

2 Crown Prince congratulates Sadu Society for UNESCO recognition



7 Japan eases mask guidelines, but few are keen to change



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14 India extend Test dominance over Australia with series win



Eight Kuwaiti banks confirm no exposure to SVB collapse

Biden says US banking system 'safe' despite contagion fears

Deputy Amir meets envoys to Saudi, US



KUWAIT: HH the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Monday Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, who presented to him the new Kuwaiti Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Sheikh Sabah Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and new Kuwaiti Ambassador to the United States of America Sheikhha Al-Zain Sabah Nasser Al-Saud Al-Sabah. The top envoys took the oath, marking their assumption of the new posts. — KUNA (See Page 3)

KUWAIT: Eight Kuwaiti banks listed on Boursa Kuwait confirmed Monday they are not exposed to Silicon Valley Bank, which was closed by the US authorities after it collapsed last week. Warba, Boubyan, Kuwait International, Ahli United, Gulf, Commercial, Al-Ahli and Burgan banks clarified in separate disclosures to Boursa Kuwait's website that there are no direct or indirect exposures to Silicon Valley Bank.

However, the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) affirmed after its contacts with Kuwaiti banks that their "exposure will be quite marginal." National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) said its exposure to SVB following the closure of the bank by the US authorities is "minimal" and will not affect the bank's financial position. The disclosure published on the Boursa website said NBK's small exposure is represented in off-balance sheet items in the form of letters of guarantee worth \$4.9 million (KD 1.5 million).

Kuwait Finance House announced on Monday that the value of its exposure to SVB is in the range of KD 381,000 (\$1.2 million). KFHH said in a statement on Boursa Kuwait's website that this exposure would entail no "fundamental financial effect on the group's financial status". CBK had confirmed earlier that the exposure of Kuwaiti banks to SVB is minimal due to the stability and solidity of the conditions of the banking system's units in light of the large financial buffers that banks possess.

Meanwhile, US President Joe Biden sought to reassure Americans over the country's banking system



WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden speaks about the US banking system on March 13, 2023 in the Roosevelt Room of the White House. — AFP

Monday as more US banks came under stress and European stocks tumbled on contagion worries. SVB - a key lender to startups across the United States since the 1980s - collapsed after a sudden run on deposits, prompting regulators to seize control Friday. On Sunday night, US federal authorities stepped in to protect all depositors at SVB, and regulators

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News in brief

Oldest Palestinian prisoner freed

RAMALLAH: The oldest Palestinian prisoner in a Zionist jail was released on Monday after serving a 17-year sentence for arms smuggling, an advocacy group and his son said. Fuad Shubaki, 83, was released from Ashkelon prison and is "on his way to Ramallah" in the occupied West Bank, a spokesperson for the Palestinian Prisoner's Club said, which was confirmed by Shubaki's son Hazem. — AFP

Iran hopes to restore Bahrain ties

TEHRAN: Iran said Monday it would welcome restoring ties with Bahrain to end seven years of ruptured relations, following a recent China-brokered deal to heal rifts between Tehran and Riyadh. "The resumption of political relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia shows the effectiveness and success of the diplomatic solution to resolve misunderstandings," said Iran's foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani. — AFP

Saudi executes drug smuggler

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia executed a Jordanian man for smuggling narcotics. Hussein Abo Al-Kheir, a driver in his late 50s, was put to death on Sunday in the northwest province of Tabuk, the official Saudi Press Agency said. The punishment shows "the keenness of the kingdom's government to combat drugs of all kinds because of the severe harm they cause to the individual and society", it said. — AFP

Driving license, inspection rules to be toughened

KUWAIT: The traffic department at the interior ministry is preparing new regulations for granting expatriates driving licenses, which will be submitted to the interior minister after the formation of the new government for

approval. "The new conditions include increasing the minimum salary requirement for expatriates applying for a driving license. Moreover, only certain professions will be allowed to obtain a driving license," sources said, indicating these conditions aim to reduce traffic congestion on the streets, which traffic studies claim is due to the large number of expatriate motorists.

"Moreover, large number of expatriates who work in basic professions and use vehicles benefit from the lenient conditions for obtaining a driving license compared to conditions applied in neighboring countries," sources added. "Other decisions will be issued by the

'Everything Everywhere' sweeps Oscars

HOLLYWOOD: Surreal sci-fi film "Everything Everywhere All at Once" dominated the Oscars on Sunday, winning seven golden statuettes including best picture, Hollywood's most coveted prize. The unorthodox but beloved movie - which features multiple universes and hot dog fingers - also won best director, best actress, best original screenplay, best editing, and both the best supporting actor and actress prizes.

Michelle Yeoh, who is Malaysian, becomes the first ever Asian woman to win best actress, for her portrayal of an

exhausted Chinese laundromat owner embroiled in battle with an inter-dimensional supervillain - who happens to be her daughter. Brendan Fraser won best actor for playing a morbidly obese teacher in "The Whale", capping a remarkable career comeback.

Vietnam-born Ke Huy Quan, 51, who was a major child star in the 1980s with "Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom" and "The Goonies", completed a stunning comeback from decades in the Hollywood wilderness by winning best supporting actor. Best supporting actress Jamie Lee Curtis paid tribute to her parents Tony Curtis and Janet Leigh, both Oscar-nominated actors who never won. "All Quiet on the Western Front," Netflix's German-language World War I, finished the night in second place with four awards. — AFP (See Pages 11-13)



HOLLYWOOD: (From left) Best Actor in a Supporting Role Ke Huy Quan, Best Actress in a Leading Role Michelle Yeoh, Best Actor in a Leading Role Brendan Fraser and Best Actress in a Supporting Role Jamie Lee Curtis pose with their Oscar trophies at the Dolby Theatre on March 12, 2023. — AFP

Syrian castle among ancient sites at risk

AL-HAFFAH, Syria: Zuhair Hassoun examines worrying cracks in a Crusader-era castle in Syria, a UNESCO World Heritage site that survived centuries of conflict only to be badly damaged by last month's deadly earthquake. Hassoun, the custodian of the

Fortress of Saladin, an architectural treasure with Byzantine roots in the 10th century rebuilt by Frankish Crusaders in the 12th century, walked carefully past fissured walls and crumbling arches.

"All of the fortress's towers are in danger," Hassoun said, warning that one had already fallen after the quake. Other parts "will inevitably collapse", he said, adding that it was only "a question of time". The hilltop fortress surrounded by forest was among dozens of cultural heritage sites that officials say were damaged in the devastating 7.8-magnitude quake that hit Turkey and Syria on Feb 6.

More than 50,000 people were killed in the disas-

ter, almost 6,000 of them in Syria. Ancient sites damaged included the Syrian city of Aleppo's famed citadel and Old City. The Fortress of Saladin has been on the United Nations' World Heritage List since 2006, and on the list of World Heritage in Danger since 2013, two years after the start of Syria's civil war.

But the castle, in western Syria's mostly government-held province of Latakia, scraped through the conflict unscathed and was still open to the public - until last month's quake. Hassoun said he feared that aftershocks or even heavy rain could cause further damage to the site, whose main facade is now

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Local

US Army celebrates Women’s History Month at Camp Arifjan

Kuwaiti, US officials attend event titled ‘Our strength is in our history’



KUWAIT: Charge d’Affaires of the United States Embassy to Kuwait James Holtsnider (fourth from left)

By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: In the presence of US Charge d’Affaires James Holtsnider and Kuwaiti officials from the ministries of interior and defense, the US Army at Camp Arifjan celebrated Women’s History Month on Monday under the title “Our strength is in our history”, attended by US Army soldiers and media representatives.

Guest Speaker BG Maria A Juarez said this event celebrates the many ways that women can use their powerful voices to propagate the truth and reflect the changing society. She talked about her own experience until she succeeded to join the army, despite the struggles she faced due to language difficulties and bullying. “People often ask me about the secret to my success. There’s no secret, just discipline, dedication, determination, and hard work. As Michelle Obama said, there’s no magic to achievements. It’s really about hard work, choices, and persistency,” she said.

“Women’s stories and the larger human story expand our understanding and strengthen our connections. This month we celebrate the stories and recognize the contributions of women past and present, but especially the everyday women warrior who works selflessly to get the job done,” Juarez concluded.



Martin A. Wohlemuth

“During Women’s History Month, we celebrate the countless women who have fought tirelessly and courageously for equality, justice and opportunity in our nation and around the world. Because women’s history is our history. The full participation of women in our society is a foundational tenet of democracy,” Commander of the Area Support Group-Kuwait Col Martin A Wohlemuth said. He added women serving on the frontlines are fighting for and securing equal rights and opportunities throughout the US’ history, leading as advocates and opening the doors for subsequent generations of leaders.



Guest Speaker BG Maria A Juarez

Holtsnider said in a press statement that the US considers women’s rights and history as a national security issue, making sure that women’s contributions are recognized as the state’s contribution. “It is a great opportunity to see how many accomplished women we have, as it is fantastic to hear from one of our great leaders BG Maria A Juarez, not only to talk about her personal story, but also how women’s rights developed in the last 23 years, and we are looking forward to see even more,” he pointed out. The event included playing “Song of the Women’s Army Corps” and “Reflection” by 281D Band and CPT Phelps.



Female officials from Kuwaiti Ministry of Defense and Interior attending the event.

Kuwait proposes updating UN statistical panel

KUWAIT: A Kuwaiti delegation that had taken part in the recently-held 54th session of the UN Statistical Commission in New York briefed peers about the national vision for revamping the commission and boosting implementation of basic statistical principles. Munia Al-Gabandi, the acting director general of the Central Statistical Bureau, said in an interview with KUNA, following comeback of the delegation after participating in the session, held on February 28-March 3, that the UN commission officials lauded Kuwait’s implementation of the “Arabic-language international framework for geographical statistical information.”

The Kuwaiti delegation, during the meetings in New York, discussed indices of the 2030 sustainable development plan, social, economic, commercial, national and families’ living statistics, ideas for updating statistics at the regional level, basic principles of official statistics, international classifications, national rules for ensuring quality and statistics concerning refugees and the displaced communities. Moreover, the participating Kuwaiti officials supported a plan for expanding the commission membership to ensure permanent Arab representation, with a suggestion for annual nomination via the ESCWA (UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia).

They also noted necessity of coordination of the international commission with national statistical authorities and working out mechanisms for implementing official statistical principles. She affirmed the Kuwaiti statistical authority’s commitment to adhering to the ten

fundamental statistical principles, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly ten years back, as part of the approach to place Kuwait at a high level of accuracy, transparency and credibility at the statistical level.

Elaborating, Al-Gabandi revealed that the delegation presented Kuwait’s vision on monitoring sustainable development indexes, informing peers that the Kuwaiti authorities have been examining international recommendations regarding the “stateless” segment of the social fabric in Kuwait. They affirmed that there has been no contradiction between the international recommendations for counting the number of the “stateless residents” with the Kuwaiti Constitution and laws. The UN Commission, which groups senior experts from the UN member states, aids the UN Economic and Social Council, for upgrading national statistics and the statistical services for the UN Secretariat General. —KUNA



KUWAIT: HH the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives Chairperson of Kuwait Al-Sadu Society Sheikhha Bibi Duaij Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah on Monday. —KUNA

Deputy Amir, PM receive chairperson of Al-Sadu Society

KUWAIT: His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace on Monday, the Chairperson of the Board of Directors of Kuwait Al-Sadu Society, Sheikhha Bibi Duaij Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah, where she presented His Highness a certificate

from UNESCO on the file “Best Safeguarding Practices”, the first Arab file for the best practice of preserving heritage.

His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince congratulated Sheikhha Bibi on this achievement, praising the sincere work of the Kuwaiti Sadu Society to preserve the authentic Kuwaiti heritage, and wished her and the Society’s members continued success. His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah also received at Bayan Palace, Sheikhha Bibi Al-Sabah. —KUNA



KUWAIT: The event highlighted the advantages of aerobic and vertical farming.

KFAS highlights success of new farming technologies

By Ghadeer Ghloum

KUWAIT: Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS) organized an event titled “Using Aerobic and Vertical Farming Techniques to Support Food Sufficiency in the State of Kuwait” on Monday. Engineer Hussain Al-Hilal, program officer of the flagship farming project, told Kuwait Times that after working with his colleagues in 2020, they identified food security as part of the new strategy of KFAS.

“After the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, food security became one of the main priority sectors. The pandemic was an opportune time to look into what Kuwait is doing with regards to food security. We put out a big call for practical solutions, and asked people working in the research field and the private sector what type of technologies can be transferred to Kuwait to help us become more sustainable in food security,” Hilal said.

He said the flagship farm is one of the most interesting and successful projects in Kuwait today, referring to some of its main advantages. “Today is more about showcasing the success of the project that we funded. It’s a pilot project we have built in Wafra. The farm was extremely successful in reducing the amount of water and space required, as well as increasing productivity and reducing costs at the same time. Based on this, we want to spread this information among people so that people know that this technology exists, is affordable and can really help Kuwait in terms of food security,” Hilal said.

The event further highlighted the project’s positive impact on food security in Kuwait and its finer outcomes compared to traditional agriculture methods, being an aerobic and vertical farm. In cooperation with the Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources, the Environment Public Authority, Societies Union, Farmers Union, Kuwait University, Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research, Ministry of Education, Kuwait Municipality and Ministry of Public Works, alongside private sector businesses such as farms and restaurants, BeOrganic set up this project in Wafra, where encouraging results were seen.

Engineer Rashid Buruzq said this is an American technology that brings two advanced techniques together in agriculture - vertical farming, which



Khawla Al-Shayji



Eng Mahmoud Juma’a (left) and Eng Rashid Buruzq.

takes up less space; and aerobic farming, which doesn’t need soil, as the roots are hanging in the air, which provide perfect ventilation and more of the needed oxygen.

Engineer Mahmoud Juma’a said the study included building 140 farming towers spread over 300 sq m, producing around 9,200 products in only a month. He said this project has proven that it can produce more than traditional farming techniques by approximately 800 percent, besides the fact that it saves water usage by 92 percent, is free of insecticides, does not need professional workers and does not require a lot of maintenance. Juma’a added a pump provides the crops with 100 percent natural minerals as a source of nutrition. He confirmed that crops can be planted any time of the year regardless of the season, as the project provides the perfect conditions for crops to grow.

Deputy Director General for Strategic Programs at KFAS Khawla Al-Shayji said that food security is a priority issue in KFAS’ 2022-2024 strategy, as the world is facing challenges to secure food. She also pointed out that KFAS recently launched an invitation to provide suggestions to activate its role in sustainable development, as part of the state’s 2035 vision.

Local

Kuwait's Deputy Amir hosts new ambassadors to Saudi Arabia, US



Sheikh Sabah Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, the State of Kuwait's Ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.



Sheikha Al-Zain Sabah Nasser Al-Saud Al-Sabah, the ambassador to the United States of America.



His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. — KUNA photos

KUWAIT: His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Monday Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah who presented to His Highness new heads of diplomatic and consular missions abroad.

The new chief diplomats, presented by the foreign minister during the audience with His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince, were Sheikh Sabah Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, the State of Kuwait Ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and Sheikha Al-Zain Sabah Nasser Al-Saud Al-Sabah,

the ambassador to the United States of America.

The assigned top envoys took the oath, marking their assumption of the new posts. The swearing-in ceremony was attended by the head of the Crown Prince Diwan Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and senior state officials.

Sheikh Sabah Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah is a Kuwaiti diplomat and a businessman. He is a former undersecretary of the Amiri Diwan in Kuwait and member of the board of directors of the Standing Committee for Arab Media (KIPCO). He speaks Arabic and English. He is the grand-

son of late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, who ruled Kuwait from 2006 to 2020. He is the son of Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and Sheikha Hessah Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah.

Sheikha Al-Zain Al-Sabah Al-Nasser Al-Saud Al-Sabah was born in 1974. She is a film producer, journalist and former undersecretary of the ministry of state for youth affairs. Sheikha Al-Zain earned a BS in Journalism from Boston University's Collection of Communication in 1996 as well as an MFA from the University of Southern

California's School of Cinematic Arts in 2003.

From 2002 to 2013, she held the position of Chairperson and Managing Director of Eagle Vision media group. In 2013, she assumed the position of Undersecretary of the Ministry of State for Youth Affairs in Kuwait, responsible for developing national policies that support innovation, civic participation, and entrepreneurship among Kuwaiti youth, and continued in her position until her resignation in 2018. Sheikha Al-Zain was most recently Chairperson and CEO of National Creative Industries Group. —KUNA and Agencies

Palestinian issue tops agenda of Arab Media session

KUWAIT: The work of the 98th regular session of the standing committee for Arab Media kicked off on Monday as part of the activities of the 16th regular session of the meetings of the Executive Office of the Arab Information Ministers' Council, which the Palestinian issue tops its agenda, along with many vital media issues.

At the beginning of his speech during the opening ceremony, Minister of Information and Culture and the Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi conveyed the greetings of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, to the participants and their wishes that the work of the current session will be a success that serve the goals and aspirations of the Arab nation.

In his speech, Al-Mutairi said that the Palestinian issue tops the agenda of the current session, showing the official and well-known Kuwaiti stance in support of the Palestinian people until they obtain their full legitimate rights in an independent state with Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with international references, relevant UN Security Council resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative (API). He stressed the keenness of the Ministry of Information in Kuwait to follow up, monitor and publish news of the Palestinian issue daily through its official media channels, to reflect the commitment of Kuwait to the Arab media strategy emanating from the League of Arab States and its principles, which is at the forefront of the Palestinian cause and API.

Unified strategy

The meetings on Monday and Tuesday deal with many important media issues, including the Palestinian cause, addressing terrorism, providing community protection for the phenomenon of rumors and misleading information, developing a unified strategy for cooperation with all international media companies, and adopting the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, he indicated. These issues require close Arab cooperation between countries, media organizations and institutions in order to

achieve positive interaction towards these issues given the wide spread and rapid development of electronic media technologies, he added.

From this standpoint, he said that the responsibilities of the media and its vital role in supporting the institutions of countries and their people while containing the effects of all the issues and circumstances they face are multiplied, recalling the earthquake that struck Turkey and Syria recently, and referring simultaneously to Kuwait's role, especially in the media aspect, in shedding light on this tragic event and initiating a campaign for donations and those affected, as well as field news coverage of humanitarian aid convoys.

In his speech, Al-Mutairi congratulated Qatar for their success in hosting the 2022 World Cup in terms of professional organization and advanced and distinguished infrastructure. In turn, the Assistant Secretary General and Head of the Media and Communication Sector of the Arab League Ambassador Ahmad Khattabi said that the meetings of the Standing Committee for Arab Media are a permanent and pivotal mechanism to follow up on joint media work and carry out the service of Arab issues, in accordance with the requirements of the statute of the Council of Information Ministers. He referred to the committee's role in shedding light on the diversity and richness of the Arab cultural heritage through various media, and in studying the strategies and plans referred to it to strengthen the potential for cooperation, integration and exchange of experiences.

