrian Sport and riders. He said KEF is always keen on following payments that were approved by the Public Authority for Sport.



Masoud Hayat



Kuwait's Gymnastics team wins four gold

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Rhythmic Gymnastics team won four gold and two silver medals at the Amsterdam World Gymnastics Championship. 10-year-old Raya Al-Qassar performed at high standard in the mace, ring and general individual events - winning three gold medals while Nabila Al-Kharafi won the gold medal and two silver medals in the mace and individual events. Kuwait's team includes Coach Victoria from Ukraine and players Lamar Al-Foudary and Ameena Al-Kandary in addition to Al-Qassar and Al-Kharafi.

Alonso dazzles under the lights in Bahrain GP

SAKHIR: Fernando Alonso dazzled under the lights to set the best time for Aston Martin ahead of Red Bull's defending double world champion Max Verstappen in Friday evening's second practice at the season-opening Bahrain Grand Prix. The 41-year-old Spaniard, driving with the enthusiasm of a man half his age, clocked a best lap in one minute and 30.907 seconds to outpace the Dutchman by 0.169 seconds. Sergio Perez was third in the second Red Bull, just 0.002 seconds adrift of his teammate, but six-tenths clear of Ferrari's Charles Leclerc, ahead of Nico Hulkenberg of Haas and Lance Stroll in the second Aston Martin.

Pierre Gasly was seventh in his first day with the Alpine team ahead of seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton of Mercedes, Lando Norris of McLaren and Zhou Guanyu of Alfa Romeo. Alonso, in his first outing with Aston Martin after moving from Alpine to replace retired four-time champion Sebastian Vettel, confirmed the widely-held paddock view that his new team has a much-improved car and will be a threat to the established top teams.

The second 'sunset' session began in cooler conditions than those for opening practice, when Perez topped the times for Red Bull, the floodlights blazing as Stroll led the way out of the pitlane in his Aston Martin. The air temperature had fallen from 25 degrees to 22, but more significantly the track had dropped from 40 to 27, allowing improved tyre performance and a general use of soft slick tyres.

Esteban Ocon set the early pace for Alpine before the Ferrari duo took over, Leclerc displacing Sainz on top with a lap in 1:31.843 after six minutes, all of them exceeding Perez's earlier pace. Hamilton, on softs, slotted into third ahead of the two Alpines as Mercedes improved in conditions that were more favorable for them. Sporting his rainbow-colored



SAKHIR: Aston Martin's Spanish driver Fernando Alonso drives during the third practice session of the Bahrain Formula One Grand Prix at the Bahrain International Circuit in Sakhir on March 4, 2023. —AFP

helmet and granted an exemption from the 'bling ban' to keep his nose stud, Hamilton appeared to be enjoying himself, before Stroll went top only to be usurped by Hulkenberg, on his first appearance for Haas, and then Perez.

The Mexican's lap of 1:31.078 did not last long as the standard-setter. Alonso clocked 1:30.907 in his Aston Martin, a lap quick enough to keep him 0.169 seconds clear of Verstappen when the champion moved up to second. As the field moved into 'race run' mode, to analyse the durability of the hard and medium compound tyres in the conditions to be expected in qualifying and the race, Perez expressed frustration. Having struggled to access lap time data in his cockpit, he was advised on how to use his steering wheel switches. "Man, we cannot have this," he said.

Stroll, who had cracked both of his wrists in a pre-season cycling accident, was also having problems. Asked to compromise Turn One for a better line in Turn Two, he admitted: "I can't. Not with the hands..." New boys Oscar Piastri and Logan Sargeant, of McLaren and Williams respectively, wound up in 15th and 20th positions, while fellow-rookie Nyck de Vries, with one race behind him as a reserve, was 19th for Alpha Tauri, one place behind team-mate Yuki Tsunoda. —AFP

Agony for family of Pakistan's hockey ex-pro feared dead

QUETTA: For the family of Shahida Raza, the Pakistani former hockey star feared to be among the dozens of migrants who drowned off southern Italy this week, the wait for her body is piling on the agony. Raza competed in international championships with the Pakistani women's team in 2012 and 2013, and was once described as the "linchpin" of the side.

