

Amir thanks all condolers

Mourners pay final respects at Bayan Palace • Amir to take oath in Assembly



KUWAIT: Mourners pay their final respects to HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and members of the Al-Sabah Family at Bayan Palace on Dec 19, 2023. — KUNA photos

KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah extended his thanks and appreciation on Tuesday to top Kuwaiti officials for their condolences and sincere sentiments on the demise of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. HH the Amir thanked National Assembly Speaker Ahmad Al-Saadoun, National Guard Chief HH Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah, HH Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, HH Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, HH Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah and HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah.

HH the Amir also expressed his thanks to ministers, MPs, citizens, editors-in-chief of local newspapers and media channels, civil society institutions

and charitable societies. HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal stated that this reflects the depth of connections between the Kuwaiti people and highlights their devotion, wishing them all good health and wellbeing.

HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal also expressed on Tuesday his sincere thanks and appreciation to leaders of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, heads of brotherly Arab countries, leaders of friendly countries of the world, Secretary General of the United Nations and Secretary General of the League of Arab States. He also extended thanks to the Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the Secretary General of the GCC, President of the Arab Parliament, Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization

(NATO), Director of the World Health Organization (WHO), Director of the United Nations World Food Program (FAO) and the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

He also expressed thanks to the Commissioner General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine (UNRWA), Director of the United Nations Development Program, all heads of organizations and agencies of the United Nations, all organizations of the League of Arab States, heads of diplomatic missions accredited to the country and heads of institutions and charitable societies outside the country.

HH the Amir also extended his thanks to heads of non-governmental organizations for their sincere condolences on the demise of late Amir Sheikh

Nawaf, whether by attending and offering condolences or via condolence messages, phone calls or statements. He expressed appreciation to these initiatives that embody the bonds of historical and close relations that bind Kuwait and all Arab and friendly countries, and to all international and regional organizations and agencies, as he wished everyone good health and wellness.

HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal will take the constitutional oath at a special session of the National Assembly on Wednesday as the 17th Amir of the State of Kuwait. On Monday, Speaker Ahmad Al-Saadoun called for the special session upon the request of the government in line with article 60 of the constitution. — KUNA

May God bless your path of continuous generosity.

Foreign leaders, delegations arrive to offer condolences

UK's Prince of Wales, FM



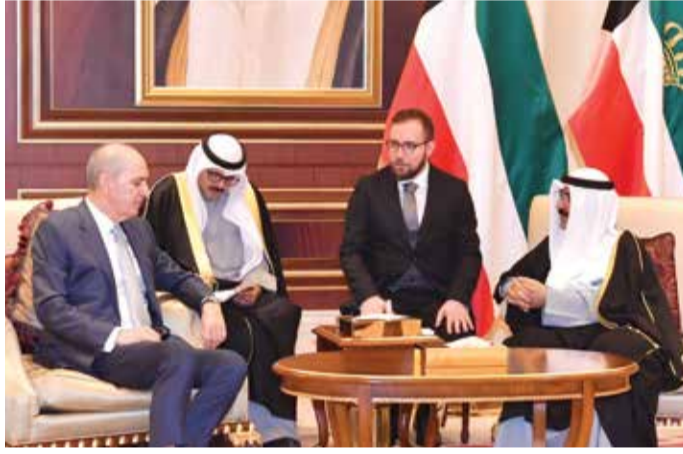
His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received William, Prince of Wales, along with Foreign Minister David Cameron and their accompanying delegations, to offer condolences. The British Minister of State for the Middle East and North Africa, Lord Tariq Ahmad, said that the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah managed to take British-Kuwaiti relations to broader horizons in all fields and at all levels. Lord Ahmad made the remark to Kuwait TV and KUNA after, on behalf of his government, having offered condolences over the passing of the late Amir at the Kuwaiti Embassy in London, which created a condolence book on Sunday for three days. He stressed deep and firm relations between Britain and Kuwait, adding that a high-level British delegation had traveled to Kuwait to extend condolences over the demise of Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. He regarded this as proof of strong relations and bonds between both friendly countries.

