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Zionists hit Gaza's Kuwait School

12 killed in Indonesian Hospital strike • 28 premature babies evacuated to Egypt



GAZA: A Palestinian media source said Zionist occupation forces bombed the Kuwait School near the Indonesian Hospital in Gaza on Monday in a new act of brutal aggression. The Palestine News and Info Agency (Wafa) revealed Zionist artillery and tanks besieged the Indonesian Hospital and bombed it, adding that the forces fired several shells directly at the Kuwait School, which housed a number of displaced people.

The Palestinian agency indicated that number of martyrs and injured affected by the bombing was yet undetermined due to a telecommunications outage in northern Gaza. Additionally, the source said ambulances were unable to reach the school due to the occupation forces' siege on the Indonesian Hospital and its surrounding areas.

The Gaza health ministry said the Zionist entity's army killed at least 12 people in the strike on the Indonesian Hospital in the Palestinian territory's north, a war zone where entire city blocks have been reduced to rubble. Those killed included patients, said Ashraf Al-Qudra, a spokesman for the ministry which has reported a death toll of more than 13,300 as the Gaza war rages on into its seventh week. Dozens more were wounded and 700 people remained trapped inside the "besieged" medical center, Qudra said.

The ministry director said it had not been possible to recover the bodies. "The (Zionist) occupation has

destroyed some buildings of the Indonesian Hospital, and other buildings are under sniper fire," Mumin Al-Bursh said from the hospital. He said the 140-bed Indonesian Hospital currently has 650 patients, more than 100 of whom require urgent surgery, adding Zionist forces "targeted" people trying to leave the hospital. Zionist strikes have hit "the clinics and surgeries floor at the hospital, destroyed equipment and bodies are piled up", he said.

The Zionist entity has pushed on with its withering air and ground campaign in Gaza. More than 2.4 million Palestinians are trapped in Gaza and only several hundred war-wounded, foreign nationals and dual passport holders have been allowed out. On Monday the UN World Health Organization said 28 premature babies evacuated from Gaza's biggest hospital, Al-Shifa, had been taken to safety in Egypt through the Rafah crossing, revising down by one a number given by Egyptian media.

"All babies are fighting serious infections and continue needing health care," the WHO said. The bloodiest ever Gaza war has seen Zionist troops raid, occupy and evacuate Al-Shifa hospital. The Zionist entity, backed by the United States, claims that Hamas has used vast tunnel networks below Al-Shifa for military purposes, but has yet to reveal evidence of a major military headquarters below ground.

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NEWS IN BRIEF

New Year off on Dec 31, Jan 1

KUWAIT: The Cabinet announced during its weekly meeting on Monday that Sunday, December 31, 2023 and Monday, January 1, 2024 will be given as days off in the public sector for the New Year's holiday, citing a Civil Service Commission notice. — KUNA

Respite for pregnant Kuwaitis

KUWAIT: Health Minister Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi issued a decision allowing Kuwaiti women who are 30 weeks pregnant to get sick leave from work for the remaining pregnancy period without the need to obtain permission from a gynecology department, the ministry announced on Monday. — KUNA

500 kg hashish seized, 6 held

KUWAIT: The interior ministry announced on Monday it foiled an attempt to smuggle 500 kg of hashish with a street value of approximately KD 1.5 million (\$5 million) by sea. The operation resulted in the seizure of a boat arriving from outside Kuwait's territorial waters. Six individuals on board resisted arrest, and a search revealed 20 bags containing the narcotics. The suspects had planned to bury the drugs on Kubbar Island before transporting them further. — KUNA

Temp above 2C for first time

PARIS: The global average temperature on Friday was more than two degrees Celsius hotter than pre-industrial levels for the first time on record, Europe's Copernicus climate monitor said Monday. According to provisional data, global temperatures on Nov 17 were 2.06C above the pre-industrial average, Samantha Burgess, Deputy Head of the EU's Climate Change Service (C3S) said on X. — AFP

Experts warn Sudan could break apart

PORT SUDAN: More than seven months into Sudan's devastating war that has killed thousands and displaced millions, experts warn that the scarred and impoverished country faces the threat of breaking apart. The paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) is waging war against the armed forces and there have been reports of new massacres in Sudan's western Darfur region.

Experts now warn the country could face a "Libya scenario", in reference to the north African country long

divided between two rival administrations in its east and west. "Continued fighting could lead to a few terrifying scenarios, including division," said Khaled Omar Youssef, spokesman for the Forces of Freedom and Change, the main civilian bloc ousted from power in a 2021 joint coup by Sudan's warring generals. "The rising tide of militarization along ethnic and regional lines deepens social fissures in Sudan," Youssef told AFP.

As it stands, the RSF is currently in control of much of the capital Khartoum and the Darfur region, while the army controls the country's north and east. Meanwhile, the army-aligned government has been all but exiled to the eastern city of Port Sudan. With the two sides failing to make any headway at US- and Saudi-brokered

Continued on Page 6



AL-FASHIR, Sudan: A man stands by as a fire rages in a livestock market area in the capital of North Darfur state on Sept 1, 2023, in the aftermath of bombardment by the paramilitary RSF. — AFP

Former US first lady Rosalynn Carter dies at 96

WASHINGTON: Former US first lady Rosalynn Carter, the wife of former president Jimmy Carter, died Sunday at 96 at the couple's home in the southern state of Georgia, their non-profit organization announced. Carter was best known for her work post-White House, as she and her husband championed human rights, democracy and health issues around the world — all while maintaining a notably humble

public image.

She had joined her husband in at-home hospice care on Friday after being diagnosed with dementia in May. "Former first lady Rosalynn Carter, a passionate champion of mental health, caregiving and women's rights, passed away Sunday... at her home in Plains, Georgia, at the age of 96," the Carter Center said in a statement. "She died peacefully, with family by her side."

"Rosalynn was my equal partner in everything I ever accomplished," Jimmy Carter said in the statement. "She gave me wise guidance and encouragement when I needed it. As long as Rosalynn was in the world, I always knew somebody loved and supported me," the former Democratic president said.

Throughout Jimmy Carter's long political career, his wife was at the heart of his campaigns. Once in the White House — from 1977 to 1981 — Rosalynn Carter stood out as a first lady intent on being involved in policy. "She attended Cabinet meetings and major briefings, frequently represented the Chief Executive at ceremonial occasions and served as the president's personal emissary to Latin American countries," according to the White House website.

Other White House occupants shared tributes to the former first lady Sunday. "Through rigors of campaigns, through the darkness of deep and profound loss — we always felt the hope, warmth, and optimism of Rosalynn Carter," President

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Rosalynn Carter

Taleban health official speaks at German mosque

BERLIN: Germany on Monday condemned an appearance by a Taleban official at a mosque in Cologne, with the interior minister demanding explanations from the Turkish organization running the Islamic site. Abdul Bari Omar, who is an official with the Taleban-run health authority in Afghanistan, attended the mosque to speak at a conference orga-

nized by an Afghan association in the city.

"The appearance of a representative of the Taleban in Cologne is completely unacceptable and must be strongly condemned," said Interior Minister Nancy Faeser. She urged Ditib, the Turkish-Islamic association managing the mosque in the city's Chorweiler district to explain "how it could have been possible that the room was used" in this manner.

Ditib's management said it had no prior knowledge of the Taleban official's planned appearance. "Contrary to the original contract, it was transformed into a political event and a speaker who was not known to us had been invited," it said. Ditib rejected "any proximity — even spiritual — to the Taleban". The foreign ministry said the Taleban of-

ficial had not been issued with a visa to enter Germany. He had apparently been able to travel to the country using a Schengen visa issued by a "neighboring country", it added.

Local media said Omar had arrived from the Netherlands, where he had participated in a World Health Organization conference in early November. Since the Taleban swept back to power in Aug 2021, billions of dollars in aid and assets have been frozen by the West in what the United Nations has described as an "unprecedented fiscal shock" to the aid-dependent Afghan economy. Ditib — the Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs — is one of the largest Islamic organizations in Germany. — AFP



Local

WHO Kuwait, MoH host symposium to tackle antimicrobial resistance

Stakeholders urged to establish robust antimicrobial stewardship program in hospitals

By Passant Hisham

KUWAIT: The World Health Organization Kuwait and Kuwait health ministry hosted a National Antimicrobial Symposium on Monday to mark World Antimicrobial Awareness Week (WAAW). Under the global theme for WAAW, 'Preventing Antimicrobial Resistance Together', the symposium brought together a diverse array of healthcare stakeholders. The event aimed to encourage stakeholders to establish a robust hospital antimicrobial stewardship program and address the rising issue of antimicrobial resistance (AMR).

The objective of the symposium was to raise awareness on the WHO's antimicrobial resistance stewardship, as well as highlight the ministry's national action plan's significance, encouraging healthcare professionals to be cautious when prescribing antibiotics and reflect on its associated risks with overprescribing. Furthermore, this event provided an essential platform for engaging in meaningful dialogues with decision-makers, working together to address the impact of AMR at a national level.

During his opening remarks, Dr Munther Al-Hasawi, Acting Assistant Undersecretary for Public Health Affairs at the Ministry of Health, expressed the impactful collaboration between WHO and MoH for embarking on a transformative journey to host the National Antimicrobial Symposium, fueled by a shared dedication to 'Preventing Antimicrobial Resistance Together'.

Dr Hasawi highlighted the efforts of the ministry of health, including antimicrobial stewardship programs within local healthcare facilities. He emphasized the importance of realizing that it's a shared responsibility of every human being to work on addressing the issues associated with misuse and overuse of antimicrobials, for the sake of shaping a better



Dr Munther Al-Hasawi



Dr Assad Hafeez

health outcome for the future generations.

Dr Assad Hafeez, WHO Representative in Kuwait, reiterated the need for multi-sectoral collaboration to implement antimicrobial stewardship, highlighting antimicrobial resistance as one of the top 10 global public health hazards and threats facing humanity. He pointed out that antibiotics are becoming increasingly ineffective as drug resistance spreads globally, leading to difficult infections and deaths.

"If we don't change the way antibiotics are used now, even if new antibiotics are discovered, they will suffer the same fate as the current ones," he warned. Dr Hafeez celebrated this gathering as a means of shedding light on the successful antimicrobial resistance initiatives in Kuwait as well as in the region.

Dr Ahlam Jeragh, Consultant Microbiologist and Head Of Department of Medical Laboratories at Adan Hospital, told Kuwait Times on her concern to raise awareness about the proper usage of antibiotics by only selling them under prescription and following the exact doses and amount instructed by the doctor to avoid the serious harm caused by developing antimicrobial resistance, that might lead to death.



KUWAIT: Delegates and officials attend National Antimicrobial Symposium on Monday to mark World Antimicrobial Awareness Week (WAAW).

Dr Abeer Omar, Head of Surveillance Department, Infection Control Directorate, said: "Tackling the issue of antimicrobial resistance is not the responsibility of a few, but of us all. The misuse and overuse of antimicrobials, occurring in various sectors, are the main drivers of AMR. We need to work together as one in Kuwait to be able to address this challenge."

Speaking to Kuwait Times, Dr Abeer Omar shed light on Kuwait's initiatives to combat antimicrobial resistance through the following initiatives: Raising awareness about the harms and precautions of using antibiotics in the society and health

sector, taking measures to combat infections within health facilities, constant monitoring for antibiotic-resistant germs, and creating an antibiotic stewardship program that aims to maximize the effective usage of antibiotics.

In line with the global campaign aimed at raising awareness and inspiring action among One Health stakeholders, this partnership aspires to address the emergence and spread of drug-resistant pathogens. The event was a testament of the dedication between WHO Kuwait and the ministry of health's ongoing efforts to work collaboratively to improve health outcomes in Kuwait.

In my view

Restore cultural awareness to the Arab nation



Dr Khalid Al-Saleh

Local@kuwaittimes.com

I rarely miss a column by Dr Mohammad Al-Rumaihi because, in this era where few wield the pen to express our reality with innovative efficiency and a commitment to neutrality, he stands out.

In a column titled "Much Light, Little Vision," published in Asharq Alawsat on Nov 11, Dr Rumaihi concluded, as usual, by stating that the Arab public continues to be victimized by glorifying marginal issues. He argued that mentioning "Yemeni arms" and "Iraqi arms" while criticizing other Arabs is misleading, as actions such as rockets from Sanaa or attacks by some members of Iraq's Hezbollah at the Jordanian borders do not influence the course of the battle.

He emphasized that insisting on such narratives is an attempt to portray Arabs as unintelligent, despite many groups breaking free from such misleading views to embrace reason and judgment based on results. Our Arab nation is accustomed to a syndrome that emerges with every bloody struggle it faces, particularly in the recurring wars between Palestinians and the Zionist entity. This syndrome manifests in symptoms such as enveloping Arab awareness, providing ammunition for launching systematic media attacks against the Arab nation and its leadership.

After the first bullet is fired in any battle within Palestine, waves of criticism are unleashed, aiming to insult the Arab nation and accuse it of every imaginable low deed, while deliberately ignoring its stands in support of the Palestinian right.

Amid the cries of orphans and widows in Gaza, a new chapter begins in the attempt to dismantle the Arab nation and describe it with all the humiliation traits one can imagine. The criminal Zionist entity and biased Western countries like the US, Britain and France, along with many others supporting the Zionist entity, remain unaffected by the attacks or angry calls. In contrast, the Arab nation, which has sacrificed much for the sake of Palestine, bears the brunt of the criticism and endures relentless accusations.

Today, we urgently need comprehensive reviews of our culture and systems. We must monitor those who allocate significant funds to dismantle our nation and drag it down. These reviews, despite the effort, money and time they may require, are a necessary precondition to clarify our vision. They are essential to activating awareness programs that can help restore a sense of awareness to our nation.



KUWAIT: PAAET and KJA officials during the signing of the MoU.

PAAET and KJA sign MoU for local media training

KUWAIT: The Public Authority for Applied Education and Training has signed a memorandum of understanding with Kuwait Journalists Association to train local media workers and develop their skills in a number of institutions. Head of PAAET

Dr Hassan Al-Fajjam stressed the aim of this MoU is to provide private media training courses for employees of the authority.

"This will be a great addition to our employees, as more similar memoranda of understanding will

be signed," he said. Head of the training committee at KJA Fatimah Al-Azemi said: "We aim to encourage public relations and media practitioners through intensive training programs to improve education coverage."



Delegates attending the Digital Transformation Conference on Monday.

CAIT holds its second digital transformation conference

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: The Central Agency for Information Technology organized the Kuwait Digital Transformation Conference at the Grand Hyatt Hotel on Monday. The conference was attended by Dr Ammar Al-Hussaini, Deputy Director of CAIT. The focus of the conference was on adopting smart and digital technologies to innovate services, boost the economy and improve the quality of the life in line with the New Kuwait 2035 vision.

The second edition of the Kuwait Digital Transformation Conference was organized after the tremendous success of the first edition. It aimed to address the key developments and pressing challenges in the digital transformation journey in Kuwait through a series of presentations and discussion sessions involving digital



Dr. Ammar Al-Hussaini

transformation leaders in the state.

The conference proved to be a vital national platform that enables digital progress in Kuwait by bringing together leaders and experts in the information and communication technology industry to shed light on efforts, aspirations and plans for digitizing thriving sectors in Kuwait, such as the government, healthcare, education and financial sectors.

Customs thwarts bid to smuggle in chewing tobacco

KUWAIT: Customs officials thwarted an attempt to smuggle a large quantity of chewing tobacco (gutka) concealed inside a container arriving in the country. This interception followed the suspicion of customs inspectors regarding a container labeled "clothes and accessories". The container underwent a meticulous inspection, revealing a significant amount of chewing tobacco packs hidden behind crates of clothing and accessories inside the container.



The seized chewing tobacco (gutka) concealed inside a container.

CITRA officials attend Dubai WRC conference

DUBAI: The Kuwait Communications and Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA) announced on Monday its participation in the ITU World Radiocommunication Conference 2023 (WRC-23) in Dubai as part of its ongoing efforts to strengthen and develop the communications sector in order to enhance international cooperation and exchange knowledge and experiences.

The authority said in a statement to Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that the conference is responsible for organizing studies for the radiocommunication sector at the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) in Dubai, as the meeting seeks to raise the efficiency of the sector by discussing and adopting recommendations, committees and preparatory work for global telecommunication conferences.

It confirmed Kuwait's nomination as Vice-Chairman of the Budget Control Committee, which is one of the main committees of the Radiocommunication Society represented by Latifa Al-Muhanna from the Frequency Spectrum Department of the Authority.

The Authority stated that the nomination of the Director of the Frequency Spectrum Department, Tariq Al-Saif, was also approved to continue as Vice-Chairman of the Third Study Committee in the Wave Propagation Committee in the Assembly.

The World Radiocommunication Conference is responsible for organizing radio-communication studies and developing transportation and communications programs. It is held every three or four years and may coincide with radio-communication conferences. — KUNA



DUBAI: CITRA officials attend the Radio-communications Association (RA) conference in Dubai.

Local

Zain's Innovation Campus hosts Science Month open day event

Employees share STEM expertise with Giftedness Academy students



Zain employees shared their experiences with the students.



Event developed young people's technical skills.

KUWAIT: Under their strategic partnership to empower gifted young people, Zain and Sabah Al-Ahmad Center for Giftedness and Creativity (SACGC) – a center of the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS) have jointly hosted a special open day event for students from SACGC's Joint Academy School for Giftedness. During the event, some of Zain's outstanding employees shared their personal and professional journeys in STEM areas with the bright young students.

In partnership with KFAS and SACGC, under Zain's Innovation Nation initiative

This special program came under the umbrella of Zain's Innovation Nation initiative and KFAS' Science Month, where the Foundation and its centers celebrate Kuwait's scientific community and encourage young people to pursue STEM degrees and careers. This event is one of the successful outcomes of the two agreements Zain recently signed with KFAS and SACGC, both of which focus on a number of strategic pillars and sustainable goals like fostering innovation in the community, investing in young people's digital skills, supporting

entrepreneurs and startups, and more. The open day, held at Zain's Innovation Campus (ZINC), welcomed a number of talented young students from SACGC's Giftedness Academy, where various inspiring sessions were held to encourage the students to pursue their passions to drive their future careers. In addition, a number of outstanding Zain employees joined the open day to share their life experiences and professional successes with the students. The employees represented some of the company's core STEM-related departments like business intelligence, data office, drones division, and more. They also showcased Zain's success stories in embracing tech innovation to drive digital transformation in the community.

The event also witnessed a hands-on session where certified trainers from SACGC introduced the students to the fundamentals of 3D printing. The session aimed at developing the students' digital and technical skills to prepare them for the career market. This program came in line with Zain's Innovation Nation initiative, under which all of Zain's innovation and entrepreneurship programs fall, especially within science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) areas. The initiative mainly targets the youth, and centers around a number of pillars, including entrepreneurship, investment, startup acceleration, supporting inventors, fostering innovation, and more.



Students with Zain and SACGC officials.

Commerce minister inspects workflow

KUWAIT: Minister of Commerce, Industry, and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Mohammad Al-Aiban, accompanied by Undersecretary of the Ministry of Commerce Ziad Al-Najem, visited the Al-Siddiq Center for Commercial Control and the Central Operations Room to assess the mechanisms and progress of work. The purpose was to monitor and stay informed about the latest developments in the work plan of the Commercial Control Department, emergency response and inspection teams.

The visit aimed to evaluate compliance with directives aimed at tightening and intensifying control over the markets to prevent artificial price increases. These measures were implemented in response to recent financial increases approved for retirees. The ministry proactively took steps to monitor and control any potential future increases.

During the visit, Aiban learned about the daily



KUWAIT: Minister of Commerce, Industry, and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Mohammad Al-Aiban during his visit to the Al-Siddiq Center for Commercial Control and the Central Operations Room.

work plan and procedures of the various departments, including follow-up and coordination, the automated information center, the central operations room and the emergency control team. Each section provided detailed explanations of its workplan.

The discussions covered the mechanism for receiving complaints and reports, procedures for handling them, inspection protocols, reports detailing control violations and their statistics, monitoring of supply branches through the operations room's screens and the operation of mobile cameras used by inspectors to document their tours.

Aiban engaged with consumers by listening to calls at the call center and communicating with several individuals to gather their opinions on the service provided and to receive their suggestions and comments. At the conclusion of the visit, Aiban commended the work mechanisms in place and encouraged further efforts. He emphasized that employees and commercial control inspectors play a crucial role as the first line of defense in protecting consumers. Aiban stressed the importance of integrity in their work. He also directed an increase in inspection tours, vigilance, and focus to deter any violations of the law. Aiban emphasized a commitment to taking maximum penalties against violators and those attempting to exploit financial increases to raise the prices of goods.

Omariya nursery opens winter gardening season

KUWAIT: Amid a heavy turnout of horticulture and agricultural lovers of all kinds, Al-Omariya nursery opened its doors on Monday for a season of selling seedlings for the winter season 2023. The Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources considers this as an exceptional season and as such the activities will continue until the end of this year.

The nursery provides 650,000 seedlings of 80 varieties of plants, trees and plantings, and is being increased to one million seedlings before the end of the season. The seedlings are sold at nominal prices, sometimes 10 percent of their actual value in commercial nurseries.