He thanked the member states, media organizations and unions that work under the umbrella of the Arab League for their continuous efforts to give the Arab media more impetus to consolidate its noble mission of community awareness, public opinion-making, and promotion of national development and democratic construction, and to defend Arab interests and rights, foremost of which are the legitimate rights of the Palestinians through mobilizing the Arab media to show solidarity against the systematic incursions of the Zionist occupation authorities, the reckless attacks of settlers in Palestinian villages and cities, and the false practices that affect the unique nature of Jerusalem and its special legal status in accordance with the resolutions of international legitimacy.

Media action plan

Based on the guidance of the open and consensual constructive atmosphere that characterized the work of the permanent team assigned to the role of media in combating terrorism, he looked forward, within the framework of this esteemed committee, to discuss the items on the agenda,



KUWAIT: Minister of Information and Culture and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi addresses the session on Monday. —KUNA

including giving concrete meaning to the media action plan and similar guiding documents, especially the Arab media strategy for sustainable development.

He underlined the importance of devoting a media and communication support that interacts with the national and regional efforts to implement the goals of the UN agenda 2030 according to a participatory approach in which all partners, including executive and elected institutions, civil society and professional associations, are involved in order to improve the living conditions first and foremost for the Arab citizen.

He expressed his aspiration in this session to move forward towards developing a unified strategy for financial dealings with major international media companies and to include media education in educational curricula, noting the successful steps taken in this regard in close cooperation with the General Secretariat, the Jordanian Ministry of Communication and the Arab Satellite Broadcasting Corporation. He commended the efforts of Kuwait, which has a pioneering role in serving joint Arab cooperation, including the field of media, wishing the work of this session a successful performance in preparation for submitting its recommendations to the Executive Office of the Council of Information Ministers during its next meeting. The activities of the 16th session started on Sunday, under the presidency of Iraq, in the presence of representatives of organizations and federations practicing media tasks under the umbrella of the Arab League and organized by the Ministry of Information in Kuwait. —KUNA

In my view

Freedom is the right of all

By Dr Khalid Al-Saleh

local@kuwaittimes.net



Human rights societies around the world appear to work hard in defense of human rights to safeguard human dignity and social peace, and they are commended for that. Yet many such societies among us forget that the most important human right is the right of expressing opinion freely and right to run life's affairs with the majoritarian system, which guarantees social peace.

It is not sane to have statements of the same content by human rights societies, as each society and culture has its own requirements and needs. Some societies in Europe - the Old Continent, as a hypothetical example, see homosexuality as a human right and allow for a family in which children are deprived of maternal or paternal affection. This is taking place in some Western countries with the acceptance of their people, but much of the global population sees otherwise, so is it realistic for human rights society in a conservative society such as ours to adopt this abnormality just because there are other societies that adopted it? We do not want our human rights societies to become just an echo of what is being said abroad.

The first and most important step I hope our human rights societies take is to include the people's opinion in any issue they adopt, as this is the first right that reflects their commitment to our rights. Thanks to all those who exerted efforts to give us our right and not grant us the rights of others, as we only want our rights that benefit us according to the values of the majority and their ethics.

Lebanese journalist discusses history of minorities in his book

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Lebanese journalist and researcher Hamza Olayan discussed on Sunday the history of minorities in Kuwait in his books during a cultural meeting organized by Kuwaiti journalist and writer Taleb Al-Refai. "There is no unified, agreed-upon definition of the concept of the word 'minority'. It is often indicated to a religious, linguistic or ethnic group whose 'number' is less than the number of the population," Olayan said.

Olayan revealed there are main pillars of the Declaration on the Rights of Minorities from the United Nations' point of view, including the right to enjoy their culture, to declare and practice their religion, and to use their language. "In my published book about the history of Christians, Jews and Armenians in Kuwait, I aim to help understand the history of these groups and how Kuwaiti society accepted them. If we look at article 35 of the Kuwaiti constitution in the section on public rights and duties, we will find satisfactory and sufficient answers in this regard," he said.

Regarding Jews in Kuwait, Olayan stated: "The experience of Jews in Kuwait acquired a special dimension, especially after Saleh and Daoud Al-Kuwaiti, who were Kuwait-born Jewish musicians who gained great fame that transcended the borders of Kuwait. I wrote a book, which is a university study of the history of Jews



Hamza Olayan with Taleb Al-Refai.

in Kuwait. The Jews practiced their beliefs and prayers without being judged. Their number did not exceed 100, and they lived in peace in Kuwait. They left Kuwait gradually from the beginning of the forties till the end of the fifties."

As for the Christian community, Olayan said: "When we started preparing the material for the book about Christians, we set up an action plan after reading the history of Christians and churches in Kuwait. We found a lot of mistakes and missing information in the narratives, so around 29 Arabic and English books were collected related to the subject, in addition to studies and theses to be published."

"There is a realistic recognition that Kuwait provided all needs to the Christian clergy, who praised it. They considered this as one of the forms of tolerance that distinguishes this society from the rest of its Gulf peers," he said. "Kuwait appeared on the world map with its embrace of Christian denominations and its commitment to freedom of belief and religions, which it is keen on and committed to, according to what is

stated in the articles of the constitution since the early sixties," he added.

About the Armenian minority, Olayan indicated that his book about Armenians in Kuwait focused on the social aspects and the circumstances of the migration of the community. "I focused on the history of the diplomatic relationship between Kuwait and Armenia. As a matter of understanding the issue, we stopped at the Armenian language, which preserved the identity and cohesion of these people in the face of the challenges they faced since the great migration after the massacres of 1915," he pointed out.

"I always sought to meet Armenian personalities to learn about the community. I established good relations with Armenian bishops and several other businessmen and members of the community who live in Kuwait. The book answers the history of the presence of this community since the forties of the last century in a country that embraced and loved them. It is the first book of its kind in the Arabic language," Olayan said.

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News in brief

Delivery driver killed

KUWAIT: A delivery driver was killed in a traffic accident that occurred during rain on Monday. The delivery driver's motorcycle skidded on slippery road following heavy rain in Sulaibikhat area. After receiving a report about the accident, an ambulance was dispatched to the scene and transferred the driver to the concerned department and a case of the accident was registered.

21,796 expat nurses in MoH

KUWAIT: Nursing services director at the health ministry, Dr Eman Al-Awadhi has revealed that the number of nurses from different nationalities working in the ministry is about 21,796. "The administration seeks to implement plans and strategies aimed at preparing training programs with British institutions to raise the level of competencies of national cadre, submit proposals regarding the nature of work and special allowances in nursing, as well as updating policies and systems related to the practice of the nursing profession in Kuwait," Dr Al-Awadhi said.

Total quake donations reached KD 4m

KUWAIT: The social affairs ministry announced that the total licenses given to private charity societies to help those affected by the earthquake in Turkey and Syria, has amounted to about KD 4 million. "Minister Mai Al-Baghli was keen on following up relief efforts launched since the beginning of the disaster to provide support to people in Turkey and Syria, implementing the instructions by the political leadership and the Council of Ministers," the ministry announced. "According to instructions from the minister, campaign licenses have been extended to complete the continuous efforts led by Kuwait to provide assistance to those affected by the disaster," the ministry added.

660 lyrica capsules seized

KUWAIT: Kuwait Customs seized a large quantity of drugs including lyrica capsules and methamphetamine while thwarting three separate smuggling attempts. Inspection supervisor, Khaled Al-Houti said: the customs officials through two seizures were able to confiscate 660 lyrica capsules coming from an Asian country.

Sarod maestro Amjad Ali Khan and sons regale Kuwait's music lovers

IBPC, Indian Embassy present 'Sarod Trio Concert'



KUWAIT: Amjad Ali Khan is honored by Indian Ambassador Dr Adarsh Swaika as IBPC office-bearers look on.

By Sajeev K Peter

KUWAIT: Kuwait's music lovers witnessed a rare musical extravaganza on Sunday when world renowned sarod maestro Ustad Amjad Ali Khan and his sons Amaan Ali Khan Bangash and Ayaan Ali Khan Bangash came together on stage to deliver a mesmerizing concert at GUST auditorium in Mishref. Organized by the Indian Business and Professional Council (IBPC) under the patronage of the Indian Embassy, the concert demonstrated the trio's impressive display of technical prowess and effortless artistry.

In his remarks prior to the concert, Indian Ambassador Dr Adarsh Swaika said the concert was organized as part of the ongoing India-Kuwait cultural exchange program and more such events will be presented in Kuwait in the future. A large number of Kuwaiti dignitaries, resident ambassadors, diplomats and Indian community members including members of IBPC were present during the musical concert.

Ustad Amjad Ali Khan, who is credited with reinventing the technique of playing the sarod, a string instrument of the Indian subcontinent, opened the concert with a masterful solo performance. This was followed by a segment in which his sons Amaan and Ayaan presented a duo performance. In an enthralling finale, the father and the sons performed in unison for a celebration of the sarod, much to the delight of the audience. Noted artiste Anubrata Chatterjee provided rhythm support on tabla.

"India created Amjad Ali Khan and all the credit goes to my country," said the maestro in an interview with Kuwait Times. "We have many religions, customs and traditions in India. Every religion and every region of India encouraged and nurtured me. Then the Western world recognized me," Khan said while talking about his growth and evolution as a world-renowned musician.

As part of the Bangash lineage, he was born into a family of classical musicians and sarod players. He has taken sarod to great heights by collaborating with many Western musicians. Khan has received honorary citizenship of several states of the US, in-



Ustad Amjad Ali Khan and his sons Amaan Ali Khan Bangash and Ayaan Ali Khan Bangash perform.

cluding Texas, Massachusetts and Tennessee, and the cities of Atlanta and Tulsa. Khan was honored with the Padma Shri in 1975, Padma Bhushan in 1991 and Padma Vibhushan in 2001, which is highest civilian award in India.

"Sarod is a difficult instrument compared to other musical instruments. My forefathers created sarod, which is a Persian word meaning music," he said. Khan also spoke at length about the legacy of Indian musicians while lauding Indian kings and queens of yesteryears. "They used to patronize musicians in the past. In the 16th century, Tansen was the court musician of Emperor Akbar," he said. Tansen was born in Gwalior, the birthplace of Khan. However, Khan said unlike politicians, musicians or poets do not get their rightful recognition in India today. "We got inspired how beautifully Beethoven is preserved in Germany and Shakespeare is preserved in England. We could not preserve Mirza Ghalib (an 18th century Indian poet)," he rued, talking about the inspiration for founding Sarod Ghar (House of Sarod).

"So, with the help of the Indian government and Madhya Pradesh state government, we converted our home into a museum called 'Sarod Ghar', which was established in Gwalior with an objective to promote classical Indian music, heritage and culture. It houses all the instruments of my forefathers, in addition to my childhood instruments. Many great musicians donated their instruments to the museum," he said.

Personal equation

Khan has written a book titled 'Master on Masters', in which he features 12 musicians who passed away in the recent past, such as Pandit Ravishankar, Bismillah Khan and M S Subbulakshmi, among others. "I have included these musicians with whom I had a personal equation. We have come to this world to give peace, happiness and tranquility," he added.

After the concert in Kuwait, Khan and his sons will be traveling to the US as part of a musical collaboration tour. "I have formed an orchestra called 'Samagam', which means confluence of different cultures. We are collaborating with Sharon Isbin, the world-famous classical guitarist and the founding director of the guitar department at the Juilliard School and a renowned Chinese female musician to hold seven to eight concerts in the US," he revealed. Khan has also agreed to compose a 45-minute orchestra for the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, in which 60 to 70 musicians will be involved. He said he is hoping to present this composition in Kuwait too in the future.

"Instrumental music transcends all barriers, since there are no lyrics and there is no language barrier between the performer and the listener. And nobody could divide music. Music has connected the world. The seven musical notes 'do re mi fa sol la si' will be there in all music, be it Western, folk or Eastern," Khan said.



Sultan Center Vice Chairman Essam Al-Rifai



A group photo taken during the event.

Sultan launches new store in Adailiya, unveils new corporate identity

KUWAIT: Sultan Center Food Products Co (Sultan) on Monday unveiled its newest store in Kuwait located in Adailiya, adjacent to the Kazma Sports Club. The new store was inaugurated with a press conference led by the company's Vice Chairman Essam Al-Rifai and attended by Sultan's board members, Sultan's executive management, and partners and suppliers.

With its strategic location, an impressive range of products, and an enhanced shopping experience, the store is poised to become a go-to destination for shoppers seeking quality food products at the heart of Kuwait's capital governorate. The store opening marks an exciting new chapter for Sultan, as it coincides with the launch of the company's new brand identity and logo, which were unveiled for the first time at the opening. The new logo reflects the Sultan Company's next stage of growth.

Sultan Vice Chairman Essam Al-Rifai said: "We are pleased to announce the opening of Sultan Al-Adailiya, a new shopping center located in the residential heart of the Capital Governorate. With a population of over 169,000 in the areas of Adai-

liya, Nuzha, Faiha, Rawdah, Surra, and Qurtuba, we have strategically placed our new store for easy access for the residents of those areas. Our vision for 2025 is to have a store within a ten-minute drive from any point in Kuwait's inhabited areas, and this store's opening is a significant milestone towards achieving that goal."

He added: "Since the launch of our first store in 1981, we have been dedicated to growing and developing the shopping sector in Kuwait, with a primary focus on providing access to fresh food and high-quality household products at competitive prices. In 2020 we set a goal to launch 20 new stores between 2020 and 2025. With today's launch of Sultan Adailiya, we now have 14 new stores already launched as part of the strategy, and we are well-positioned for more launches soon."

Sultan CEO Khadija Oubala said, "We are excited to unveil Sultan's refreshed corporate identity with the opening of the new store in Adailiya. This updated identity reflects the company's progress and responsiveness to the evolving demands of our customers. It also aligns perfectly with our new store interiors and enhanced shopping experience that we also unveiled today with the inauguration of "Sultan Adailiya", which offers a diverse range of high-quality products catering to different lifestyles, including diabetic-friendly, keto, and gluten-free foods."

Sultan Center Food Products Company is the largest independent retailer listed on the Kuwait



The attendees at the event.

Stock Exchange that owns and operates a series of supermarkets across the Middle East. It operates 46 stores in Kuwait, spanning from Jahra to Nuwaiseeb, through three distinct store formats. This includes 6 flagship stores, which cater to dai-

ly needs in every neighborhood; 12 Sultan Market stores; and 29 Sultan Express stores, which offer quick and convenient shopping options. Additionally, there are 12 Sultan stores in Jordan, 3 stores in Bahrain, and eight stores in Oman.



Japan court orders retrial for death row inmate

Pope Francis marks 10 years with podcast and a diplomatic row



NOVOSIBIRSK: Children of Russian pastor Roman Vinogradov (4th L) and his wife Yekaterina (3rd R) walk along a street in a village outside the Siberian city of Novosibirsk. — AFP

Kyiv condemns ‘kidnappings’ as Russians foster Ukrainian kids

‘Children are children everywhere, it doesn’t matter what nation’

KYIV: At their home in the middle of Siberia, Russian pastor Roman Vinogradov and his wife Yekaterina are the new foster parents of five children from Moscow-occupied eastern Ukraine. The Vinogradovs are experienced fosterers now raising 16 children, including four of their own, and say they just want to help those who are “very much in need”.

But Ukraine and human rights groups have condemned the forced transfer of thousands of children into Russia or Moscow-controlled territory since the invasion last year. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky last week referred to “kidnapping, forced adoption and re-education of Ukrainian children committed by Russia”, calling this “a war crime and a crime against humanity”. Russia says it is simply taking in “refugee” children from Ukraine. “I didn’t steal anyone. And they (the children) don’t think they were stolen,” Vinogradov, a 41-year-old Protestant minister, told AFP. The

Vinogradovs, who live in the Siberian city of Novosibirsk, more than 3,000 kilometres (1,800 miles) east of Moscow, said local authorities asked them to take in Ukrainian children after they requested another child. “They phoned from children’s services, saying: ‘Will you take children from Ukraine?’” said Yekaterina Vinogradova, 38. “We said: ‘Yes, we’ll take them’.” “What difference does it make? Children are children everywhere. It doesn’t matter what nation.”

Four girls and a boy

The couple are now fostering five Ukrainian half-siblings-four girls and a boy aged three to 12, who arrived from Moscow six months ago. They already had seven foster children. AFP saw the children cheerfully sledging together, clearing snow around the couple’s large house and helping prepare a meal. The Vinogradovs say the Ukrainian children came from

children’s homes in the city of Lugansk, which has been controlled by Russian-backed separatists since 2014. They showed foster papers issued by officials from Lugansk’s pro-Moscow administration. The children do not remember their mother, who was stripped of her parental rights, Vinogradov said.

“The time will come of course when they ask questions. We’ll have a look (for her). Maybe we’ll organise a meeting,” said his wife. Vinogradov said the children were learning to live in a family and still needed reassurance that “this is their home”.

When the youngest went to nursery school “they were worried about whether we would collect them”, Vinogradov said. “They asked: ‘When will you come? Will you really come or not?’” According to international law, no party to a conflict should evacuate children to a foreign country except temporarily for a compelling health or safety reason.

‘Russians hide our children’

In a report released on Monday, Human Rights Watch (HRW) called for a “concerted international effort” to return forcibly deported children and urged Russia to publish information on their whereabouts.

“Returning children who were illegally taken by Russian forces should be an international priority,” said Bill Van Esveld, HRW associate director for children’s rights. Ukraine’s presidential commissioner for children’s rights, Daria Gerasymchuk, said Russia was refusing to recognise that these children were “deportees”.

“Russians hide our children,” she told journalists last week. Kyiv has so far brought back 308 children, Gerasymchuk said, with a “big team of government officials working to this end”. Ukraine has “many pieces of evidence coming from different cities” and has identified 43 children’s camps in Russia. But children “are being moved around all the time”, she said.—AFP



LONDON: Gary Lineker, former England footballer turned sports TV presenter for the BBC, walks his dog, in London. — AFP

BBC reaches deal with Gary Lineker after Twitter row

LONDON: Gary Lineker will return as presenter of the flagship BBC football show Match of the Day, the broadcaster said on Monday, ending a crisis sparked by his criticism of the UK government’s new asylum policy. The former England footballer was suspended on Friday after using Twitter last week to compare the language used to launch the new policy to the rhetoric of Nazi-era Germany. His comments and removal sparked days of frenzied media coverage, that escalated on Friday after fellow presenters, pundits and commentators refused to work over the weekend in support.

That threw the publicly funded broadcaster’s sports coverage into disarray, curtailing its highlights package to just 20 minutes, without commentary or analysis. But on Monday the two sides said they had come to an agreement that would see Lineker return to screens and the launch of an internal review into the corporation’s social media guidelines. “Gary is a valued part of the BBC and I know how much the BBC means to Gary, and I look forward to him presenting our coverage this coming weekend,” said BBC director-general Tim Davie.