Libyan Presidential Council



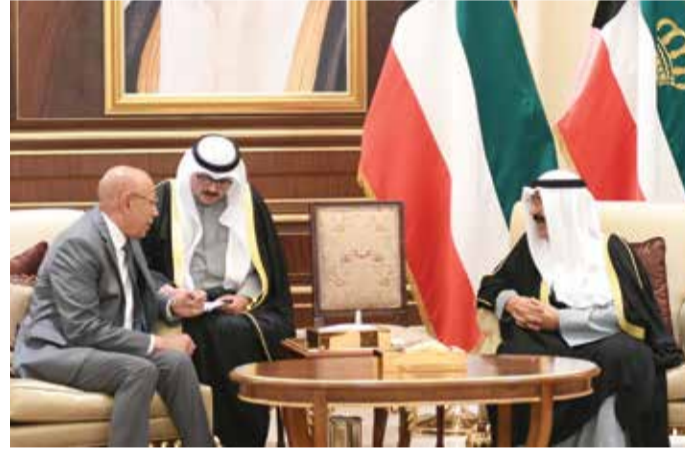
His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Monday the President of the Libyan Presidential Council Mohamed Al-Menfi and his accompanying delegation who came to offer condolences over the demise of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Turkey's top lawmaker



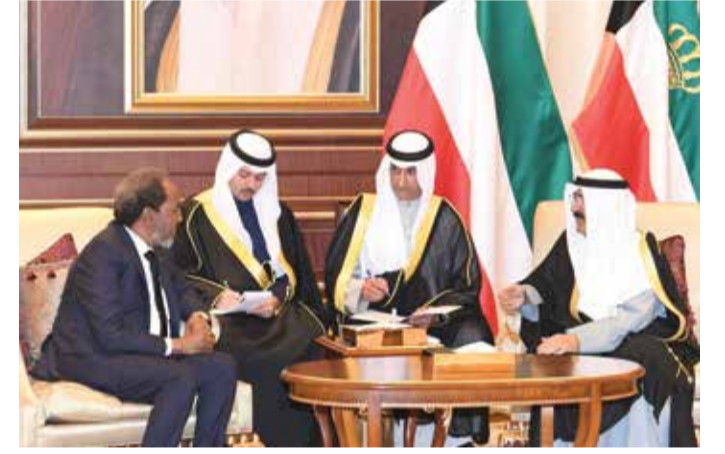
His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received Turkish Parliament Speaker Numan Kurtulmus and his accompanying delegation, who are in Kuwait, to offer condolences over the passing of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Mauritanian President



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received Mauritania President Mohamed Ould Cheikh Ghazouani and his accompanying delegation who came to offer condolences over the demise of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Somali President



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received Somalia President Hassan Sheikh Mahmoud and his accompanying delegation, who came to offer condolences over the demise of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. The Somali leader extended his condolences to Kuwaiti leaders, top officials and citizens.



خير خلف.. لخير سلف

تتقدم شركة الاتصالات الكويتية stc

ممثلة بمجلس إدارتها وجميع موظفيها بخالص التهنئة

إلى حضرة صاحب السمو

الشيخ مشعل الأحمد الجابر الصباح

أمير دولة الكويت

بمناسبة توليه مقاليد الحكم، سائلين المولى عز وجل أن يوفقه في مواصلة

مسيرة البناء والتنمية لما فيه خير لدولتنا الحبيبة الكويت وشعبها الكريم.

stc

Pakistani Prime Minister



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Monday at the Amiri Airport, Pakistani Prime Minister Anwar Ul Haq Kakar and his accompanying delegation who came to offer condolences.