The nursery is keen to provide hundreds of types of seedlings suitable for cultivation at home, gardens, roads or on land, in addition to providing guidance and advice and contributing to agricultural experiments to produce new types and varieties that could withstand the harsh climatic condition in Kuwait.

According to those in charge of the nursery, the plants — Mary's Palm, Arak and Sidr — are the most sought after ones, while some plants such as Vinca Rosa and Marigold are the most requested for flowers. For fruit, many prefer Jas-sim figs - berries - mint plants - basil and other seedlings for fruit trees such as oranges, grapes, berries, etc, or seedlings of rose trees such as oleander, roses or even leaves, in addition to ornamental plants. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Omariya Nursery provides 650,000 seedlings of 80 varieties of plants, trees and plantings.

For fifth year in a row, NBK sponsors TAMAKAN program

KUWAIT: For the fifth year in a row, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) sponsors "TAMAKAN" training program for fresh Kuwaiti graduates, as part of its strategic partnership with "Creative Confidence".

The online registration for TAMAKAN" training program for fresh Kuwaiti graduates continues through <https://www.creativeconfidence.co/tamakan/> until Dec 3, 2023. The program is an innovative training experience especially tailored for fresh Kuwaiti university graduates. It aims to support young Kuwaiti graduates to develop their skills, expand their capabilities and grow their knowledge in a way that will make them compelling candidates for employment. NBK will be hosting the program and providing a real business challenge that participants will work on into the final stages of the training sessions.



Asmaa Bin Hussain

The program will start on December 12 till February 22, 2024. TAMAKAN is a full-time commitment for 10 weeks, 5 days a week, from 8 am — 4 pm.

It's worth mentioning that the program won the "The Social Work Pioneer Project Award" from the GCC Council of Ministers of Social Affairs and Labor. Asmaa Bin Hussain, NBK Public Relations Officer, said: "We encourage Kuwaiti nationals who recently graduated from university and are currently unemployed, from all majors to apply". "The program helps participants gain real, relevant experience and develop their skills", she noted. "Participants will get exposed to the latest methods and tools that helps them in designing solutions and shaping ideas in any field. After completing the program, participants can add this experience to their resume."

As to the added value of the program, the graduates will gain real, relevant work experience and develop their skills to help them start their careers. They will get exposed to the latest methods and tools that will help them in designing solutions and shaping ideas in any field. TAMAKAN Program offers recent graduates a unique development opportunity before starting their first job. TAMAKAN is organized by Creative confidence in collaboration with NBK. Creative confidence is a Kuwaiti based consulting and training company that specializes in creativity, innovation and collaboration.

How technology is transforming Kuwait's dental care paradigm

Post-COVID, remote care becomes an integral part of practice

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: During the COVID-19 pandemic, technology played a pivotal role in transforming the dental industry, ensuring both patient care and practitioner safety, allowing dentists to assess and guide patients remotely, minimizing in-person visits for non-emergency cases. Kuwait Times spoke with Orthodontist Dr Mubarak Al-Saeed to learn more about how digital dentistry supports dental practices.

In the face of the pandemic, Dr Saeed, drawing on his expertise in digital dentistry, said adopting technology was a remarkable innovation to ensure continued care for patients. But operating in Jahra, a relatively remote area with a less tech-savvy population, the challenge was significant. However, a strategic decision was made to embrace virtual appointments, and this adaptation allowed him to reach and treat patients remotely, transcending geographical constraints and providing a vital solution during a time of restricted physical interactions.

"We started sending aligners directly to patients' homes and recording and monitoring their progress effectively. In fact, during the pandemic, 461 patients benefited from this approach. And due to the success, I decided to keep offering it to patients long after the pandemic," he noted.

"Currently, we are adopting a balanced approach, with roughly a 50/50 split between remote and in-person care. This has been a significant shift from our previous practice, where the majority of our care was in person. Our adoption of remote care, though initially prompted by the pandemic, has become an integral part of our practice. It has allowed us to con-

tinue delivering care effectively, offering convenience to patients and utilizing digital tools and AI to enhance the quality of care," Dr Saeed said.

"The dental field in the Middle East has recently undergone a massive paradigm shift when it comes to the adoption of digital technologies. Today, you can see hints of digital technology everywhere. However, this was not always the case. Not too long ago, fixed appliances or analog dental practices were considered the gold standard in this region, and many professionals still heavily depend on them," he pointed out.

Dr Saeed revealed that when digital dentistry and technology were first introduced, they were met with general skepticism. "3D imaging and scanning have greatly enhanced treatment precision. Digital tools like intraoral scanners have transformed the patient experience. The ability to visualize treatment outcomes using 3D models and simulations enhances patient education and decision-making. These are only a few of the many other benefits offered by the technology," he said. As for whether providing remote care has freed up more time, he said: "It is a bit of a double-edged sword. While remote care does offer flexibility and convenience, it also adds new processes and tasks, which can offset the time-saving aspect. Adopting digital dentistry without a doubt makes the practice more efficient by treating the same number of patients in less time, and it's up to the clinician to enjoy the freed-up time or treat more patients."

Dr Saeed revealed the dental industry in Kuwait has made it easier to adopt new technologies, saying that one of the technologies that satisfies patients is the face visualization tool, which shows the patients their smiles after they follow the treatment. "The whole process is digital

from start to end, and we use high-level technologies and scanners during consultation to show the patients the result before they make a decision. AI, in particular, has become a valuable part of our toolkit, in addition to virtual care to monitor patients even after their treatment is done, just to get an insight on how long-lasting the effect is and whether anything changes in the next couple of years," he explained.

In the field of orthodontics, Dr Saeed said that the speed of technological advancement continues to far outpace the rate of adoption in the field. It is essential to build a solid foundation with the fundamentals of orthodontics, as the basics are important. However, it's equally vital to keep an open and inquisitive eye towards emerging innovations. You don't want to find yourself lagging and hesitant to embrace new technologies or approaches, he cautioned.

Dr Saeed called other doctors to be willing to explore and learn about innovations, even if they challenge established practices, where those who stay receptive to change and innovation are more likely to thrive in this dynamic environment. "Embrace the opportunities that new technologies and methodologies offer, as they may hold the key to advancing both your career and the field as a whole," he advised.



Dr Mubarak Al-Saeed



Dr Abdel Fattah Muhammad Khader delivers the lecture.

Sharia and Islamic Studies College hosts lecture on Quran

KUWAIT: The Office of the Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs, Research and Graduate Studies at the College of Sharia and Islamic Studies at Kuwait University, in collaboration with the Master's Program in Quranic Sciences, organized a lecture as part of the "Hathiq" program series. The lecture, titled "The Language of the Noble Quran between Brevity and Redundancy", was delivered by visiting guest Dr Abdel Fattah Muhammad Khader, the Dean of the Faculty of the Noble Quran at Al-Azhar University. The event took place on Tuesday at the Faculty of Sharia at the Kaifan campus.

Dr Saud Al-Ajmi extended a warm welcome to the guest and the attendees, including college students. Dr Khader addressed the audience, exploring the concepts of brevity and redundancy in the Holy Quran and delving into the perspectives of scholars on these linguistic aspects. He also discussed the rhetorical purposes associated with each of these linguistic forms.

Concluding his speech, Dr Khader emphasized the miraculous nature of brevity and redundancy in the Holy Quran. He wrapped up the lecture by providing practical examples and applications from the Holy Quran to illustrate the themes discussed.

In his closing remarks, Dr Ajmi expressed gratitude to the visiting guest for dedicating time to the students of the College of Sharia and Islamic Studies at Kuwait University and for delivering this insightful lecture.

EPA launches Kuwait's 'Low Carbon Strategy'

KUWAIT: The Environment Public Authority launched on Monday Kuwait's 'Low Carbon Strategy 2050' to confirm its commitment to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in cooperation with the United Nations Environment Program and various concerned sectors in the country to participate in reducing its emissions and launching and implementing this strategy.

Acting Director General of the Authority Samira Al-Kandari said that Kuwait is the second country in the Gulf and the Arab region to present its strategy, as it was preceded by the sisterly State of Oman.

"This strategy will be presented at the Conference of the Parties to the Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP28), which will be held in Abu Dhabi on November 30 and continue until December 12," she said.

Al-Kandari stressed Kuwait's commitment to the Convention on Climate Change in all items, especially the submission of national communications, the adaptation plan, and this strategy, which aims to reach carbon neutrality in 2026, at a time when Kuwait aspires to reduce its emissions to 60 percent by concerted efforts, and if cooperation continues, it will reach 80 percent.

She pointed to Kuwait's support for the efforts made by the United Nations to combat climate change since the Rio Conference in 1992 through its active participation in negotiations aimed at reducing the negative effects of this phenomenon.

"Kuwait was making unremitting efforts to combat that phenomenon in accordance with the principles and provisions contained in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris



Climate Agreement and to implement them in effective and sustainable ways as binding legal tools and the basis for international cooperation in that field," she added.

Al-Kandari stated that combating the phenomenon of climate change is a common international responsibility despite the different burdens and disparities in capacities, justice and sustainable development in developing countries, stressing the importance of harnessing the potential in line with their national priorities and capabilities in order to reduce emissions that cause climate change.

For his part, the Regional Representative of the United Nations Environment Program and Director of the Regional Office for West Asia, Sami Dimasi, said in a speech delivered on his behalf by the Coordinator of Climate Change Programs at the program, Tariq Al-Khouri, that the Authority's submission of this strategy reflects Kuwait's keenness to fulfill its obligations, especially under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement.

Khouri said that the world is under real threat due to climate change and the earth is currently living in an era of



Samira Al-Kandari



Sherif Al-Khayyat



Tariq Al-Khouri

global turmoil, as described by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, as last July witnessed a record rise in temperatures, while different regions of the world are witnessing natural disasters such as hurricanes, floods and fires.

In turn, the Director of the Air Quality Monitoring Department at the Environment Public Authority, Sherif Al-Khayyat, said in his speech that this strategy aims to enhance resilience in Kuwait in the face of the effects of climate change and provides a comprehensive roadmap that includes ways to achieve sustainable economic growth through the use of integrated technical and innovative solutions in the field of circular carbon economy.—KUNA

Kuwaiti researcher wins 'Distinguished Service' award

KUWAIT: Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR) said on Monday, that KISR Efficiency Technologies Program Manager Dr Fotouh Al-Raqum, has received the "Distinguished Service" award from the United States Association of Energy Engineers (AEE), for her scientific and research contributions in the field of energy efficiency.

In a statement, KISR said that Al-Raqum won many local, regional and international awards during her 20-year scientific career, and still providing important research contributions to invest in technology outcomes that help respond to the requirements of the future and Kuwait needs.

KFAS hosts regional workshop on 'Strategic Foresight'

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS) hosted a regional workshop entitled 'Strategic Foresight', organized by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), West Asia Office, and concluded Monday. The Foundation said in a press statement that the workshop, which was launched on Sunday, serves as a regional platform to review and discuss forward-looking global outputs and data from a regional perspective by involving regional experts in various environmental issues such as climate

change, biodiversity, pollution and others.

The statement quoted the representative of the United Nations Environment Program and the Regional Director of the West Asia Office, Sami Demasi, as saying that the aim of the workshop is to strengthen the global foresight results prepared by the program by giving the social and cultural context of West Asia and highlighting concerns for the future in the region.

He added that the workshop was held at the e-learning center of the Central Library at Kuwait University, Sabah Al-Salem University City in Al-Shadadiya area. About 40 environmental experts and strategic thinkers from West Asian countries participated in it, in addition to representatives from Kuwait University, the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research, the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences and the Environment Public Authority.—KUNA



Dr Fotouh Al-Raqum



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President-elect Milei vows 'end of Argentina's decline'

Hundreds found guilty in historic Italian mafia trial

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GAZA: A Palestinian woman walks on building rubble following a Zionist strike in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on Nov 20, 2023. — AFP photos

As temperatures drop, Gazans struggle to find warm clothes

'If we don't die in the bombing we will die of hunger or thirst, sickness and cold'

RAFAH: When Khulud Jarboueh and her children fled their home in the northern Gaza Strip under Zionist bombardment in early October, the young ones were wearing just shorts and T-shirts. The heat of late summer still lingered then. But now she rummages through piles of clothing looking for something to keep them warm in the rain and bitter cold.

"We left Gaza City with 20 members of the family more than a month ago," the 29-year-old told AFP at a second-hand clothes stall outside a school in Rafah run by the UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA). They had left the north of the Palestinian territory after the Zionist entity warned people to flee south, saying it was safer there.

The exodus came after the Zionist military began a relentless bombardment of Gaza in response to Hamas men infiltrating the border on Oct 7, attacking Zionist military bases and settlements. Around 1,200 people, mostly civilians, were killed that day, according to Zionist officials, and around 240 were taken captive by Hamas.

Seven weeks of Zionist strikes have killed more than 12,000 people, a third of them children, according to Palestinian officials.

Now Jarboueh and her family sleep on the floor of the UNRWA school. "We didn't take any clothes with us. But now it's cold and I have to buy winter stuff," she said at the stall where items of clothing go for a shekel each (around \$0.25).

'No other choice'

Even before the war, life in the Gaza Strip was difficult. The United Nations estimates that in 2022, the blockade the Zionist entity had enforced against the territory since 2007 had "hollowed out Gaza's economy". "The restrictions on movement also impede access to health and other essential services, as 80 percent of Gazans depend on international aid," said UNCTAD, the UN Conference on Trade and Development.

Unemployment in the densely populated strip of land was 45 percent. Today, the UN says, all 2.4 million people in Gaza are going hungry, and 1.65 million have been displaced by the war. With almost half the houses in Gaza destroyed or damaged, poverty will only get worse. "It's the first time in my life I've had to buy second-hand clothes," said Jarboueh. "We're not rich, but I can usually afford to pay 10 shekels for an item of clothing for the children. "Now

they're coughing because it's so cold. I have no other choice."

She said she was sure the old clothes were "full of germs". "But they're going to have to put them straight on. I don't have the water to shower my children, let alone do the laundry." On a road lined with stalls, hundreds of Palestinians held up items to check sizes or compare fabrics. The temperature has now dropped and downpours are common.

'This is no life'

Farmer Walid Sheh said he has been uprooted from his land and does not have a shekel to his name. He camps at the UNRWA school each night with his wife and 13 children. "I can't stand it, seeing my children still in their summer clothes go hungry, and I know I can't buy them anything," he told AFP. "This is no life. They force us from our homes and kill us in cold blood. If we don't die in the bombing we will die of hunger or thirst, sickness and cold," he said.

Sheh said that when they left after their house was bombed they brought blankets with them. "But on the road, the Zionist soldiers told us to drop everything and keep our hands up." He said some



KHAN YUNIS: Displaced Palestinian children, who fled the northern Gaza Strip due to Zionist bombardment, stand under a makeshift shelter south of the besieged strip.

people gave them warmer clothing their own children had outgrown.

Adel Harzallah, who runs a clothes shop, said his stock of winter pajamas sold out in two days. "The war began when we were waiting for winter wear to arrive. It was due to come across the border" but that was shut after the Oct 7 attacks.

Now his goods were stuck in containers, like food, drinking water and fuel. One

potential customer left Harzallah's store disappointed. "Seventy shekels for a jacket? I can't pay that — I've got five kids," she said. Abdelnasser Abu Dia, 27, told AFP he "doesn't have enough to buy bread, let alone clothes". For a month he had only the clothes in which he fled. But as the temperature dropped, "someone gave me and my kids sportswear jackets. We've been wearing them non-stop for a week." — AFP

'Urgent' steps needed to ease Gaza crisis: Beijing

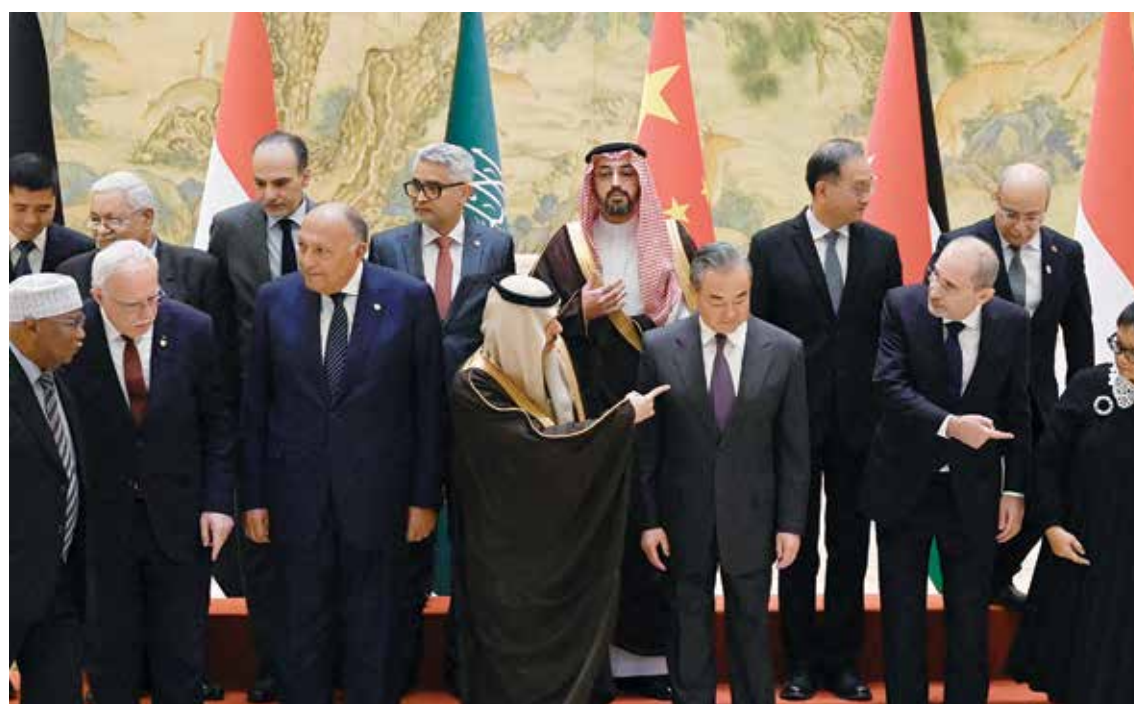
BEIJING: Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said Monday the world must "act urgently" to calm the Zionist war on Palestine as he hosted diplomats from Arab and Muslim-majority nations in Beijing. A delegation of foreign ministers of the Palestinian Authority, Indonesia, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan are in Beijing this week for talks aimed at a "de-escalation" of the current escalation in the 75-year Zionist occupation of Palestine. "Let us work together to quickly cool down the situation in Gaza and restore peace in the Middle East as soon as possible," Wang told ministers at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in the Chinese capital.

"A humanitarian disaster is unfolding in Gaza," Wang told the delegates, including the secretary-general of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. "The situation in Gaza affects all countries around the world, questioning the human sense of right and wrong and humanity's bottom line," he said. "The international community must act urgently, taking effective measures to prevent this tragedy from spreading," Beijing's top diplomat added.

'Good friends'

Following the Zionist attack on Gaza, Chinese officials, including Foreign Minister Wang, called for an immediate ceasefire and a "cooling down" of the situation. China has historically been sympathetic to the Palestinians and supportive of a two-state solution to the Zionist-Palestinian conflict.

And it has this year sought to play a greater



BEIJING: China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi (front row center right) poses for a group photo with Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al-Saud (front row center left), Jordan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi (front row second right) and other Arab and Muslim officials before a meeting of foreign ministers on Nov 20, 2023. — AFP

role in the Middle East, facilitating a historic rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran and sending an envoy to the region to push for a ceasefire in the Zionist war on Palestine.

Wang told the diplomats on Monday that Beijing was "a good friend and brother of Arab and Muslim countries". "We have always firmly defended the legitimate rights and interests of Arab and Muslim countries and have always firmly supported the Palestinian people's efforts to restore their legitimate national rights and interests," he

said. "China firmly stands with justice and fairness in this conflict."

The Palestinian Authority's foreign minister Riyad al-Maliki accused the Zionist entity of seeking to "bring to an end the Palestinian people's presence on what remains of its historical land". And Prince Faisal bin Farhan, Saudi Arabia's top diplomat, said Riyadh was "seeking more cooperation with our friends in China" with a view to "work towards ending this crisis and this grave situation as quickly as possible". — AFP

UN protectorate in Gaza not a solution: Guterres

UNITED NATIONS: A UN protectorate in Gaza would not solve the conflict there, the body's Secretary-General said Monday, calling instead for a "transition period" involving Arab nations and the United States and leading to a two-state solution.

Antonio Guterres said it was "important to be able to transform this tragedy into an opportunity" — which, for him, meant moving "in a determined and irreversible way to a two-state solution." This means, after the current Zionist on Gaza ends, "a strengthened Palestinian Authority, assuming responsibilities in Gaza," he said.

But the Palestinian Authority cannot go into Gaza backed by Zionist tanks, he added — meaning the "international community needs to look into a transition period." "I do not think that a UN protectorate in Gaza is a solution," however, Guterres said. Instead, he called for a "multi-stakeholder approach" that would see the US act as the "main guarantor" of the Zionist entity's security, while Arab nations are "essential" to support Palestinians.