In a joint statement, Lineker, 62, said: “I am glad that we have found a way forward. I support this review and look forward to getting back on air.” He tweeted separately that the last few days, during which he has been mobbed outside by London home by reporters, photographers and camera crews, had been “surreal”. But in a parting shot he added: “However difficult the last few days have been, it simply doesn’t compare to having to flee your home from persecution or war to seek refuge in a land far away.” Davie apologized for the disruption to the service, saying he recognized the “potential confusion caused by the grey areas of the BBC’s social media guidance”. “Impartiality is important to the BBC. That is a difficult balancing act to get right where people are subject to different contracts and on air positions, and with different audience and social media profiles,” he said. The independent review will look at how the guidance applies to staff and freelancers such as Lineker, he added.—AFP

N Korea launches missiles as US, S Korea hold drills

SEOUL: North Korea said Monday it had test-fired two strategic cruise missiles from a submarine, as South Korea and the United States kicked off their largest joint military exercises in five years. Nuclear-armed Pyongyang said the test verified its “nuclear war deterrence means in different spaces” as it slammed the drills-known as Freedom Shield-which will run for 10 days from Monday as part of the allies’ drive to counter North Korea’s growing threats.

“The two strategic cruise missiles precisely hit the preset target on the East Sea of Korea,” the official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said. North Korea is not technically banned from firing cruise missiles under current UN sanctions-although tests relating to its nuclear arsenal are not allowed.

The KCNA report said the test was linked to the United States and South Korea “getting evermore undisguised in their anti-DPRK military manoeuvres”, referring to the North by its official name. The South Korean military said it had detected the launch of at least one unidentified missile from a North Korean submarine Sunday morning. Photos and video released by North Korean state media showed the submarine, the “8.24 Yongung”, and a missile flying into the sky from the water, trailing white smoke and flames. Analysts said “huge doubts” remain about how advanced the North’s submarine programme is. Park Won-gon, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul, said the state media images suggested the missile was fired from above the water. “Then there is no point in shooting from a submarine because there is no stealth,” Park told AFP. “North Korea says the weapons are deployed, but whether we believe it with credibility is another matter.”

Defensive drill

The Freedom Shield drills “involve wartime procedures to repel potential North Korean attacks and conduct a stabilisation campaign in the North”, the South Korean military has said. It emphasised that the exercise was a “defensive one based on a combined operational plan”. But North Korea views all such exercises as rehearsals for invasion and has repeatedly warned it would take “overwhelming” action in response. “North Korea has been speaking in missiles against joint drills,” said Go Myong-hyun, a researcher at the Asan Institute for Policy Studies in Seoul.

“It wants to emphasise that the reason for developing missiles is for self-defence purposes.” The foreign ministry in Pyongyang also released a statement Monday slamming the United States over what it called “the US vicious ‘human rights’ racket”, after Washington said it would hold a UN meeting this week on abuses in North Korea. Last year, North Korea declared itself an “irreversible” nuclear power and fired a record-breaking number of missiles. Leader Kim Jong Un last week ordered his military to intensify drills to prepare for a “real war”. Washington has repeatedly restated its “ironclad” commitment to defending South Korea, including using the “full range of its military capabilities, including nuclear”. —AFP



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Pope Francis marks 10 years with podcast and a diplomatic row

Pope has sought to forge an image of a more open, compassionate Church

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis marked 10 years as head of the Catholic Church on Monday with a podcast, a private mass and a series of interviews, one of which triggered a diplomatic spat with Nicaragua.

“It seems like yesterday,” the 86-year-old recalled of his election during a podcast for the official Vatican News outlet—after first having to be told what a podcast was. Asked what he would like as a gift for his 10-year anniversary, for which he had no public plans beyond a mass with cardinals, Francis added: “Peace. We need peace.”

Jorge Bergoglio was elected pope on March 13, 2013, after his predecessor Benedict XVI stunned the world by becoming the first pope to resign since the Middle Ages. He has said he never expected to be elected, only packing a small suitcase to travel from Argentina to Rome for the conclave on the assumption he would soon be back in Buenos Aires, where he was archbishop.

But he had a vision, and over the next decade he would overhaul the governance of the Church, including cleaning up the Vatican books and taking action against clerical child abuse. He also shifted many people’s perception of the papacy by engaging less in theology and more with social issues from migration to the environment.

And even while maintaining traditional doctrine on issues such as abortion and gay marriage, he has sought to forge an image of a more open, compassionate Church. “He is a Pope for this time,” said Italian priest Father Roberto, who travelled to Saint Peter’s Square to hear the pope deliver his weekly Angelus prayer on Sunday. “He managed to grasp today’s needs and to propose them to the whole

universal Church... And now he’s giving the Church a push forward for the years to come. He is sowing good for the future.” However, not everyone is enamoured of Francis’ approach, notably the conservative wing of the Catholic Church. One critic, German Cardinal Gerhard Mueller, recently criticised the pope’s “doctrinal confusion”. Francis has never shied away from controversy, regularly using his pulpit to rail against everything from the mafia to consumerism and the arms industry. In one of his anniversary interviews, with Argentine news outlet Infobae, he described the government of Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega as a “crude dictatorship”.

Ortega’s government—which has long had tensions with the Catholic Church—responded on Sunday by saying it was considering suspending diplomatic ties with the Vatican. In another interview, with Swiss broadcaster RTS last week, the pope denounced the involvement of all the “great powers” in the Ukraine war. He prays regularly for the victims of the war, although he has been criticised for failing to squarely put the blame on Russia as the aggressor.

‘It’s not easy’

Pope Francis has sought to improve ties with Islam during his papacy, and Sheikh Ahmed al-Tayeb, the grand imam of Cairo’s prestigious Al-Azhar mosque, was one of those who sent their congratulations on his 10-year milestone.

In a letter published by Vatican News, al-Tayeb hailed the pope’s efforts to “build bridges of love and fraternity among all human beings”. Messages of congratulations also came in from Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, the leader of the world’s Orthodox



LUJAN: Faithfuls march towards the Basilica of Lujan on March 11, 2023, in Lujan, Buenos Aires province, to participate in a mass to celebrate 15 years of the Familia Grande Hogar de Cristo organization that works to rehabilitate drug addicts and marking the 10th anniversary of Pope Francis’ proclamation.— AFP

Christians, and Anglican leader Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury. Welby joined Francis on a recent peace mission to conflict-ridden South Sudan, where huge crowds flocked to see the pontiff, as they do everywhere he goes. The pope continues to travel widely, despite his age and health issues.

Francis was hospitalised in 2021 for colon surgery and now uses a wheelchair due to knee trou-

ble—something he admitted in one interview he was “a little ashamed” about. The pope has said he would follow Benedict in resigning if he ever became too infirm for the job but insists that is not on his agenda.

Asked by Italian newspaper Il Fatto Quotidiano what his hopes for the future were, he replied: “That the Lord be merciful with me. Being the pope is not an easy job.” — AFP

30 migrants missing after boat capsizes off Libya: Italy

ROME: About 30 migrants were missing and presumed drowned after the overcrowded boat they were on capsized during a rescue attempt by a cargo ship off Libya, Italy’s coastguard said on Sunday. Seventeen migrants were saved and a search was underway for the missing after the early-morning attempted rescue in Libya’s search-and-rescue zone, the coastguard said.

“During the rescue operations... the boat capsized during the transfer of the migrants: 17 people were rescued and recovered by the (cargo) vessel while approximately 30 migrants were missing,” said the coastguard. The latest disaster in the Mediterranean comes exactly two weeks after a shipwreck off Italy’s southern coast of Calabria that killed at least 76 migrants, with bodies continuing to wash ashore nearly daily.

That shipwreck has put Italy’s right-wing government led by Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni on the defensive as it tries to fend off sharp criticism that it failed to intervene in time to save the migrants. Sunday’s botched rescue is sure to increase finger-pointing over who is to blame for deaths even as an increasing number of

migrants embark on the perilous Central Mediterranean crossing headed for Italy’s shores. Italy’s coastguard said the boat in distress was in Libya’s search-and-rescue zone, and that the deadly episode laid bare “the inactivity” of other countries in the Mediterranean. Rome has long complained to its EU partners that it bears the brunt of the tens of thousands of migrants seeking to reach Europe by boat each year.

First to be alerted to the boat in distress some 100 miles (160 kilometres) northwest of Benghazi was Alarm Phone, a charity that monitors migrant boats. It said it then alerted Italian authorities at 0118 GMT Saturday morning. A surveillance plane of German NGO SeaWatch also spotted the boat and reported it was “dangerously overcrowded and in frightening waves”. In a statement, Italy’s coastguard confirmed that Alarm Phone had notified Rome’s rescue coordination centre, as well as Maltese and Libyan authorities, about the boat.

A merchant vessel that had headed towards the boat after the alert by SeaWatch reported difficulty in rescuing the boat due to bad weather, the coastguard said.

Distress call

Authorities in Libya—which the coastguard said was responsible for search and rescue efforts in that zone—reported “a lack of availability of naval assets” and requested the support of Rome, which dispatched three additional nearby merchant ships to

Hundreds of migrants storm US-Mexico border

CIUDAD JUAREZ: Hundreds of people tried to storm the US-Mexico border on Sunday, after a rumor that migrants would be allowed to cross into the United States. Around noon, a large crowd of mainly Venezuelans began to gather near the entrance of a bridge connecting Mexico’s Ciudad Juarez to El Paso, Texas in the southern United States. Frustrated by delays and difficulties in applying for asylum in the United States after journeys thousands of miles long through Central America and Mexico, some told AFP they thought they would be allowed entry because of a supposed “day of the migrant” celebration.

Images on social media showed a group that included many women and children running towards the border, shouting “to the USA.” They quickly encountered barbed wire, orange barricades and police with shields. US border guards “of course” moved to close the bridge, said Enrique Valenzuela, a civil society worker who helps migrants in Juarez. Jackson Solis,

a 23-year-old Venezuelan, was among those who came to the bridge on Sunday to see if the rumor was true. “We all ran and they put a fence with barbed wire around us. They threw tear gas at us,” he said. Solis told AFP he had been waiting six months to try to schedule an appointment to apply for asylum in the United States, where he wants to work.

Appointments must now be booked through a Customs and Border Protection mobile app that was introduced this year as asylum seekers were required to apply in advance rather than upon arrival. The Biden administration has been hoping to stem the record tide of migrants and asylum seekers undertaking often dangerous journeys organized by human smugglers to get to the United States. In January, the White House proposed expanding a controversial rule to allow border guards to turn away more would-be migrants if they arrive by land. “Do not just show up at the border,” President Joe Biden said in a speech at the time.

Biden took office vowing to give refuge to asylum seekers and end harsh detention policies for illegal border crossers. About 200,000 people try to cross the border from Mexico to the United States each month. Most are from Central and South America, and cite poverty and violence back home in requesting asylum. — AFP

Eight Kuwaiti banks confirm...

Continued from Page 1

took over a second troubled lender. “Americans can have confidence that the banking system is safe. Your deposits will be there when you need them,” Biden said in brief televised remarks from the White House in which he insisted taxpayers would not be on the hook.

But there were immediate signs of pressure at additional US lenders. San Francisco-based First Republic Bank shares plunged around 75 percent, while Ohio-headquartered KeyCorp lost 28 percent and Zion Bancorporation lost 30 percent. While major US indices veered in and out of positive territory, trading was uglier in Europe, with bourses in Paris, Frankfurt and Milan down around three percent or more.

“Far from calming nerves, fear of contagion has ramped up further with investors dumping risk assets across Europe,” City Index analyst Fiona Cincotta told AFP. “Banks are leading the charge southwards with investors taking aim at Spanish and Italian banks, suggesting that these are considered the weakest links.” Most financial market watchers are optimistic that the upheaval will not be comparable to the 2008 financial crisis. Still, many forecasters see a rising risk of recession, especially in light of expectations that the central banks will continue to lift interest rates. The next major move is expected Thursday when the European Central Bank meets for a likely half a percentage point interest rate increase.

Biden praised the “immediate” action taken by officials. In a joint statement on Sunday, the US Federal Reserve, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) and the Treasury Department said SVB depositors would have access to “all of their money” starting Monday. They added that depositors in Signature Bank – a New York-based regional-size lender with significant cryptocurrency exposure that was shuttered on Sunday after its stock price tanked – would also be “made whole”.

The Fed announced it would make extra funding available to banks to help them meet the needs of depositors, which would include withdrawals. While the government is ensuring that SVB depositors get their money back, “no losses will be borne by the taxpayers”, Biden said. “The money will come from the fees that banks pay into the deposit insurance.” Biden said the management of the failed banks would



SANTA CLARA, California: Security guards and FDIC representatives open a Silicon Valley Bank (SVB) branch for customers at SVB headquarters on March 13, 2023. — AFP

lose their jobs and that shareholders would not have their losses covered. “They knowingly took a risk and when the risks didn’t pay off, investors lose their money. That’s how capitalism works,” he said.

In Britain, banking giant HSBC bought SVB’s UK division for just £1 (\$1.2) in a rescue deal overseen by the Bank of England and the government. However, French and German authorities said there were no risks to their financial systems. The British government’s SVB UK rescue deal also guarantees deposits of customers, which includes major businesses in the technology and life science sectors. EU economy commissioner Paolo Gentiloni told reporters that “we don’t see it as a significant risk”. However, European stock markets fell deeper into the red on Monday and most Asian indices finished lower, with banks taking a hit. Little known to the general public, SVB specialized in financing startups and had become the 16th largest US bank by assets: at the end of 2022, it had \$209 billion in assets and approximately \$175.4 billion in deposits. Oxford Economics said in a note that the developments “should not have significant broader implications for the economy and are not a sign of systemic risks to the banking sector.”

However, Oxford said the United States will probably undergo a “mild recession” in the second half of 2023. “The Federal Reserve will continue to tighten until they break something,” it said. — Agencies

Syrian castle among ancient...

Continued from Page 1

cracked from top to bottom. “Every (stone) slab weighs at least a ton,” he said. “Any part of the fortress that falls into the valley can never be retrieved.”

The earthquake hit one of the longest continuously inhabited areas on the planet within the so-called Fertile Crescent home to ancient civilizations including the Sumerians and Phoenicians. This rich history has left behind a plethora of archaeological sites, many of them thousands of years old. At the national museum in the capital Damascus, the head of the antiquities and museums department pored over a map of quake-stricken Syrian heritage locations, including in areas outside government control.

“We have identified more than 40 damaged sites,” Nazir Awad said, noting that the provinces of Aleppo, Idlib, Latakia and Tartus were badly affected. “The Citadel of Aleppo and the Old City recorded the worst damage,” he added. The day of the quake, AFP photographers saw damage in Aleppo

to parts of the citadel, including to a minaret of a mosque at the World Heritage site. UNESCO, in a preliminary assessment, cited “significant damage” to the citadel and said the western tower of the old city wall had collapsed, while several buildings in the souks had been weakened.

Some Syrian heritage sites “require urgent intervention so we don’t lose priceless historical treasures”, Awad said. He called for “international quake experts” to assess damage across the country, citing reports of “severe damage” to several sites in rebel-held areas. An AFP photographer saw heavy damage to the Saint Simeon Stylites monastery – an ancient Christian pilgrimage site named after a famous hermit – in northern Aleppo province, an area controlled by the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham jihadist group. In the north of neighboring Idlib province, some of the walls and courtyard arches of a centuries-old castle in the border town of Harim had collapsed, another AFP correspondent said.

Firas Mansour, a teacher and antiquities enthusiast in Harim, one of Syria’s worst-affected areas where dozens of buildings crumpled as residents slept, said he was not surprised that modern buildings had been destroyed. “But for a castle that withstood centuries of stress to collapse, it is shocking and sad,” he said. — AFP



AL-HAFFAH, Syria: A picture shows a view of the Saladin Fortress, a UNESCO World Heritage site, in Syria’s Latakia province on March 7, 2023. — AFP

International

Japan court orders retrial for decades-long death row inmate

AI welcome decision as a 'long-overdue chance to deliver some justice'

TOKYO: Tokyo's High Court ordered a retrial on Monday for an 87-year-old former boxer, dubbed the world's longest-serving death row inmate, nearly six decades after he was convicted of murder.

Lawyers for Iwao Hakamada left the court after a brief session and unfurled banners reading "retrial" as supporters shouted "Free Hakamada now!" "I was waiting for this day for 57 years and it has come," said Hakamada's sister Hideko, 90, who has campaigned tirelessly on her brother's behalf. "Finally a weight has been lifted from my shoulders," she said. Hakamada spent nearly five decades on death row, and was certified the world's longest-serving death row inmate, before a lower court ordered a retrial and freed him while his case proceeded.

He was sentenced to death in 1968 for robbing and murdering his boss, the man's wife and their two teenage children. He initially denied the accusations but later confessed after what he subsequently claimed was a brutal police interrogation that included beatings.

His attempts to retract the confession were in vain and his verdict was confirmed by the Supreme Court in 1980. After a prolonged battle, a district court in the central city of Shizuoka granted a retrial in 2014, finding investigators could have planted evidence. But Tokyo's High Court overturned the lower court ruling four years later, and the case was sent to the Supreme Court on appeal. There, judges ruled in 2020 that the Tokyo High Court must reconsider its decision.

'Long overdue'

One key piece of evidence used to convict him was a set of blood-stained clothes that emerged more than a year after the crime. Supporters say the

clothes did not fit him and the bloodstains were too vivid given the time elapsed. DNA tests found no link between Hakamada, the clothes and the blood but the High Court rejected the testing methods. National broadcaster NHK said the court's presiding judge Fumio Daizen cast doubt on the credibility of the clothes as evidence.

"There is no evidence other than the clothes that could determine Hakamada was the perpetrator, so it is clear that reasonable doubt arises," NHK quoted him as saying. Japan is the only major industrialised democracy other than the United States to retain capital punishment, which is always carried out by hanging.

The death penalty still enjoys broad public support and debate on the issue is rare. Supporters say nearly 50 years of detention, mostly in solitary confinement with the ever-present threat of execution, took a heavy toll on Hakamada's mental health. He told AFP in 2018 he felt he was "fighting a bout every day".

His sister Hideko told a news conference later on Monday she does not talk about the trials with him. "I will only tell him to rest assured, because we got a good result," she said. "Now, I just need to make sure I can see the retrial begin." The process for a retrial could take years if a special appeal is filed, however, and lawyers have been protesting against this system.

The Japan Federation of Bar Associations welcomed Monday's ruling but said in a statement it "strongly demands prosecutors swiftly start the retrial process without issuing a special appeal to the Supreme Court".

"We cannot afford any further delay to remedy Mr Hakamada, who has an advanced age of 87 and suffers mental and physical conditions after 47 years of physical restraint," association head Motoji Kobayashi said.



TOKYO: Hideko Hakamada (front-R) and supporters of her brother Iwao Hakamada, enter the Tokyo High Court on March 13, 2023. —AFP

Rights group Amnesty International also welcomed the decision as a "long-overdue chance to deliver some justice". "Hakamada's conviction was based on a forced

'confession' and there are serious doubts about the other evidence used against him," said Hideaki Nakagawa, director of Amnesty International Japan. —AFP

Ivory Coast's capital struggles to make its mark

YAMOUSOUKRO: The gleaming white basilica that overlooks Yamoussoukro symbolises the ambitions of a modern capital of Ivory Coast, a goal that still feels out of reach 40 years since being carved out of the tropical countryside.