King of Spain



Kuwait Amir HH Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received Spain's King Felipe VI and his accompanying delegation who came to offer condolences over the demise of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Sultan of Oman



Kuwait Amir HH Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Monday received the Sultan of Oman Haitham Bin Tarik and his accompanying delegation who offered their deepest condolences over the demise of Kuwait's late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Bhutanese King's Envoy



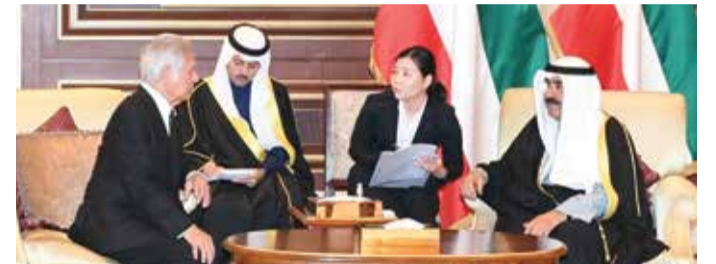
His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Tuesday the envoys of Bhutanese King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, Prince Jigyel Ugyen Wangchuck, President of the Bhutanese Olympics Committee, and the accompanying delegation. The visiting Bhutanese officials expressed their condolences on the demise of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

South Korean Representative



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Monday received South Korean Government Representative and Foreign Minister Park Jin and his accompanying delegation who visited to offer condolences over the demise of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Japan PM's Special Envoy



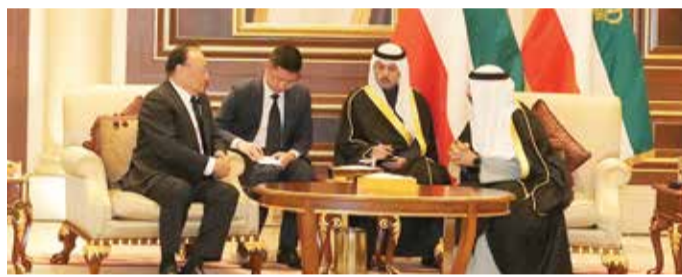
Kuwait Amir HH Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Monday received Japanese Prime Minister's Special Envoy Dr Mori Eisuke and his accompanying delegation who came to offer condolences over the demise of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Algerian President's Representative



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received (at the Amiri Airport) representative of Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune, Prime Minister Nadir Larbaoui and his accompanying delegation who came to offer condolences.

Chinese President's Special Envoy



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Monday Chinese President Xi Jinping's special envoy Shohrat Zakir and his accompanying delegation who visited to offer condolences over the demise of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Moroccan King's Representative



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Monday the representative of King Mohammed VI of Morocco Prince Rashid Bin Al-Hassan II and his accompanying delegation who visited to offer condolences over the demise of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

President of Privy Council for Canada



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received the President of the King's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Emergency Preparedness and Minister responsible for the Pacific Economic Development Agency of Canada Harjit S Sajjan and his accompanying delegation who came to offer condolences over the demise of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Djiboutian Foreign Affairs Minister



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Monday received the Djibouti Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Mahmoud Ali Youssouf and his accompanying delegation who came to offer condolences.

Yemeni Presidential Council Chief



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Monday Yemeni President of the Presidential Council Dr Rashad Al-Alimi and his accompanying delegation who came to offer condolences over the demise of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Qatari Deputy Amir



Kuwait Amir HH Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received Qatari Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad Al-Thani and his accompanying delegation, who came to offer condolences over the demise of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Son of Bohra Sultan



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received Dr. Husain Burhanuddin, son of the Sultan of Bohra, and the accompanying delegation. Dr. Burhanuddin offered his condolences over the demise of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. He also sent condolences to top Kuwaiti officials and citizens.

Kurdistan Prime Minister



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Monday received the Prime Minister of the Kurdistan region Masrour Barzani and his accompanying delegation who offered condolences to the Amir over the demise of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Bangladeshi President's Representative



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received the representative of the President of Bangladesh, Mohammed Shahabuddin, Minister of Foreign Affairs Abul Kalam Abdul Momen, and his accompanying delegation, who are in Kuwait, to offer condolences to the Amir over the demise of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

French Minister of Armed Forces



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received French Minister of Armed Forces Sebastien Lecornu and his accompanying delegation, who are in Kuwait to offer condolences to the Amir over the demise of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Leader of Iraq's National Alliance