"Everybody needs to come together to create the conditions for the transition, allowing for a strengthened Palestinian Authority to assume responsibilities in Gaza," and from there to a two-state solution, he said. Guterres also again denounced the killing of civilians — especially children — in Gaza. — AFP

International

Hundreds found guilty in historic Italian mafia trial

Verdict significant blow to 'Ndrangheta mafia which monopolizes European cocaine trade

LAMEZIA TERME: An Italian court on Monday convicted and sentenced around 200 mobsters and their white-collar helpers, the culmination of a historic, nearly three-year trial against Calabria's notorious 'Ndrangheta mafia. For over an hour and a half, the president of the court in southern Vibo Valentia, Brigida Cavasino, read out the names of the guilty and their sentences, which ranged from 30 years to a few months, as defendants incarcerated in prisons across the country watched via videolink.

Prosecutors had asked for guilty verdicts against 322 accused mafia members operating in the Calabrian province and their white-collar collaborators, requesting 30 years for a dozen of the 'Ndrangheta's most seasoned decision-makers. About 200 were convicted and sentenced on Monday, although only four top members received this maximum penalty. The remainder were either formally or effectively acquitted.

One of the trial's most high-profile defendants, 70-year-old former parliamentarian and defense lawyer Giancarlo Pittelli, accused of being a fixer for the mafia, received 11 years, short of the 17 years prosecutors requested. A few dozen family members sat in the back of the vast, narrow courtroom, squinting at the television screens for a glimpse of their loved ones, and occasionally crying out with joy over a light sentence. The verdicts — which can be appealed twice — capped Italy's largest mafia trial in decades and mark the most significant blow to date against one of the world's most powerful organized crime syndicates.

Stranglehold over territory

The 'Ndrangheta has moved beyond its roots in the poor southern Italian region of Calabria to exercise near-monopoly on the European cocaine trade and is now found in more than 40 countries worldwide. Since the trial began in January 2021, the court has heard thou-

sands of hours of testimony, including from more than 50 former mafia operatives turned state witnesses.

They and others have detailed countless examples of the 'Ndrangheta's brutality and its stranglehold over the local population. They include carrying out violent ambushes, shaking down business owners, rigging public tenders, stockpiling weapons, collecting votes or passing kickbacks to the powerful.

The accused were members or affiliates of the top 'Ndrangheta "clan" in Vibo Valentia, one of the region's many economically depressed rural areas where the mafia has suffocated the local economy, infiltrated public institutions and terrorized its people for decades. The territory's undisputed boss, Luigi "The Supreme" Mancuso, 69, was cut from the defendants list last year to be tried separately.

'We don't want you'

Hundreds of lawyers and a few dozen members of the media attended the sentencing Monday in the heavily secured courtroom bunker in the Calabrian city of Lamezia Terme. Also present was Rocco Mangiardi, 67, a local businessman and one of the first to denounce the 'Ndrangheta for extortion before a judge in 2009.

Mangiardi, who has lived under police escort ever since, lamented the low turnout for the trial's most important moment. "This courtroom should be filled with citizens," he told AFP. "To show the judges that we're on their side and then to tell the mafiosi with their presence 'We don't want you.'"

The 'Ndrangheta of Vibo Valentia — whose members have nicknames straight out of Hollywood like "The Wolf", "Fat-tie", "Sweetie" and "Lamb Thigh" — were entrenched in the local economy, feared by business owners and farmers, and protected by white-collar professionals and politicians.

Informants — a relatively rare phenomenon within the 'Ndrangheta due



LAMEZIA TERME: Lawyers wait for the reading of the verdict during the maxi mafia "Scott Rebirth" trial on Nov 20, 2023. — AFP

to blood ties between members — recounted how weapons were hidden in cemetery chapels and ambulances used to transport drugs, and municipal water supplies diverted to marijuana crops. Those who opposed the mafia found dead puppies, dolphins or goat heads dumped on their doorsteps, sledgehammers taken to store fronts or cars torched. Less lucky were those beaten or fired at — or those whose bodies were never found.

Challenging the mafia

Long dismissed as mere livestock thieves, the 'Ndrangheta flourished under the radar

for decades as authorities concentrated efforts against Sicily's Cosa Nostra — defendants in the first, now-legendary maxi-trial of 1986-1987 in Palermo.

Today, mafia experts estimate that the 'Ndrangheta, made up of approximately 150 Calabrian families and their associates, bring in more than 50 billion euros (\$53 billion) annually around the world from drug trafficking, usury, syphoning public funds and extortion.

Relying on frontmen, shell companies and favors from the elite, the 'Ndrangheta reinvests illegal gains in the legitimate economy, cementing its power. For the first time in

such trials, the defendants list included many non-mafia members, including a high-ranking police official, mayors and other public servants and businessmen.

Mafia expert Antonio Nicaso told AFP ahead of the sentencing that although the maxi-trial was important, much needs yet to be done to eradicate the 'Ndrangheta. "It's about freeing the territory. The need to provide jobs, invest more money in education, challenging the mentality of people, building a sense of trust in institutions. "That's what you need to challenge a criminal organization." — AFP

'Like a video game': Japan's gangs hire online

TOKYO: Risa Yamada grew up fatherless and struggled to find consistent work until she stumbled on an intriguing job listing: one of a growing number of advertisements posted on social media by Japanese criminal gangs. Hired to impersonate a police officer, she thrived, wheedling hundreds of thousands of dollars out of Japan's many lonely, wealthy and naive elderly people on the phone.

"I didn't think I could ever work a normal job," the 27-year-old told a Tokyo court in July before being sentenced to three years in jail. "For the first time in my life, I was told I was good at something... the job made me feel I was needed," she said.

The young woman was far from the only unlikely criminal to be attracted by a "yami baito" — a black-market part-time job — ad on X, formerly Twitter, and other platforms. For Japan's criminal underworld, social media offers an anonymous way to con-

nect with anyone from teenagers to pensioners who are willing to commit crimes to earn money. In 2022, damage incurred by yami baito crime rings and other organized fraudsters soared 30 percent from the previous year to top 37 billion yen (around \$250 million), the first increase in eight years.

Gateway

Black-market job advertisements have long appeared in Japanese magazines or on stickers in public toilets. But thanks to their proliferation online, recruiters now can "just relax in an air-conditioned room, sip coffee and use your mobile to assemble a group of robbers," criminal sociologist Noboru Hirotsue said.

Online platforms, especially encrypted messaging apps like Telegram and Signal, also help gangs remain nameless and untraceable. A 57-year-old former yami baito hiree described how his supervisor would direct him via Telegram to drop parcels of illicit cash in train station lockers in Tokyo. "It's like you're in a video game, where you're given tasks, complete missions and get rewards," the man, who spent time in jail but now works at a hostel, said on the condition of anonymity.

At the end of each day, anonymous Telegram messages with emojis would thank him for his work and tell him where his day's pay lay hidden, wait-

ing for him. "You don't even feel guilty because you don't see anyone," he said.

Champagne celebrations

In January a 90-year-old Tokyo woman died after being tied up and beaten in her house by several men looking for valuables. The perpetrators of the assault, which shocked Japan and focused police attention on the problem of yami baito crimes, had reportedly been hired through online ads.

The kingpins were a Philippines-based gang of Japanese men, who reportedly used Telegram to direct a team of underlings who carried out break-ins and fraud schemes across Japan. Those hired to go into crime have varying reasons for doing so. But for a 31-year-old former low-ranking member of an organized fraud group, it was to "earn extra money so I can go a bit crazy".

Donning a suit, he would pose as a bank official and visit the homes of elderly people, convincing them to hand over their cash cards. The gig earned him nearly 10 million yen (\$66,000) in just a few months, he told AFP. "All I could think about was I could get wasted again that night ... drinking expensive champagne at hostess bars." He was eventually jailed for two years.

Exploited

Police have been scrambling to get criminal ads taken down and have offered rewards of up to 1 million yen (about \$6,600) for information on the gangs behind them. Criminal recruits are being "exploited and disposed of as pawns" by gang leaders, the National Police Agency said in a statement to AFP.

Of the roughly 13,100 people arrested on organized fraud charges between 2018 and 2022, only two percent had occupied high-ranking gang positions, police records show. Tales abound of applicants being forced to disclose personal information about themselves and their families, including home addresses, in case they quit.

X could not be reached for a comment, and Telegram said it "proactively" monitors public parts of the platform and that users can report private groups. Yamada found out how ugly things can get after she was sent an air ticket and flown to the Philippines in 2019 by the gang that had hired her on X.

There she and other recruits were trained to make hundreds of cold calls to elderly residents in Japan while cooped up in a hotel under close surveillance, fearing for their lives. She believes a fellow recruit was murdered. When she was eventually arrested, she said, "I thought I would finally be set free." — AFP

Zionists hit Gaza's Kuwait School...

Continued from Page 1

After another Gaza building was hit, in Deir al-Balah south of Gaza City on Sunday, rescuers searched through the debris for survivors and bodies, using the lights of their mobile phones. "There are only children and women in the house and no one else," exclaimed one resident. "How can that give them (the Zionist army) an excuse to hit it? ... We don't have any equipment to pull people out from under the rubble."

Alarm has surged over the dire humanitarian situation across Gaza where cold autumn rain has deepened the misery by soaking families living in tents and turning dust to mud. The WHO warned of spreading sickness with 44,000 cases of diarrhea and 70,000 acute respiratory infections registered in shelters. A field hospital sent by Jordan entered Gaza on Monday to treat patients in the south despite "catastrophic conditions" marked by "aggressive aerial and artillery strikes," said Mohammed Zaqout, director-general of Gaza hospitals.

As intense urban combat raged in northern Gaza,

many thousands more fled south on Sunday, said the UN humanitarian agency. Families walked along cracked roads as gunshots and explosions rang out in the distance. "It's like the apocalypse," said one tearful woman, Renad Al-Helou. "We are tired. There's no water, no food ... There's nothing left in Gaza. There's only destruction, suffering and torture."

The Zionist army said Sunday it was taking the Gaza fight against Hamas to "additional neighborhoods". Artillery and airstrikes destroyed several houses in Gaza City, and doctors at the Al-Ahli hospital told AFP they had received dozens of dead and injured. Zionist forces were also reportedly pounding southern Gaza, where Doctors Without Borders said 122 casualties had arrived at a facility in Khan Yunis, 70 of them dead on arrival.

The Gaza war has sparked fears of a wider conflagration in the Middle East where the Zionist entity has long faced archenemy Iran and its allies.

Zionist tanks, a fighter jet and a helicopter struck the Iran-backed group Hezbollah in Lebanon on Monday, in response to earlier missile launches, the army said. Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels on Sunday said they had seized in the Red Sea a cargo ship owned by a Zionist businessman. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said the ship "was hijacked with Iran guidance by the Yemenite Houthi militia", an allegation Iran rejected on Monday. — AFP

Rosalynn Carter was born in the small town of Plains on Aug 18, 1927, as the first of four children. At 13 her father died and she worked alongside her mother, who became a dressmaker to make ends meet. She met Jimmy Carter in 1945 while she was in college and he was on leave from the US Naval Academy in Annapolis. They married in 1946, and hold several longevity records in US politics: The longest-wed presidential couple and, for 99-year-old Jimmy Carter, the oldest living US president.

Former first ladies Michelle Obama and Melania Trump paid tribute to Carter's legacy. "When our family was in the White House, every so often, Rosalynn would join me for lunch, offering a few words of advice and always — always — a helping hand," Obama said. — AFP

Experts warn Sudan could...

Continued from Page 1

negotiations this month, some fear a new, fragmented status quo.

Since April 15, the war between army chief Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan and his former deputy, RSF commander Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, has forced about six million people to flee both within Sudan and across borders. By the end of last month, it had killed over 10,000 people, according to a conservative estimate by the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project.

But in November, new reports of massacres began to emerge amid a major offensive by the RSF in the vast Darfur region, where they quickly claimed control of army bases in all but one major city. In Ardamata alone, in West Darfur, the United Nations reported that nearly 100 shelters housing displaced people were razed to the ground, with fighters going house to house killing civilians and more than 8,000 people fleeing to neighboring Chad in one week.

Preliminary reports indicate hundreds have been killed, but with Darfur under an ongoing communications blackout, civilians have struggled to document the full scale of the violence. The European Union said on Nov 12 it was "appalled" by reports of more than 1,000 people killed in "just over two days". Organizations and civilians have both blamed the RSF and allied Arab militia, which have carried out a targeted campaign against the region's Massalit tribes, including the assassination of tribal leaders. Across Darfur, home to about a quarter of Sudan's 48 million people, over 1.5 million have been internally displaced since the war began.

With Burhan and the government having retreated to Port Sudan, fears of division have spiraled. According to political analyst and journalist Fayed

al-Salik, failure to reach a political solution could lead to a situation similar to Libya, with "more than one government, with no real effectiveness or international recognition". Though Daglo has friends in high places, Burhan has maintained his role as de facto head of state on the global stage, recently attending both UN and Arab League summits. But on the ground, the RSF's unbridled spread through Darfur "gives it home advantage and allows it to move within its own social base", Salik said, referring to the region's Arab tribes.

The RSF's predecessor, the Janjaweed, stemmed from Arab tribal militias armed by former dictator Omar al-Bashir to quash dissent amongst non-Arab minorities. That war, which began in 2003, killed hundreds of thousands, displaced over two million and saw Bashir indicted for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide by the International Criminal Court. The UN has warned history is repeating itself, and the ICC has launched a fresh investigation.

According to one military expert, even with the RSF offensive, the chances of either side claiming a decisive victory remain slim. "The RSF's expansion does give it an open line between the capital and Darfur, but that's a very long line," he told AFP, speaking on condition of anonymity out of fear for his safety. The vast western region is nearly the size of France, "and a lot of it is open areas the army can attack by air", he explained.

But with the RSF now controlling most of Darfur, key oil infrastructure, parts of central Sudan and much of the capital itself, he said an army victory is also unlikely. "Even if they succeed in taking control of Khartoum, which is very difficult, sending forces to regain areas of Darfur from RSF control would be a massive logistical challenge." To get from Khartoum to El Geneina, on Sudan's western border, the army would have to fight across over 1,400 km — about the distance between Berlin and Kyiv. — AFP

Former US first lady Rosalynn...

Continued from Page 1

Joe Biden and First Lady Jill Biden said in a statement, pointing to the Carters' "deep love" as the "definition of partnership". And fellow Democrats former president Bill Clinton and former first lady Hillary Clinton said they were "deeply grateful" for Carter's service, calling her "a compassionate and committed champion of human dignity".

International

President-elect Milei vows 'end of Argentina's decline'

Chainsaw-wielding far-right outsider to slash spending in country big on welfare

BUENOS AIRES: Libertarian outsider Javier Milei swept to victory in Argentina's presidential election Sunday, vowing to halt decades of economic decline in a country reeling from triple-digit inflation. The self-described "anarcho-capitalist" pulled off a massive upset by ousting the populist Peronist coalition which has long dominated Argentine politics.

With 55.7 percent of the vote, Milei thumped his rival, Economy Minister Sergio Massa, who won 44 percent of the vote and rapidly conceded defeat. "Today begins the reconstruction of Argentina. Today begins the end of Argentina's decline," Milei said in his victory speech. "The model of decadence has come to an end. There is no way back."



A supporter of Javier Milei celebrates his victory in the presidential election runoff while wearing a chainsaw helmet.

Latin America's third-biggest economy has suffered decades of crises under interventionist governments big on welfare that resort to printing money to finance spending, fueling inflation, while borrowing heavily only to default on their debt. Access to dollars is strictly controlled, leading to a thriving black market for greenbacks, and analysts warn the peso is ripe for a sharp devaluation.

"There is no room for gradualism ... or half-measures," said Milei. Milei's main platform has been a plan to ditch the ailing peso for the US dollar and "dynamite" the Central Bank to do away with the "cancer

of inflation." Analysts, however, warn the country is too low on dollar reserves for the move to happen anytime soon. "This is the change that us young people want. I am not afraid of Milei, I am afraid my dad won't be able to pay his rent. The Argentine peso isn't worth a thing," said Juan Ignacio Gomez, 17.

No business with 'communists'

Thousands of Milei supporters waved flags and chanted "freedom" as they celebrated outside his campaign headquarters. "We are tired of Peronism. Milei is an unknown, but better a madman than a thief," said 50-year-old writer Nacho Larranaga, wearing the blue-and-white Argentine flag as a cape.

Milei, a 53-year-old economist with wild hair and thick sideburns, has drawn comparisons with former US president Donald Trump and Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro for his abrasive style and controversial remarks. Both former presidents congratulated him on social media. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Washington "(looks) forward to working with President-elect Milei and his government on shared priorities." Milei had vowed on the campaign trail to cut ties with his country's top trading partners Brazil and China, saying he would not "do business with communists."

Following Milei's victory, Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva wished "good luck and success" to the new Argentine government. China said Monday it would continue working with Argentina, congratulating the president-elect on his victory. "China has always attached great importance to the development of China-Argentina relations from a strategic and long-term perspective," foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said at a regular briefing.

Milei is against abortion, has insulted Pope Francis, questioned the death toll under Argentina's brutal dictatorship and says humans are not causing climate change. He took to the stage in his campaign wielding a powered-up chainsaw to symbolize the drastic cuts he plans to make to a bloated state.

'The lesser evil'

Milei's red-faced rants against the "thieving and corrupt political class" struck a nerve with Argentines



BUENOS AIRES: Argentine presidential candidate Javier Milei (left) celebrates with supporters after winning the presidential election runoff at his party headquarters in Buenos Aires on Nov 19, 2023. - AFP photos

struggling to make ends meet and fed up with politicians they see as the architects of their misery. He carried out much of his campaign on TikTok and other social media, firing up young people.

Others were spooked by his style in an election that has polarized the nation. Teacher Catalina Miguel, 42, among a dejected crowd at Massa's campaign headquarters said she was in "shock." "Milei will find us on the street defending every right he seeks to challenge. Half of Argentina does not support him."

On the other end of Milei's chainsaw are millions of Argentines who depend on welfare assistance and generous government subsidies of fuel, electricity and transport — with bus tickets costing only a few cents. Meanwhile, the country's coffers are in the red, with \$44 billion debt with the International Monetary Fund

looming over the incoming government.

'Quick decisions'

Political analyst Ana Iparraguirre said that Argentines should brace themselves. "Whoever comes into office has to make some quick decisions that are going to hurt people." As Milei is set to take office on Dec 10, leaving his rival Massa still in charge of the economy for three weeks, analysts predict a rocky ride with the strictly controlled peso ripe for devaluation.

Michael Shifter of the Inter-American Dialogue think-tank in Washington said Argentina "is part of the regional trend of a real weakening of political parties and the emergence of an outsider who ... has a powerful message that resonates: just get rid of the political class and then everything will be ok." - AFP

Trump pledges new migrant crackdown in Mexico border visit

EDINBURG, United States: Donald Trump took his presidential campaign down to the border with Mexico on Sunday, doubling down on the hardline immigration rhetoric that was a hallmark of his first White House term. The Republican leader asserted that border security had evaporated under President Joe Biden, with "gangs of thugs" pouring into the US. "We're going to take over that border and we're going to make it the most secure border in our history," Trump said.

He was speaking to a supportive group of border guards and Texas Governor Greg Abbott, a like-minded Republican who has endorsed Trump's 2024 campaign. In recent weeks, the former president has ramped up his campaign rhetoric to extreme levels, warning that undocumented migrants are "poisoning the blood of our country" and denouncing his political opponents as "vermin."

'The enemy'

He employed similar language Sunday, referring to some migrants as "the enemy" and predicting that 15 million undocumented migrants would be in the country by the end of Biden's first term — a number millions larger than estimates by most non-governmental groups. Abbott, like Trump, has pursued hard-line immigration policies, including installing a 1,000-foot (330-meter) floating barrier in the Rio Grande that critics say imperils migrants attempting to cross.

The Texas legislature recently passed a bill that would make entry into the state without papers a crime punishable by up to two years in jail. The bill would also allow Texas officers to arrest anyone they believed was in the state without proper documentation, a power that critics say is sure to be abused. Abbott has vowed to sign the measure into law. The Trump campaign has made clear that if the real estate tycoon returns to the White House, he will engineer a tough crackdown on the undocumented, reportedly including huge detention camps and mass deportations.

Biden under fire

Texas has been a reliably conservative bastion for Trump as he looks forward to the 2024 elections, and he holds huge leads both there and nationwide over his Republican rivals. Trump and Abbott blame Biden for the current migrant crisis, as thousands of people flow into the country from Latin American countries beset by crime, poverty and violence.

How Biden handles the crisis could play a major role in the 2024 election — and the president's outlook doesn't appear to be promising. Biden is already facing a wave of intense criticism after his administration announced last October it would build up to 32 km of new border barrier in sections across rural Starr county in Texas. Democrats after the president's administration waived 26 federal laws to allow the wall construction, its first use of a sweeping executive power that was often employed under Donald Trump. And that's even though President Biden previously pledged he would not add another foot of border wall.