But a wave of tragedies in recent years left her desperately seeking the money and opportunity to get life-saving treatment for her three-year-old son, who was diagnosed with a condition that causes paralysis. Her options in Pakistan exhausted, she left her child at home and made her way legally to Turkey last year, her family told AFP. On Sunday, she boarded the ill-fated wooden boat carrying some 150 passengers on the central Mediterranean migrant route, the deadliest in the world.

"Shahida was constantly in touch with the family and I even spoke to her at 6:30 in the morning on Sunday, around an hour or so before the tragic incident," her elder sister Sadia Raza told AFP on Thursday at the family home in the city of Quetta in southwestern Pakistan. "She told me that she was fine and on a boat." The overloaded vessel broke up and sank in stormy seas, with bodies, shoes and debris washing up along a long stretch of shoreline. Nearly 70 people are confirmed dead. With the help of an acquaintance who lives in Italy, Raza's body was identified using photo-

graphs and a treasured pendant that was still around her neck, her family said.

They have yet to receive official word about her death from Pakistani or Italian authorities, or when her body will be repatriated. "The whole family, particularly our old mother, is experiencing agony with every passing day," her sister said, her fingers tracing the dozens of medals, trophies and team photographs that adorn a cabinet in their home. Raza's marriage had broken down in the years following her son's birth. He is now with his father's family.

Tragedies

Raza began playing hockey in 2003, competing professionally until 2019 when she turned to coaching. It is still unusual for women to play sport in deeply conservative Pakistan where families often forbid it. But Raza found solace in hockey, away from the troubles faced by her marginalised community, the Hazara.

The mainly Shia Muslim ethnic minority has faced frequent attacks - including suicide bombings - by Sunni Islamist militants, especially in Quetta. "Shahida was a kind-hearted person, talkative, jolly and always had a smile on her face," said her friend and fellow hockey player Sumiya, who did not want to give her last name. "But the tragedies of her personal life, her son's illness, her divorce and unemployment changed her. She became silent and liked to be alone." Raza had appealed to the government and Pakistani sports federation for financial help, and visited top hospitals in the country. But doctors told her there was no treatment available in the country. "After that, Shahida was determined to look at possibilities in European countries to get her son treated," Sumiya said. —AFP

Sports

Nets overwhelm Celtics 115-105; Jokic triple-double fuels Nuggets

Sacramento Kings hold off Clippers 128-127

LOS ANGELES: The Brooklyn Nets stunned the Boston Celtics 115-105 on Friday, rallying from a 28-point deficit to beat the Eastern Conference contenders on their home floor in the biggest comeback win of the NBA season. Mikal Bridges scored 38 points and grabbed 10 rebounds and Cameron Johnson, celebrating his 27th birthday, added 20 points for Brooklyn, who have struggled since the February trade departures of stars Kyrie Irving and Kevin Durant.

They'd lost four straight and looked headed for another lopsided defeat when the Celtics took a 51-23 lead with 7:23 left in the second quarter. "We just kept fighting, we got stops and that was the biggest thing," said Bridges, who arrived in the trade that sent Durant to the Phoenix Suns. "It all started with our defense."

The Nets had whittled the deficit to nine points at halftime and took the lead for the first time—and for good—with 6:11 left in the third quarter. The win marked the biggest comeback of the season, eclipsing the Lakers' fightback from a 27-point deficit in a victory over Dallas. Jaylen Brown led the Celtics with 35 points. Jayson Tatum, celebrating his 25th birthday, added 22 points with 13 rebounds but the Celtics have lost two of their last three and slipped a bit further behind the Milwaukee Bucks atop the East.

"We got off to a really good start playing the right way and we just took the foot off the gas and it cost us," said Celtics coach Joe Mazzulla. In Denver, two-time reigning Most Valuable Player Nikola Jokic scored 18 points with 18 rebounds and 10 assists, his 25th triple-double of the season pushing the Nuggets to a 113-97 victory over the Memphis Grizzlies in a battle of the top two teams in the West. The Nuggets, who are a perfect 25-0 this season when Jokic posts a triple-double, pushed their lead atop the standings to six games.

'Amazing' Jokic

Michael Porter Jr scored 26 points and Jamal Murray netted 11 of his 22 in the fourth quarter as the Nuggets pulled away after going into the final period tied. "I just got aggressive," said Murray, who is enjoying his ringside seat to Jokic's incredible season. "He loves to pass and make the right reads and get us going. He's been doing it all season. It's amazing to see every night. You don't know what to say about him because he just keeps doing it." Ja Morant, wearing a protective mask after suffering a nasal fracture at Houston on Wednesday, scored 27 points and handed out 10 assists for Memphis.