With smooth wide avenues, manicured parks and imposing 1970s concrete buildings, Yamoussoukro is unique in the Ivory Coast-and a world away from the sprawl of Abidjan, the country's economic and cultural heart.

It was the dream of the first post-colonial president, Felix Houphouet-Boigny, who wanted to turn the village of his birth, N'Gokro, into the political centre. The decree was issued on March 21, 1983. Gradually the city emerged and was renamed in honour of Yamoussou, a queen of the regional Baoule ethnic group and a great-aunt of the man revered as "FIB". "Above all, Felix Houphouet-Boigny wanted to correct the colonial legacy and not have everything concentrated in a single town," said Jean-Noel Loucou, director of the former leader's namesake peace research institute in Yamoussoukro.

"The idea in creating this capital

was to demonstrate African ingenuity with a distinctive architecture ... and with plenty of green space," he told AFP. Four decades later, the former agricultural village is home to 300,000 people but few national institutions-only the Senate and the national chamber of traditional chiefs and kings have been transferred to the city.

On its edge, plants overrun the abandoned construction sites for a National Assembly and a presidential palace, launched by former president Laurent Gbagbo.

'Three pillars'

"The determination to transfer the capital to Yamoussoukro exists, what's lacking is the resources," said regional governor Augustin Thiam. "As a territory we can't go get loans on the international market, so we have to choose projects that are self-sustaining financially," he said. "But I'm hopeful that this will happen one day."

The city is already a tourism magnet, not least for its stately canals filled with caimans-a cousin of alligators-and the modernist stylings of buildings such as the Houphouet-Boigny foundation. Also visible from nearly every corner is the imposing Our Lady of Peace basilica, which at 158 metres (520 feet) is one of the tallest religious structures in the world.

"Houphouet tried to build Yamoussoukro bit by bit on three pillars: education with its major schools, religion with the basilica, and tourism," said Nanan

population of more than 125 million.

Some observers have credited masks and other voluntary measures, along with strict border closures, with that relative success. But the government has been keen to gradually return to normal, reopening the borders and seeking to stimulate the economy.

There were just over 7,000 COVID cases reported nationwide on Sunday, and businesses have largely said they will leave it up to customers to decide whether to mask-though staff will continue to wear them.

'Bit by bit'

Hajime Yamaguchi, a professor of psychology at J.F. Oberlin University in Tokyo, said it was unlikely many Japanese would unmask quickly. "The Japanese worry a lot about what other people think and fear being judged if they're the first to take off their masks," he told AFP.

"They will watch to see what other people do and unmask bit by bit," he added, noting that this year's particularly bad pollen season made it likely masks would be around until at least May. Half of the people surveyed in February by national broadcaster NHK said they would continue to wear a mask even after the recommendations eased, while 38 percent said they

"It has been confirmed that he is in mainland China," said Chiu Tai-san, head of the Mainland Affairs Council, Taiwan's top policy-making body on China. When asked if Chen had deserted his post, Chiu said the government will "follow up on the situation".

"The defence ministry has relevant mechanisms for identifying deserters," he added. The defence ministry, which formed a special task force to search for the soldier, has so far not commented on his presence in the mainland.

Defence Minister Chiu Kuo-cheng said Friday that it was too early to conclude if the soldier was "running away". Chen is a staff member in a kitchen at the Lieyu Garrison Battalion on Erdan, according to the Taiwanese military. —AFP



YAMOUSOUKRO: A general view of Jean Paul II avenue in Yamoussoukro. —AFP

Kouassi Konan, chief of the neighbouring village of Kami, one of the former president's homes while growing up.

"The city is at a strategic location, a crossroads in the centre of the country. Everyone passes through here," he said. In recent years, the city has indeed become a haven for people seeking respite from the bustle of Abidjan and its six million residents, or for villagers leaving the land.

Serge Pokou, a farmer and hotel operator, made the move with his family a few years ago. "Naturally I chose the calm of Yamoussoukro and its mix of the

country and a modern city, with its African heritage preserved," he said.

City officials now aim to build up an economic base beyond tourism, with plans for an industrial zone that could attract more businesses. "The major schools in Yamoussoukro struggle to retain their engineers and technicians, because there's no industry here," Loucou said.

Pokou agreed, "But we need to make sure we maintain the city's identity and its tranquillity, which above all are the reasons people live here or want to come." —AFP



TOKYO: Commuters cross a street in central Tokyo on March 13, 2023 on the first day of reduced mask requirements. —AFP

expected to remove them more often.

"A lot of people have started to feel more comfortable behind a mask, realising how reassuring it is to communicate without revealing your face," said Yamaguchi. Still, there were a handful of commuters embracing the new rules, including 49-year-old Hiromi Mitsui.

"If it's not an obligation, then there's no problem in taking off the mask, it's

freedom of the individual," he said. "Those who want to wear it can do so, and others don't have to. If we respect one another, there's no problem." Prime Minister Fumio Kishida also arrived at work on Monday morning without a mask for the first time. His government plans to downgrade the classification of COVID to the same level as the flu from early May. —AFP

Japan eases mask guidelines

TOKYO: Japan's government eased its mask guidelines on Monday, recommending them only on crowded trains and in hospitals or care homes, but there was little sign residents were keen to unmask. Japan has never had a mask mandate, but residents have adhered to guidelines to wear them indoors and outside from the early days of the pandemic, and masks were common even pre-Covid during cold and hay fever seasons.

The country is one of the last places in Asia to end nationwide masking recommendations, and on Monday morning most commuters kept their faces covered, on trains and outdoors. "I think I'll keep wearing a mask for the moment," 46-year-old Tatsuhiko Ohashi told AFP on his way to work, outside Tokyo's busy Shinagawa station.

He still had "a bit of fear" of COVID and worried that getting infected unknowingly would "risk inconveniencing people around me". Japan avoided lockdowns and other harsh restrictions during the pandemic but still fared better than many countries, with 73,199 deaths in a

Missing Taiwan soldier found in China

TAIPEI: A Taiwanese soldier who went missing last week while stationed on an island near China has been found in the mainland, the government said Monday. The soldier, identified only by his family name Chen, was reported missing on Thursday after morning roll-call on Erdan Island, which lies just five kilometres (three miles) off the mainland coast.

Myanmar rebels, junta blamed for monastery killings

BANGKOK: Myanmar's junta and anti-coup fighters traded accusations on Monday over the killing of around 30 people who were sheltering in a monastery. The Southeast Asian country has been in turmoil since a coup two years ago, with the military fighting dozens of "People's Defence Forces" (PDFs) across much of the country.

Local villagers and media have reported killing and burning sprees by junta forces in many parts of the country as they struggle to crush opposition to the coup that ousted Aung San Suu Kyi's government.

Two rebel groups operating around Shan state-the Karenni Nationalities Defence Force (KNDF) and the Pa-O National Defence Force-said soldiers entered Nam Neint village on Saturday.

After ordering civilians sheltering in a monastery to come out, the soldiers shot dead 33 people, including three Buddhist monks, the KNDF said. Junta spokesman Zaw Min Tun confirmed there had been clashes in Nam Neint village on Saturday and some anti-coup fighters had been killed.

He also confirmed that some civilians had died in the village, but blamed their deaths on the local PDF fighters. AFP has not been able to independently verify those involved. Pictures posted on Facebook by the KNDF showed a bloody aftermath of the incident, with bodies on the ground, including some who appeared to be wearing the saffron robes of the monkhood.

The KNDF said 22 civilians including three Buddhist monks. Its members had found seven other dead bodies but were working to confirm who they were, it added.

AFP on Monday also obtained video from the Karenni Revolution Union (KRU), another anti-junta group operating in the area. The video showed around a dozen bodies lying in pools of blood on the ground, near a wall with what appeared to be bullet holes in it. Three of the dead are in saffron robes.

'Shot in the head'

Junta spokesman Zaw Min Tun did not confirm how many civilians had died in Nam Neint village. He said reports that the military had killed civilians were to create "illusions between local people and the Tatmadaw", using the word Myanmar's military refers to itself.

Another series of pictures purportedly taken in the same village were released by a prominent pro-military Telegram channel. According to AFP digital verification reporters, landmarks seen in the images matched a satellite image of Nam Neint village.

The pictures from the pro-military Telegram channel showed several bodies on the floor, and the account said 24 "PDFs had been shot in the head". One picture from the pro-military Telegram account showed three bodies slumped in a corner holding what appeared to be homemade rifles-differing from the KRU video that showed the same bodies, with no rifles visible. "Disciplining unruly Kayah PDFs," the text on the pro-military Telegram account read. Kayah state borders Shan state, and has seen regular clashes between the military and anti-coup fighters, including the KNDF. —AFP

assistance to the quake-hit northwest, the UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria said.

They failed to secure an immediate pause in hostilities, or to facilitate life-saving aid through any available route, including for rescue teams in the crucial first week following the February 6 quake, the commission said.

The independent three-member panel, set up to investigate and record all violations of international law since March 2011 in the country, said they were now probing fresh attacks since the February 6 quake-attacks they branded incomprehensible.

"Syrians felt abandoned and neglected by those supposed to protect them, in the most desperate of times. Many voices are rightly calling for an investigation and for accountability," the panel said in a statement. —AFP

UN slams sluggish help for Syria quake victims

GENEVA: The world failed to act quickly enough to rush life-saving aid to Syrians in desperate need following the devastating earthquake, United Nations investigators said Monday. The quake response was characterised by failures by the government, other factions in the civil war, the international community and the UN itself, which hindered the delivery of urgent

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Business

Biden govt brushes aside concerns, approves Alaska oil drilling project

US energy giant ConocoPhillips to drill for oil at three sites

WASHINGTON: The Biden administration, brushing aside climate concerns from environmental groups, approved a controversial oil drilling project on Monday on Alaska's North Slope. The Interior Department gave the green light to US energy giant ConocoPhillips to drill for oil at three sites in the federally owned National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska's pristine western Arctic.

During the 2020 presidential race, Joe Biden had vowed not to approve any new oil and gas leases on public lands and he had been under intense pressure by environmentalists not to approve the so-called Willow Project. Alaska lawmakers and other backers of the drilling plan had lobbied strongly for approval of ConocoPhillips's \$8 billion project, defending it as a source of several thousand jobs and a contributor to US energy independence, with production of 180,000 barrels of oil per day at its peak, or some 576 million barrels over 30 years. ConocoPhillips chief executive Ryan Lance welcomed the Interior Department's move as the "right decision for Alaska and our nation," but it was met with immediate criticism from environmental groups.

"We are too late in the climate crisis to approve massive oil and gas projects that directly undermine the new clean economy that the Biden administration committed to advancing," said Earthjustice president Abigail Dillen. "We know President Biden understands the existential threat of climate, but he is approving a project that derails his own climate goals." Ben Jealous, executive director of the Sierra Club, said "the harmful effects of President Biden's decision cannot be overstated. "Willow will be one of the largest oil and gas operations on federal public lands in the

country, and the carbon pollution it will spew into the air will have devastating effects for our communities, wildlife, and the climate," Jealous said.

"We will suffer the consequences of this for decades to come." The Biden administration's approval of the Willow Project came a day after it restricted offshore oil and gas drilling in the Arctic Ocean and barred development in 13 million acres (5.26 million hectares) of Alaska's National Petroleum Reserve. The move, seen as a trade-off for approval of the Willow Project, will protect an area that is a major habitat for wildlife, including grizzly and polar bears, caribou and hundreds of thousands of migratory birds, the Interior Department said.

'Carbon bomb'

The Trump administration approved the Willow Project at the tail end of the former president's term, but it was blocked by a judge for further review. The Bureau of Land Management, in an environmental impact analysis in February, approved three drilling sites, while striking down one and deferring consideration of another. Biden has described global warming as an existential threat and promoted the development of renewable energy sources. Temperatures in Alaska have been rising faster than in other regions of the planet and environmental groups have warned that the oil extraction project would make things worse. The Willow Project will add 239 million metric tons of carbon emissions to the atmosphere over the next 30 years, according to Interior Department calculations, equivalent to the annual emissions of 64 coal-fired power plants. Greenpeace has described it as a "carbon bomb." A petition on Change.org seeking



WASHINGTON: The Interior Department gave the green light to US energy giant ConocoPhillips to drill for oil at three sites in the federally owned National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska's pristine western Arctic.

to halt the project garnered more than 3.2 million signatures and a #StopWillow campaign on TikTok drew tens of millions of views.

Alaska's two Republican senators and the state's sole member of the House, Mary Peltola, a native Alaskan and a Democrat, met with Biden earlier this month to urge him to approve the project and they welcomed the green light on Monday. "The Willow

Project is critically important for Alaska's economy, good-paying jobs for our families, and the future prosperity of our state," Senator Dan Sullivan said. "This decision is also crucial for our national security and environment." Biden has pledged to cut greenhouse gas emissions in half by 2030 compared to 2005, with the goal of achieving a net zero emissions economy by no later than 2050. — AFP



Lebanon's Central Bank Governor Riad Salameh

Lebanon banking chief summoned in European probe

BEIRUT: A Lebanese judge has asked central bank chief Riad Salameh to appear before visiting European investigators, a judicial official said Monday, part of a multinational probe into his personal wealth. Salameh "has been summoned to appear at 10 am (0800 GMT) on Wednesday" before investigators from France, Luxembourg and Belgium, the Lebanese judicial official told AFP on condition of anonymity as they were not authorized to speak to the media.

The embattled central bank chief faces embezzlement accusations in separate investigations in Lebanon and abroad, looking into the fortune he has amassed in a country mired in financial crisis.

He denies all accusations against him and has rarely appeared before the judiciary, despite numerous complaints and summonses. Salameh had been summoned for questioning on Wednesday in the domestic case, but that session has been postponed to make way for the European investigators, according to the judicial official. If he shows up, it would be the first time Salameh, 72, appears before European investigators probing suspected financial misconduct, including possible money laundering and embezzlement. For procedural reasons, Lebanese judge Charbel Abu Samra would question Salameh in the presence of the European investigators, the official said.

France, Germany and Luxembourg in March last year seized assets worth 120 million euros (\$130 million) in a move linked to a French probe into Salameh's personal wealth. Lebanese authorities last month charged the three-decade central bank chief, who remains in his post, with embezzlement, money laundering and tax evasion. In January, the European investigators interviewed banking officials in Beirut about the transfer of funds to countries where Salameh has significant assets.

They also examined the central bank's ties to Forry Associates Ltd, a British Virgin Islands-registered company that listed Salameh's brother as its beneficiary. Forry is suspected of having brokered Lebanese treasury bonds and Eurobonds at a commission, which was then allegedly transferred to his bank accounts abroad. Swiss media reported last month that 12 banks in the European country had received a large part of the money Salameh is alleged to have embezzled-estimated at up to \$500 million. Head of the central bank since 1993, Salameh is part of the Lebanese political class widely blamed for a crushing economic crisis in Lebanon that began in late 2019. — AFP

UAE's ADNOC Gas shares surge 19% in \$2.5bn IPO

DUBAI: Shares in the United Arab Emirates' ADNOC Gas rose 19 percent in their first day of trading on Monday in a \$2.5 billion initial public offering that aims to tap into growing demand for the fuel. ADNOC Gas, a subsidiary of state-owned energy giant Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC), closed at 2.82 dirhams (\$0.77) after opening at 2.37 and briefly hitting 2.96 on the Abu Dhabi stock exchange.

ADNOC Gas, which only became operational at the start of this year, is the bourse's biggest flotation yet. The overall market was down 0.6 percent at 9,767.63. At more than 50 times oversubscribed, it was the biggest demand ever seen for an initial public offering in the Middle East and North Africa, outstripping oil firm Saudi Aramco's world-record \$29.4 billion listing just over three years ago. The final offer price of 2.37 dirhams, near the top of its range, implied a market capitalization of around \$50 billion for the new company. "Demand for the stock was expected to remain strong after listing with the favorable pricing," Monica Malik, chief economist at UAE bank ADCB, told AFP.

The rapidly organized IPO follows last year's scramble for alternative gas resources after Russia's

invasion of Ukraine, and comes as countries search for cleaner fuels to mitigate global warming.

'Transition fuel'

ADNOC, the United Arab Emirates' key revenue-earner, retains a 90 percent stake in the subsidiary formed from its former gas processing, LNG and industrial gas units. Gas is being touted as cleaner than other fossil fuels as countries around the world strive to reduce their emissions.

Energy consultant Roudi Baroudi, who heads the Qatar-based Energy and Environment Holding firm, said Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) was "the most important transition fuel" in the move away from more polluting hydrocarbons. In 2021, the UAE produced 57 billion cubic meters (bcm) of natural gas, or about 1.4 percent of global output, according to the BP Statistical Review of World Energy.

That same year, the Emirates exported 8.8 bcm of LNG, 1.7 percent of world LNG exports, the Statistical Review said. "As global efforts to battle climate change gain pace, the role of natural gas in general... is widely expected to grow," Baroudi said. "ADNOC enjoys a solid reputation, so it was to be expected that the ADNOC Gas IPO would attract strong interest." ADNOC Gas could be the first in a series of share offerings in Abu Dhabi this year. At least eight companies are expected to follow, Bloomberg said, citing Sameh Al Qubaisi, director general of economic affairs at Abu Dhabi's Department of Economic Development. — AFP



Chinese premier warns 2023 growth target 'no easy task'

BEIJING: China's new premier warned Monday that the country's five-percent growth target for 2023 would not be "easy" to achieve, as its rubber-stamp parliament wrapped up over a week of meetings.

The government set the economic growth target of "around five percent" this month, one of the lowest in decades as China emerged from strict zero-COVID rules that dragged on its GDP. And Li Qiang—one of Chinese President Xi Jinping's most trusted allies, confirmed as premier over the weekend-admitted that goal would be hard to attain. "I'm afraid that reaching our growth target of around five percent will be no easy task, and will require that we redouble our

efforts," Li said at a press conference in Beijing held to mark the closing of the National People's Congress (NPC). China posted just three percent growth last year, missing its stated target of around 5.5 percent by a wide margin as the economy strained under the impact of strict COVID policies and a property crisis.

Li said Monday that the modest figure "has been determined after a comprehensive consideration of various factors". He warned of "many new challenges" to growth, but added that most people "don't fix their sights every day" on the country's economic indicators. Instead, he said, they care more about "specific issues close to them" such as housing, employment, income, education and health. He also hit out at the United States, with relations at lows not seen in decades as the powers grapple over trade, technology and security. "Encirclement and suppression are not advantageous for anyone," Li said. "China and the United States should cooperate, and must cooperate. When China and the US work together, there is much we can achieve," he added.

Russia agrees to 60-day Black Sea grain deal extension

GENEVA: Russia has agreed to extend the Ukraine grain export deal following talks with the United Nations on Monday—but only for a further 60 days. Moscow said it wanted to see "tangible progress" on a parallel agreement on Russian exports before the deal comes up for renewal again.