Biden met Friday with Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador on the sidelines of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum in San Francisco, and thanked the Mexican leader for his "cooperation" over the migrant crisis. Lopez Obrador, in turn, thanked Biden for being the first recent president "who has not built walls." But the Mexican leader blasted the Texas border bill, saying it would lead to family separation, discrimination and racial profiling. — Agencies



LAPANG BARAT: A UNHCR worker talks to Rohingya refugees, who were earlier refused landing twice by local communities and left stranded off the coast, following their arrival at a village community hall. - AFP

Why locals don't welcome Rohingya refugees in Indonesia

BIREUEN: As a rickety wooden boat carrying Rohingya refugees approached the shores of western Indonesia, several desperate men swam ashore to plead that the vessel be allowed to land after weeks at sea. But the calls of the men — some of whom collapsed to the sand in exhaustion — fell on deaf ears.

Local communities twice prevented the vessel packed with 256 Rohingyas, heavily persecuted in Myanmar, from landing before it finally reached the shore on Sunday. "I felt sad, because they are humans. But what can we do?" said 53-year-old Acehese fisherman Aswadi, who like many Indonesians has one name.

Roughly 800 Rohingyas have arrived in Indonesia's Aceh province in at least five vessels over the past week. More than a million Rohingya have fled Myanmar since the 1990s, most in the wake of a 2017 military crackdown that is now subject to a UN genocide investigation. The bulk of them have settled in camps in Bangladesh.

But many have for years also sought to travel more than 4,000 kilometers (2,500 miles) to Malaysia, fueling a multi-million dollar human-smuggling operation that often involves stopovers in Indonesia. More than 100,000 Rohingya live in Muslim-majority Malaysia. The latest wave of arrivals coincides with the end of the stormy season in the region, allowing boats to set sail from Bangladesh.

Desperation

Although the refugees on the refused boat were eventually allowed to land, their status in Aceh is far from assured, and locals say they could still force the newcomers back to sea. Many Acehese, who themselves have memories of decades of bloody conflict, have long been sympathetic to the plight of their fellow Muslim refugees.

But some say their patience has been tested, claiming Rohingyas consume scarce resources and occasionally come into conflict with locals. There are also fears about keeping track of the new arrivals, who have sometimes run away from shelters to be smuggled to more affluent Malaysia.

Some Rohingyas have been accused of working for the smuggling networks ferrying refugees to Malaysia, further heightening tensions with the local Acehese. "It's not that we don't care about humanity, but these people sometimes run away. We fear bad things will happen," said Rahmat Kartolo, a village chief in northern Aceh. Some in the Aceh fishing community said they thought they were helping the refugees by setting them back to sea. "Let them sail to a safe place. This place is not good. There is no food," said 61-year-old Nurelawati, who also goes by one name. "We want to help but we can't."

Locals brought the Rohingyas rice, noodles and water in the first village where they attempted to land. But residents turned the refugees back because they had "caused disturbances" before, said village head Mukhtaruddin, 55. "Number one, there is no place. Number two, because of the Rohingyas' behavior," he said. Sending the refugees back to sea can be a death sentence. Nearly 200 Rohingyas died or went missing last year while attempting hazardous sea crossings, UNHCR estimated.

'Everyone cried'

Before the latest wave of arrivals, Indonesia hosted only around 1,000 Rohingyas, according to the UN refugee agency (UNHCR). Aid agencies have appealed to Jakarta to accept more, but Indonesia is not a signatory of the UN Refugee Convention and says it is not compelled to take in refugees from Myanmar, complaining that neighboring countries have shut their doors.

Some Rohingya who have settled report being welcomed by locals. "We're happy here. The Acehese at the time helped with food, clothes," said Hasimullah, a father-of-two, who arrived in December last year. Hasimullah was a farmer in Myanmar but was forced to flee to Bangladesh.

"We always experienced violence from Buddhists. Shot, killed, our houses burned. That's why we ran away," the 39-year-old said. UNHCR has just six temporary shelters around Aceh to handle arrivals. "We're really hopeful that in the name of humanity, the people ... could be given protection," said UNHCR official Faisal Rahman. Even some of those who thought they were doing the refugees a favor by turning them away said they felt a twinge of guilt. "There were people who were sick, elderly. Those little kids at sea. Everyone cried seeing them leave. I didn't know what to say," said Nurelawati. "Those people asked for our help." - AFP

Indian rescuers to dig new shaft for trapped 41 men

DEHRADUN: Indian rescuers were battling Monday to free 41 men trapped in a road tunnel for nine days, as they prepared to dig an entirely new shaft after previous efforts failed. Excavators have been removing earth, concrete and rubble from the under-construction tunnel in the northern Himalayan state of Uttarakhand since Nov 12, after a portion of the tunnel collapsed.

But rescue efforts have been slowed by falling debris as well as repeated breakdowns of the crucial heavy drilling machines, with the air force having to twice airlift new kit. Engineers had been trying to horizontally drive a steel pipe through the debris, just wide enough for the increasingly desperate men to squeeze through at least 57 meters (187 feet) of earth and rock that block their escape.

But drilling on that route was paused on Friday, after a cracking sound created a "panic situation", officials said. Teams were now preparing to dig the new shaft from above, forcing workers to cut an entirely new track up to the top of the forested hill high above for the heavy equipment needed.

Officials estimated the proposed shaft would need to be 89 meters (291 feet) deep to reach the men. Experts have warned about the impact of extensive construction in Uttarakhand, where large parts of the state are prone to landslides. "Every effort is being made," Uttarakhand chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami said in a statement Monday, insisting the "workers trapped in the tunnel are safe". He said he had spoken to Prime Minister Narendra Modi about the crisis.

'Get them out'

Top local civil servant Abhishek Ruhela said the track to the new drilling site was three-quarters built. "Up to 900 meters (2,950 feet) of the 1,200-meter-long road being built for drilling over the tunnel has been completed," Ruhela told AFP.

Rescuers have been communicating with the trapped workers by radio, while food, water, oxygen and medicine have also been sent to them via a narrow pipe. Anshu Manish Khalkho, director of the government's highways and infrastructure company, NHIDCL, said Monday that workers had successfully installed a wider 15-centimetre (six-inch pipe), allowing more food to be sent.

"We will now provide them with food and medical supplies through that pipe," Khalkho said in a statement. Foreign experts have been drafted in, including independent disaster investigator Arnold Dix, president of the International Tunneling and Underground Space Association. "We are going to find a solution and get them out," Dix told reporters Monday at the site. "A lot of work is being done here. It is important that not only the men rescued but also the men who are (doing the) rescuing are safe."

Villagers have set up a Hindu temple at the mouth of the tunnel, saying the original temple had been moved during construction. Some villagers blamed the tunnel collapse on the fact that the initial temple was destroyed. The tunnel is part of Modi's infrastructure project aimed at cutting travel times between some of the most popular Hindu sites in the country, as well as improving access to strategic areas bordering rival China. - AFP

Business

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 2023

KUFPEC sells its upstream Norwegian assets to PGNiG

Kuwait firm achieved over \$600m in cumulative net income from Norway portfolio

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Foreign Petroleum Exploration Company (KUFPEC) announced on Monday that it has begun the exit procedures from KUFPEC Norway Limited by selling its entire stake and assets in Norway. KUFPEC continues to meet its strategy of rationalizing the current portfolio and maximize value by announcing that KUFPEC UK Limited, a KUFPEC subsidiary, is divesting its 100 percent shareholding in KUFPEC Norway AS (KNAS) to PGNiG Upstream Norway AS, subject to customary approvals by the Norwegian authorities, a press release issued by the company said on Monday. The deal is expected to be completed in Q4 2023 and has an effective date of Jan 1, 2023.

KUFPEC entered Norway in 2013 with the acquisition of Norske AEDC and has grown its portfolio through both acquisition and participation in licensing rounds. KNAS has stakes in several producing and exploration fields on the Norwegian continental shelf, the release added.

KUFPEC Chief Executive Officer Mohammad Salem Al-Haimer stated, "We have achieved and exceeded all the targets set when we entered Norway. KNAS has provided KUFPEC with opportunities to develop our Kuwaiti young professionals, gain technological and best practices expertise and achieved high rate of return on investment. The Norway Portfolio has achieved a cumulative net income to KUFPEC exceeding \$600 million and an investment payback by early 2022, with an approximate IRR of 14 percent from 2013 to 2022. This transaction has al-



Mohammad Salem Al-Haimer

lowed both parties to meet their respective strategic targets and group synergies. Although, we have sold our current portfolio, Norway is still considered one of our core areas of interest and aligns with KUFPEC's strategic directions, focusing on enhancing our portfolio. We will continue evaluating opportunities and focus on organic growth", he said.

KUFPEC is an international upstream company engaged in exploration, development and production of crude oil and natural gas outside the State of Kuwait and is a wholly owned subsidiary of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation.

Kuwait Central Bank's awareness drive to check financial fraud

KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) had carried out a number of measures to counter financial fraud through directives from financial institutions and banks as well as awareness campaigns for clients and the general masses. On the level of financial institutions, the CBK had put out a number of directives to banks in 2019 to ensure proper governance and boost administrative responsibility, which in turn act as a fail-safe in case of financial fraud.

The CBK also advised banks' board of directors to find the most effective means to safeguard information and bolster online security, making it a necessity and a common practice. In February of 2020, the CBK finalized a strategic framework for the banking sector's cybersecurity, which met the minimum needs for governance, risk management, administrative operations, cloud technology and systems protecting online payment.

The CBK made a mandate for the banking sector to implement the strategy in addition to informing clients on suspicious activities as well as recommending password changes and other measures. Security actions also included the ability to cancel cards and accounts of clients within a short period in addition to preventing the use of credit cards on unauthorized devices.

In April of 2023, the Central Bank issued a memo to local banks in regards to payment links for individuals, mandating that the clients, involved in this type of transactions, must provide the necessary information from banking statements, which includes names of the clients and the reason for the payment. This particular transaction via online link must not exceed 24 hours and must have a certain daily and monthly value

ceiling. The CBK, last September, also issued a notification for local banks to ban the use of the malicious "Anydesk" application on smartphones. It also tasked Kuwait Banking Association (KBA) to establish a round the clock-command center to deal with financial fraud and reports from clients in Kuwait. To reinforce banking cards, the CBK had made imperative for banks to remind clients to activate their cards with their respective banks before usage in addition to measures such as locking the cards in the case of three



failed attempts of entering passwords.

In regards to further protecting clients, the CBK launched in December 2022 as cyber unit to protect clients, which gathers complaints from them against local banks. The Central Bank had been encouraging local financial institutes to establish their respective units in this regard since January of 2011. In 2013, it established the clients' complaints hotline.

A comprehensive guide for clients' rights protection was also issued in 2015 to create a safe environment in Kuwait and bolster efforts to counter fraud. The CBK's measures also focused on boosting the public awareness of financial fraud, launching the "Let's Be Aware" campaign to prevent online fraud. The campaign saw the cooperation of the public and private sectors in addition to the participation of experts. —KUNA



PARIS: This illustration photograph taken with a macro lens shows an 'OpenAI' logo reverse projected onto a human eye at a studio in Paris on June 6, 2023. — AFP

Hundreds of OpenAI staff threaten mass exodus to join ex-CEO

SAN FRANCISCO: Hundreds of staff at OpenAI threatened to quit the leading artificial intelligence company on Monday and join Microsoft. They would follow OpenAI co-founder Sam Altman, who said he was starting an AI subsidiary at Microsoft following his shock sacking from the company whose ChatGPT chatbot has led the rapid rise of artificial intelligence technology.

In a letter, some of OpenAI's most senior staff members threatened to leave the company if the board did not get replaced. "Your actions have made it obvious that you are incapable of overseeing OpenAI," said the letter, which was first released to Wired. Included in the list of names of signers was Ilya Sutskever, the company's chief scientist and one of members of the four-person board that voted to oust Altman. It also included top executive Mira Murati, who was appointed to replace Altman as CEO when he was removed on Friday, but was herself demoted over the weekend. "Microsoft has assured us that there are positions for all OpenAI employees at this new subsidiary should we choose to join," the letter said.

Reports said as many as 500 of OpenAI's 770 employees signed the letter. OpenAI has appointed Emmett Shear, a former chief executive of Amazon's streaming platform Twitch, as its new CEO despite pressure from Microsoft and other major investors to reinstate Altman.

The startup's board sacked Altman on Friday, with US media citing concerns that he was underestimating the dangers of its tech and leading the company away from its stated mission—claims his successor has denied. Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella wrote on X that Altman "will be joining Microsoft to lead a new advanced AI research team," along with OpenAI co-founder Greg Brockman and other colleagues. Altman shot to fame with the launch of ChatGPT last year, which ignited a race to advance AI research and development, as well as billions being invested in the sector.

His sacking triggered several other high-profile departures from the company, as well as a reported push by investors to bring him back. "We are going to build something new and it will be incredible. The mission continues," Brockman said, tagging former director of research Jakub Pachocki, AI risk evaluation head Aleksander Madry, and longtime researcher Szymon Sidor.

But OpenAI stood by its decision in a memo sent to employees on Sunday night, saying "Sam's behavior and lack of transparency... undermined the board's ability to effectively supervise the company," The New York Times reported.

Shear confirmed his appointment as OpenAI's interim CEO in a post on X on Monday, while also denying reports that Altman had been fired over safety concerns regarding the use of AI technology. "Today I got a call inviting me to consider a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity: to become the interim CEO of OpenAI. After consulting with my family and reflecting on it for just a few hours, I accepted," he wrote.

"Before I took the job, I checked on the reasoning behind the change. The board did not remove Sam over any specific disagreement on safety, their reasoning was completely different from that."

"It's clear that the process and communications around Sam's removal has been handled very badly, which has seriously damaged our trust," Shear added. Global tech titan Microsoft has invested more than \$10 billion in OpenAI and has rolled out the AI pioneer's tech in its own products.

Microsoft's Nadella added in his post that "we look forward to getting to know Emmett Shear and OAI's new leadership team and working with them." "We remain committed to our partnership with OpenAI and have confidence in our product roadmap," he said.

OpenAI is in fierce competition with others including Google and Meta, as well as start-ups like Anthropic and Stability AI, to develop its own AI models. Generative AI platforms such as ChatGPT are trained on vast amounts of data to enable them to answer questions, even complex ones, in human-like language. They are also used to generate and manipulate imagery. But the tech has triggered warnings about the dangers of its misuse—from blackmailing people with "deepfake" images to the manipulation of images and harmful disinformation. —AFP

UK govt prepares crunch budget with eyes on election

LONDON: Britain's Conservative government this week unveils a budget update that could determine its chances of re-election—or the size of its defeat—with promises to reinvigorate the economy as the party lags badly in the polls.

Finance minister Jeremy Hunt will deliver the Tories' fiscal plans in parliament on Wednesday, hoping it will narrow the gap with the main opposition Labour party. But analysts assess that after 13 years in power and even with pledges to cut taxes, the tax and spend plans may not be enough to turn around the government's fortunes.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and Hunt have cautioned against big giveaways despite recent falls in inflation, which remains high, and pressure from some parliamentary colleagues. On Monday, Sunak—a former finance minister under Boris Johnson—promised to cut tax "carefully and sustainably" after his target of seeing inflation halve this year was met in October.

Sunak declined to pre-empt Hunt's announcement but vowed to crack down on welfare cheats to get more people back into work. Last week, the government announced it would cut welfare payments to people who "refuse to work", to address chronic

labour shortages in several sectors. The government has already indicated that it would invest £4.5 billion (\$5.6 billion) in the auto, aerospace, green energy and life sciences sectors, among others.

Addressing a London college, Sunak said he was able to move on to the "next phase" of the government's economic plan after UK annual inflation slid to 4.6 percent last month from 10.1 percent in January. "We will do this in a serious, responsible way," Sunak said before the budget update, which is known as the Autumn Statement. "And we can't do everything all at once. It will take discipline and we need to prioritise. But over time, we can and we will cut taxes." At 4.6 percent, UK inflation remains the highest of the G7 world's richest nations.

Also citing high inflation, Chancellor of the Exchequer Hunt stressed last week end that cuts to income tax are "not going to happen overnight". With another budget likely before the next election, economists said Hunt could either announce tax cuts on Wednesday that would take effect in the spring—or wait until the government's fiscal update in March.

"The chancellor will squeeze as much political juice out of Wednesday's Autumn Statement to try and regain the agenda ahead of an election next year," noted Paul Dales, chief UK economist at Capital Economics. It is widely rumored that the government will announce cuts to inheritance tax and levies on home purchases, known as stamp duty. Political analysts argue that such reductions could help the Conservatives win over voters, even if there is a greater call for cuts to income tax as the country suffers from a cost-of-living crisis. —AFP



LONDON: Britain's Prime Minister Rishi Sunak (left) and Britain's Chancellor of the Exchequer Jeremy Hunt learn how to lay bricks during a visit to a college in north London on November 20, 2023. — AFP

Gulf Bank officially introduces Gulf Capital Investment Company

'Invest GB' obtains all regulatory approvals, to oversee assets totaling \$3.2 billion

KUWAIT: Following approval from the Capital Markets Authority, Gulf Bank has secured all required regulatory authorizations for the establishment of Gulf Capital Investment Company. Functioning as a closed joint stock enterprise specializing in securities activities, it now operates as the fully owned investment arm of the Bank, with a capital of KD 10 million.

After obtaining approvals from the Central Bank of Kuwait and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Gulf Bank has obtained the approval of the Capital Markets Authority to license Gulf Capital Investment Company, known as Invest GB. This entity is granted authorization to engage in securities activities, functioning as an investment portfolio manager, investment advisor, custodian, investment controller, collective investment scheme manager, subscription agent, and securities broker not registered in the stock exchange. The validity of this license is for a specified duration from the date of issuance by the Capital Markets Authority.

Gulf Bank's Chairman Jassim Mustafa Boodai conveyed his joy regarding the official launch of Gulf Investment Company, following the successful completion of all regulatory approvals. He highlighted the commencement of its operations in providing a comprehensive range of investment services to meet the aspirations of customers in both local and international markets. Boodai emphasized the exper-

tise and professionalism of the distinguished team leading the company. Jassim Mustafa Boodai noted that the new company will commence operations by managing assets exceeding KD 1 billion (equivalent to about \$3.2 billion). Additionally, he pointed out that all investment services and products previously provided by the bank will now fall under the purview of the new investment arm. Expressing gratitude, Boodai thanked all regulatory authorities for their cooperation in securing the necessary approvals for the company's launch, including the Central Bank of Kuwait, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, and the Capital Markets Authority.

Waleed Khaled Mandani, Acting CEO of Gulf Bank and Chairman of Gulf Capital Investment Company emphasized that the establishment of the new company is part of Gulf Bank's ongoing efforts to strengthen its pivotal role in activating the local capital market. He highlighted the company's commitment to offering distinguished investment opportunities, expanding its investor base, and providing thoughtful and di-



Jassim Mustafa Boodai

- It brings us great satisfaction to introduce the new company, offering a comprehensive spectrum of investment services to our clients
- All investment products and services previously provided by the bank, will now be transferred to the oversight of the new investment arm



Waleed Khaled Mandani

- Gulf Bank remains committed to enhancing its crucial role in rejuvenating the local capital market
- Our meticulous selection of personnel adheres to standard criteria, and the percentage of national employment is among the highest in the Kuwaiti investment sector

versified investment options to achieve the highest returns with the lowest risks.

Mandani emphasized Gulf Bank's meticulous approach to selecting human resources for Gulf Investment Company, adhering to standardized criteria, to guarantee the company's competitive efficiency on local, regional, and global scales. He highlighted that more than 70 percent of the company's workforce consists of national talent, showcasing a substantial "Kuwaitization" rate in the Kuwaiti investment sector. Furthermore, the representation of women among the

three major credit rating agencies.

Gulf Bank continues to offer innovative investment solutions to its customers, including WISE, the first digital investment platform in the Kuwaiti market. This platform provides excellent investment opportunities for customers to initiate investments in various international markets, enabling easy access and performance tracking from anywhere, and at any time.



Invest GB overview

- Capital size: KD 10 million
- Assets under Management: \$3.2 billion
- National employment percentage: 70%
- Women workforce representation: 40%

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Hani Al-Awadhi appointed as CEO of Invest GB

In line with its commitment to foster national talents in leadership roles, the Capital Markets Authority (CMA) has approved the appointment of Hani Al-Awadhi as the CEO of Gulf Capital Investment Company (Invest GB). Cur-

rently serving as the General Manager of Investment at Gulf Bank, Al-Awadhi brings over 20 years of experience in both local and international investment.

Before joining Gulf Bank, Al-Awadhi held the positions of Head of Managed Funds and Acting Head of GCC Equities at Gulf Investment Corporation (GIC), overseeing global investments in hedge funds, private equity, real estate, infrastructure, and more. His career includes various roles in prominent institutions and companies, both domestically and internationally.

With a wealth of expertise in developing, implementing, and monitoring alternative investment portfolios, Al-Awadhi played a key role in establishing and maintaining one of the region's largest hedge fund investment programs. He also contributed to the successful listing of Shamal Az-Zour Company on Boursa Kuwait.

Actively involved in corporate governance, Al-Awadhi holds multiple directorial positions on various boards. He earned a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration from the Frank G Zarb School of Business at Hofstra University.

ABK Capital appoints Ali Abdulmohsen Al-Fulaij as Deputy CEO

KUWAIT: ABK Capital, the investment arm of Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK), announced the appointment of Ali Abdulmohsen Al-Fulaij as the company's Deputy Chief Executive Officer starting Nov 12, 2023.