In Miami, Julius Randle scored 43 points, draining

the game-winning three-pointer with 1.7 seconds remaining to lift the New York Knicks to an eighth straight win, 122-120 over the Heat. Jalen Brunson added 25 points for the surging Knicks. Jimmy Butler scored 33 points for Miami and Tyler Herro added 29.

Herro's layup put the Heat ahead by one with 23.1 seconds left to play. Randle responded, coming up with the game-winner after nearly having the ball poked away by Butler. Golden State, still awaiting the return of injured star Stephen Curry, posted a fifth straight win, 108-99 over the New Orleans Pelicans in San Francisco. Klay Thompson scored 27 points and Jonathan Kuminga added 19 off the bench as the reigning champions rallied from an early 17-point deficit.

The Sacramento Kings held off the Los Angeles Clippers 128-127 - a week after they came out on top in a 176-175 double-overtime thriller against the Clippers. The Kings, led by 33 points from De'Aaron Fox, were a perfect 26 for 26 from the free-throw line. In Chicago, Devin Booker drilled six three-pointers on the way to 35 points to lead the Phoenix Suns to a 125-104 victory over the Bulls. Durant, playing his second game for Phoenix, scored 20 points to help his team withstand a 31-point performance from Chicago's DeMar DeRozan. —AFP



Nikola Jokic of the Denver Nuggets

Vecino, Lazio hand Napoli rare defeat

NAPLES: Matias Vecino's brilliant long-range strike earned Lazio a 1-0 win at Napoli on Friday as the runaway Serie A leaders lost for only the second time in the league this season. The Uruguayan midfielder drilled in the winner on 67 minutes, unleashing a thumping half-volley from 25 yards to send Lazio up to second but still 17 points behind Napoli.

Vecino had gone close to scoring at the start when he glanced Luis Alberto's free-kick towards goal only for Napoli captain Giovanni Di Lorenzo to head over from under his own crossbar. Andre-Frank Zambo Anguissa saw his drive from distance deflected just over for Napoli, who had won eight in a row and 19 of their last 20 in Serie A—a run that began with a 2-1 victory away to Lazio in September.

Victor Osimhen, the league's top scorer with 19 goals, headed powerfully against the bar from a Khvicha Kvaratskhelia cross and Ivan Provedel produced a terrific stop to keep out the rebound from Kim Min-jae. Sergej Milinkovic-Savic grazed the crossbar with a free-kick late on for Lazio, who climbed above both Milan clubs courtesy of a third



NAPLES: Napoli's Nigerian forward Victor Osimhen (right) challenges Lazio's Italian goalkeeper Ivan Provedel (left) during the Italian Serie A football match between Napoli and Lazio on March 3, 2023. —AFP

successive victory. It is only the fourth time in 25 Serie A this season that Napoli have failed to win. They remain overwhelming favorites

for the title—their first since 1990 - but still have to play Atalanta, AC Milan, Juventus and Inter Milan. —AFP

Reus and Can lift Dortmund

BERLIN: First-half goals from Marco Reus and Emre Can sent Borussia Dortmund three points clear at the top of the Bundesliga on Friday with a 2-1 home win over title rivals RB Leipzig. Dortmund captain Reus won and converted a penalty after 21 minutes and Can doubled the lead with five first-half minutes remaining with a long-distance shot from outside the box. The win was Dortmund's 10th from 10 matches in 2023 and switched the pressure back to previous leaders Bayern Munich, who travel to Stuttgart on Saturday. After the match, Reus told DAZN "we had to hold on at the end" but said "our goal was to steal the lead on top of the table back and we did it". A "very satisfied" Dortmund coach Edin Terzic said his side "played a really good game in the first half and in the second half defended passionately".