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Monday the leader of the Alliance of National State Forces of Iraq, Sayyid Ammar Al-Hakim, and his accompanying delegation, who are in Kuwait, to offer condolences over the passing of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Italian Deputy FM



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received Italian Deputy Foreign Minister Edmondo Cirielli and his accompanying delegation, who offered condolences over the passing of the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Sudan's Ruling Council Member



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received a Member of the Sudanese Transitional Sovereignty Council Lieut Gen Shams Eddin Kabashi Ibrahim and his accompanying delegation, who are in Kuwait to offer condolences over the passing of the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Armenian President



Armenian President Vahagn Khachaturyan expressed his deepest condolences to the Kuwaiti leadership and people over the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, who passed away last Saturday.

Officials, citizens offer condolences



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received, on Tuesday, at Bayan Palace, Justice Dr. Adel Majed Boursli, the head of the Supreme Judicial Council and the Court

of Cassation, and members of the council. His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal also hosted senior officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, heads of the diplomatic missions in the State of Kuwait, ranking

chiefs of the Army, the National Guard, the Fire Directorate General, and citizens. They offered condolences over the demise of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. — KUNA

Kuwait missions abroad mourn

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti embassies in Austria, New Zealand, Cambodia, and Indonesia held their respective functions to mourn the demise of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, who passed away last Saturday. The embassies each opened their condolence book for the late Amir and held a three-day mourning period. In Austria, Ambassador of Kuwait Talal Al-Fassam remembered Amir Sheikh Nawaf for his keen interest in the development of Kuwait and the welfare of its people. He expressed his condolences to the Kuwaiti leadership and people for this great loss.

Similarly, a statement from the Kuwaiti Embassy in New Zealand said that the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad would always be remembered as a man of great vision and compassion for Kuwaitis and residents alike. In Cambodia, the Kuwaiti Embassy held a three-day mourning period with the Ambassador Mohammad Al-Hajri and embassy staff receiving officials offering condolences over the great loss of Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad. In Indonesia, the Kuwaiti Embassy there released a statement lamenting the passing of Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad, announcing a three-day mourning period at the Embassy in Jakarta.

Arab officials mourn

Several Arab officials, while attending functions at Kuwaiti diplomatic missions abroad, expressed on Tuesday their sorrow over the demise of the late Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. At the Kuwaiti Embassy in the Republic of Austria, visiting Saudi Minister of Commerce Dr. Majid Al-Qasabi offered his condolences on the demise of Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the late Amir of Kuwait.

Al-Qasabi met with Ambassador to Austria Talal Suleiman Al-Fassam in the presence of the Saudi ambassador, Dr. Abdullah Bin Khalid Tola. He offered sincere condolences to the Al-Sabah Family and to the



Kuwait Embassy in Cambodia. — KUNA photos



Kuwait Embassy in New Zealand



Kuwait Embassy in Indonesia opens a condolence book.



Dr Abdullah Al-Saidi signs condolence register at Kuwait Embassy in Muscat.



Saudi Trade Minister Majed Al-Qasabi signs condolence register.

Kuwaiti people on the demise of Sheikh Nawaf, who passed away after a career full of achievement and giving. Meanwhile, the Ambassador of the State of Kuwait to Russia, Rashid Al-Adwani, expressed on Tuesday his condolences on the demise of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

He pointed out that Sheikh Nawaf also worked to consolidate the foreign political approach of Kuwait, which is based on peace, humanitarian work, and continuing to provide assistance to people and

countries in need. From Muscat, two Omani ministers offered condolences on the demise of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah at the headquarters of the Kuwaiti Embassy in the Sultanate of Oman. The Minister of Justice and Legal Affairs, Dr. Abdullah Al-Saidi, and the Minister of Trade, Industry, and Investment Promotion, Qais Al-Yousef, expressed in a statement to Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) their deep sorrow over this great loss. — KUNA



UN flags fly at half-mast

NEW YORK: The UN flags were lowered to half-mast at the international organization headquarters in New York on Monday to mourn the demise of Kuwait's late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. The ceremony was attended by Kuwait's Permanent Delegate to the UN, Ambassador Tareq Al-Bannai, and other members of the Kuwaiti mission at the UN. In a press statement on Sunday, the UN said the late Amir was a distinguished statesman who contributed to the growth of understanding and cooperation in the Gulf and beyond and pursued strengthened relations in support of peace and stability in the region and around the world. — KUNA



Kuwait Ambassador to Russia Rashid Al-Adwani and Embassy Staff.