Ali Al-Fulaij



Dr Husayn Shahrur

framework of the Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait Group, focusing on investing in human capital and expertise, leveraging the customer experience and the investment solutions platform, and developing the company's systems infrastructure. Al-Fulaij said: "I am delighted to be on board. In my tenure, I will leverage my experience to add value to ABK Capital's management team and work towards accelerating the ascension of ABK Capital to becoming one of the top investment firms in the region by enhancing the company's distinguished services, products and global partnerships. We will also strive to increase our client base, enrich their experience in managing their wealth and enable them to make well-informed investment decisions."

Al-Fulaij has almost 24 years hands-on exper-

ience in the local and Arab markets, and has held many leadership positions in investment companies and banks, such as Rasameel, Global Investment House (Global), and Gulf Bank. He also served as a board member in a group of companies and investment funds in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

Al-Fulaij holds a degree from the University of Leeds in the United Kingdom and is a Certified Wealth Manager from the American Academy of Financial Services. ABK Capital is a leading regional investment firm, providing asset management solutions and investment advisory services. Since its establishment in 2006, ABK Capital, the Investment Arm of Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK), has built a business model that places clients' interests at the top of its priorities. ABK Capital remains committed to fostering close long-term relationships with its clients and strives to meet their investment needs.

With a team of highly experienced investment professionals, ABK Capital pursues to strengthen its position as one of the leading investment companies in Kuwait. It delivers a wide range of products, services, and investment solutions, tailored to meet its clients' specific goals. The company's offerings cover traditional and alternative asset classes, and provide an easy and convenient access to local, regional, and global markets. ABK Capital seeks partnerships with leading regional and global asset managers to leverage their resources in delivering the performance investors seek and to provide the most appropriate investment solutions.

Benin struggles in battle to halt coastal erosion

COTONOU, Benin: Along its Atlantic coast, Benin's government has spent millions of dollars to protect coastal communities from sea erosion. But Doris Alapini can only watch as waves tirelessly eat away at her land and the large seaside restaurant she built.

The ocean is slowly winning the battle. "The sea is advancing a lot. We have to do dredging or else block it, otherwise it will keep advancing," Alapini said as she walked along Cotonou's long sandy beach. "I have seen how many times it has destroyed and invaded the neighborhood." She has lived for 27 years in the Jak district, one of the oldest and most chic in the economic capital of Benin. Every year, sea waters overflow into her area.

"The neighborhood is under threat every day," she said. "No one here has any guarantees. If there is a big wave, it will demolish the entire neighborhood."

Not all coastal erosion is linked to climate change. But since 2002, Benin has lost kilometres (miles) of coastline, said Esquillouticissou, executive of the government's general directorate of environment and climate. "The state has not remained idle," he said, pointing to protective structures, stone groynes and other installations, particularly to the east of Cotonou.

According to Outicissou, nearly 100 billion CFA francs (\$160 million) have been injected into the protection of Beninese coasts in recent years and the investment helped slow down the ocean's advance. Africa often finds itself on the front line of climate change impact despite the continent contributing the least to greenhouse gas emissions globally. Still, Benin and its littoral West African neighbours Togo and Ghana are, just like Pacific islands and coastal South Asian cities, at risk of shore erosion's impact on communities. With global warming affecting sea levels, coastal erosion will be one of the subjects leaders will address when they meet for COP28 in Dubai in December.

Raymond Mekpe, a 40-year-old fisherman, cannot believe the erosion losses. Born in Cotonou, Mekpe might not be a climate expert but has his own indicators to illustrate the sea's unbridled advance. "The homes of my grandparents and my parents were there," he said, pointing out to sea. "We played somewhere there in our childhood," he added, gesturing towards another area where big waves crash. Benin loses approximately 30 meters (yards) of its coastline every year, according to oceanographer Cossi Georges Degbe. "It's really serious. And if nothing is done, within a few years we will lose the Cotonou Porto-Novo interstate road," the 51-year-old warned, referring to the main coastal route to the capital city.

"When we put protective structures in a given place, we are just moving the phenomenon along," he said. For Outicissou, the government must respond segment by segment, but "the segments that are still vulnerable are under study and will be dealt with in due course". Thirteen structures have been built east of Cotonou starting from the coastal lagoon, he said. Since then, the waves of erosion have become noticeably weaker, he added.

As well as rising water levels, due to climate change, extreme weather phenomena are increasing, "with very high waves washing over our coasts", explained oceanographer Degbe. Alain Tossounon, president of a network of media focusing on water, the climate and environment, agrees more needs to be done. "Efforts have not been sufficient and populations have not yet become aware of the importance of this phenomenon in the years to come," he said.—AFP

Stock markets diverge as traders eye Fed minutes

LONDON: Asian and European stock markets traded mixed Monday with investors focused firmly on whether the US Federal Reserve and other central banks have reached a peak over interest-rate hikes as inflation cools.

Minutes from the Fed's November policy meeting, due for release Tuesday, will be closely analysed for clues on the outlook. Wall Street ended slightly higher Friday, while observers said they expected this week to see light US trading heading into the Thanksgiving holiday.

Expectations that interest rates could eventually be cut next year continued to weigh on the dollar, with the yen jumping one percent against the greenback. "While a wait-and-see mood has descended, confidence is still quietly bubbling that interest rate cuts could be on the horizon," noted Susannah Streeter, head of money and markets at Hargreaves Lansdown.

"Concerns that there could be another grinch-like hike from the Fed in December have retreated and more bets are being placed that a reduction could come in the Spring." Inflation remains hugely elevated in some countries, including Argentina, where libertarian outsider Javier Milei swept to victory in a presidential election Sunday. Milei won power on a promise to halt decades of economic decline in the Latin American nation that is reeling from triple-digit inflation.

The self-described "anarcho-capitalist" pulled off a massive upset by ousting the populist Peronist coalition which has long dominated Argentine politics. Milei has proposed the dollarization of the economy by 2025 to halt the "cancer of in-



TOKYO: A man looks at an electronic board displaying stock prices of each company listed on the Tokyo Stock Exchange along a street in Tokyo. — AFP

flation", meaning he would drop the peso and Argentina would lose control over monetary policy such as setting interest rates. Elsewhere Monday, oil prices edged higher, extending Friday's gains of more than four percent, before a meeting of OPEC and other key producers, where Russia and Saudi Arabia could extend output cuts.

Microsoft's share price was expected to be closely tracked at the Wall Street open after the company hired OpenAI co-founder Sam Altman following his shock sacking from the company, whose ChatGPT chatbot has led the rapid rise of artificial intelligence technology. OpenAI's board sacked Altman on Friday, with US media citing concerns that the former CEO was underestimating the dangers of its tech and leading the company away from its stated mission—claims his successor has denied. Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella wrote on X that Altman "will be joining Microsoft to lead a new advanced AI research team," along with OpenAI co-founder Greg Brockman and other colleagues. — AFP

Thailand economy stagnates in third quarter

BANGKOK: Thailand's economy grew less than expected in the third quarter owing to still-weak exports, officials said Monday, as the government pushes a stimulus program that includes cash handouts worth about \$14 billion.

The kingdom has endured a period of sluggish growth, with investor confidence knocked despite a new government taking office and ending months of political uncertainty. The National Economic and Social Development Council said gross domestic product grew 1.5 percent on-year in July-September, well off the 2.2 percent tipped by the NESDC and slower than the previous three months.

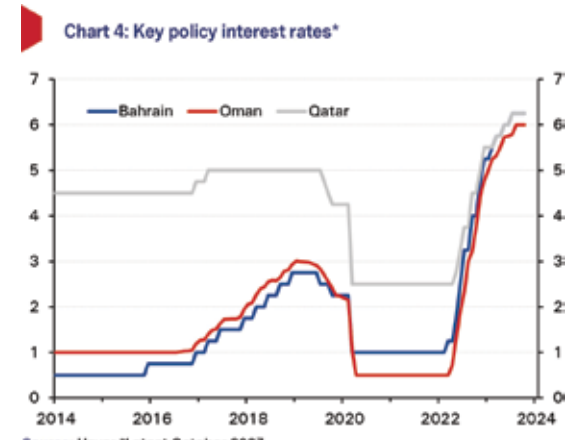
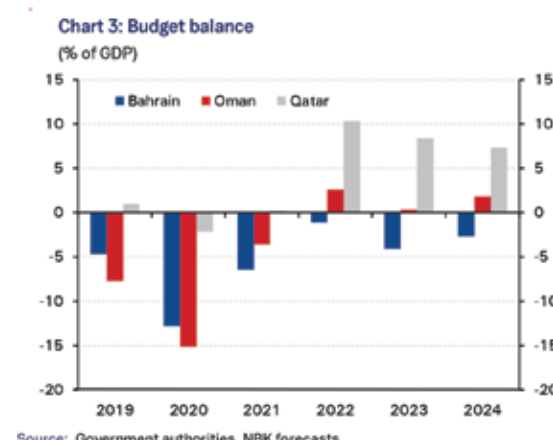
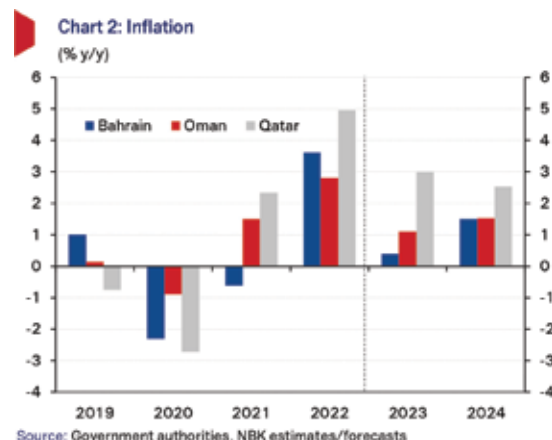
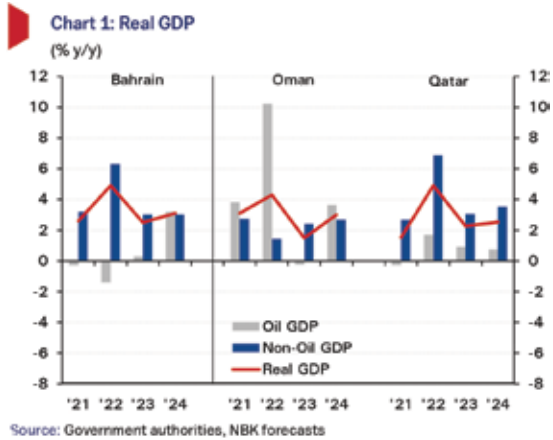
"The increase is lower due to the decline of exports, and the export figure has been lower in three consecutive quarters this year," NESDC secretary-general Danucha Pichayanan said.

The council said it now expected the economy to grow at the low end of a forecast 2.5-3.0 percent this year. It expanded 1.9 percent in the first nine months. However local consumption and investment were on a better footing, Danucha said. New prime minister and former businessman Srettha Thavisin has promised a range of stimulus measures to spur the economy.

Among them is a plan to give everyone over 16 a handout of almost \$300 in a bid to kick-start buying in the country. He has also embarked on numerous foreign trips, seeking to attract much-needed fresh investment in the kingdom. Thailand's lucrative tourism industry had struggled to recover after the pandemic, but numbers are slowly rebounding. — AFP

Business

NBK ECONOMIC REPORT



Bahrain deficit to widen in 2023; Qatar growth seen moderating

Oman's better fiscal and debt metrics generate rating upgrades

KUWAIT: Bahrain's economic growth has moderated in 2023, forecast at 2.5 percent versus a well-above-trend 4.9 percent in 2022 amid elevated interest rates that have hit consumption and borrowing, and lower oil prices. We see improvement next year, led by a 3.2 percent expansion in the hydrocarbon sector as the completion of maintenance on the Bahrain oil field pushes output higher to 196 kb/d. Growth in non-oil activity (around 80 percent of the economy), should be broadly steady at 3 percent amid the peaking of the monetary policy tightening cycle, the government's continued commitment to development projects and still high oil prices. Decent expansion in non-oil GDP should contribute to slightly higher inflation (+1.5 percent) and credit growth (+2.4 percent) after softness in 2023.

Some previous progress in narrowing the fiscal deficit was reversed this year, with the deficit forecast to widen to 4.1 percent of GDP in 2023 (4.8 percent in H1 2023) on lower oil revenues (around 60 percent of all receipts). However, we see only limited spending growth and the government's commitment to its Fiscal

Balance Program is intact. We expect the deficit to resume its narrowing path in 2024 albeit achieving fiscal balance would require a higher oil price than in our base case. Public debt (including concessional GCC development fund loans) declined to 100 percent of GDP by end-2022 as bond amortizations and nominal GDP rose. With debt issuance picking up in 2023-2024 to cover a larger fiscal deficit, the debt-to-GDP ratio could edge back up slightly. Given ongoing fiscal consolidation steps, a sharp drop in oil prices remains a key risk to the outlook.

Oman

Following an expected slowdown to 1.5 percent in 2023, Oman's GDP growth could improve to 3.0 percent in 2024 aided by the government's economic diversification strategy (Vision 2040) initiatives and higher oil output. Having contracted in 2023, we forecast oil GDP up 3.6 percent in 2024, given the expected unwinding of OPEC+ voluntary output cuts from January 2024 and higher gas production. Non-oil GDP growth is forecast to improve to 2.7 percent from 2.4 percent

in 2023 amid higher construction sector output (helped by the Sultan Haitham Smart City and Oman-UAE Rail projects), a potential boost in tourism, and refining gains linked to the ramping up of the OQ8 Duqm refinery – though constrained somewhat by the ongoing need for fiscal caution.

The Medium-Term Fiscal Plan is bearing fruit and we expect the government to post a surplus through the forecast period – just about. This year we forecast a reduced surplus of 0.3 percent of GDP on the back of lower oil receipts, widening to 1.8 percent in 2024 on increased oil revenues. Public debt is expected to continue its downward trajectory from 40 percent of GDP in 2022 (and a peak of 70 percent in 2020), with the authorities recently identifying a 'safe' debt limit of 30 percent of GDP signaling that debt reduction will remain a key theme. More positive fiscal and debt metrics prompted ratings agencies Fitch and S&P to upgrade the government's credit rating to "BB+" from "BB" in recent months. Lower-than-expected oil prices or an increase in the government debt-to-GDP ratio due to looser

fiscal policy provide the most significant downside risks to our outlook. Key upside risks include higher-than-expected oil prices and stronger-than-projected non-oil growth, which would improve fiscal revenues and reduce social spending pressures on the government.

Qatar

Qatar's economic activity is set to moderate in 2023 from last year's exceptional World Cup-driven growth, curbed by tighter monetary conditions, limited hydrocarbon sector growth, and relative to a very strong 2022. With only minor further increases in gas production expected, the private sector should drive economic growth over the forecast period, with monthly data since April signaling a pickup in non-hydrocarbon activity. PMI numbers were consistently in expansion (9-month average of 53), visitor arrivals remained elevated (up 150 percent y/y in the period Jan-Aug), while credit growth hit a 19-month high in September of 4.5 percent despite higher interest rates. We forecast GDP growth of 2.3 percent and 2.5 percent in 2023 and

2024 respectively, with non-oil output up 3.1 percent and 3.5 percent. Further out, economic activity will be supported by higher construction activity as progress on the \$30 billion North field gas expansion megaproject accelerates ahead of the scheduled completion of phase 1 in 2026, which would raise LNG output significantly (from the current 77 mtpa to 127 mtpa), boosting hydrocarbon revenues and enabling the funding of other Vision-linked infrastructure projects.

We forecast fiscal surpluses in 2023 (8.4 percent of GDP) and 2024 (7.3 percent of GDP) on the back of still-elevated hydrocarbon receipts and relative spending restraint, although capex on strategic projects may pick up in 2024 as the government takes advantage of improved fiscal space, with its debt-to-GDP ratio having declined from a peak of 73 percent in 2020 to 48 percent in 2022. Upside risks to the outlook include higher gas prices possibly from a renewed shortage or a stronger global demand. Downside risks stem from a flare-up in geopolitical tensions or a global recession leading to lower gas demand and prices.



LAGUNA BEACH, United States: Sam Altman, Chief Executive Officer of OpenAI, and Mira Murati, Chief Technology Officer of OpenAI, speak during The Wall Street Journal's WSJ Tech Live Conference in Laguna Beach, California on October 17, 2023. — AFP

Altman: The 'super optimistic' star of AI

SAN FRANCISCO: By recruiting former OpenAI CEO Sam Altman following his surprise ouster by ChatGPT's parent company, Microsoft is hiring a tech industry star at the forefront of the artificial intelligence revolution.

His unexpected dismissal by the board of OpenAI sent shockwaves through Silicon Valley as the 38-year-old entrepreneur has been the public face of the company's rapid rise in the high-stakes world of AI. Altman, together with Tesla chief Elon Musk and others, started OpenAI in 2015, creating a research company with the stated goal of building generative AI that benefits humanity.

"The technological progress we make in the next 100 years will be far larger than all we've made since we first controlled fire and invented the wheel," Altman said in a 2021 blog post. ChatGPT became an instant hit when the generative AI platform was launched in November last year with its humanlike ability to answer questions to generate everything from essays to recipes and computer codes.

But the emergence of AI has also sparked concerns about the technology taking jobs away from people and even posing an existential threat to humanity. OpenAI's board has yet to disclose the reason behind Friday's sacking but his successor, former Twitch chief executive Emmett Shear, denied reports it was over safety concerns regarding the use of AI.

On Friday, Altman tweeted that he "loved" his time at OpenAI, adding that it was "transformative for me personally, and hopefully the world a little bit".

Microsoft, which has financially backed OpenAI, announced on Monday that it was hiring Altman to lead a new advanced AI research team.

Born in 1985, Altman grew up in a St. Louis suburb, where he got his first computer at the age of eight, according to a profile in the New Yorker from 2016. Altman told Esquire magazine that computers and access to an online community helped him navigate being gay in a conservative part of the country. He dropped out of Stanford University to start a company, Loopt, which let smartphone users selectively share their whereabouts. Loopt was acquired in 2012 in a deal valued at \$43.4 million.

He took a year off during which he "read many dozens of textbooks; I learned about the fields that I had been interested in," the San Francisco resident has said.

He learned about nuclear engineering, synthetic biology, investing and AI. "The seeds were planted for things that worked in deep ways later," he said. In 2014, Altman became president of Y Combinator, an "accelerator" that provides startups with guidance and funding in exchange for stakes in the young companies. — AFP

Lure of migration snares Senegal's fishermen

THIAROYE, Senegal: These days, when a Senegalese fisherman climbs into a canoe, it's likely to be the last time — either he is leaving his life behind in hope of a new one in Europe, or failing in the attempt. Small-scale fishing has long been a mainstay of Senegal's economy and its communities along the Atlantic coast, but over-fishing, industrial competition and the impacts of climate change are taking their toll.

"These young guys behind me, when we're at sea all they talk about is going to Europe," said Ibrahim Diouf, a solidly-built fisherman in his 40s, pointing to the six crew members getting his boat ready in Thiaryoye, outside the capital Dakar. He pointed to a dozen other boats lying on the beach, saying they'd been abandoned by colleagues who left for Europe "because there are not enough fish, they can no longer make a living".

In recent years thousands of Senegalese have embarked in the narrow wooden canoes, some reaching 20 meters (65 feet) long, and carrying dozens of passengers paying several hundreds of dollars each to traffickers. It's a huge price for a dangerous trip of 1,500 kilometers (around 930 miles) and over a week toward the Canary Islands of Spain, their gateway to the European Union.

Nearly every day in cities and towns across Senegal, people hear about a successful venture, a boat stopped by coastguard interceptions — or capsized ships. But that

has not deterred a growing number of fishermen to join the ranks of those hoping to leave, usually young people fleeing poverty and unemployment.

"Today you also have women and children, and people with jobs. Fishermen are the new ones," said Bou-bacar Seye, president of the migrant NGO Horizons Without Borders.

"Almost everyone here has left," said Ababacar Diop, a married father of two in his 30s, who himself tried to make the crossing but was picked up and returned by Senegal's navy in October. "We've gotten used to coming back empty-handed" from fishing trips, he said, blaming the lost catches on "these trawlers behind me". At anchor are dozens of hulking fishing boats, some with Senegalese flags, many others with Chinese or other foreign flags. Most are hauling in hake, sole, shrimp or octopus mainly to meet the demands of European consumers, or to supply fishmeal or oil producers, the Environmental Justice Foundation said in a recent report.

"A few years ago, we would set out at 6 am and return around 5 or 6 pm," Diop said. "These days we're forced to return at 10 or 11 am" because there's nothing to catch. Fishing provides around 600,000 direct and indirect jobs for Senegal and 3.2 percent of its GDP, according to a 2022 report from the US Department of Agriculture. But for the tens of thousands still trying to catch sardine, mackerel or scad, "heading out to fish is a losing proposition", said Aliou Ba, head of ocean campaigns for Greenpeace Africa. "This craft is dying," he said.

Senegal's fishing exports nearly quadrupled between 2008 and



DAKAR, Senegal: A fisherman paddles in front of commercial fishing boats in the polluted Hann Bay in Dakar. — AFP

2018, according to the Environmental Justice Foundation, even though more than half the stocks of species in nearby waters are facing "collapse". Meanwhile, catches by small-scale fishermen in canoes plunged by 58 percent from 2012 to 2019. The diminished prospects help explain why Senegalese are now alongside Moroccans as the most numerous migrants to reach the Canary Islands this year, according to Spanish NGOs and the EU's Frontex border agency.