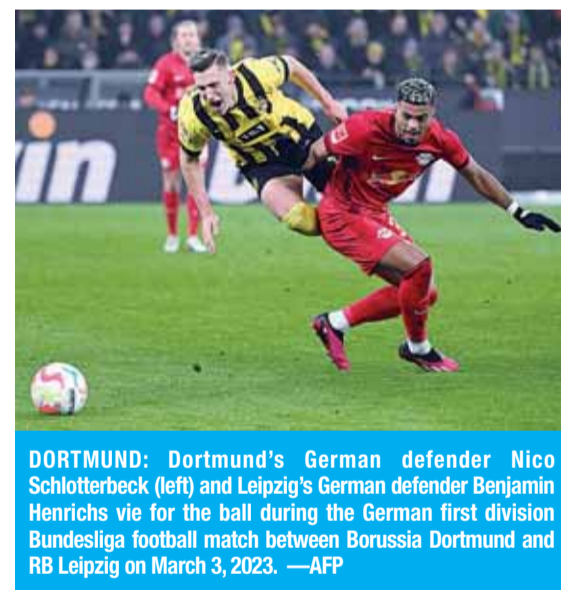
"The second half was of course frustrating but you can see that it's not really easy to score goals against us," he said. "Today the two most in-form teams in the Bundesliga played each other." Leipzig boss Marco Rose said the result "was difficult to accept" and credited Dortmund's "efficiency". "We've got to do more to perform at this level consistently, but I think we also showed what we are capable of," he added. Both sides

were hit by late withdrawals in the lead-up to the game, with Leipzig striker Timo Werner forced to the bench through injury and Dortmund goalkeeper Gregor Kobel injured in the warm-up. Julian Brandt had the ball in the net for Dortmund after 15 minutes when he controlled a superb lofted pass from Jude Bellingham and put the ball past RB keeper Janis Blaswich. However, a VAR review showed the Germany midfielder handled the ball before unleashing his shot.

Reus on the spot

Reus was fouled in the box just five minutes later and won the spot-kick despite not going to ground. He dispatched the ball to the left of Blaswich's outstretched hand to put Dortmund 1-0 in front. Marcel Halstenberg had a chance to equalize after 35 minutes when he connected with an expert cross from Sweden midfielder Emil Forsberg, but the Germany defender blasted over.

Former Liverpool midfielder Can doubled Dortmund's advantage before the break, driving a long-range shot through a crowded penalty box and into the goal. Leipzig, who had lost only one of their last 22 games heading into Friday's clash, found their fluency in the second half, with Portugal striker Andre Silva going close a minute after the break. Dortmund goalkeeper Alexander Meyer denied Silva again midway through the second half, but Leipzig continued to push and cut the deficit in the 74th minute through Forsberg. Germany wingback David Raum, who came off the bench in the 60th minute, cut a sliding pass through Dortmund



DORTMUND: Dortmund's German defender Nico Schlotterbeck (left) and Leipzig's German defender Benjamin Henrichs vie for the ball during the German first division Bundesliga football match between Borussia Dortmund and RB Leipzig on March 3, 2023. —AFP

defender Nico Schlotterbeck's legs, allowing a diving Forsberg to pounce. Rose, who sat in the Dortmund dugout in the same fixture last season, brought on Werner in search of an equalizer. The former Chelsea striker almost snatched a point for the visitors with an injury-time shot but his Germany team-mate Schlotterbeck chested it away from danger. —AFP

PSG and Morocco defender Hakimi charged with rape

PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain defender Achraf Hakimi, one of the stars of Morocco's historic charge to the semi-finals of the World Cup last year, was charged with rape on Friday. Hakimi, 24, was charged after being questioned by prosecutors on Thursday about accusations made by a 24-year-old woman who cannot be identified. The Madrid-born player trained with his teammates on Friday. A PSG spokesman said the club "gives its support" to Hakimi and "places its trust in the justice system".

The player's lawyer said he denied the accusations and welcomed the chance to clear his name. Hakimi allegedly paid for his accuser to travel to his home in the Paris suburb of Boulogne-Billancourt last Saturday while his wife and children were away on holiday. The woman went to a police station on Sunday and was questioned by prosecutors on Wednesday, according to sources close to the case. Although the woman refused to make a formal accusation, prosecutors decided to press charges against the player.

In Qatar, Hakimi was a cornerstone of the Morocco team that became the first African or Arab nation to reach the semi-finals of a World Cup. On Monday, he appeared at the FIFA Best awards ceremony in Paris, where he was named in the FIFPro men's world team of the year. Fanny

Colin, Hakimi's lawyer, said he "firmly denies all the accusations against him" and claimed he was the victim of "an attempted racket". She said Hakimi welcomed the charge laid against him because "he finally has the possibility to defend himself". Colin said Hakimi's accuser had "refused to make a formal accusation and refused to have a medical or psychological examination". Rachel-Flore Pardo, the lawyer for the alleged victim, told AFP: "My client maintains everything that she said. She made the choice to speak exclusively to prosecutors and does not want the affair to become a media issue, mainly to protect her safety." Under French law, being charged does not necessarily mean the case will go to trial.