The grain export deal has helped ease the global food crisis triggered by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February last year. The invasion saw Ukraine's Black Sea ports blocked by warships until a deal signed in July allowed for the safe passage of exports of critical grain supplies.

More than 24.1 million tons have been exported under the UN and Turkey-brokered Black Sea Grain Initiative (BSGI), according to the United Nations. The initial 120-day agreement was extended once in November, and was due to expire on March 18, and the Kremlin had cast doubt on whether it would agree to a fresh extension, claiming that the twin deal on Russian exports was not being respected.

Moscow wants to see deeds, not words on upholding this second part of the package, Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Vershinin said after concluding the talks with top United Nations officials at the Palais des Nations UN headquarters in Geneva. "The Russian side ... does not object to another extension of the 'Black Sea Initiative' after its second term expiration on March 18, but only for 60 days," Vershinin said in a statement issued by the Russian mission in Geneva.

"Our further stance will be determined upon the tangible progress on normalization of our agricultural exports, not (in) words, but in deeds. "It includes bank payments, transport logistics, insurance, 'unfreezing' of financial activities and ammonia supplies via the Tolyatti-Odessa pipeline."—AFP

Li's comments cap more than a week of high-level meetings in Beijing. President Xi, addressing the closing session of lawmakers in his first address since being handed a third term-and further cementing his position as China's most powerful leader in generations-emphasized the need to strengthen national security. He thanked the thousands of delegates at Beijing's Great Hall of the People for giving him a third term, vowing to "take the needs of the country as my mission, and the interests of the people as my yardstick". "Security is the bedrock of development, while stability is a prerequisite for prosperity," Xi said.

"We must fully promote the modernization of national defense and the armed forces, and build the people's armed forces into a Great Wall of steel that effectively safeguards national sovereignty, security and development interests." He also called for consolidated stability in once-restive Hong Kong and unification with the self-ruled island of Taiwan, which China considers its territory.—AFP

Business

Thousands of hospital doctors walk out in latest UK strike

LONDON: UK hospital doctors on Monday began a three-day strike over pay at the start of a week that will also see teachers, train staff and civil servants walk out, in the latest wave of industrial action.

The doctors say years of below-inflation pay increases mean they have effectively had a 26 percent pay cut since 2008. Ahead of the stoppage, the body that represents them, the British Medical Association (BMA), launched an advertising campaign claiming a newly qualified doctor earned less than some coffee shop staff. "Pret a Manger has announced it will pay up to £14.10 (\$17.13) per hour," the ad said.

"A junior doctor makes just £14.09. Thanks to this government you can make more serving coffee than saving patients. This week junior doctors will take strike action so they are paid what they are worth." On Wednesday, hundreds of thousands of workers are expected to walk out, including teachers, London Underground train drivers, BBC journalists, and university staff.

Since last year the UK has been plagued by strikes across the economy from nurses and ambulance staff to lawyers and dock workers fuelled by soaring food, energy and housing costs. They have all clashed with the government, which insists the country cannot afford inflation-busting pay hikes.

The strike by so-called junior doctors—a category of doctors who are not senior specialists but who can still have decades of experience—is the longest they have ever staged. The BMA says junior doctors in England, who mostly work in hospitals but also in some cases in general practitioners' surgeries, have suffered a 26 percent real-terms cut to their pay since 2008-09.

Nomo Bank launches its new multicurrency account with 6 currencies

KUWAIT: Nomo Bank, the Digital Bank of the Bank of London and the Middle East "BLME", a subsidiary of Boubyan Bank Group, announced the launch of its new multicurrency account which allows customers to perform banking transactions in 6 different currencies and to link them all to one card in a major step towards employing the digital bank's services in providing easier, more convenient, and secure digital payment solutions.

Abdullah Al-Tuwaijri, BLME's Board Member, stated: "This step complements Nomo Bank's strong strategy that aspires for enhancing and improving its core digital business in order to ensure offering the best banking experience to individual customers through the best digital solutions that suit customers' lifestyle and provide them with a unique experience."

"Despite the relatively short span of Nomo in the market, its recent launch of many products and services puts it on par with top financial institutions. At Nomo, we try to offer a banking experience that provides customers with many benefits while leveraging the latest digital innovations to become the preferred digital banking solution in the United Kingdom," Al-Tuwaijri added.

He went on to elaborate: "The new bank account from Nomo allows customers to perform their transactions using six different currencies, namely, pound sterling, US dollar, euro, Kuwaiti dinar, Emirati dirham and Saudi riyal, which are all linked to one card, thus offering a comprehensive banking solutions allowing cus-

Public support
"For my most junior colleagues the issue is that they are financially burdened by debt and their income doesn't allow them to have the security that they should expect," Vincent McCaughen, 37, who is training to be a specialist cardiologist, told AFP. "People who feel more secure financially, who have a standard of living that hasn't got worse, will be able to engage more of their emotional energy in their patients," he said on a picket line outside St Bartholomew's Hospital in central London.

Doctors and nurses leaders have repeatedly warned that poor pay and conditions are driving UK-trained medical and nursing staff abroad at a time of record waiting lists exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic backlog. "Is it any surprise that junior doctors are looking for jobs abroad or in other fields when the government is telling them they are worth more than a quarter less than they were in 2008?" said Robert Laurenson and Vivek Trivedi, co-chairs of the BMA junior doctors' committee, in a joint statement. Around 80 doctors and supporters joined a picket line outside Leeds General Infirmary in the northern city. A constant stream of motorists signaled their support by honking their car horns as the doctors sang "Claps don't pay the bills", referring to the country's weekly routine of applauding healthcare workers during the pandemic.

"It's really reassuring when members of the public go past honking their horns, giving us messages of support. It reemphasizes why we're doing this," said Chris Morris, a doctor and BMA rep.

Health Secretary Steve Barclay said the BMA's decision to push ahead with the strike was



LONDON: Junior doctors and supporters join the picket line outside St Thomas' Hospital as members of the British Medical Association take part in a 72-hour strike action over pay in London, United Kingdom on March 13, 2023. —AFP

"incredibly disappointing". He said the body had declined to enter formal pay negotiations on condition that the strikes were paused. Other unions

representing nurses and ambulance workers had put their strike action on hold to allow negotiations to continue this week, he added. —AFP



Abdullah Al-Tuwaijri



Sean Gilchrist

tomers to use it instead of carrying several banking cards or cash at hand."

"Nomo has become a unique brand among Kuwaiti customers, which is a goal we try to achieve upon planning to launch any new product. This account is a means to cater for the needs of customers to support the lifestyle of various segments of customers," he highlighted.

He pointed out: "In Nomo Bank, we always seek to be closer to our customers by making international investment and real estate banking services easily within their reach, while offering them a world-class banking experience backed by state-of-the-art and innovative technology." On his part, Sean Gilchrist, CEO - Nomo, stated: "With the new bank account from Nomo, we offer our customers a smooth and secure service to make their digital payments using six different currencies across more than 25 countries spanned across Europe and the Middle East, thus helping them save various FX fees and commissions."

"Nomo customers can now open a multicurrency account within seconds using Nomo App, and immedi-



ately benefit from its remittance and fund-transfer services, coupled with the possibility of linking the account with Nomo card and Apple Pay to use it globally without incurring any international fees," Gilchrist added. He went on to add: "We can see that most Nomo's products launched recently are bundled as integrated services to serve as a set of innovative banking solutions, while guaranteeing the highest levels of protection and security," Gilchrist concluded: "The property finance solution which has been recently launched serves as the best example here, and with this new multicurrency account from Nomo, customers and investors will be able to pay/send their due amounts over recurring periods at discounted fees."



that as part of Gulf Bank's continuous efforts to establish the principles of environmental sustainability in society, and as part of its recently launched campaign, reusable bags were distributed at the Bank's booth in Kuwait Motor City, aiming to reduce plastic bags usage and to raise awareness of the dangers of plastic waste on our environment.

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

diversify the economy by investing in new sectors, enhancing competitiveness, increasing local content, and creating new jobs in line with Vision Saudi 2030.

The PIF Private Sector Forum, the first of its kind, will be attended by PIF executives, ministers, senior government officials, and representatives from 50 PIF portfolio companies, as well as over 4,000 private sector participants from across Saudi Arabia, representing a broad range of sectors. The forum is the latest PIF initiative to empower and support the private sector, and aims at strengthening partnerships between PIF, its portfolio companies and the private sector as well as advancing opportunities and localising supply chains in strategic

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.

sectors. The forum will witness the signing of a number of agreements between PIF, portfolio companies and the private sector, which will enhance business opportunities and partnerships. Jerry Todd, Head of National Development Division at PIF, said: "PIF has a key role in enabling a thriving private sector as a major investor and driver for the diversification of the local economy. This forum is dedicated to engaging with the domestic private sector and showcasing available opportunities, as well as demonstrating that through working together we can build local capabilities, create opportunities for private sector players across the value chain in line with Vision 2030."

European equities dive on fears of US banking crisis

LONDON: European stocks tanked Monday as investors shrugged off global efforts to stem a fast-moving crisis emanating from the US banking sector. Germany's finance watchdog insisted the collapse of Silicon Valley Bank (SVB) posed no threat to financial stability, and France's economy minister declared US bank failures had no contagion risk.

However, European equities tipped deep into the red as the morning progressed, with bank shares falling particularly hard in Italy and Switzerland. Frankfurt and Paris stock markets dropped by about three percent, while Milan dived almost five percent at one stage and Zurich shed 1.7 percent.

London dipped 2.3 percent with losses capped after HSBC agreed to buy SVB's UK division for a nominal £1 (\$1.2). The dollar fell as the turmoil sparked uncertainty over the US Federal Reserve's plans to hike interest rates, while oil prices also slid.

'Weakest link'

"Far from calming nerves, fear of contagion has ramped up further with investors dumping risk assets across Europe," City Index analyst Fiona Cincotta told AFP. "Banks are leading the charge southwards with investors taking aim at Spanish and Italian banks, suggesting that these are considered the weakest links as fears rise." Asian stocks diverged on US pledges to backstop troubled lenders after the collapse of SVB was followed by the failure of Signature Bank.

US authorities unveiled sweeping measures to ease concerns over the health of the banking system but it was insufficient to soothe market fears of an imploding banking sector.

Friday's collapse of SVB, which specialized in venture-capital financing largely in the tech sector, came after a huge run on deposits left it unable to stay afloat on its own. That came in response to its announcement of a stock offering and sale of securities to raise much-needed cash. Its shares collapsed 60 percent in New York on Thursday and trading was suspended Friday morning, before regulators closed it down. The crisis has sent shockwaves worldwide, with traders on red alert over any more bank failures. "Markets... could continue to be volatile throughout the week as a major domino effect could cause widespread risk-off moods leading to further losses for stocks and riskier assets," said XTB analyst Walid Koudmani.

SVB is the largest retail bank to fall since the 2008 financial crisis. Its problems had built up as the US Federal Reserve's interest rate hikes meant securities it owned were selling for significantly less—a problem other banks could face. On Sunday, New York regulators said they had closed another lender, Signature Bank.

Fed plans

The crisis forced the Fed, the Treasury Department and Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. to promise to fully protect all depositors and give back-up to any lenders struggling to find cash, providing easier terms on short-term loans. In a joint statement, they said SVB depositors would have access to "all of their money" starting Monday, March 13, and that taxpayers will not have to foot the bill.

President Joe Biden vowed to hold "fully accountable" the people responsible for "this mess" and said he would deliver remarks on Monday morning on maintaining a resilient banking system.

The SVB crisis will complicate the Fed's plans to further hike interest rates as it struggles to rein in inflation, with investors now expecting it will lift them just 25 basis points at its next meeting, rather than the 50 points tipped last week. "The Fed is now in question over even a 25-point hike at the next meeting," Strategic Alpha analyst Maurice Pomeroy told AFP.

"The issue for me is that many businesses were constructed on zero interest rates, leverage and debt model—which with rising rates is no longer viable," he warned. —AFP

Gulf Bank sponsors 2nd edition of Kuwait Track Challenge event

KUWAIT: As part of its continuous efforts to support the youth and aligning with the principles of social sustainability, Gulf Bank concluded its sponsorship of the second edition of Kuwait Track Challenge two-day event, that was held in Kuwait Motor City on March 10 and 11, 2023.

The race included three categories for individual contestants, who were classified based on their tires' width, in addition to a special category for teams of three - which include one contestant from the individual's category as part the team. The race had a total of 16 prizes: One prize for the winning team of three, and 15 prizes for five contestants from each of the three individual categories.

On this occasion, Corporate Communications Officer at Gulf Bank, Abdul Mohsen Al-Nassar said, "Gulf Bank is pleased to sponsor this year's Kuwait Track Challenge event, which witnessed more than 40 contestants, who competed fiercely with one another."

In parallel with the KTC race event, 4x4 car enthusiasts got to enjoy Gulf Bank's Off-Road Challenge on the same weekend, which simultaneously took place in Bnadir last Friday, 10th of March, 2023.

Al-Nassar added: "For the past two days, we have provided an opportunity for motorsport enthusiasts to practice their beloved sport on specially equipped courses, whilst taking into account all security and safety measures." He further indicated



Abdul Mohsen Al-Nassar

PIF launches private sector forum on March 14

RIYADH: The Public Investment Fund (PIF) is set to hold its inaugural Private Sector Forum on March 14 and 15 at the Four Seasons Hotel in Riyadh. This 2-day event is focused on PIF's efforts to support and enable the private sector to unlock opportunities and further

Business

Bank jitters fuel uncertainty as ECB eyes next rate hike

Concern over health of banking system as borrowing costs climb higher

FRANKFURT: The European Central Bank is poised to raise interest rates again on Thursday to tackle inflation, but the sudden collapse of a US lender has fuelled concern about the health of the banking system as borrowing costs climb higher. The ECB's 26-member governing council will "very, very likely" raise interest rates by another half a percentage point at its meeting in Frankfurt, president Christine Lagarde said last week. It would be the sixth successive increase, leaving the ECB's three main rates 3.5 percentage points higher since July. The ECB has hiked rates at a historically fast pace to cool consumer prices after energy and food costs shot up in the wake of Russia's war in Ukraine.

With Thursday's decision "a done deal", investors will be more interested in clues about the ECB's future moves, said ING bank economist Carsten Brzeski. He predicts a "heated discussion" between dovish policymakers wanting to slow down rate hikes to ease the pain of higher borrowing costs, and "hawks" pushing to stay the course as inflation remains well above the ECB's two-percent goal.

"The March hike will be less important than what is signaled for May and beyond," Deutsche Bank economists said in a preview note. Ahead of Thursday's gathering, ECB policymakers will be closely watching the market turmoil sparked by the failure of US lender SVB last week, which saw European bank shares

plunge on spillover fears. Concerns about the financial fallout from rising rates could see the ECB opting for smaller hikes after Thursday "to take some pressure off", said Baader Bank analyst Robert Halver. "The over-indebtedness is far too high and higher interest rates could leave debtors vulnerable," he told AFP.

French Finance and Economy Minister Bruno Le Maire sought to calm jitters on Monday, saying he didn't "see any risk of contagion", while Germany's finance watchdog said the SVB collapse posed no threat to financial stability.

Analysts say SVB's collapse could influence the decision-making of the US Federal Reserve, which started hiking rates earlier and more aggressively than the ECB. The higher rates played a part in SVB's collapse as they brought down the value of US government bonds with lower returns that it held. SVB took a \$1.8 billion loss in the sale of \$21 billion worth of securities before it collapsed, raising concerns that other banks could face similar problems. Prior to SVB's turmoil, Fed chief Jerome Powell had said that the "ultimate level of interest rates is likely to be higher than previously anticipated" in the wake of stronger-than-expected economic data.

"With the market turmoil following the collapse of SVB, there are now heightened expectations that the Federal Reserve will be less aggressive with its monetary policy," said Richard Flax, chief investment officer

at Moneyfarm. The economic picture is murkier in the eurozone, with revised data showing that the economy stagnated in the fourth quarter of 2022, instead of recording weak growth as initially estimated.

Declining energy prices in recent months have helped slow inflation, which reached 8.5 percent in February, down from 8.6 percent in January. But excluding volatile energy and food costs, core inflation hit a fresh record high of 5.6 percent, bolstering the argument for further interest rate rises. Lagarde has vowed to do "whatever it takes" to restore price stability in the 20-nation currency club.

The eurozone economy has proved "resilient" to the fallout from the Ukraine war, she said last week, and unemployment remains low. Nevertheless, the bank is keeping a close eye on wage growth as higher consumer prices fuel demand for pay rises across Europe-adding to inflationary pressures.

New forecasts

"The ECB needs to be prepared to climb further. We suspect it is," the Deutsche Bank economists said. Many analysts expect the ECB's bank deposit rate, currently at 2.5 percent, to peak at 3.5-4.0 percent this summer and remain there for some time.

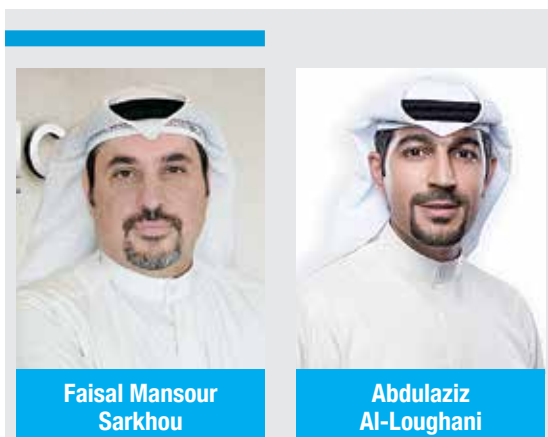
The ECB will be armed with new economic forecasts on Thursday to help guide its decisions. Back in December, the bank expected inflation to soften



GENEVA: European Central Bank (ECB) President Christine Lagarde delivers a speech during a conversation event on the occasion of International Women's Day, at the WTO headquarters in Geneva. —AFP

to 3.4 percent in 2024 and 2.3 percent in 2025.

Given the recent plunge in natural gas prices, observers now predict a downward revision of those figures. The ECB does not expect a recession in 2023, and any upward revisions to economic growth forecasts would make it easier for policymakers to back more monetary tightening. —AFP



Kamco Invest attends Floward's pre-IPO series C investment round

KUWAIT: Kamco Invest, a regional non-banking financial powerhouse with one of the largest AUMs in the region, announced Monday that its private equity team has participated in the Pre-IPO Series C investment round raised by Floward, the go-to online flowers and gifts destination operating in 37 cities in nine countries across MENA and UK.

In addition to Kamco Invest, the Floward's most recent round of \$156 million was also led by Aljazira Capital, Rainwater Partners, and STV. Some other earlier investors include Impact46, Faith Capital, BNK and 500 Startups. This round will assist Floward in growing further by expanding their gifting verticals and utilizing artificial intelligence and machine learning to manage its organic growth. Additionally, it will be used to fund its M&A strategy as it looks to acquire regional champions in different gifting verticals following its recent acquisition of Mubkhar, the leading brand defining authentic standards of perfumery in the GCC, in November 2022. Chief Executive Officer of Kamco Invest, Faisal Mansour Sarkhou, said: "We are proud to take part in this regional tech champion, which is successfully showcasing a tremendous growth trajectory with multiple pillars of growth initiatives supported by prominent regional and international investors. We are confident in Floward's business model, its strategy and the team's ability to lead the company to a successful future. This investment is in line with our strategy to extend our tech ecosystem expertise to the region following our venture capital initiatives across US and Europe."