AFP could not obtain overall statistics on the migrant numbers, nor the number of Senegalese intercepted on the Canary Islands route. But most that AFP reporters spoke with on the islands in mid-October said they were fishermen or from a family of fishers, or from towns along Senegal's coast.

Senegal's navy said in late October that it had intercepted 26 canoes

carrying a total of 3,800 migrants in just two weeks. Senegalese but also people from Gambia, Guinea or Mali.

An official at the Spanish embassy in Senegal acknowledged that "the arrival of fishermen is a new factor" with regards to the canoes landing on the southernmost Canary Island of El Hierro. Dozens of Senegalese have drowned on the route that has seen 633 deaths overall this year, according to the International Organization for Migration. For Ba at Greenpeace, more fishermen are leaving for the simple reason that they have the means to do so.

"If the fishermen decided they weren't going to leave, nobody would be able to leave," he said.

But for those like Diop, whose first attempt was thwarted, a chance to leave for Europe is too tempting to refuse. "If I had a little bit of hope in fishing, I would never have tried to reach Spain by canoe," he said. — AFP

Postal workers join Sweden Tesla strike

STOCKHOLM: Postal workers halted deliveries to Tesla repair shops in Sweden on Monday, joining mechanics and dock workers in a strike over the US company's refusal to sign a collective wage agreement. Some 130 mechanics at 10 Tesla repair shops in seven cities across Sweden first walked off the job on October 27, according to trade union IF Metall.

The strike has since been expanded to include other repair shops that service Tesla among other auto brands, and dock workers have stopped unloading Tesla cars at all Swedish ports. On Monday, the Swedish Union for Service and Communications Employees (Seko), said it had started blocking deliveries and pickups of mail and packages via postal companies PostNord and CityMail at

all Tesla workplaces in Sweden. This meant spare parts and components would not be delivered to Tesla sites, according to the union. "By refusing to play by the rules here in Sweden Tesla is trying to gain a competitive advantage by giving workers worse wages and conditions than they would have had with a collective agreement," Seko president Gabriella Lavecchia said in a statement.

Negotiated sector-by-sector, collective agreements are the basis of the Swedish labor market model, covering almost 90 percent of all Swedish employees and guaranteeing standard wages and working conditions. In late October, IF Metall — which has some 300,000 members — told AFP that "many" of Tesla's workers in Sweden are members of IF Metall, but would not disclose an exact number.

According to IF Metall, Tesla had told them it would not sign a collective bargaining agreement because they "don't do that anywhere in the world." In addition to IF Metall, nine other unions have announced "sympathy measures," including the Swedish Building Workers' Union announcing last week it would stop servicing and



A worker striking in front of Tesla service center in Segeltorp, Sweden. — AFP

repairs on Tesla facilities as of November 28.

Despite this, several Swedish media have reported that the impact of the strike has so far been limited, and IF Metall has accused the electric carmaker of systematically using strike breakers to circumvent the strike. Tesla has also found other ways to deliver new cars to Sweden, notably by road. — AFP

'City of jinn'

Magical myths haunt ancient Omani oasis



A picture shows a view of Bahla Fort, one of four historical forts located at the foot of the Green Mountain highlands of Oman, and the only fort in the country designated a UNESCO Heritage Site, in Bahla, 200km north of Muscat. — AFP photos



Omanis walk in Bahla Fort.

Deep in Oman's parched interior, the ancient oasis town of Bahla abounds with myths of camel-eating, fire-mouthed hyenas and men turning into donkeys — a reputation for magic and mystery that persists to this day.

Some superstitious Omanis still shun the isolated desert settlement because of its stories of "jinn", the spirits that have been part of Arab folklore since before the dawn of Islam.

Bahla, a quiet town of palm groves and eerie, abandoned mud-brick homes, lies about 200 kilometers (125 miles) southwest of the capital Muscat in Al-Dakiliya governorate, with an imposing double-archway at its entrance. Here, in one of Oman's oldest inhabited settlements, belief is firm in jinn, which are described as supernatural beings distinct from humans and angels that live alongside mankind.

"We believe that jinn are among the creations of God... so it is not strange," said tour guide Hamad Al Rabaani at Bahla's medieval fort, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Magical stories permeate Bahla, including the popular myth that supernatural forces built the 13-kilometre wall around the town in a single night, to protect it from invaders. "The legend is of two sisters, both jinn, one of whom built the wall for protection... and the other who created an ancient irrigation system for agriculture," said Rabaani, 55.

'Your mind couldn't take it'

The concept of jinn predates Islam but descriptions of the spirits feature in Islamic texts, which declare them subjects of God. Few places, however, are as strongly linked with jinn as Bahla, where "you hear stories of men who suddenly transform into donkeys and other animals", said Rabaani. One old woman often used to hear someone milking her cow after midnight, he said. But whenever she went to check, she found no

one there. "You hear but you never see, because your mind couldn't take it."

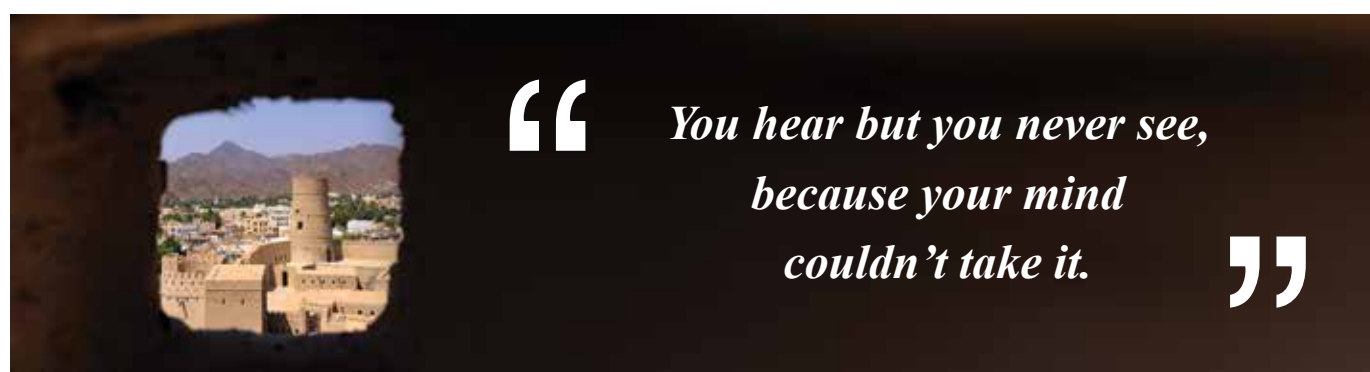
In Bahla's old souk, or market, as silence descends after mid-day prayers, some residents are uneasy discussing the town's reputation for spirits, fearing it might tarnish its image. But Mohammad al-Hashemi, a Bahla native in

ic," he told AFP in an air-conditioned supermarket.

Phantom blazes

Oral folklore and certain ancient texts say jinn are common in the Arabian Peninsula's far reaches, according to Ali A Olomi, a professor of

"In Bahla, there are stories of phantom blazes and fires, animated desert storms, and even edifices built by supernatural forces," said Olomi, who specializes in Islamic esoterism and astrology. Part of the reason Bahla is rife with such stories is that it was a remote outpost in ancient times, sur-



his seventies, said most of his life has been shaped by supernatural beliefs.

As a child he was told stories of hyenas hungry for camels and with mouths of flames that roamed the desert at night. "They used to warn us not to go out after sunset because of mag-

Islamic history at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. Oman and neighboring Yemen, the peninsula's southernmost countries, "both earn a reputation as not only ancient places with great historical significance, but as lands of the jinn", he said.

rounded by desert and the dramatic Hajar mountains. "The presence of jinn in places like Bahla can tell us a great deal about the history and culture of the Arabian Peninsula," Olomi said.

"This is a history of a people living in far-off settlements, linked precariously to other human settlements, and who keenly feel the presence of nature all around them." Among younger Omanis, however, not everyone is convinced about the jinn, including Mazen Al Khaterrri, a 24-year-old maths teacher in Bahla.

"These are just stories told by our grandparents," he said at a cafe in the old souk. "We don't know if they are right or wrong." But Hasan, a 30-year-old who lives in Muscat, said suspicions of Bahla remain commonplace all the same. "My family would never let me go," he said, asking to use only his first name to protect his privacy. "The rumors say it is a city of jinn, where they live and have more freedom." — AFP



A picture shows a view of Bahla Fort.



An Omani man opens his shop at Bahla Fort.



North America fans show appetite for 'Hunger Games' prequel

A "Hunger Games" prequel from Lionsgate topped all other movies in North American theaters this weekend, gobbling an estimated \$44 million in ticket sales, industry watcher Exhibitor Relations reported Sunday. "The Hunger Games: The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes" put up "very good numbers" for an action adventure prequel and should also do well abroad, said David A. Gross of Franchise Entertainment Research.

The film, the fifth in the "Hunger Games" series, stars Tom Blyth as Coriolanus Snow (who as an old man in the series is played by Donald Sutherland) and Rachel Zegler as Lucy Gray Baird; Peter Dinklage and Jason Schwartzman also star in a tale built around the 10th Hunger Games in the dystopian state of Panem. In second for the Friday-through-Sunday period was another new release, "Trolls Band Together," a family-friendly animated musical comedy from DreamWorks and Universal Pictures. It took in \$30.6 million.



A sequel to "Trolls World Tour," this installment, which has fared better with audiences than with critics, features the voices of Anna Kendrick, Justin Timberlake, Zooey Deschanel and Kenan Thompson. In third was superhero film "The Marvels." After opening last weekend at \$47 million, the lowest debut ever for a movie from Disney's Marvel Cinematic Universe, the superhero

film made history again, plummeting to \$10.2 million—Marvel's "worst second-weekend drop of all time," said the Hollywood Reporter.

Brie Larson, Teyonah Parris and Iman Vellani star in the sci-fi yarn. Tying with "The Marvels" was gory slasher film "Thanksgiving," from Spyglass Media and TriStar Pictures, also with ticket sales of \$10.2 million—not a bad

start for a film that cost just \$15 million to make. "Reviews are excellent," Gross said, "and the picture should play well over the upcoming Thanksgiving weekend."

Patrick Dempsey, better known as neurosurgeon Derek "McDreamy" Shepherd on popular series "Grey's Anatomy," plays a sheriff with a dark backstory. And in fifth place was another horror film, "Five Nights at Freddy's" from Universal Pictures and Blumhouse Productions, at \$3.5 million. Josh Hutcherson plays a luckless security guard working nights in a creepy abandoned store.

Rounding out the top 10 were:

"The Holdovers" (\$2.7 million)

"Next Goal Wins" (\$2.5 million)

"Taylor Swift: The Eras Tour" (\$2.4 million)

"Priscilla" (\$2.3 million)

"Killers of the Flower Moon" (\$1.9 million)—AFP



British actor Joss Ackland arrives at the British Premiere of his latest film 'Flawless' in London's Covent Garden. — AFP

Joss Ackland, distinguished British star of stage and screen, dies at 95

The British actor Joss Ackland, who excelled in playing film villains in a varied career spanning eight decades, died on Sunday, his family said. He was 95. In a statement, they said the actor, known for his "distinctive voice and commanding presence", passed away peacefully at home, surrounded by relatives. "He will be remembered as one of Britain's most talented and beloved actors," it added.

Ackland's most famous big-screen baddie was a corrupt South African diplomat in "Lethal Weapon 2" whose diplomatic immunity ultimately fails to protect him from Mel Gibson and Danny Glover's tenacious LA cops. He played a vengeful mafia don in "The Sicilian", and was a buttoned-up aristocratic Englishman accused of murder in Kenya in "White Mischief".

Ackland even made a cameo as a murderous hitchhiker in a surreal video for the Pet Shop Boys' synth-pop version of "You Were Always On My Mind". But far from feeling typecast, the imposing actor, who stood at 6ft 1in (1.85 metres), with a rich voice bordering between grandfatherly reassurance and outright menace, revelled in the roles. "I think you can still be subtle but it's so much easier to portray evil than it is good," he told BBC radio in 2001.

Ackland attributed his prolific output in television, film, stage plays and even musicals to his early struggles as a jobbing actor. Those difficulties in the first 10 years of his career from the mid-1940s prompted him and his actress wife Rosemary to move to a tea plantation in Malawi, then South Africa.

He returned to the UK in 1957 with a newfound determination to succeed, joining London's Old Vic theatre alongside actors including Maggie Smith, Judi Dench and Tom Courtenay. Ackland, who was born in the west London suburb of North Kensington on February 29, 1928, had no truck with method acting, in which actors immerse themselves in a character.

"I like to do research before because it saves acting," he said, believing credibility above all was the key to winning over audiences. Before filming "The Sicilian", he lived with an ageing mafioso for six weeks in a village near Palermo, to give him an insight into the life of crime families. When the cameras started rolling, "all I had to do was say the lines", he said.

Grief

Ackland's grief at the death of his son Paul in an overdose aged 29 helped him portray the writer C.S. Lewis' loss of his wife in the 1985 television film "Shadowlands". Other real events gave him a perspective on his work, such as when a fire destroyed the family home and left Rosemary badly injured when she jumped from a window to escape. "Suddenly you realize how valuable every minute of life is," he said.

The devoted couple were married for 51 years and had seven children. Rosemary developed motor neurone disease and died in 2002. Ackland, who appeared in the acclaimed TV version of John le Carre's "Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy" and in "The Hunt for Red October" as the Russian ambassador, acknowledged some of his roles were better than others. He admitted only accepting a part in "Bill and Ted's Bogus Journey" because of a bet with his daughter, and agreed to be in the Pet Shop Boys video because his children liked them.

But he got fustier in later life, retiring in 2014 and preferring instead to spend time with his large family of grandchildren and great-grandchildren. In 2020, he sought to dispense some of his nine decades of experience to a younger generation struggling with the fear and unknown of the coronavirus pandemic and the isolation of lockdown.

"Every decade has its surprises, challenges and its marvels," he intoned reassuringly in a video from his home in the fishing village of Clovelly in north Devon, southwest England. "Over the years in time of trouble I have seen adversity breed strength, connection and humor in this country. I've seen it over and over again and I hope that you, the young, will look back on this decade and be able to say it too."—AFP

Careful what you 'Wish' for: Disney brings back the villain

From Cruella de Vil to Scar, Disney has created many of cinema's most memorable villains—but bombastic baddies have been notably absent from the studio's recent hits. In movies such as "Frozen 2" and "Raya and the Last Dragon," heroes have battled abstract enemies like mistrust and xenophobia rather than puppy-flaying prima donnas or regicidal uncles, leaving some fans disappointed.

That is about to change with "Wish," an old-school animation out in theaters Wednesday, which celebrates the 100th anniversary of Disney with dozens of throwbacks to the studio's earliest films—including their dastardly antagonists. "We hear what people are saying out there—the fans are like, 'Just give us a villain! A real good old-fashioned villain!'" director Chris Buck told AFP. "And a good-looking villain!" added his fellow director Fawn Veerasunthorn.

"Wish" follows the adventures of Asha, a plucky 17-year-old girl who unexpectedly finds herself pitted against the handsome, duplicitous King Magnifico. Magnifico—voiced by Chris Pine—is a seemingly benevolent sorcerer-monarch, with the power to grant the wishes of his subjects and those who travel to his Medieval realm from far and wide.

But when Asha (Ariana DeBose) applies for a job as Magnifico's apprentice, she quickly learns that the king only grants wishes that suit his own selfish purposes. "He starts off charming," explains Veerasunthorn, but "we get to see the evolution of how he became the villain throughout the course of the story."

For producers Peter Del Vecho and Juan Pablo Reyes Lancaster Jones, there is something "delicious" about watching a villain make all the wrong choices. "Disney villains are funny and fun, and they are over-the-top at times," said Reyes. "But also they have their reasons to be villainous. And the villain song! Who



Atmosphere is seen at a celebration for the Walt Disney Company's 100th anniversary of the company's founding at Walt Disney Studios in Burbank, California.—AFP

hasn't missed a villain song?"

'Celebrate'

The movie, from the creators of "Frozen," was dreamt up as a way to celebrate Disney Animation's centenary. Early in the process, Buck and writer-producer Jennifer Lee sought inspiration by putting together a giant bulletin board with stills from all of the studio's previous films. They quickly realized that a common theme linking films from "Pinocchio" to "Moana" was characters wishing on stars.

Visually, "Wish" uses a watercolor style reminiscent of the fairytale storybooks that originally inspired Walt Disney to make his first animated feature, "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs," back in 1937. Disney staples such as talking animals hark back to movies like "Pinocchio" and "Bambi."

And when Asha makes a powerful wish of her own, she accidentally conjures to life an impish Star reminiscent of the earliest Disney character of them all—Mickey Mouse. Directors Buck

and Veerasunthorn encouraged crew across the various departments to suggest their own ways to honor Disney's legacy, and ended up having to create an Excel spreadsheet to keep track of all the references to previous films.

"I don't know how many, but there's a list of all the nods that we have—and it's a long list!" said Buck. The filmmakers even mined Walt Disney's childhood for inspiration. Researchers discovered that the studio's founder once dressed up animals in human clothes on the farm where he grew up.

Accordingly, Asha is accompanied on her adventures by a pajama-wearing goat called Valentino. And then, of course there, is the villain, King Magnifico, who has obvious shades of the Wicked Queen from "Snow White," and Maleficent from "Sleeping Beauty." "Certainly for this movie—for the 100th anniversary—it seemed great to celebrate that," said Del Vecho.—AFP

Napoleon's hat sells for record sum at French auction

A hat belonging to Napoleon Bonaparte when he was French emperor sold for a record of nearly two million euros at a French auction on Sunday, the auction house said. It went for 1.932 million euros (\$2.1 million) — breaking the previous record for a Napoleonic hat, held by the same auction house, of 1.884 million euros in 2014 shelled out by a South Korean businessman.

The hat, known as a bicorne, is in Napoleon's trademark colors—black, with the French flag's colors blue-white-red as insignia—and attracted interest from collectors "the world over", auctioneers Osenat said, declining to give the identity or nationality of the eventual buyer. It was last owned by businessman Jean-Louis Noisiez, who died last year.

Other Napoleon memorabilia from the Noisiez collection also went on the block, including a Legion of Honor medal and a pair of silver spurs owned by Napoleon. The final price for the hat, including all charges, was more than double the estimate of 600,000 to 800,000 euros, and nearly four times the reserve price, the auction house based in Fontainebleau, south of Paris, said. Napoleon is believed to have owned around 120 such hats in total over 15 years, most of which are



A black bicorne hat with red, white and blue cockade worn by the French Emperor Napoleon I (1769-1821), from the Collection of Jean Louis Noisiez, is displayed before an auction sale at Osenat auction house in Paris. — AFP

now lost. "The hat in itself represented the emperor's image," auction house expert Jean-Pierre Osenat told AFP ahead of the sale.

'A romantic'

Napoleon wore this particular hat towards the middle of his time as emperor, according to the auction house. Unlike most other officers at the time, Napoleon wore his hat sideways, which gave him a distinct silhouette easily recognized by his troops in battle. Napoleon rose to prominence during the French Revolution, becoming a key figure in the revolutionary wars. He served the republic as first consul, and had himself crowned as emperor in 1804.

He was exiled in 1815 after losing the battle against British and Prussian forces at Waterloo. He died in 1821 on the island of Saint Helena in the Atlantic Ocean. Sunday's hat sale comes only days before a biopic on Napoleon reaches cinemas worldwide.—AFP



British actor and comedian Russell Brand addresses an anti-austerity rally in Parliament Square in London.—AFP

London police question Russell Brand on sex assault charges

London police have questioned the comedian and actor Russell Brand over allegations of three sexual offences, The Times reported Sunday, following claims from several women of rape, sexual assault and emotional abuse. Brand, 48, has denied the claims stemming from an investigation by The Times, Sunday Times and Channel 4 of the alleged incidents, which are said to have taken place between 2006 and 2013.

Without identifying Brand by name, Scotland Yard said, "A man in his 40s attended a police station in south London on Thursday" for questioning in relation to "three non-recent sexual offences. Inquiries continue".

The inquiry was opened in September against the provocative actor who has become an anti-establishment influencer on social media, with millions of followers. Police have said "a certain number of claims" of sexual assault had since emerged, and Brand's former employers the BBC and Channel 4 as well as a production company have also opened investigations. The BBC recently said it had received two more complaints, for a total of five against the actor in Britain on "allegations of inappropriate conduct in the workplace, including urinating in bottles in a BBC studio". —AFP



Australians vote on name for home-made Moon rover

Australians began voting Monday on a name for the country's first home-made Moon rover, with a shortlist including "Mateship", "Roo-ver" and "Kakirra"—an Indigenous word for the Earth's satellite. Australia's space industry will develop the semi-autonomous rover to collect lunar soil under an agreement signed two years ago with NASA, which plans to fly it to the Moon's surface as soon as 2026.

NASA will then attempt to extract oxygen from the soil sample, marking "a key step towards a sustainable human presence on the Moon", the Australian Space Agency said in a statement. Two Australian consortiums, AROSE and

ELO2, are working on rover concepts, one of which will be selected to design and develop the final rover.