Reigning French champions PSG are top of Ligue 1 and face Nantes at home on Saturday before traveling to Germany where they will try to overturn a 1-0 first-leg deficit against Bayern Munich in the last 16 of the Champions League on Wednesday. Hakimi has been receiving treatment for a thigh injury but the club said he will return to action "next week". PSG coach Christophe Galtier declined to comment on the details of the case, but said on Friday: "The aim is that he's available for the match against Bayern." The legal proceedings against Hakimi do not prevent him from leaving France. Hakimi came through the youth system at Real Madrid before joining Bundesliga side Borussia Dortmund in 2018. He went on to make 73 appearances for the German club. He moved to Inter Milan in 2020 and then on to PSG in 2021 where he has established himself as an integral part of the team and has struck up a close friendship with star forward Kylian Mbappe. —AFP

Crusaders dedicate Super Rugby win to coach Robertson

MELBOURNE: Canterbury Crusaders dedicated their first win of the Super Rugby Pacific season to coach Scott Robertson who was absent because of a family bereavement, as the reigning champions roared back to their best. Robertson, widely touted to be named the new All Blacks coach in coming weeks, missed the Crusaders' 52-15 thrashing of the Otago Highlanders in Melbourne on Friday.

He remained in Christchurch, handing his duties to assistant Scott Hansen for the opening match of the competition's "super round"—which features all 12 teams playing in the Victorian capital across three days. Hansen said the Crusaders spoke to Robertson soon after the win—a performance vastly improved on the previous week's 31-10 home loss to the Waikato Chiefs to begin their title defence.

"Obviously we are thinking of them at this time. We spoke to Razor at the end of the game," Hansen told journalists, referring to Robertson's nickname. "The main thing is, he is back home with his family. I do feel the boys did put in a performance for Ray (Robertson) and (wife) Jane. And we could be proud of that." —AFP

Today's matches

English Premier League

Nottingham Forest v Everton	17:00
beIN Sports HD 1 English	
Liverpool v Man United	19:30
beIN Sports HD 1 English	
beIN 4K HDR	
beIN Sports Connect	
beIN Sports 1 HD Premium	

Spanish League

Real Valladolid v Espanyol	16:00
beIN Sports HD 4	
beIN Sports HD 3 English	
beIN Sports Fr 5 HD max	
beIN Sports Connect	
Barcelona v Valencia	18:15
beIN Sports HD 1	
beIN Sports HD 3 English	
beIN Sports Connect	
Rayo Vallecano v Athletic de Bilbao	20:30
beIN Sports HD 4	
beIN Sports HD 3 English	
beIN Sports Fr 5 HD max	
Real Betis v Real Madrid	23:00
beIN Sports HD 1	
beIN Sports 1 HD Premium	
beIN Sports HD 1 English	
beIN 4K HDR	

Italian League Serie A

Spezia v Hellas Verona	14:30
beIN Sports Fr 4 HD max	
Sampdoria v Salernitana	17:00
beIN Sports Fr 4 HD max	
Inter Milan v US Lecce	20:00
beIN Sports Fr 4 HD max	
Roma v Juventus	22:45
AD SPORTS Premium 1	
German Bundesliga 1st Div	
Bayer 04 Leverkusen v Hertha	17:30
beIN Sports HD 3	
beIN Sports HD 2 English	
beIN Sports Fr 6 HD max	
beIN Sports HD 4 TR	
VfL Wolfsburg v Eintracht Frankfurt	19:30
beIN Sports HD 3	
beIN Sports Fr 6 HD max	
beIN Sports HD 4 TR	

French League 1st Div

ES Troyes v Monaco	15:00
beIN Sports Connect	
Montpellier v Angers	17:00
beIN Sports Connect	
Strasbourg v Stade brestois	17:00
beIN Sports Connect	
Stade de Reims v Ajaccio	17:00
beIN Sports Connect	
Toulouse v Clermont Foot 63	17:00
beIN Sports Connect	
Olympique Lyonnais v Lorient	19:05
beIN Sports Connect	
Stade Rennais v Marseille	22:45
beIN Sports Connect	