Chairman and CEO of Floward, Abdulaziz B Al-Loughani, said: "We are proud to see Kamco Invest amongst our esteemed list of shareholders as we keep working towards achieving our goals of becoming a unicorn ahead of our IPO in the next 24 months. We are grateful to our team members, clients, and partners for believing in us and their continuous support in helping Floward achieve its vision of becoming a prominent global player in the flowers and gifts industry."

It is worth noting that Floward, which was established in 2017, has raised \$194 million through several investment rounds and has expanded its operations to cover 37 cities across the six GCC countries, Egypt, Jordan, and the United Kingdom. The company's commitment to the region has delivered 50 million flower stems in 2022, created more than 1,000 direct jobs, and partnered with +400 brands and local talents who have produced some of the best brands on a global scale. During the region's largest tech event Leap23 Conference that took place in Riyadh in February 2023, it was announced that Floward has been selected for the Saudi Unicorns Program.

LuLu Hypermarket wins 'Service Hero' award

KUWAIT: For a second consecutive year, LuLu Hypermarket, the leading regional retailer, won the prestigious 'Service Hero 2022 Customer Service Assessment' award, after customers in Kuwait voted the retailer as the 'Best Supermarket 2022' in Kuwait. This is the fourth time that LuLu Hypermarket is being selected for this annual award, after having won the 'Service Hero Service Assessment Award' in 2013, 2014, and 2021 in the 'Best Specialty Store' category.

In a media statement issued after receiving the 'Service Hero 2022' award, top LuLu Hypermarket management in Kuwait expressed their gratitude and appreciation to all their valued customers, well-wishers, and other stakeholders for their overwhelming vote of confidence in the brand. The statement also underlined the hypermarket's pride in winning the Arab world's only customer satisfaction index that is based solely on consumer perceptions. The statement added: "As a responsible retailer, it is our commitment and obligation to our loyal customers in Kuwait to facilitate well-organized, easily accessible, and conveniently located retail outlets, where shoppers are able to purchase quality products at the best competitive prices in a world-class shopping ambience. "We also assign the utmost priority to enriching and refreshing the product range available on our shelves so as to cater to the tastes, desires, requirements, and choices of customers. Our future plans include further extending our product range to meet the demands of various sectors of our customer base, and enlarging our network to reach all areas of the country in the

Indonesian farmers fight for their land in nickel mining boom

WAWONII, Indonesia: Three women with machetes stood guard at their farm hilltop on Indonesia's Wawonii Island, directing their blades towards the nickel miners working in the forest clearing below. "I pointed the machete at their faces. I told them: 'If you scratch this land, heads will fly, we will defend this land to the death'," said 42-year-old villager Royani, recounting a recent encounter with some of the miners. The dig site is part of a huge rush to Indonesia, the world's largest nickel producer, by domestic and foreign enterprises to mine the critical component used in electric vehicle batteries. Residents and rights groups told AFP the boom threatens farmers' land rights and harms the environment in areas like Wawonii in the resource-rich Sulawesi region, which is home to black macaques, maleo birds and tarsier primates.

'We were destroyed'

Facing the prospect of losing their land and livelihood, around a dozen Wawonii villagers take turns keeping watch from a hut surrounded by clove trees, waiting for trespassers as machinery roars below.

Royani, who goes by one name, joined the effort to safeguard the land after an Indonesian firm cleared hundreds of her family's tropical spice trees in January. "When we saw there was nothing left, we were destroyed," she said. Royani said she wants to protect not just her family's land from further encroachment, but also her neighbors'. But the farmers are up against formidable adversaries. Soaring global demand for metals used in lithium-ion batteries and stainless steel has pushed major economies such as China and South Korea, alongside electric car giant Tesla and Brazilian mining company Vale, to zero in on Indonesia. Dozens of nickel processing plants now pepper Sulawesi—one of the world's largest islands—and many more projects have been announced.

'I will continue to fight'

Nickel miner PT Gema Kreasi Perdana (PT GKP), owned by one of Indonesia's wealthiest families, has two concessions on Wawonii totaling 1,800 hectares (4,450 acres). Islanders said it is trying to expand further, with employees repeatedly approaching them for land talks they never asked for.

PT GKP, the Indonesian Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources, and the local energy agency in Southeast Sulawesi all declined to comment for this



most efficient manner." The award is widely seen as a reflection of the entrenched loyalty and popularity that the brand and its customer-oriented services enjoys among shoppers in Kuwait. LuLu Hypermarket won the 2022 award following an in-depth and stringent assessment procedure that evaluated various criteria across several service dimensions.

Among the dimensions examined by the index evaluators were quality and variety of the hypermarket's product range, reliability and speed of service delivery, staff attitude, and convenience of location and value to price, as well as store hygiene, product availability and the usefulness and functionality of

their online presence. In this year Lulu hypermarket has announced plans to open five more new outlets in Kuwait. These new projects are expected to provide customers with an enhanced shopping experience and access to a wider variety of products.

The top scoring brands on overall customer satisfaction in each service category, which met the minimum vote requirements, were then awarded pole-position prizes. Launched in 2010, the Service Hero Awards are the only national index which awards prizes based solely on consumer feedback. The assessment is overseen by an independent advisory council.



JANTHO: A newly constructed road is seen on a mountain top in a protected forest area in Jantho, in Indonesia's Aceh province on March 12, 2023. —AFP

story. "Even for 1 billion rupiah (\$65,537), I don't want to sell," said cashew grower Hastati, 42, whose land has already been partially cleared. Several protesters in Wawonii have been detained after the land disputes sparked demonstrations, riots, and in some cases armed confrontations. Hastoma, a 37-year-old coconut farmer, said he was detained for 45 days last year after clashes between villagers and miners. Other villagers have blocked miners' vehicles and set heavy equipment on fire, while some held miners hostage, restraining them with ropes for up to 12 hours. "If I keep quiet... where we live will be destroyed," Hastoma said, adding that two hectares of his land were seized after his release. "I will continue to fight to defend our area."

Nickel museum

While land registers in many parts of Indonesia are poorly managed, a presidential decree issued in 2018 recognized farmers' rights on state lands they use. Citing a 2007 law designed to protect coastal areas and small islands like Wawonii, courts have on several occasions ruled in favor of plaintiffs contesting mining investments. But Jakarta is leveraging its resources to entice investors, with many land disputes stemming from overlapping claims due to a lack of adequate ownership checks. "The problem is, permits are often unilateral-

ly issued" by the government, said Benni Wijaya of the Consortium for Agrarian Reform advocacy group.

"After the permit is issued, it turns out that people have been cultivating the land for years. This is what drives these conflicts," he added. Among the leading international investors are Chinese companies. Indonesian government data shows Chinese firms pumped \$8.2 billion into the country last year—more than double the 2021 figure of \$3.1 billion.

In central Sulawesi, Chinese companies have set up their own nickel ore processing facilities and even built a nickel museum. The investments have come at a cost, worsening pollution and stoking tensions over poor working conditions at Chinese-run facilities, including a deadly January riot. The southeastern Sulawesi coastline has borne the brunt of the environmental impact of the mines. In a village in the Pomalaa region of the island, still houses sit above rust-red sludge where children swim in murky waters. Contaminated soil from nickel mines—including one by state-owned firm PT Aneka Tambang Tbk (Antam) — brought down the hills by rain has turned the coastal waters of the Pacific Ocean a deep red color, locals said. "When there were no mines, the water was not like this. It was clean," said villager Guntur, 33. Antam did not respond to an AFP request for comment. —AFP

ANGELA BASSETT



Oscars red carpet:

smooth elegance, lots of trains, candy glam

The Oscars gala is the pinnacle of Hollywood's awards season, and thus the A-listers in attendance typically save their best looks for last. On Sunday, the stars did not disappoint.

As the guests filed into the Dolby Theatre, a few trends emerged: lots of understated white, silver and cream gowns; loose flowing hair; dresses with trains; and a few excellent pops of color.

Muted elegance

For the first time in decades, Oscars organizers changed the red carpet to a champagne hue. And the stars responded by bringing an ethereal lightness to their frocks, many of them in white, cream or silver.

Michelle Yeoh, who won the best actress Oscar for "Everything Everywhere All at Once," wowed in a floating white sleeveless Dior



Michelle Yeoh

gown, her long hair flowing in loose curls - a look seen all over the carpet - and topped with a bejeweled headband. "This was the perfect opportunity to show that moms are superheroes," Yeoh told ABC of her film.



Fan Bingbing



Harry Shum Jr.

Jamie Lee Curtis, who won for best supporting actress for her work alongside Yeoh, rocked a sleek glittering long-sleeved off-white column gown from

Dolce & Gabbana, perfectly setting off her cropped white hair.

Nobel peace laureate Malala Yousafzai, the executive producer of Oscar-nominated documentary short "Stranger at the Gate," wore a sequined silver hooded Ralph Lauren gown that was ruched at the waist.

Candy-colored glam

Pink, purple, yellow - Curtis' fellow nominees in the best supporting actress category brought a rainbow of hues to the Academy Awards. Angela Bassett, whose turn as Queen Ramonda in "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever" earned her the first acting nomination for a performance in a Marvel film, slayed in an amethyst Moschino gown with a bow neckline, a train ... and lots of diamonds.

Hong Chau, who scored a nod for her work opposite Brendan Fraser in "The Whale," oozed sophistication in a cotton candy pink sleeveless Prada gown, with a Mandarin collar and an unusual fringed black train.

"Everything Everywhere All at Once" star Stephanie Hsu floated down the

carpet at the Dolby Theatre in a strapless bubble gum pink Valentino number with a full ball skirt, her hair cascading down in soft waves.

And Irish actress Kerry Condon, who shared the big screen with Colin Farrell and Brendan Gleeson in "The Banshees of Inisherin," donned a lemon yellow one-shoulder Versace gown - with another train, a definite Oscars trend.

Let's hear it for the boys

For years, the men of Hollywood were a bit of an afterthought on red carpets - tuxedo, rinse, repeat. But no longer. "Everything Everywhere" star Harry Shum Jr embraced his Asian heritage with a white dinner jacket with mid-night piping and coordinated belted sash. And for his "Glee" fans, he danced a bit on the red carpet.

And Oscar-nominated "Elvis" star Austin Butler wore a Saint Laurent tuxedo fit for a king - though definitely a bit more traditional than his other awards season looks. — AFP



Stephanie Hsu



Malala Yousafzai



Hong Chau



Kerry Condon

Lifestyle | Oscars

'EVERYTHING EVERYWHERE' SWEEPS OSCARS WITH SEVEN WINS

Surreal sci-fi film "Everything Everywhere All at Once" dominated the Oscars on Sunday, winning seven golden statuettes including best picture, Hollywood's most coveted prize.

The unorthodox but beloved movie - which features multiple universes and hot dog fingers - also won best director, best actress, best original screenplay, best editing, and both the best supporting actor and actress prizes.

2023 Oscars

in den wichtigsten Kategorien

Film

„Everything Everywhere All at Once“

Regie

Daniel Kwan und Daniel Scheinert

„Everything Everywhere All at Once“

Hauptdarstellerin

Michelle Yeoh

„Everything Everywhere All at Once“

Hauptdarsteller

Brendan Fraser

„The Whale“

Nebendarstellerin

Jamie Lee Curtis

„Everything Everywhere All at Once“

Nebendarsteller

Ke Huy Quan

„Everything Everywhere All at Once“

Internationaler Film

„Im Westen nichts Neues“

(Deutschland)

Dokumentarfilm

„Navalny“

Adaptiertes Drehbuch

Sarah Polley

„Die Aussprache“

Animationsfilm

„Guillermo del Toros Pinocchio“

AFP

Brendan Fraser won best actor for playing a morbidly obese teacher in "The Whale," capping a remarkable career comeback. Fraser was a major action star in the late 1990s with films like "The Mummy," before largely disappearing from the public view.

"I started in this business 30 years ago, and things — they didn't come easily to me," he said. He thanked director Darren Aronofsky for "throwing me a creative lifeline and hauling me aboard the good ship 'The Whale.'"

'American Dream'

"Everything Everywhere," comfortably the night's biggest winner, is a word-of-mouth smash hit that has grossed \$100 million at the global box office. In a plot that is not easily described, Yeoh's heroine Evelyn must harness the power of her alter egos living in parallel universes, which feature hot dogs as human fingers and talking rocks.

The film, which features a predominantly Asian cast, was directed by Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert - two young filmmakers who were previously best known for an oddball comedy about a talking corpse. Kwan thanked his "immigrant parents," while his counterpart thanked his mother for never "squashing my creativity," including when he had dressed in drag as a child.

"Which is a threat to nobody," he added, to enormous cheers. Vietnam-born Ke Huy Quan, 51, who was a major child star in the 1980s with "Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom" and "The Goonies," completed a stunning comeback from decades in the Hollywood wilderness by



Jonathan Wang (C) accepts the Oscar for Best Picture for "Everything Everywhere All at Once". - AFP photos

winning best supporting actor. "My journey started on a boat. I spent a year in a refugee camp. And somehow, I ended up here on Hollywood's biggest stage... this is the American Dream," said Quan. After the show, he came bounding into the backstage press room, shouting "Wow, wow, wow... Can you believe I'm holding one of these?"



Director Guillermo del Toro is seen backstage during the 95th Annual Academy Awards.

He shared that "Indiana Jones" director Steven Spielberg had grabbed him and said: "You are now an Oscar winner!" Best supporting actress Jamie Lee Curtis paid tribute to her parents Tony Curtis and Janet Leigh, both Oscar-nominated actors who never won.

'All Quiet' makes noise

"All Quiet on the Western Front," Netflix's German-language World War I, finished the night in second place with four awards. It won best international feature and best cinematography early in Sunday's ceremony.



Daniel Kwan (L) and Daniel Scheinert (R) pose with their awards for Best Director for "Everything Everywhere All at Once".

As the night progressed, it also gathered Oscars for best original score and best production design. But it ultimately could not stop the "Everything Everywhere" juggernaut, and lost adapted screenplay to "Women Talking," and best sound to "Top Gun: Maverick." Tom Cruise's "Top Gun" sequel had been seen as another potential best picture contender, having helped bring audiences back to movie theaters after the pandemic.

'Naatu Naatu'

In the night's other prizes, "Guillermo del Toro's Pinocchio" won best animated film, and "Avatar: The Way of Water" won best visual effects. "Navalny" - about the imprisoned Russian dissident Alexei Navalny - won for best documentary.

Dozens of dancers brought a colorful, energetic performance of "Naatu Naatu," the showstopper tune from Indian crowd-pleaser "RRR," which won the Oscar for best original song.

Academy bosses hope that Oscars television ratings will pick up from recent years, calling in heavy hitters from the world of music to perform the other nominated songs. A dressed-down Lady Gaga sang an emotional, heartfelt rendition of her song "Hold My Hand" from "Top Gun: Maverick." And Rihanna - draped in diamonds, including over her baby bump - sang "Lift Me Up" from "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever," which won for best costume design. Lenny Kravitz performed the annual "In Memoriam" segment. — AFP



(From L) The cast and crew of "Everything Everywhere All at Once" Jamie Lee Curtis, Ke Huy Quan, James Hong, Jonathan Wang, Michelle Yeoh, Stephanie Hsu, Daniel Kwan (bottom L), and Daniel Scheinert (bottom R), pose with their Oscar trophies.



(From L) Best Actor in a Supporting Role US-Vietnamese actor Ke Huy Quan, Best Actress in a Leading Role Malaysian actress Michelle Yeoh, Best Actor in a Leading Role US actor Brendan Fraser, and Best Actress in a Supporting Role winner US actress Jamie Lee Curtis.



Production designer Christian Goldbeck (L), director Edward Berger (C) and cinematographer James Friend pose with their Oscars for "All Quiet on the Western Front".



Daniel Roher accepts the Best Documentary Feature award for "Navalny".



Indian composer M.M. Keeravaani (R) and Indian musician Chandrabose accept the Oscar for Best Music (Original Song) for "Naatu Naatu" from "RRR".

Lifestyle | Oscars

Michelle Yeoh makes history as first Asian to win best actress Oscar

Michelle Yeoh on Sunday made history by becoming the first Asian woman to win the best actress Oscar, for her exuberant portrayal of an immigrant business owner thrust into a zany multiverse in the sci-fi trip "Everything Everywhere All at Once."

The Hollywood veteran won over Academy voters with her complex take on Evelyn Wang, a Chinese American

laundromat owner who is mired in a tax audit, stuck in a crumbling marriage and struggling to connect with her daughter Joy. Oh, and she ends up traversing multiple universes to evade a powerful supernatural enemy, who happens to be an iteration of ... her daughter.

"For all the little boys and girls who look like me watching tonight, this is a beacon of hope and possibilities. This is proof that ... dream big and dreams do come true," Yeoh said as she accepted the award. "And ladies, don't let anybody tell you you are ever past your prime. Never give up," she said to cheers.

Yeoh won top honors over strong performances from Cate Blanchett ("Tar"), Michelle Williams ("The Fabelmans"), Andrea Riseborough ("To Leslie") and Ana de Armas ("Blonde"). "Everything," directed by Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert, arrived at Hollywood's biggest gala at the top of the nominations pile with 11 chances at Oscars glory, including for best picture.

Sunday's statuette for the Malaysian actress comes at the end of a very successful awards season, with wins at the Golden Globes, the Spirit Awards and the Screen Actors Guild Awards. The lack of Asian representation at Hollywood's highest levels had been a constant in her interviews on the road to the Oscars.



Michelle Yeoh accepts the Oscar for Best Actress in a Leading Role for "Everything Everywhere All at Once". — AFP photos



Janet Yeoh (centre R), Michelle Yeoh's mother, celebrates after her daughter won the Oscar for best leading actress.

"I feel a little sad because I know there have been amazing actresses from Asia that come before me, and I stand on their shoulders," she told the New York Times. "I hope this will shatter that frigging glass ceiling to no end, that this will continue, and we will see more of our faces up there."

Beauty queen, action hero

Yeoh was born to Malaysian-Chinese parents on August 6, 1962 in the city of Ipoh, 200 kilometers (125 miles) north of Malaysia's capital, Kuala Lumpur. She embraced dance as a child and specialized in ballet, which she studied in England.

On a vacation while visiting family, her mother entered her in the Miss Malaysia contest without consulting her. "I agreed to go to shut her up," a giggling Yeoh, who unwittingly won the beauty pageant, told a talk show.

A back injury made her give up her dancing career, but by the mid-1980s, she was using the body control she had learned in ballet to appear in action films alongside the likes of Jackie Chan. Her global big break came in the James Bond installment "Tomorrow Never Dies" (1997), in which she played a Chinese spy opposite Pierce Brosnan, redefining the typical Bond girl.