The agency said it had asked thousands of people and schools to take part in a contest to come up with the best name for the future Moon vehicle, whittling them down to a shortlist of four names. They were "Mateship", "Roo-ver", "Kakirra" and "Coolamon"—an Aboriginal wooden dish with curved sides used for various tasks including carrying food and cradling babies. Online voting opened to the public Monday, with the winning name to be announced December 6.—AFP

Lifestyle

SHAKIRA REACHES DEAL TO SETTLE SPAIN TAX FRAUD CASE

Colombian superstar Shakira will pay millions of euros in fines as part of a settlement announced Monday with Spanish prosecutors to settle her tax fraud case and avoid trial. Under the deal, announced at the start of what would have been the trial of the 46-year-old singer, Shakira agreed to receive a three-year suspended sentence and to pay 7.3 million euros (\$7.98 million) in fines.

Prosecutors had accused the superstar of defrauding the Spanish state of 14.5 million euros (\$15.7 million) on income earned between 2012 and 2014, charges Shakira had denied, saying she only moved to Spain full time in 2015. The singer, who wore a pink suit and sunglasses, did not speak to the throng of reporters as he entered and left the Barcelona courthouse, but in a statement she said she had agreed to settle for the sake of her two sons, Milan and Sasha.

"I need to move past the stress and emotional toll of the last several years and focus on the things I love - my kids and all the opportunities to come in my career, including my upcoming world tour and my new album," she said in the statement issued by her lawyers. "I admire tremendously those who have fought these injustices to the end, but for me, today, winning is getting my time back for my kids and my career."

The case centred on how much time



Colombian singer Shakira (center) leaves the High Court of Justice of Catalonia after attending her trial on tax fraud, in Barcelona. — AFP

the singer, whose hit singles include "Whenever, Wherever" and the 2010 World Cup song "Waka Waka", spent in Spain between 2012 and 2014. Spanish authorities alleged Shakira Isabel Mebarak Ripoll — dubbed the Queen of Latin Pop — spent more than half of that period in Spain and therefore should have paid taxes in the country. They say she moved to Spain after her relationship with former FC Barcelona star defender Gerard Pique became public in 2011, but maintained official tax residency in the Bahamas until 2015.

'Nomadic life'

Shakira's lawyers argued that until 2014, she was leading a "nomadic life"

and earned most of her money from international tours, and that she moved permanently to Barcelona just before the birth of her second son in January 2015. The diva announced her split from Pique in June 2022 after a decade-long relationship, ending what had been one of the world's most famous celebrity couples. She moved to Miami in April with their two sons, Milan and Sasha.

Her trial had been expected to run until December 14, with the court scheduled to hear from nearly 120 witnesses. Spanish prosecutors had interviewed her neighbours, tracked her images on social networks, checked payments at hairdressers and even the health clinic she attended during her pregnancy to bolster

their accusations. Questions about Shakira's finances have been raised before. The Latina superstar was named in one of the largest-ever leaks of financial documents in October 2021, known as the "Pandora Papers", which revealed the wealth and tax avoidance strategies of the global rich, in her case relating to residence in the Bahamas.

Latin Grammy winner

Spain has in recent years cracked down on celebrities like football stars Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo for not paying their full due in taxes. Both players were found guilty of evasion and received prison sentences that were waived for first-time offenders. Shakira's former partner Pique was himself convicted of tax fraud in 2016 and later ordered to pay the tax office 2.1 million euros.

The singer picked up three awards at the Latin Grammy Awards in Seville in southern Spain on Thursday, including for song of the year and best pop song for her collaboration with Argentine DJ Bizarrap on "Bzrp Music Sessions, Vol. 53". The track takes swipes at her former partner Pique and includes a reference to being left with a "debt to the tax office". It has been played almost 1.5 billion times on Spotify and YouTube. — AFP

Shakira, Shakira: Wronged Latina superstar in comeback mode

After a bitter split from her footballer ex Gerard Pique, Colombian superstar Shakira is back with a vengeance. First she released a diss track that nearly broke YouTube and on Monday she struck a deal with Spanish authorities to avoid the embarrassment of a tax fraud trial related to her years in Barcelona with Pique. The legal woes of the woman dubbed the queen of Latin music since her 2005 smash hit "Hips Don't Lie" are not yet at an end, with a second Spanish investigation into alleged tax evasion still hanging over her.

But the trial that had been due to start on Monday was the bigger of the two cases. Prosecutors had been seeking a jail sentence of eight years and two months for the 46-year-old, whom they accused of defrauding the Spanish state of 14.5 million euros (\$15.7 million) between 2012 and 2014. Shakira admitted guilt and agreed to pay a fine of 7.3 million euros, saying she needed "to move past the stress and emotional toll of the last several years and focus on the things I love", including her two sons, Milan and Sasha.

Dark times

But the last few years have not been easy for Shakira Isabel Mebarak Ripoll, an icon of Latina girl power, who has sold some 80 million albums worldwide and won three Grammy awards. In 2021, she was named in the "Pandora Papers" leaks, which revealed the wealth and tax avoidance strategies of the global elite.

And in June 2022 she announced her split from Spanish footballer Pique, ending one of the world's most famous celebrity couples. The breakup came around the same time as her elderly father suffered a bad fall. "Everything happened at once. My home was falling apart," she told People Magazine in 2023. "I thought I wasn't going to survive so much."

Picking herself up through her music, Shakira released a searing revenge song with Argentine DJ Bizarrap that has been viewed 645 million times on YouTube. Slamming Pique and his new love interest, she sings: "You swapped a Ferrari for a Twingo/You swapped a Rolex for a Casio."

'Like a goat'

Her phenomenally successful career is a story of serial reinvention, from teen crooner to Colombian rock chick to Latina bombshell. She grew up in a family of Arab descent in the Colombian port city of Barranquilla and began performing at the age of four, when she hopped up onto a table in a Middle Eastern restaurant and had the room clapping and cheering as she bellydanced. "I fell in love with the sensation of being on stage," she told Britain's Guardian newspaper in a 2002 interview.

Her friends were less complimentary about her voice, declaring she sang "like a goat", but Shakira was undeterred, recording her first single "Magia" as a denim-clad 14-year-old pining for her first love. Her breakthrough came in 1996 with her third album "Pies Descalzos", featuring a young rocker with jet black hair and a guitar slung across her shoulder.

'Innocent sensuality'

By 22, she had become Latin America's biggest pop star, with fans including Colombian Nobel literature prize laureate Gabriel Garcia Marquez, who declared she had "invented her own brand of innocent sensuality". To help her break out of Latin America, US-Cuban diva Gloria Estefan encouraged her to sing in English and in 2002 she went on a world tour with her first bilingual album, "Laundry Service".

She had become blonde by this point, mixed salsa and merengue with RnB, electro and hip-hop on chart-topping tracks like "Whenever, Wherever", and infused her routine with the head-spinning hip gyrations that would become her trademark. By the time she got to the World Cup South Africa, where she met Pique and headlined the closing ceremony, she was a superstar.

In 2017, she temporarily lost her voice after suffering a haemorrhage on her right vocal cord and was forced to call off a world tour for seven months. But she recovered and enjoyed a new career high in 2020 when she shared a half-time show with Jennifer Lopez during the Super Bowl. This year she collaborated with one of her new, younger rivals on the Colombian music scene, Karol G, on the reggaeton hit "TQG" (acronym for "Too Big for You" in Spanish). — AFP



Visitors look over Saint Anthony of Padua, ca. 1340, by Maso di Banco, during a press preview at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.



A visitor walks through a gallery exhibiting paintings by Rembrandt.

At NY Met, European masters can be seen in a new light



The "Africa & Byzantium" exhibit is shown during a press preview at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

Five centuries of European painting can be seen in a new light starting Monday, thanks to a five-year, \$150 million renovation at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art. The bold redo of the museum's massive wing devoted to masters from the 14th to 19th century includes a range of improvements, including to the section's skylights. More than 700 Dutch, Flemish, French, Italian, Spanish and English masterpieces — by artists including Johannes Vermeer, Rembrandt, Francisco Goya and El Greco — have been rehung and put back on display on the walls of the 45 galleries of the permanent exhibition "Look Again: European Paintings 1300-1800."

The Met has one of the largest collections of European paintings in the world, according to its director, Max Hollein. The Austrian art historian leads one of the richest museums on the planet, thanks in large part to its deep-pocketed donors. But the major renovation was vital, especially as the Met has been losing visitors since 2019.

As part of the renovation, all the rooms topped by skylights have been repainted, reorganized chronologically and re-lit. The aging skylights themselves were also replaced, according to the museum — a move which has "improved the quality of light" and "enhanced the experience of looking at (the) paintings." The sprawling muse-

um — in Beaux-Arts construction and located on Fifth Avenue on the edge of Central Park — boasts the largest collection outside of Europe of Dutch art from the 17th century, and of Greco and Goya works outside Spain.

The Met has also recently acquired paintings by women artists or portraits representing them, such as a still life by the Flemish painter Clara Peeters from the 17th century, and the portrait of an Indian woman by the British painter William Wood at the end of the 18th century during India's colonial era. — AFP



A visitor looks over paintings during a press preview at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.



Security guards walk through a gallery during a press preview at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.



A visitor looks at "Triptych with Crucifixion," while touring the "Africa & Byzantium" exhibit during a press preview at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.



A visitor looks at "Icon with the Virgin and Child, Saints, Angels, and the Hand of God," while touring the "Africa & Byzantium" exhibit during a press preview at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.



A visitor looks at "Vita Icon of Saint George with Scenes of His Passion and Miracles," while touring the "Africa & Byzantium" exhibit during a press preview at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.



A couple looks over Rembrandt's painting Aristotle with a Bust of Homer, 1653.

Sports

World Cup chokers? India searches for answers after latest letdown

'I just think we haven't played really well on the day'

AHMEDABAD: Cricket-obsessed India was left grappling for answers Monday after the team's devastating defeat to Australia in the final of their home World Cup extended a drought in global tournaments.

A much-fancied India team led by skipper Rohit Sharma went into Sunday's final in front of nearly 100,000 fans in Ahmedabad undefeated and favourites to capture the one-day crown. But they were outplayed by Pat Cummins' Australia, going down to a six-wicket defeat and leaving players, fans and pundits with a familiar feeling of disappointment.

"You can't deny the fact that it's been more than 10 years since they won a global title," Indian sports journalist R Kaushik told AFP on Monday. "If you look at the semi-final losses then there is a pattern, maybe there is something wrong in the planning," he added.

"You can interpret that as, 'Yes, they freeze on the big stage,' or you can say that, 'On that day they were not good enough'. But it's hard to say they freeze mentally." India's record makes for painful reading for its hundreds of millions of fanatical supporters.

Their last global title came a decade ago with the 2013 Champions Trophy. Sunday was also India's second loss to the Australians in a final in five months, after they went down in the World Test Championship decider in June. India won the one-day World Cup in 1983 and 2011, but then faltered at the semi-final stage in 2015 and 2019.

"India are the real chokers, they are the new chokers," fan Abir Saini, wearing a Virat Kohli In-

dian jersey, fumed as he trudged away from the world's biggest cricket stadium. "They play well but fall at the final hurdle."

'Can't pin it down'

Fans had turned anticipating an Indian victory after the hosts stormed into the final with 10 straight victories in the lead-up matches. But it was Australia who triumphed to win a record-extending sixth World Cup crown, with Travis Head hitting a sparkling 137.

India coach Rahul Dravid appeared as baffled as anyone at his team's inability to get over the line. "I mean, I guess if I knew the answer, I would say that," Dravid, who was appointed coach in 2021 until this year's World Cup, told reporters.

"I just think we haven't played really well on the day," he said of India's succession of near-misses. The former captain said that "there's not one particular reason you can pin it down to", adding that on Sunday "we didn't bat well enough". Indian media attempted to look on the bright side. The Hindustan Times said in a headline: "Champions, nonetheless."

But it noted there were some "harsh lessons", prime among them lack of depth in the batting department. "Don't despair, let's celebrate this India team," said The Times of India, highlighting several memorable moments during the six-week tournament—including an emphatic win over Pakistan.

India's dire record when it really counts is in stark contrast to Australia's, who have won six of the eight ODI World Cup finals they have contested. Osman



AHMEDABAD: India's coach Rahul Dravid (in orange) stands along with his team players at the end of the 2023 ICC Men's Cricket World Cup one-day international (ODI) final match between India and Australia at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad. — AFP

Samiuddin, a senior editor at ESPNcricinfo, said Australia had been clear underdogs against what he called India's best-ever one-day side.

But he singled out for praise Australia's fast bow-

ers, their fielding and skipper Cummins, and most of all their winning mentality. "They won the World Cup because Australia," he wrote, saying there was an air of inevitability to their latest success. — AFP

Faisal Abulhassan appointed by World Aquatics

KUWAIT: Member of Kuwait Aquatics Federation Faisal Abulhassan was appointed by World Aquatics with the advisory committee that includes experts in their professional fields.

Head of the advisors committee at the World Aquatics, Lawyer Christopher Burton welcomed the appointment of Abulhassan in the committee, adding that he has confidence in the new member.

The World Aquatics is the recognized entity by the International Olympic Committee to manage the aquatics competitions and its headquarters is located in Lausanne, Switzerland, and was established in 1908 under the name FINA, before changing the name into World Aquatics in January.

It is currently sanctioning six water sports: Swimming, diving, technical swimming, water polo, high diving and swimming in open water.



Faisal Abulhassan

Aberg grabs first PGA Tour title at RSM Classic

MIAMI: Sweden's Ludvig Aberg closed out a sensational rookie season with his first US PGA Tour title on Sunday, firing a nine-under-par 61 for a four-shot victory over Mackenzie Hughes in the RSM Classic. The 24-year-old, who turned pro in June, started the final round on the Seaside course at St. Simons Island, Georgia, with a one-shot lead and barely put a foot wrong, grabbing 10 birdies with one bogey for a 29-under-par total of 253.

Aberg cemented his rising star status, which had been building with a victory in the DP World Tour's European Masters and a stellar performance in Europe's Ryder Cup victory over the United States in Italy in September. "It's kind of beyond my dreams," Aberg said after birdies at three of the last four holes. "It's really cool. To first off play on the PGA Tour, I have a lot of people to thank for that. It's been so much fun, six months that I'll never forget."

"This is what you dream of as a kid. This is the sport that I love and the sport that I'm going to love for a very long time. Watching these events from a very young age is what I've done so to see myself win is really cool." The victory will move Aberg into the top 50 in the world rankings and give him entry to next year's Masters at Augusta National, which will be his first appearance in a major championship. "If you told me this a couple of months ago I would not have believed you," he said.

Aberg launched his round with an 11-foot birdie at the first hole, then added birdies at the fourth fifth and sixth. Another trio of birdies at the ninth, 10th and 11th boosted his lead, and after his lone miscue of the day at 12 he birdied 15, 17 and 18 coming in. Hughes, a two-time PGA Tour winner, said that after seeing Aberg up close he believes the "sky's the limit" for the young Swede. "He's kind of the modern day player," Hughes said, pointing to Aberg's birdie at the par-four fifth, where he drove the green and two-putted. — AFP



AHMEDABAD: India fans react while watching the 2023 ICC Men's Cricket World Cup one-day international (ODI) final match between India and Australia at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad. — AFP

'Let me sleep': India fans heartbroken after World Cup defeat

AHMEDABAD: India's six-wicket loss to Australia in the final of the Cricket World Cup in Ahmedabad Sunday left tens of thousands of fans heartbroken and in frantic search of a new plan for the night ahead. Having braved the long, colourful and festive queues for hours early Sunday to get into the ground, many started leaving the stadium in droves by the 35th over of Australia's chase as the result became obvious.

The grand 132,000-seat arena is the world's biggest cricket ground and named after Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The home team, which entered the final unbeaten and favourites to win a third title, could only set a below-par 241 target for Australia to chase.

"I am returning to my home in Mumbai now," said Jine Shah, 40, who left the stadium when Australia still needed 49 runs to win their sixth World Cup title. "I'd have stayed here and in the city if we were

Yang clinches LPGA Tour Championship

MIAMI: South Korea's Amy Yang claimed the biggest victory of her career on Sunday, outdueling Japan's Nasa Hataoka down the stretch to win the LPGA Tour Championship in Florida. The 34-year-old Florida-based Yang carded a six-under-par 66 to complete a three-shot victory at the Tiburon Golf Club in Naples and earn the \$2 million first prize. "I still can't believe I did it," said Yang, whose four prior LPGA titles all came in Asia.

Hataoka had been at the top of the leaderboard since the opening round, and went into Sunday's sharing the lead alongside Yang after shooting a seven-under-par 65 on Saturday. But after going through the first 54 holes of the tournament without shooting a single bogey, Hataoka finally blinked when it mattered most in Sunday's tense back nine shootout with Yang.

The two women were level on 25 under heading to the par-three 16th, and it looked as if they would remain tied at the top after Yang missed a long putt for birdie and the solo lead. Yet Hataoka bogeyed after missing her short par putt to leave Yang one shot clear with two to play. Yang said she was "really nervous" as they duelled down the stretch, knowing that Hataoka could seize the momentum at any moment. "I had no idea where this was going," Yang said. "All I could do was just stick to my game and trust it."

The Korean then turned the screw on the par-five 17th. Both players were left with tricky third shots after seeing their seconds miss the green. Yang though produced a sublime third shot, her chip for eagle lipping out to leave herself with a short putt for birdie. Hataoka's chip left her with an awkward birdie

winning, but what's the reason now?" he asked.

Rajiv Kumar, 25, who planned to "celebrate through the night after India's expected win", couldn't pinpoint what went wrong with the team. "They have been so good throughout this tournament, the best, and I don't know what happened today," he said.

"I just want to go back to my hotel to sleep and not think of this now if possible," Kumar added. While thousands of Indian fans left their seats, Rolofo Hugo, 51, a South African cricket fan from Paarl, stuck around for the final formalities.

Before this game "I didn't think that anyone could defeat India" on their current form, Hugo told AFP. Hugo felt that Australia's bowling and fielding made the difference in the all-important game. "We stayed back for the final even after" South Africa's elimination "because India reached the finals and we wanted to see them win over Australia today," he added.

Jacob Diaz, 33, from Arizona in the United States, watched his first cricket game with his friend Parvathi Subramanian, 33, and described it as a "good introduction to the game". "We would have stuck around at the stadium if the result was not a foregone conclusion. I expected India to play much better," said Subramanian. — AFP



NAPLES: Amy Yang of Korea poses with the CME Globe trophy after winning the CME Group Tour Championship at Tiburon Golf Club in Naples, Florida. — AFP

chance which she duly missed. Yang coolly rolled in her birdie to leave her two shots clear going to 18, and from there she never looked like slipping up, nailing her second to within eight feet for another birdie chance. Hataoka missed her birdie putt from off the green, giving Yang three putts from eight feet to seal victory.

In the end the world number 36 only needed one putt, rolling in the birdie to finish in style before being doused in champagne by friends and fellow players. The moment was especially satisfying in the wake of injury concerns that Yang feared could cut her season, if not her career, short. — AFP

World Cup thrills cannot erase future ODI concerns

AHMEDABAD: A World Cup that started with questions over the future of 50-over one-day internationals ended with doubts still being expressed about their worth outside the context of a showpiece event. Australia's six-wicket win over India in front of a 92,000 crowd at Ahmedabad's Narendra Modi Stadium may have been a disappointingly one-sided final for home and neutral fans.

But the memory of several more dramatic contests earlier in the tournament was still vivid, with Afghanistan overwhelming defending champions England by 69 runs and non-Test nation the Netherlands defeating eventual semi-finalists South Africa.

One of the plus points of an ODI is that it allows a team to stage the kind of epic comeback more often associated with a Test match, while still producing a result in a day. And while the high-velocity, smash-and-grab Twenty20 game may be increasingly important to the finances of players and national boards alike, as evidenced by the lucrative Indian Premier League, it rarely produces drama to compete with cricket's longer formats.

Nowhere was this more evident at this World Cup than during Australia's remarkable pool play victory over Afghanistan when, on the brink of defeat at 91-7 chasing 292, a staggering double century from Glenn Maxwell secured an extraordinary three-wicket win.

Pat Cummins, who kept Maxwell company during an unbroken stand of 202 in that memorable match at Mumbai's Wankhede Stadium, admitted to mixed emotions after leading Australia to a record-extending sixth World Cup title. "It's hard to say. Maybe because we won, but I did fall in love with ODI again this World Cup," said fast bowler Cummins, who took a superb 2-34 from his maximum 10 overs as Australia held India to a modest total of 240 all out.

Australia briefly wobbled at 47-3 in reply before Travis Head's 137 and the opener's partnership of 192 with Marnus Labuschagne (58 not out) took Cummins's side to victory with seven overs to spare. "I think the scenario where every game really matters, it does make it a bit different to just a bilateral (ODI)," said Cummins after a win that ended a run of three straight World Cup titles for a host nation following 2011, 2015 and 2019 triumphs for India, Australia and England respectively.