Arsenal maintain 5-point lead

Man City blank Newcastle 2-0 • Chelsea beat Leeds



LONDON: Arsenal's Ghanaian midfielder Thomas Partey (center) heads the ball during the English Premier League football match between Arsenal and Bournemouth on March 4, 2023. — AFP

LONDON: Arsenal recovered from conceding the second fastest goal in Premier League history as Reiss Nelson's stoppage-time strike gave the Premier League leaders a thrilling 3-2 win over Bournemouth after title rivals Manchester City beat Newcastle 2-0 on Saturday. Mikel Arteta's side were trailing by two goals with just over half an hour left.

But the Gunners showed they can cope with the pressure of the title race with a remarkable comeback that kept them five points ahead of second placed City. Arsenal hadn't even touched the ball when Philip Billing gave second-bottom Bournemouth the lead after just 9.11 seconds with a clinical finish from inside the Gunners area. The quickest goal in Premier League history was scored by Shane Long after 7.69 seconds for Southampton against Watford in 2019.

Arsenal fell further behind in the 57th minute as Marcos Senesi escaped Thomas Partey to glance a

header past Aaron Ramsdale from a corner. Partey made amends for his slack marking five minutes later when he reduced the deficit with a close-range finish from Emile Smith-Rowe's header. Underlining their desire to win a first title since 2004, Arsenal seized the momentum and equalised through Ben White's powerful finish from Nelson's cross in the 70th minute.

Nelson completed Arsenal's incredible revival in the seventh minute of stoppage-time when the substitute produced a superb finish from 20 yards to spark scenes of wild celebration all around the Emirates Stadium. Earlier on Saturday, City rode their luck in a 2-0 win over Newcastle at the Etihad Stadium. Phil Foden and Bernardo Silva scored the goals for the champions, who were let off the hook by a series of glaring misses from the visitors. Sean Longstaff, Callum Wilson and Joellinton were all guilty of not even forcing Ederson into a save as fifth placed Newcastle suf-

fered another blow to their hopes of a top-four finish.

Wesley Fofana eased the pressure on Chelsea boss Graham Potter as the French defender sealed a 1-0 win against Leeds at Stamford Bridge. Fofana put Chelsea in front with his first league goal for the club seven minutes after half-time, the former Leicester centre-back rising to head home from Ben Chilwell's corner.

It was Chelsea's first goal in 396 minutes and just their second in seven games in all competitions. The 10th placed Blues held on for just their third win in their last 16 games in all competitions. Ending a run of three successive defeats will give Potter a little breathing space ahead of Chelsea's bid to overturn a 1-0 deficit in the second leg of their Champions League last 16 tie against Borussia Dortmund.

Fourth placed Tottenham's hopes of qualifying for the Champions League was rocked by a 1-0 defeat at Wolves. Just days after losing 1-0 at sec-

ond tier Sheffield United in the FA Cup fifth round, the north Londoners were beaten again as Adama Traore struck in the 82nd minute, driving the rebound in off the bar after Raul Jimenez's effort was saved. Brighton kept West Ham in relegation trouble with a 4-0 victory at the Amex Stadium. Albion took the lead through Alexis Mac Allister's penalty after Jarrod Bowen shoved Kaoru Mitoma in the 16th minute.

Joel Veltman doubled Brighton's advantage when he chested in Solly March's corner in the 55th minute and Mitoma tapped in the third after 69 minutes. Danny Welbeck completed the rout in the 80th minute to leave West Ham just one point above the bottom three as Hammers fans chanted for boss David Moyes to be sacked. Aston Villa beat 10-man Crystal Palace 1-0 at Villa Park, with Eagles defender Andersen scoring a 27th minute own goal before Palace's Cheick Doucoure was sent off for two bookings in the second half.— AFP



Women footballers make history at Jaber Stadium

KUWAIT: Kuwait's under-17 women's team won 4-1 over the Saudi under-17 women's team in a friendly match at Jaber International Stadium on Saturday. Kuwait's goals were scored by Munira Al-Othman, Tala Al-Sultan (brace) and Zain Al-Khars. This was the first women's match to be held at Jaber International Stadium and the first international match for the Saudi junior women's team.