Omani officials at Kuwait Embassy in Muscat to express condolences on passing of Kuwait's late Amir.



Scan & Subscribe
KD 20 a year

For Individuals Only



Scan Now

Kuwait Times
Established 1961
The First English Daily in the Arabian Gulf



Tel: 24833199 Ext: 220

Amir receives condolence messages

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received a cable on Tuesday from the President of Romania, Klaus Werner Johannis, voicing heartfelt condolences and sincere solace over the passing of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. In his cable, he remembered the outstanding contributions of the late Amir to the renaissance and progress of Kuwait in various fields. In reply, His Highness the Amir sent to the Romanian President a cable of thanks and appreciation for his sincere sentiments of condolences and sympathies, wishing him good health and wellness.

NZ Governor-General

His Highness the Amir received a cable from New Zealand Governor-General Cindy Kiro voicing heartfelt condolences and sincere solace over the passing of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. In his cable, the Governor-General praised the late Amir's nobility, humanistic vision, solidarity, and contribution to strengthening friendly relations between the two countries.

North Korea President

His Highness the Amir received a cable of condolences from President Kim Jong Un on the demise of the late Kuwaiti Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. The President expressed his deep sorrow and sincere solace to the Amir and the people of Kuwait. His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal sent a cable thanking the Korean President for his sentiments and wishing him good health.

Netherlands King

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received a cable of condolence from the King of the Netherlands, Willem Alexander, expressing his sorrow over the demise of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. In the cable, the King expressed grief on behalf of his nation, extending his sentiments to the Kuwaiti people.

South Sudan President

HH the Amir received a cable from President Salva Kiir Mayardit on Tuesday, voicing heartfelt condolences and sincere solace over the passing of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. In reply, His Highness the Amir sent to the South Sudanese President a cable of thanks and appreciation for his sincere sentiments of condolences and sympathies, wishing him good health and wellness.

European Council President

His Highness the Amir received on Tuesday a cable of condolences from President of the European Council Charles Michel on the demise of the late Kuwaiti Amir. The European President recalled the long legacy of the late Amir and his significant contributions to bolstering relations with the European Council.

Kazakh President

His Highness the Amir received a cable from the President of Kazakhstan, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, voicing heartfelt condolences and sincere solace over the passing of the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. In the cable, he commended the late Amir's great role in bolstering friendly relations between both countries.

Eritrea President

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received a cable from the President of Eritrea, Isaias Afwerki, voicing heartfelt condolences and sincere solace over the passing of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. In reply, His Highness the Amir sent the Eritrean president a cable of thanks and appreciation for his sincere sentiments of condolences and sympathies, wishing him good health and wellness.

Spain's Prime Minister

HH the Amir received a cable on Monday from the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Spain, Pedro Sanchez, voicing heartfelt condolences and sincere solace over the passing of the late Amir. In reply, His Highness the Amir sent the Spanish premier a cable of thanks and appreciation for his sincere sentiments of condolences and sympathies, wishing him good health and wellness.

OIC chief

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received a cable from the Secretary General of the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation, Husein Ibrahim Taha, voicing heartfelt condolences and sincere solace over the passing of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Tatarstan President

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received a cable from the President of Tatarstan, Rustam Minnikhanov, expressing sincere solace over the passing of the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. In reply, His Highness the Amir sent the president of Tatarstan a cable of thanks and appreciation for his sincere sentiments of condolences and sympathies, wishing him good health and wellness.