This was Australia's eighth appearance in a World Cup final, having been involved in the inaugural 1975 showpiece game, losing to the West Indies in a celebrated clash at Lord's. "The World Cup's got such rich history, I'm sure it's going to be around for a long time," said the 30-year-old Cummins, with the next edition scheduled for 2027 in southern Africa.

"There's so many wonderful games, so many wonderful stories within this last couple of months. So, I think there's definitely a place (for it)." But the issue of what happens to ODIs between World Cups remains to be discussed.

Prior to this edition, incoming MCC president Mark Nicholas called for all ODIs between World Cups to be scrapped. "We believe strongly that ODIs should be World Cups only," he told ESPNcricinfo. "They're not filling grounds in a lot of countries. And there is a power at the moment to T20 cricket that is almost supernatural."

He added: "In a free market, the most money wins." But former Hampshire captain Nicholas was a television broadcaster at a World Cup where he commented admiringly on both Afghanistan and the Netherlands.

And without bilateral ODIs between tournaments such as the World Cup and the Champions Trophy, to be next played in Pakistan in 2025, how will those teams maintain their standard or become even better at 50-over cricket? — AFP

Sports

Son issues warning as S Korea travel to China in WCup qualifier

Australia face Palestine in Kuwait

HONG KONG: South Korea travel to China on Tuesday for 2026 World Cup qualifying, with Son Heung-min warning his side they must keep their cool in front of a sell-out crowd. The clash in Shenzhen, just over the border from Hong Kong, is the pick of the second round of games in the second phase of qualifying for the World Cup in North America.

Among other notable matches, Australia face Palestine in Kuwait, Japan travel to Jeddah to play Syria, Iran are away at Uzbekistan and India host Qatar. South Korea thrashed Singapore 5-0 on Thursday to begin their qualifying campaign, with skipper and Tottenham Hotspur forward Son scoring a screamer from outside the box.

The Koreans are top of Group C in the early standings with China, who scored 16 minutes from time for a 2-1 win in Thailand. Jurgen Klinsmann's South Korea are favourites in Shenzhen, but Son warned: "I think Asian teams will try to be physical against us, and getting under our skin will perhaps be a part of their strategy."

"We just have to make sure we don't get dragged into that kind of thing and stick to our own game plan," Yonhap quoted him as saying following the thumping of Singapore in Seoul. More than 40,000 will pack out the Shenzhen Universiade Sports Centre stadium for the game.

President Xi Jinping has big ambitions for Chinese football, including hosting and even winning the World Cup one day, but they have only reached the tournament once, back in 2002. And following the victo-

ry over Thailand, Xi — in an unusually unguarded moment — was seen on video telling Thai Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin that China had been "lucky".

No matter the result on Tuesday, South Korea and China will be expected to qualify out of Group C when the second round wraps up in June. The top two from each of the nine groups go through to the final Asian qualifying round.

'Quite stressful'

Australia and Japan, who like South Korea both reached the last 16 at the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, also made fast starts to their qualifying campaigns. The Socceroos smashed Bangladesh 7-0 in Group I, with substitute Jamie Maclaren hitting a second-half hat-trick in Melbourne.

They will face a sterner test against Palestine in Kuwait City and coach Graham Arnold said that preparations were "quite stressful" given the backdrop of the Zionist entity-Hamas conflict. But his message was clear — focus on the football — and Australia chartered a flight direct to Kuwait from Melbourne to give themselves as much time as possible to get ready.

Palestine began their campaign with a 0-0 draw against Lebanon. In Group B, Ayase Ueda also scored a hat-trick as Japan got their bid to reach an eighth straight World Cup off to an emphatic start with a 5-0 win over Myanmar. They too can expect a much stiffer challenge against Syria, who defeated North Korea 1-0. — AFP



SEOUL: In this file photo South Korea's forward #7 Son Heung-min fights for the ball with Singapore's defender #21 Muhammad Safuwan Baharudin during the 2026 World Cup qualification football match between South Korea and Singapore in Seoul. — AFP

Ali Al-Kharafi wins gold in showjumping

KUWAIT: Kuwait club rider Ali Jassim Al-Kharafi won the "JAHIZ" international showjumping of the 3 star category that was organized by Saudi Equestrian Federation with the participation of 135 riders from 17 countries around the world.

In the top prize heat, at a height of 150cm with 24 riders of both genders competing, Kuwait's Ali Al-Kharafi was able to win the gold medal after tough competition with Saudi rider Kamal Bahamdan who took second place and Khalid Al-Mubti along with Thailand's Jingabahn Kramidaj in third place.

Ali Al-Kharafi continued his excellent performance as he won the first place of the middle category at a height of 135cm with 40 riders competing in this category.

President of Kuwait Equestrian Federation Masoud Hayat congratulated Kuwait riders, adding that Kuwait riders has a lot to achieve whenever they receive technical and financial support by decision makers.



Ali Al-Kharafi receiving the trophy.

Struggling La Rochelle edge Bordeaux-Begles

PARIS: La Rochelle prepared for Siya Kolisi's Racing 92 debut next weekend with a 25-21 win over Bordeaux-Begles on Sunday in the French Top 14. Ronan O'Gara's side moved up to eighth in the table with just their third win of the season, a week before facing Racing in Kolisi's expected first game for the Parisians.

Bordeaux-Begles dropped to 10th with their fourth loss of the campaign. "I think we've started our season now, it will do us a lot of good, it was an important victory," O'Gara told broadcaster Canal+. "We're in a tough period but I'm very proud of the players, and the crowd."

France winger Damian Penaud made his first Bordeaux-Begles start after his move from Clermont as ex-New Zealand scrum-half Tavera Kerr-Barlow captained La Rochelle, two-time Champions Cup holders under former Ireland fly-half O'Gara.

Penaud's outfit led 9-8 at the break thanks to three penalties from his Test and club team-mate Matthieu Jal-

ibert, while hooker Pierre Bourgarit crossed from a rolling maul for the hosts. Penaud set up centre Nicolas Depoortere before crossing for a superb effort of his own after a Jalibert cross-kick and Bordeaux-Begles led 21-8 with 25 minutes to play.

But La Rochelle claimed victory thanks to Samoa centre UJ Seuteni's try and Bourgarit's second, as 19-year-old replacement fly-half Hugo Reus slotted two conversions. Reus then completed the comeback against their Atlantic coast rivals with a long-range penalty to make it 25-21 with nine minutes to go, mirroring his impressive goal-kicking efforts in last weekend's win over Bayonne. South Africa's two-time World Cup-winning captain Kolisi joined his new club in the French capital two weeks ago after lifting the Webb Ellis trophy last month in the same city.

'Missing part'

On Saturday, he watched their 13-9 Parisian derby win over Stade Francais from the stands. "I can't wait to play, honestly. That's the missing part," Kolisi told Canal+ earlier on Sunday. "Being on the field is what I'm looking forward to most."

Elsewhere, Montpellier appointed controversial former France head coach Bernard Laporte as director



LA ROCHELLE: Bordeaux-Begles' French wing Damian Penaud passes the ball during the French Top14 rugby union match between Stade Rochelais (La Rochelle) and Union Bordeaux-Begles (UBB) at The Marcel-Deflandre Stadium in La Rochelle, western France. — AFP

of rugby hours after the 23-16 loss to Perpignan left the 2022 champions bottom of the table. Laporte resigned from his position as French Rugby Federation president in January after being found guilty of favoritism in awarding a shirt sponsorship contract for the national side to Mohamed Altrad,

Montpellier's billionaire owner.

Test rugby's most capped player in former Wales and British and Irish Lions captain Alun Wyn Jones made the final appearance of his career on Saturday as Toulon edged Clermont 30-27 for their first win at the Stade Marcel-Michelin in eight years. — AFP

Another WCup blow for Nigeria after Zimbabwe draw

JOHANNESBURG: Nigeria suffered a second setback in four days to their hopes of competing at the 2026 World Cup after drawing 1-1 with Zimbabwe on Sunday. Walter Musona scored direct from a free kick to put Zimbabwe ahead in the first half of the match-day two clash and Kelechi Iheanacho equalized midway through the second half.

Last Thursday, Nigeria also had to come from behind to draw 1-1 at home against Lesotho, the lowest ranked of the six Group C teams. "It was a tough, difficult flight of many hours from Nigeria and the players did not have sufficient rest," said Nigeria coach Jose Peseiro. "Our first half performance was very poor, but we improved considerably in the second half and missed several late chances to take all three points." Nigeria have participated at six World Cups — a record bettered only by Cameroon in Africa — and are favorites to win a mini-league, which also includes South Africa, Benin and Rwanda.

But if South Africa win in Rwanda on Tuesday, they will go four points clear of Nigeria after just two rounds. While Zimbabwe were officially the home team, the match was staged in the Rwandan city of Butare because the southern African nation does not have an international-standard stadium. Despite lacking the backing of their supporters, Zimbabwe impressed in the opening half and went ahead after 26 minutes. There did not appear to be any immediate danger to Nigeria when Zimbabwe were awarded a free kick well outside the box.

Superb kick

But Musona, who plays for South African top-tier club Polokwane City, gave goalkeeper Francis Uzoho no chance with a superb kick into the roof of the net. Peseiro made three changes at half-time and one of the substitutes, Iheanacho, levelled on 67 minutes with a low shot past goalkeeper Bernard Donovan into the corner of the net.

It was a well constructed goal with captain Moses Simon making a timely off-the-ball run to win possession before passing to Iheanacho. Alex Iwobi and Iheanacho then wasted chances to score and ease the pressure on Peseiro, with many Nigerians calling for him to be fired before the Africa Cup of Nations starts on January 13. While Nigeria struggle, Egypt, Algeria and Gabon triumphed for the second time in different groups to finish the first two rounds with maximum points. Former Aston Villa forward Mahmoud 'Trezeguet' Hassan netted in each half to earn Egypt a 2-0 Group A victory over hosts Sierra Leone, Fares Chaibi and Ramiz Zerrouki scored in the second half as four-time World Cup qualifiers Algeria won 2-0 away to Mozambique in Group G. Gabon followed up a last-gasp win over Kenya under new coach Thierry Mouyouma by overcoming Burundi 2-1 in Group F through goals from Jim Allevinah and Denis Bouanga. — AFP

Classifieds

Clinics & Hospitals

Clinics

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

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

Hospitals

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

Change of Name

I, **Musthafa** Kamal Malik Batcha S/o Musthafa Kamal holder of Indian Passport No. L4906329 having permanent address 8/2067,2068, KMS Nagar, Melacauvery, Kumbakonam, Thanjavur, Melakaveri, Tamil Nadu, 612002, India residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as: Nazeer Ahamed (given name) and Musthafa Kamal (surname). 21-11-2023

I, **Miqdad** S/o Abbas Ali, Holder of Indian Passport No. Z2815566, having permanent address 132/4 Kotawala Baag Ratlam, Madhya Pradesh, India - 457001 residing in Kuwait at present hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as: Miqdad (Name) Kalabhai (surname). So I known as Miqdad Kalabhai (C#4559) 20-11-2023

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Record-breaker Djokovic claims seventh ATP Finals crown

Rajeev Ram and Joe Salisbury retain their doubles title

TURIN: Novak Djokovic claimed yet another record on Sunday with his seventh ATP Finals title, sweeping aside local hero Jannik Sinner 6-3, 6-3 in Turin and leaving tennis fans wondering when he will relinquish his tennis dominance. Djokovic came into the Finals at the end of an age-defying year which has brought three Grand Slams, taking his total to an all-time best of 24, and a 40th Masters 1000 title.

He will clock a 400th week at world number one after crowning an incredible season—in which he also reached the Wimbledon final—by moving clear of retired great Roger Federer in victories at the season-ending tournament. The 36-year-old took his record-breaking crown by beating in straights sets the game's best two young players in Sinner and vanquished semi-finalist Carlos Alcaraz, showing that he still has plenty to give with the Paris Olympics around the corner and a gold medal the only major title missing from his list of honours.

"Very special, one of the best seasons I've had in my life, no doubt. To crown it with a win against a home town hero in Jannik, who has played amazing tennis all week, is phenomenal," said Djokovic. "I'm very proud of the performances of the last two days against Alcaraz and Sinner, who are probably the two best players in the world, next to me and Medvedev at the moment. The way they have been playing I had to step it up."

Sinner was bidding to become the first ever Italian to win the Finals and looked like the right man to do it after his impressive group stage win over Djokovic. But the 22-year-old, like Alcaraz in Saturday's semi, simply could not handle Djokovic, a man on a mission who hit his best form at exactly the right time in the tournament.

It is a testament however to how far Sinner, a

four-time winner this year, has come in the past year that he had Djokovic's tournament fate in his hands at the end of the group stage, when defeat by Holger Rune would have sent the Serb home early.

Record-breaker Djokovic

Sinner saved Djokovic's skin and in the end paid for it in the final, but the quality of his performances at the Pala Alpitour has been a cause for much optimism in Italy and suggests that he should be a Grand Slam contender next season. "We've seen today that there's still plenty to work on... but we can look at the positives from this season," said Sinner.

"When I started this season I was one type of player, now I'm another. Let's see how we go next season." Djokovic took control early in the match, breaking Sinner at the first opportunity in game four and then comfortably serving out the opening set.

Such was his dominance that Djokovic silenced a partisan crowd which has been rambunctious for all of Sinner's matches, and he immediately broke serve again at the start of the second set. He reeled off 14 straight points from the start of the final game of the first set into the third game of the second, which was eventually won by Sinner to just hold his serve.

Sinner looked like he was going to be walked over but he showed huge heart and brought the crowd to its feet when he held his serve in game seven, a 15-minute mini-epic in which Djokovic had two break points, to stay at 4-3. However in the end he couldn't stay with Djokovic and surrendered the match in disappointing fashion with a double fault.

Earlier, Rajeev Ram and Joe Salisbury retained



Novak Djokovic

their doubles title as they cruised to a 6-3, 6-4 victory over Marcel Granollers and Horacio Zeballos. The US Open champions kept hold of their crown with a near-perfect campaign in Turin, going unbeaten in their five matches.

American Ram and Briton Salisbury took their winning streak at the season-ending tournament to 10 matches after also sweeping to last year's title undefeated. — AFP

Durant leads Suns to win over Jazz, Lakers edge Rockets

LOS ANGELES: Phoenix star Kevin Durant scored 39 points and thwarted Utah's Lauri Markkanen at the final buzzer on Sunday as the Suns beat the Jazz 140-137 in an NBA double-overtime thriller. Durant added eight rebounds and 10 assists while Devin Booker scored 26 points for the Suns.

Markkanen led Utah with 38 points and grabbed 17 rebounds. Durant scored eight points in the second overtime, which the Suns led 138-135 with 43.2 seconds left. Markkanen's layup sliced the deficit to one but Booker drained two free throws to put Phoenix up 140-137 with nine-tenths of a second left.

Markkanen had a last chance, with officials initially ruling he was fouled by Durant on a failed three-point attempt. But that call was overturned on review and the Suns had the win. Utah had trailed much of the night before Markkanen forced the first overtime with a layup with 20.3 seconds left in regulation.

Phoenix jumped to a 123-118 lead in the first extra session, but Utah clawed back and Collin Sexton forced a second overtime with a putback layup. Durant notched his 12th straight game with 25 or more points, the longest such streak in Suns history.

"I'm just trying to stay prepared on off days and before games, just trying to follow the game plan to execute as much as I can and play with a calm and free spirit," Durant said. The Los Angeles Lakers, fueled by a season-high 37 points from superstar LeBron James, held off the Houston Rockets 105-104.

Austin Reaves, fed by James, drilled a three-pointer to put the Lakers up 103-100 with 24.2 seconds to play. But Alperen Sengun's layup tied it up at 104-104 with four seconds left. James, fouled under the rim, made one of two free throws to clinch it.

James added six rebounds and eight assists and Anthony Davis scored 27 points with 10 rebounds. Reaves finished with 17 points off the bench—a

key contribution on a night when Lakers starters Cam Reddish, Taurean Prince and D'Angelo Russell struggled offensively. The Boston Celtics also had a narrow escape, stretching their winning streak to six games with a 102-100 victory over the Grizzlies in Memphis.

A back-and-forth battle featuring 18 lead changes saw the Celtics survive when Kristaps Porzingis drove for a go-ahead dunk with one minute, one second remaining then blocked Ziaire Williams's last-gasp attempt at the buzzer. Porzingis led the Celtics with 26 points, pulling down eight rebounds and blocking six shots.

Embiid leads Sixers

Elsewhere, the short-handed Cleveland Cavaliers shocked the NBA champion Denver Nuggets 121-109 as frustrated Nuggets star Nikola Jokic battled foul trouble and ended the game watching from the bench. Darius Garland led Cleveland with 26 points and rookie Craig Porter Jr. added a career-high 21 to help the Cavs to a third straight victory despite the absence of star guard Donovan Mitchell and top reserve Caris LeVert.

Two-time NBA Most Valuable Player Jokic, shouldering a big load with star teammate Jamal Murray still sidelined by a strained hamstring, finished with 18 points, 10 rebounds and seven assists. Reigning NBA MVP Joel Embiid needed just three quarters to score 32 points with 12 rebounds and nine assists, powering the Philadelphia 76ers to a 121-99 victory over the Nets in Brooklyn.

Tyrese Maxey scored 25 points and handed out 10 assists for the Sixers, who led 61-49 at halftime and never trailed the rest of the way. With the game in hand, Embiid sat out all of the fourth quarter. His nine assists were his season high, and he was unconcerned at missing out on a sixth career triple-double.

"I got told I was three assists away, but that's not where my head was at," Embiid said. "We just try to play the right way." In Toronto, the Raptors led by as many as 40 points on the way to a 142-113 victory over the Detroit Pistons. The Raptors set a franchise record with 44 assists as they handed the Pistons an 11th straight defeat. — AFP



LISBON: Iceland's midfielder #08 Arnor Sigurdsson is tackled by Portugal's defender #20 Joao Cancelo during the UEFA Euro 2024 group J qualifying football match between Portugal and Iceland at the Jose Alvalade stadium in Lisbon. — AFP

Portugal notch 10th straight win, Serbia qualify for Euro 2024

PARIS: Portugal finished their Euro 2024 qualifying campaign with a 100-percent record by beating Iceland 2-0 on Sunday, after Serbia booked their place at next year's finals in Germany and Romelu Lukaku scored four goals for Belgium.

Bruno Fernandes and Ricardo Horta netted the goals for Roberto Martinez's Portugal, with Cristiano Ronaldo not on the scoresheet, to end with 10 wins from 10 matches in Group J. The 2016 winners will be among the favourites for the title in what could be the 38-year-old Ronaldo's last major tournament. Slovakia finished eight points behind Portugal in the second qualifying place after a 2-1 win over Bosnia and Herzegovina in Zenica. Luxembourg, who will head into the play-offs, were a further five points adrift after closing out an impressive group-stage showing with a 1-0 success in Leichtenstein.

Earlier Sunday, Serbia qualified for the first time as an independent nation, after four previous failures to get to the main event, with a 2-2 draw against Bulgaria. The Serbs finish second in Group G behind Hungary who snuffed out any hopes Montenegro had of progressing by beating them 3-1 in Budapest.

"The players showed a mentality of not giving up, believing in themselves," said Serbia coach Dragan Stojkovic. "It's a big day for Serbian football. Serbia is finally at the European Championship. I congratulate my boys, who fought until the end and believed. We are happy and satisfied." Centre-back Milos Veljkovic put Serbia ahead in the 17th minute before

substitute Georgi Rusev levelled for Bulgaria in the 59th. Ten minutes later Kiril Despodov put the visitors ahead but Srdjan Babic equalised eight minutes from time to ensure Serbia would become the 17th team to qualify for Euro 2024.

Montenegro needed Serbia to lose to have any hope of taking their place in Germany but also needed to win against the Hungarians who have eased impressively through qualifying. Slobodan Rubezic put Montenegro ahead on 36 minutes but Hungary hit back in the second half with two goals in three minutes from Liverpool midfielder Dominik Szoboszlai before Zsolt Nagy rounded off the win in added time.

Lukaku on fire

Lukaku scored four goals as Belgium finished with a 5-0 thrashing of Azerbaijan. Roma striker Lukaku extended his record tally of international goals for Belgium to 83, with all of his goals coming in a remarkable first half in Brussels.

He opened the scoring in the 17th minute by converting a Jeremy Doku cross, before Eddy Israfilov was shown a second yellow card seven minutes later to leave the Azeris with a mountain to climb. Lukaku fired home shortly afterwards and then headed in Wout Faes' delivery to complete a hat-trick.

He rounded off his scoring spree of four goals in 20 minutes before being replaced by Lois Openda at half-time. The Belgians took their foot off the gas in the second period but Leandro Trossard added a fifth in the 90th minute from another Doku assist.

Belgium finished top of Group F, one point clear of Austria, with both having wrapped up qualification with matches to spare. Sweden ended a miserable campaign, in which they failed to qualify for a European Championship for the first time since 1996, with a 2-0 win over Estonia in the other game in the group. — AFP



LOS ANGELES: LeBron James #23 of the Los Angeles Lakers dunks the ball against Jabari Smith Jr. #10, Tari Eason #17, Fred VanVleet #5, Dillon Brooks #9 and Alperen Sengun #28 of the Houston Rockets during the fourth quarter at Crypto.com Arena in Los Angeles, California. — AFP