That was followed by the massively successful "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon," directed by Ang Lee, and "Memoirs of a Geisha" (2005), both alongside Chinese actress Zhang Ziyi.

With more than 50 credits over four decades, Yeoh has a busy upcoming slate, including three new installments of "Avatar" and the movie adaptation of the musical "Wicked," which will reunite her with "Crazy Rich Asians" director Jon Chu. Yeoh lives with her partner, Jean Todt, the former head of the International Automobile Federation (FIA), which governs the Formula One circuit. — AFP



(L-R) Jamie Lee Curtis, Ke Huy Quan and Brendan Fraser accept their awards.



Ruth Carter poses with the Oscar for Best Costume Design for "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever".



Sarah Polley poses with the Oscar for Best Adapted Screenplay for "Women Talking".



TV host Jimmy Kimmel walks onstage with a donkey.

From navy jets to slap jokes: Biggest moments of the night

The Academy's decision to bring back late-night funnyman Jimmy Kimmel as Oscars host was widely seen as the cautious choice of a "safe pair of hands" after last year's slap-shaped controversy.

But Kimmel - who has twice hosted before - delivered a sharp, witty performance, with plenty of political zingers. Topics included Fox News' coverage of the US Capitol riots, which host Tucker Carlson recently tried to downplay, and beleaguered Congressman George Santos, who has been accused of making a litany of improbable boasts and lies. Introducing the presenter of the award for best film editing, Kimmel quipped: "Editors can turn 44,000 hours of violent insurrection footage into a respectful sight-seeing tour of the Capitol." Later, he joked: "Did you know ... the last directing team to win an Oscar was Congressman George Santos?"

Kimmel's attempt to draw Nobel peace laureate Malala Yousafzai into a discussion about a recent internet scandal surrounding Harry Styles fell flat, however. "I only talk about peace," she deadpanned.

'Top Gun' flyover

The Oscars kicked off in unforgettable fashion, as two US Navy fighter jets roared over Hollywood's Dolby Theatre, in a tribute to nominated film "Top Gun: Maverick." Residents ran outdoors and took to social media to speculate on what the planes were doing above the Los Angeles skies.

The planes came from the Flying Eagles Squadron at a nearby California military air base, the Academy later revealed in a statement. "A huge thank you to the US Navy for helping execute a once-in-a-lifetime Oscars opening," the show's producers said.

Slap jokes

Kimmel also cracked several jokes about last year's shocking moment when Will Smith assaulted Chris Rock on stage for cracking a joke about his wife. "If any of you get mad at a joke

and decide you want to get jiggy with it - it's not going to be easy," vowed Kimmel, referring to lyrics from one of Smith's hit songs.

Several movie superheroes were in the audience and could protect him, he noted. When the documentary section arrived, Kimmel noted that it was at the same section of the night "where we had that little skirmish last year. 'Hopefully this time it goes off without a hitch. Or at least without 'Hitch,'" he said. Smith starred in a 2005 romantic comedy of the same name.



Ke Huy Quan (R) and Harrison Ford share an emotional hug. The two actors co-starred in the 1984 film "Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom".

Indie studio reigns

From deep-pocketed streamers like Netflix to traditional Tinseltown powerhouses like Warner Bros, Disney and Universal, this award season has seen studios spend big on their Oscars hopefuls. But small, indie arthouse distributor A24 walked away with an astonishing sweep of the top prizes, including all four acting awards, thanks to "Everything Everywhere All at Once" and "The Whale."

"This is EVERYTHING," tweeted the studio's official account Sunday. — AFP



Rihanna performs "Lift Me Up" from "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever".

Sports

India extend Test dominance over Australia with series win

India win their fourth series in a row

AHMEDABAD: India won their fourth series in a row against Australia after a fourth and final Test lit up by an epic 186 by Virat Kohli ended in a draw on Monday in Ahmedabad. The hosts won the series 2-1 and the world's two top-ranked teams will do battle again on June 7-11 at The Oval in the World Test Championship final.

Coach Rahul Dravid told broadcaster Star Sports: "It was a really hard-fought series, there were moments where we were put under extreme pressure by a really good cricket team and we responded." India similarly lifted the Border-Gavaskar Trophy at home in 2017 and then beat the Australians in their own back yard in 2018-19 and 2020-21, each time 2-1.

chance of a potential defeat for the hosts after Australia posted 480 on a vastly different pitch from the previous three Tests.

Expectations and more

Kohli, one of the best players of his generation, recorded his 28th Test century to power India to 571 all out on Sunday as India managed a lead of 91 after their first innings. "I think in Test cricket I wasn't able to play with my tempo and template that I have played with for the last 10 years for a while now," said the man-of-the-match. Kohli's partnership of 162 for the sixth wicket with Axar, who hit his third half-century of the series with an attacking 79, marked India's dominance on Sunday. Opener Shubman Gill hit 128 to lead India's reply and make the most of his opportunity after being added to the team in place of struggling KL Rahul in the third Test. Indian spinner Ravichandran Ashwin excelled with his six wickets in Australia's first innings, in a run-filled match which was at odds with the first three Tests.

Ashwin managed 25 wickets in the series, ahead of Ravindra Jadeja's 22, as the spin duo received the player-of-the-series award jointly. Not to be outdone, Australian spinner Nathan Lyon took 22 wickets including three in the final Test and was ably supported by up-and-coming spinners Todd Murphy and Kuhnemann. "The spinners bowled really well," said stand-in-skipper Steve Smith. "Murphy and Kuhnemann bowled with composure. Lyon bowled his best in the first innings here, the best I have seen him bowl."

Dogged Australia

An Australia team which lost several players to injury and personal circumstances had appeared on the brink of chaos after being well beaten inside three days in the first two Tests. But the tourists roared back to win the third match in Indore in just over two days on a viciously turning track to keep the series alive until the final match. Smith led Australia in the final two Tests after regular captain Pat Cummins returned home to be with his seriously ill mother. She died last week. The two teams now head into three one-day internationals starting Friday in Mumbai, ahead of the 50-over World Cup in India later this year.—AFP



AHMEDABAD: India's players pose with the trophy after winning the series at the end of the fourth and final Test cricket match between India and Australia at the Narendra Modi Stadium on March 13, 2023. — AFP

Even before the players shook hands on day five, India knew they had reached the WTC decider thanks to New Zealand's thrilling last-ball win over Sri Lanka earlier in the day. It will be India's second successive WTC final, having lost the inaugural edition to New Zealand in 2021. Australia reached 175-2 in their second innings in the final session of play at the world's biggest cricket stadium when the players of both teams called it a day. "We do understand the importance of this series and the opposition. Lot of hard work has gone into this," India skipper Rohit Sharma said.

Garin stuns Ruud at Indian Wells, Norrie and Zverev survive

INDIAN WELLS: Qualifier Cristian Garin shocked third-seeded Casper Ruud 6-4, 7-6 (7/2) to reach the fourth round at Indian Wells on Sunday as Daniil Medvedev and Cameron Norrie survived scares. Garin's attacking game paid off as the 97th-ranked Chilean dispatched world number four Ruud in just under two hours. "The way I played today I'm so happy," the 26-year-old Garin said. "I was aggressive the whole match." His 39 winners were too much for Ruud, a two-time Grand Slam finalist last year who had hoped a quick victory over Diego Schwartzman in his second-round opener would mark a turnaround in a season where he hadn't advanced past the second round in three prior tournaments.

Meanwhile, Medvedev, long frustrated by the slow hard courts in the California desert, managed to push his ATP winning streak to 16 matches with a 6-2, 3-6, 6-1 victory over 85th-ranked Ilya Ivashka. Medvedev, coming off three straight titles at Rotterdam, Doha and Dubai, said the victory was a matter of "a few points," but they went his way to keep him on track to improve on his previous best Indian Wells showing—the round of 16 in 2021. "(It's) tough to make anything during the rallies, so just have to kind of see who puts more balls in court. If you lose a little momentum you lose a set," said Medvedev, who was clearly frustrated at the end of the second set. He grumbled to the referee that he would be "as slow as the court" in taking a bathroom break, but pulled himself together to take a 5-0 lead in the third, serving it out after Ivashka saved three match points to hold in the penultimate game.

"I cannot say I played much better in the third, but (I) managed to be the one not missing after 25 shots," said Medvedev, who next faces former world number two Alexander Zverev. Zverev, coming back after torn ankle ligaments ended his 2022 campaign at the French Open, said much the same after a 7-5, 1-6, 7-5 victory over Finland's Emil Ruusuvuori. "To be honest I think he played much better than me throughout the match," Zverev said.—AFP

500 days before Paris Olympics, the race is on

PARIS: In 500 days on Tuesday, the 2024 Summer Olympics will burst into life in Paris as the teams float down the River Seine on barges in a unique opening ceremony. The Paris Olympics and Paralympics have a lot riding on them—they involve the return of full crowds of spectators to the world's greatest sporting spectacle after the COVID-blighted Summer Games in Tokyo in 2021 and the Winter Olympics in Beijing last year.

On top of that, the spending on the Games is being scrutinized as never before—venues are focused on Seine-Saint-Denis, the poorest area in France. And the buildup is being buffeted by the war in Ukraine and its ramifications for competitors from that country, Russia and its ally Belarus. Here are the key issues to be resolved before the Games open on July 26, 2024:

Travis Head (90) and Marnus Labuschagne (63 not out) snuffed out India's push for a victory on the final day with a stand of 139 after nightwatchman Matthew Kuhnemann fell early for six.

The left-handed Head, capping a successful series after being left out of the first Test, missed out on his century after being bowled by Axar Patel. Regular opener Usman Khawaja did not bat due to "lower leg soreness" after getting hurt while fielding on day four. The match in Ahmedabad belonged though to Kohli, who hit a masterful knock on day four to end a Test century drought of 1,205 days since his previous ton. The marathon 364-ball knock blocked every



EDINBURGH: Scotland's wing Kyle Steyn holds onto the ball during the Six Nations international rugby union match between Scotland and Ireland on March 12, 2023. — AFP

Ireland outlast Scotland to stay on course

EDINBURGH: Ireland remained on course for a Six Nations Grand Slam after overcoming stiff Scottish resistance to win 22-7 at Murrayfield on Sunday. Johnny Sexton's seven points with the boot took him level with Ronan O'Gara as the all-time top scorer in the Six Nations, while Mack Hansen, James Lowe and Jack Conan scored tries as Scotland were denied a first Triple Crown since 1990. Ireland still have work to do just to win the title, though, as the failure to land a bonus point for the first time in this year's Championship means they need to beat England in Dublin on Saturday to ensure they cannot be caught by France.

"We knew this was going to be our toughest game of the year," said Hansen, who won man-of-the-match. "To be fair to the Scottish lads, they showed up - it was such a tough test match. At half-time we said this is where we want to be. We thought we'd turn it on in the second half." Scotland got off to their best

Will Russians take part?

The International Olympic Committee's suggestion that it wants to find a "pathway" for athletes from Russia and its ally Belarus to take part as neutrals in Paris moved a step closer on Friday when the International Fencing Federation said it would re-open its events to Russians. Ukraine has reacted with fury to the prospect that its athletes will have to compete alongside their aggressors while their country is being bombed from the air and shelled by Russian tanks and has threatened to boycott the Games. IOC president Thomas Bach has passed the decision on to the federations of individual sports, such as fencing. Thirty countries including the United States have asked the IOC for "clarification" over how Russian athletes would be able to compete in practice.

Ceremony plans cause concerns

The plans to take the opening ceremony out of its traditional stadium setting and stage it on the River Seine, framed by the Eiffel Tower and other monuments, is an organizational headache and has provoked concerns from the security services. The original plan allows for up to 600,000 spectators along the banks

of the Seine but political sources say the number could be revised down. Private security companies are struggling to recruit enough staff, begging the question of whether the army will be called in, as it was for the 2012 London Olympics. Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin says it is "too early to say" while Etienne Thobois, the director general of the 2024 organizing committee says "all scenarios are on the table".

Transport headache

Will the Paris transport system, which has been plagued by staff shortages and sporadic strikes in recent months, be ready to move millions of people around the city for the Olympics? Now headed by former prime minister Jean Castex, network operator RATP is under extreme pressure. There are serious questions about whether the extension of a key metro line to the Athletes' Village will be completed and a large shortfall in the number of bus drivers is causing concerns too. Paris' airports, still attempting to return to full capacity after the COVID pandemic, are in a race against time to be ready for a massive influx of competitors and spectators from abroad.



FLORIDA: Scottie Scheffler of the United States celebrates with the trophy as he speaks with sportscaster Mike Tirico during the trophy ceremony.— AFP

Scheffler returns to World Number one

MIAMI: American Scottie Scheffler won The Players Championship at TPC Sawgrass by five strokes on Sunday to return to number one in the world rankings. Scheffler ran away with the US PGA Tour showdown at Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, after making five straight birdies between the eighth and 12th holes while his closest rival, Australian Min Woo Lee imploded. The defending Masters champion, who ended on 17-under par 271, will replace Spain's Jon Rahm atop the rankings on Monday. Rahm withdrew from the event due to illness. The 26-year-old from New Jersey won four events on the tour last year, including at Augusta, and now has two more already this season, having won in Phoenix last month. "I'm just trying to get a little bit better at a time, not over-think things, and fortunately to be able to see some good results and enjoy some wins and I'm very thankful," he said.

The wind might have become a factor in a closer battle but by the time he reached the testing final holes, Scheffler had wrapped things up. "It was a lot of fun. Long day, tough day," he said. "I knew the conditions were going to get really hard late and I did a really good job of staying patient, not trying to force things, and then I got hot kind of in the middle of the round and tried to put things away as quickly as I could." Scheffler began the day with a two-stroke lead over Lee, who immediately reduced the deficit with a birdie on the opening hole.

When Scheffler bogeyed the third, the pair were in a tie for the lead but it was soon to change dramatically when Lee had a nightmare on the par-4 fourth hole, where he made a triple bogey. Lee found the rough off the tee and took his medicine, chipping out back on to the fairway but that cautious decision was followed by his approach shot ending in the water. A double bogey on the 11th, where he got in trouble in the trees, saw Lee fall totally out of contention and by then Scheffler was in his groove and moving away from the field. "It happened really quick," said the Australian. "It's one of those things where it's Sunday and you just make a couple bad decisions and it all kind of falls down. To make a seven there, it was pretty gut wrenching after I started really well." After his streak of birdies, which got under way when he chipped in to birdie the par-three eighth, it was a victory procession for Scheffler over the final holes. He crowned his victory in style with a superb 21-foot putt on the 18th.

Excited for 'hard test'

Scheffler becomes only the third player to hold the Masters and Players titles at the same time after Jack Nicklaus and Tiger Woods and said the bigger events raise his game. "I think I get excited for a good hard test," he said. "I feel like I can find a way to make pars and hang in there. This week I think I had five bogeys for the whole week. Around this place that's really hard to do and that's probably what I'm most proud of is just playing so solid." England's Tyrrell Hatton finished second after a sensational close with five straight birdies to complete the back nine in 29, the lowest score on the back section in a final round. Hatton ended on 12-under par after his 65 with Norway's Viktor Hovland and American Tom Hoge tied for third, a further two strokes back. "It was just a pretty mad two and a half hours in the end, from standing on the 10th tee" said Hatton, who birdied seven of his last nine holes.—AFP

Ticket policy criticism

The first sales phase for tickets sparked criticism from people who felt they were too expensive and resented being forced to buy tickets for minor sports if they also wanted to see popular events like athletics and gymnastics. The organizers say the prices are in line with the London Olympics. Chief organizer Tony Estanguet insisted the first stage had been a success "even if we understand the criticism and the frustration of some people who were not satisfied".

Budget scrutiny

The organizing committee's budget, of which 96 percent comes from private funding, rose 10 percent to 4.4 billion euros (\$4.7 billion) last year. Add to that another 4.4 billion euros for Solideo, the body tasked with building facilities, and the total budget comes to 8.8 billion euros. Local politicians in the deprived Seine-Saint-Denis area are watching the expenditure more closely than anyone. "When the Olympic flame is extinguished, residents here won't be asking (Paris Mayor) Anne Hidalgo, (President) Emmanuel Macron or Tony Estanguet for accountability, they'll be asking me," said the head of the area, Stephane Troussel. — AFP

Sports

Wolfsburg goal deprives Union Berlin of victory

Freiburg deepen Hoffenheim woes

WOLFSBURG: An 84th-minute equalizer from Wolfsburg's Patrick Wimmer helped his side snatch a point at home in a 1-1 draw against Union Berlin on Sunday. Despite Wolfsburg having the better of a less-than-inspiring encounter, a 72nd-minute penalty from former Celtic wing-back Josip Juranovic had Union on course for victory until Wimmer's late goal. Union forward Sven Michel said his "exhausted" side have "invested so much" due to their Europa League run alongside their league efforts and "can be satisfied with a point." Freiburg's win earlier on Sunday meant Union, who have been in the top four for much of the season, had slipped to fifth before kick-off.

The home side had the better of a dour opening half, carving out a handful of half-chances against the dogged Union defense. Wolfsburg midfielder Mattias Svanberg rattled the bar with a free-kick after 17 minutes. Omar Marmoush should have given the home side the lead when one on one with Union goalkeeper Frederik Ronnow, but the Egyptian winger blasted wide. The two players duelled it out again early in the second half, with Ronnow diving to keep out Marmoush's low header.

In a rare foray from Union, Josuha Guilavogui clipped Aissa Laidouni's foot in the box, giving the visitors a spot-kick. Juranovic sent the ball straight down the middle for his first league goal in Union colors. Union seemed to have secured another trademark underdog win, but Wimmer's low strike with six minutes remaining levelled the scores. Guilavogui said "we wanted to pick up three points and put more pressure on the top six. That unfortunately didn't happen."

Earlier on Sunday, Freiburg's Japanese winger

Ritsu Doan scored late to secure a 2-1 home win over under-pressure Hoffenheim. Trying to keep on track for their first ever taste of Champions League football, Freiburg scored early through Maximilian Eggstein, who pounced on a loose ball after a swerving delivery from Vincenzo Grifo. Hoffenheim hit back early in the second half thanks to a low drive from midfielder Angelo Stiller.

Hoffenheim defender Ozan Kabak picked up a second yellow card with six minutes remaining for throwing the ball away, handing Freiburg the advantage in the closing stages. Doan took the initiative and scored in the 89th minute, threading the ball into the corner of the net to give the home side a valuable victory. Frustrated Hoffenheim 'keeper Oliver Baumann said the red card was the "turning point", telling Sky "we simply can't end a match like this with 10 men".

Hoffenheim's loss leaves them stranded alone on the bottom of the table on 19 points and in danger of relegation for the first time since their promotion in 2008. Bayer Leverkusen kept their unlikely push for European football going, winning 3-2 at Werder Bremen with goals from Mitchel Bakker, Jeremie Frimpong and Adam Hlozek. Leverkusen were dealt a blow before kick-off when star midfielder Florian Wirtz and striker Patrik Schick were ruled out with tiredness and injury respectively.

Bremen's Marvin Ducksch opened the scoring midway through the opening half but Leverkusen equalised just four minutes later through Bakker. The visitors hit Bremen on the counter 10 minutes into the second half, Dutch defender Frimpong finishing off a length-of-the-field move to give his side the



WOLFSBURG: Wolfsburg's Danish forward Jonas Wind (left) and Union Berlin's German midfielder Rani Khedira vie for the ball during the German first division Bundesliga football match between VfL Wolfsburg and 1 FC Union Berlin on March 12, 2023. —AFP

lead. Hlozek glanced in a superb header from another counter attack to make it 3-1 with seven minutes remaining, but a late Niclas Füllkrug penalty gave

the home side hope of snaring a point. Bremen continued to push but Leverkusen held on, chalking up their fourth win in their past five matches. —AFP

Guardiola: City star Haaland is here to stay

LONDON: As Erling Haaland was mobbed by his Manchester City team-mates, the Norway star's broad grin gave Pep Guardiola renewed belief that his coveted striker is still happy at the club ahead of Tuesday's decisive Champions League clash with RB Leipzig. When Haaland scored a late penalty to clinch City's 1-0 win against Crystal Palace in the Premier League on Saturday, he responded with a joyous slide across the rain-soaked Selhurst Park pitch.

Amid reports that Paris Saint-Germain and Real Madrid are plotting audacious bids for Haaland in the close season, the 22-year-old's ecstatic reaction to his winner was a welcome sight for Guardiola. Haaland has scored 28 times in the Premier League and netted 34 goals in all competitions since arriving from Borussia Dortmund in May. He remains on course to break the Premier League goal record for a single campaign, jointly held by Alan Shearer and Andy Cole, who netted 34 for Blackburn and Newcastle respectively.

Yet, although the raw numbers suggest all is well with the astonishingly prolific striker and his team, the eye-test has sometimes painted a different picture. There have been pointed questions raised about Guardiola's ability to get City to adapt to Haaland's unique talents, and the striker's own issues with coming to terms with the champions' style of play. At times, Haaland has ploughed a lone furrow in City's attack,



LONDON: Manchester City's Spanish manager Pep Guardiola (left) celebrates with Manchester City's Norwegian striker Erling Haaland after the English Premier League football match between Crystal Palace and Manchester City on March 11, 2023. —AFP

left isolated and surrounded by defenders during his team's long spells of possession.

As a result, City have occasionally seemed more toothless than Haaland's phenomenal record would suggest, with his misses microscopically analysed for evidence he is square peg in a round hole. Haaland did

miss a sitter before scoring at Palace, while his proficiency in a 1-1 draw at Nottingham Forest in February saw City surrender first place in the Premier League. With City trailing Arsenal by five points in the title race, the Champions League may offer their best chance of a memorable end to the season. —AFP

Randle, Barrett spark NY Knicks over LA Lakers

LOS ANGELES: Julius Randle scored 33 points and RJ Barrett added 30 to lead New York over the Los Angeles Lakers 112-108 on Sunday, snapping the Knicks' three-game NBA losing streak. A night after Randle managed only 19 points in a loss to the Los Angeles Clippers, he hit 11-of-24 shots, grabbed eight rebounds and passed off five assists to ignite New York. "Games like that happen," Randle said. "I'm not going to second-guess myself just because I had a bad game. Come back next game and be better."

Randle's 16th 30-point performance on the road this season matched Bernard King's Knicks record for such heroics away from Madison Square Garden. Barrett scored eight points in an 11-6 Knicks run for

a 99-94 lead early in the fourth quarter and finished with 13 points in the final period.

"We just wanted to put the pressure on them right at the beginning of the fourth, build a lead, and we did that," Barrett said. "We just stayed in attack mode and played together. Especially just getting those easy transition points, that definitely helps." Josh Hart sank two final free throws with five seconds remaining for New York to create the final margin. LeBron James remained sidelined for the Lakers with a foot injury while the Knicks were without Jalen Brunson due to a sore left foot.

The Knicks improved to 40-30, sixth in the Eastern Conference, while the Lakers saw their three-game win streak snapped and fell to 33-35. The Lakers stand 11th in the Western Conference but with the same record as Utah, Oklahoma City and New Orleans in the ninth-12th spots and one game behind Minnesota and Dallas in the seventh and eighth positions. Brooklyn's Mikal Bridges scored 25 points and Nic Claxton added 20 as the Nets edged host Denver 122-120 despite a triple double by Serbian superstar center Nikola Jokic. —AFP



LOS ANGELES: Rui Hachimura #28 of the Los Angeles Lakers blocks a layup by Julius Randle #30 of the New York Knicks during the first half at Crypto.com Arena on March 12, 2023. —AFP

Inzaghi under pressure; Inter face FC Porto

MILAN: Simone Inzaghi is in the firing line as his Inter Milan side travel to Porto trying to make the last eight of the Champions League and turn a depressing tide of bad results away from home. Friday's 2-1 defeat at relegation-threatened Spezia was the latest poor effort away from the San Siro and left Inter once again 18 points behind champions-elect Napoli. Inzaghi and his team were booed and insulted by the Inter fans present at the Stadio Picco, who had to watch the son of AC Milan icon Paolo Maldini slot home the opening goal.

Inter have only held on to second place in Italy's top flight thanks to Lazio failing to win at Bologna on Saturday, but their bid to qualify for next season's Champions League is being damaged by their dreadful away form. Inzaghi said "we won't be able to sleep" after Friday's hugely disappointing eighth loss of the Serie A season, which took their tally of goals conceded to 24 in 13 league away matches.

"We're not happy about our results away from the San Siro. Last year it was a different story," said Inzaghi. "We have had some great results away, like at Barcelona (a 3-3 draw), and we know that we need to put in a great performance if we're going to reach the quarter-finals." Inter's defensive wobbles were also present in their group stage campaign, with five goals conceded in matches at Barcelona and Bayern Munich.

And elimination on Tuesday would not only mean missing out on a first last-eight tie since 2011, it would also heap more pressure on Inzaghi with fierce rivals Juventus visiting the San Siro on Sunday. One piece of good news is that Milan Skriniar might be ready to return from a spell on the sidelines with lower back pain. Porto, gunning for a third quarter-final in five seasons, have been a bogey side to Italian teams in recent years and are aiming to add to the series of Serie A scalps which include Juventus and Roma.

The Portuguese champions had to come from behind when they knocked out Roma four seasons ago and have cause for optimism given how they performed in Milan last month. Marko Grujic, Mehdi Taremi and Zaidu Sanusi all had great opportunities to score before Romelu Lukaku netted the only goal of the game shortly before the end. However Sergio Conceicao again has to deal with important absences. Gabriel Veron is out with an ankle injury and Evanilson and Galeno are both suffering from muscle problems. In addition, Otavio will be suspended and unable to play in the game. —AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Sabah Hospital
Amiri Hospital
Maternity Hospital
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital
Chest Hospital
Farwaniya Hospital
Adan Hospital
Ibn Sina Hospital

24812000
22450005
24843100
25312700
24849400
24892010
23940620
24840300

Al-Razi Hospital
Physiotherapy Hospital

24846000
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Clinics

Kaizen center
Rawda
Adaliya

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22517144

Khaldiya
Kaifan
Shamiya
Shuwaikh
Abdullah Salem
Nuzha
Industrial Shuwaikh
Qadsiya

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Dasmah
Bneid Al-Gar
Shaab
Qibla
Ayoun Al-Qibla
Mirqab
Sharq
Salmiya

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22518752
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22465401
25746401

Change of Name

I, Michelle Henry Fernandes, holder of passport no. T5337449, do hereby change my name to Michelle Antonet (as given name) D'Costa (as surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known by the name Michelle Antonet D'Costa and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. (C#3181) - 14-03-2023

I, Shahnas Riyas, decided to change my name in passport (T5333279) as Shehnaz Azmin, for all future purposes. (C#3180) - 14-03-2023

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Juventus overpower Sampdoria Sassuolo dent Roma's top four hopes

MILAN: Adrien Rabiot made sure Juventus continued their charge towards European football with a decisive brace in his team's hard-fought 4-2 Serie A win over struggling Sampdoria. France midfielder Rabiot put Juve two ahead with a first-half header and then smashed them back in front in the 64th minute after Samp had stunned the home crowd by levelling before the break with two rapid-fire goals from Tommaso Augello and Filip Djuricic. Youngster Matias Soule nodded home in stoppage time to make the scoreline more flattering against Samp who are bottom and 12 points from safety. Rabiot almost left Juve in the summer but has become a key figure in Massimiliano Allegri's team, his double taking his league tally to seven and moving the Turin giants to within four points of the European places.

"We need to concentrate more for the whole match and not get distracted just because we scored two goals and were more comfortable," said Rabiot to DAZN. "We needed to win to prepare well for Freiburg. I'm happy to be scoring so many goals here, let's hope I can get some more between now and the end of the season." Juventus, in seventh on 38 points, are contesting a 15-point penalty for illicit transfer activity and as it stands they would be second should their appeal be successful.

They would still be a whopping 15 points behind champions-elect Napoli but given the inconsistent form of Serie A's other top clubs they would be a strong bet to reach next season's Champions League. Missing a host of big names, including Paul Pogba who suffered yet another injury during Sunday morn-

ing's training session, Juve looked set for a cruise against a similarly depleted Samp when headers from Bremer and Rabiot had them two in front midway through the opening period.

But two goals within just over a minute stunned the home fans, Augello crashing in Samp's first on the rebound in the 31st minute before Djuricic swept in the leveller from Alessandro Zanoli's low pass. Rabiot then stepped in with the key goal, which Samp thought came after the 27-year-old handled to control the ball, an impression which post-match images appeared to confirm. Dusan Vlahovic thwacked a penalty off the post and then had a header tipped onto the woodwork, from which Soule added the fourth.

Roma's Sassuolo slip

Roma could have moved level on points with second-placed Inter Milan, who lost at struggling Spezia on Friday, but were stunned 4-3 by Sassuolo thanks to an Armand Lauriente double, Domenico Berardi's penalty and Andrea Pinamonti's neat finish with 15 minutes remaining.

Roma were without the suspended coach Jose Mourinho and had to play the entire second half a man down after Marash Kumbulla was sent off for kicking Berardi and conceding the spot-kick from which the Italy international gave Sassuolo a 3-1 half-time lead. Mourinho's team, who netted through Nicola

Zalewski, substitute Paulo Dybala and Georginio Wijnaldum, are now fifth, level on 47 points with fourth-placed AC Milan but below the champions by virtue of having played a game more.

There is little chance of Roma moving back into the top four as Milan host Salernitana on Monday night. Mourinho was absent after his two-match ban for being sent off during Roma's defeat at Cremonese earlier this month was confirmed. Roma are livid at the decision as Mourinho's red card came following a blazing row with fourth official Marco Serra, who, the capital club claim, insulted their Portuguese coach. Home fans waved hankies



Juventus' French midfielder Adrien Rabiot

Marseille suffer a late collapse

PARIS: Marseille conceded two late goals to draw 2-2 at home to Strasbourg in Ligue 1 on Sunday having played for over an hour with 10 men after Leonardo Balerdi was sent off. The Argentine centre-back saw red for bringing down Habib Diallo as the last defender on 29 minutes, but Marseille took the lead right after half-time through Chancel Mbemba.

Alexis Sanchez tucked away a penalty to put Marseille firmly in control, but Jean-Eudes Aholou struck twice in the final three minutes to stun the hosts and rescue a vital point for his side. "I think today the main thing was the red card. The referee got it wrong and for me it wasn't a sending off," said Marseille coach Igor Tudor.

"As a former player I know the difference between contact and a push. He just touched him and the referee couldn't tell the difference," Marseille are 10 points behind leaders Paris Saint-Germain and their grip on second place is under threat from Lens, now just two points behind. Strasbourg kicked off at the Velodrome in 17th place but pulled themselves out of the relegation zone thanks to Aholou's equalizer. Lois Openda scored a five-minute first-half hat-trick as Lens thrashed Clermont 4-0 earlier in the day to climb back above Monaco into third.

Lens' improbable title challenge had fizzled out after only one win in their past seven games but Openda, who had not scored since January 11, took advantage of the gifts from the home defense. He broke between two defenders before popping the



MARSEILLE: Marseille's Congolese defender Chancel Mbemba (left) vies Strasbourg's Senegalese forward Habib Diallo during the French L1 football match between Olympique de Marseille (OM) and Stasbourg (RC Stasbourg) France on March 12, 2023. — AFP

ball between the legs of the goalkeeper Mory Diaw after 30 minutes. Three minutes later the Belgian striker pounced when Clermont's Maxime Gonalons gave the ball away on the edge of his penalty area.

Barely a minute after that, Openda benefited from another big mistake by central defender Mateusz Wieteska to add his third. "There have always been strikers who don't score for a while," said Lens coach Franck Haise. "Lois is a striker who knows how to score, he has it in him. It's good that it happened this afternoon." "After a dozen games

without scoring, I'm not going to quibble about his inconsistency." In the second half Seko Fofana hit the post for Lens before substitute Alexis Claude-Maurice made it 4-0 from an Openda cross.

Balogun propels Reims

Monaco slumped to a 1-0 loss at home to Reims as Arsenal loanee and England Under-21 international Folarin Balogun scored his 16th league goal this term. The hosts twice struck the post through Wissam Ben Yedder and Brazilian defender Vanderson before

French Ligue 1 table

PARIS: French Ligue 1 table after Sunday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Paris SG	27	21	3	3	68	26	66
Marseille	27	17	5	5	51	27	56
Lens	27	15	9	3	44	21	54
Monaco	27	15	6	6	55	37	51
Rennes	27	14	5	8	45	29	47
Lille	27	13	7	7	49	36	46
Nice	27	11	10	6	36	24	43
Reims	27	10	13	4	35	26	43
Lorient	27	12	7	8	40	36	43
Lyon	27	11	7	9	42	31	40
Toulouse	27	10	5	12	43	46	35
Clermont	27	9	7	11	26	38	34
Montpellier	27	10	3	14	42	46	33
Nantes	27	6	11	10	29	36	29
Strasbourg	27	4	11	12	32	46	23
Brest	27	5	8	14	28	44	23
Auxerre	27	5	8	14	23	49	23
Ajaccio	27	6	3	18	20	48	21
Troyes	27	4	8	15	36	59	20
Angers	27	2	4	21	21	60	10

Balogun raced onto a pass from Alexis Flips and drilled low past Monaco goalkeeper Alexander Nubel.

Reims are unbeaten in Ligue 1 since Will Still took over as coach in October, winning for the fourth time in five games and making it 19 without defeat. They move up to eighth and to within four points of the European places. Toulouse won 2-0 at bottom side Angers and Lorient beat Troyes by the same scoreline. Nantes grabbed a late equalizer through Egypt forward Mostafa Mohamed to draw 2-2 against Nice, while Montpellier defeated Ajaccio 1-0. — AFP

Barca win as Real Sociedad stumble

BARCELONA: Raphinha's strike earned Barcelona an agonizing 1-0 win over Athletic Bilbao on Sunday to restore their nine-point lead over Real Madrid at the top of La Liga. Real Sociedad stumbled to a 1-1 draw at Real Mallorca, with their bid to finish in the top four losing steam at an alarming rate. Struggling Sevilla earned an important 2-1 win over Almeria to climb to 13th, two points clear of the relegation zone, leaving their opponents 19th. In Barcelona's first game after being charged with corruption by Spanish prosecutors, they shut out the noise and took another step towards their first title since 2019.

The Catalans secured their 19th clean sheet in 25 La Liga games this season as they held on to earn their ninth 1-0 win of the season, keeping second place Madrid at arm's length after the champions beat Espanyol on Saturday. Goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen made some superb saves in the second half and Alex Berenguer struck the post, but Athletic could not break down the league leaders. When Inaki Williams eventually did late on, the goal was disallowed after VAR spotted a handball by Iker Muniain in the build-up.

"In the end what counts (is holding on), we defended with everybody, including in goal, on the goal line, these are games we have to win," Ter Stegen told DAZN. "I have not seen the disallowed goal, but that's why we have VAR. It's a decision (the officials) have to take. We are very happy to keep another clean sheet." With Ronald Araujo suspended, Xavi used Jules Kounde alongside Andreas Christensen and started Sergi Roberto at right-back.

The visitors put in a backs-to-the-wall display to keep Athletic out. Athletic fans threw fake banknotes with the word "mafia" printed on them into the air, in protest after Barcelona's corruption charge. "I respect the fans at San Mames, they have

always treated me well," said Xavi. "It surprises me this atmosphere of hostility towards Barca. It saddens me there's hostility towards Barca at San Mames, I don't think it's good for society."

On the pitch the Catalans were under the cosh too, with Ter Stegen denying Williams and Raul Garcia heading against the crossbar. In-form winger Raphinha finished well from Sergio Busquets' clever pass before the break, against the run of play, and top scorer Robert Lewandowski missed two good chances on his return from injury. It was all Athletic again after that, with Berenguer hitting the post and Ter Stegen denying Muniain.

Eventually Williams blasted past Ter Stegen after racing through on goal but Athletic were left infuriated after Muniain's handball was spotted at the start of the move. The win leaves the Catalans sitting comfortably clear ahead of next Sunday's Clasico at Camp Nou, while Athletic are winless in five in the top flight. "I think that VAR is there to correct big flagrant errors," Valverde told DAZN. "Huge errors, balls that went in, or not. Calling the referee because it touched him, or it didn't touch him ... I don't know if this belongs in the world of football."

Sociedad struggles

Real Sociedad have just one win in their last nine matches across all competitions and were frustrated by hosts Mallorca, 10th. The Basque side remain fourth, level on 45 points with third-place Atletico Madrid, who visit Girona on Monday.

Carlos Fernandez fired Real Sociedad ahead early on but they could not extend their lead, and soon paid the price with Lee Kang-In leveling. Real Sociedad captain Mikel Merino was dismissed late on for a late lunge on Abdon Prats to make a disappointing afternoon worse still. "Today we wanted to win and the team's reaction after their goal was phenomenal," said Real Sociedad coach Imanol Alguacil. "Being close (to winning), it escaped us, and we can do nothing else but reset and try to improve."

However neither Real Betis, fifth, or Villarreal,



BILBAO: Athletic Bilbao's Spanish goalkeeper Julen Agirrezabala jumps for the ball during the Spanish league football match between Athletic Club Bilbao and FC Barcelona on March 12, 2023. — AFP

sixth, could capitalise, sharing a 1-1 draw at Estadio de la Ceramica, with Jeremy Pino's goal cancelling out Borja Iglesias' opener. Sevilla came from behind to beat Almeria in an important battle at the bottom. Sergio Akieme sent the visitors ahead but

Lucas Ocampos leveled from the penalty spot. Lamela headed home winger Bryan Gil's cross to win it for Sevilla after 73 minutes, helping Jorge Sampaoli's side bounce back after their hammering by Atletico last weekend. — AFP