Portuguese President

The President of Portugal, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, offered his condolences on Monday over the demise of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. President Da Souza sent a message of condolence over the demise of the late Amir on Monday, the Presidency of the Portuguese said on its official website. In his condolence message, Da Souza indicated that Sheikh Nawaf will be remembered for his important contributions to the country and the region.



Iceland volcano erupts after weeks of intense earthquakes

Ukraine army short of new recruits for front

Page 6

Page 7

Zionists continue assault on Gaza hospitals

Hospitals out of action, another left in ruins after Zionist army attack

GAZA STRIP: One of the last remaining hospitals in the northern Gaza Strip stopped operating on Tuesday after being stormed by the Zionist army, its director said. Fadel Naim told AFP Zionist troops had attacked the Al-Ahli hospital and arrested doctors, medical staff and patients, destroying part of the building's grounds.

The Zionist attack has "put the hospital out of action", he said. "We can't receive any patients or injured." At least four people who were wounded by Zionist fire on Monday died on Tuesday after being injured in the Al-Ahli assault, he said. "According to our information, there are dozens of wounded in the surrounding streets," he said.

Hospitals, protected under international humanitarian law, have repeatedly been hit by Zionist strikes in the Gaza Strip since the start of the recent Zionist attack on Gaza on Oct 7. The military accuses Hamas of having tunnels under hospitals and using the medical facilities as command centers to plan and carry out attacks against the army and the Zionist entity, a charge denied by the group.

Al-Ahli, also known as the Baptist or Ahli Arab hospital, was already heavily damaged by an explosion in its car park on Oct 17, resulting in at least dozens of deaths. Palestinian groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad accused the Zionist entity, which denied responsibility and blamed a misfired rocket by Islamic Jihad for that blast.

Relentless raids

Zionist troops have previously raided other medical facilities in Gaza, including Al-Shifa, the territory's largest hospital, which is now functioning at minimal capacity with a very small team. On Sun-

day, the World Health Organization said Al-Ahli hospital was receiving "critical patients" from Al-Shifa for surgery. The Al-Shifa emergency department, devastated by Zionist bombardments, is "a blood bath" and "in need of resuscitation", the WHO said.

Ashraf al-Qudra, spokesman for the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory, said on Tuesday that another hospital in northern Gaza, Al-Awda in the Jabalia area, had been turned "into a barracks" by the Zionist army. He said the army was holding 240 people in the hospital, "including 80 medical staff and 40 patients," and had arrested its director, doctor Ahmad Mhanna.

The Gaza health ministry reported on Dec 12 that the Zionist army stormed the Kama Adwan hospital in Beit Lahya during a "siege" that lasted several days. On Saturday, the Zionist army said it "completed its activity in the area of the Kamal Adwan hospital", which it charged "had been used by Hamas as a command and control center".

In what was once the courtyard of the Kamal Adwan hospital, Palestinians waded through the rubble, searching for corpses. The sound of one of them sobbing breaks out while he wraps a body to prepare for burial. Mahmud Assaf, 50, came to the hospital from Jabalia with a cart to recover two of his relatives' children who had been patients at the facility for 10 days. "I found Hadi paralyzed ... lying on his back under the chairs. Everything was on top of him," he said, speaking about one of the children who appeared barely conscious and severely burned.

Assaf said he wanted to take away the children quickly now that the army had withdrawn, but was shocked by the "massive, indescribable destruc-



RAFAH: An injured man bids farewell to the body of his son as they lie in a hospital, in the aftermath of overnight Zionist bombardment, on Dec 19, 2023. — AFP

tion" he found at the hospital. "Patients are everywhere. There is nothing left fit for life," he said. "(The children have) cases of serious burns without having received anything to eat, drink, or treatment," he added.

'Let them kill us all'

The army said it had "questioned hospital workers" who had "confessed that weapons were hidden in incubators ... that were supposed to be used to treat premature babies". Hamas accused the Zionist entity of carrying out a "horrific massacre" at the hospital and said Zionist forces "fired at patient rooms", arrested staff, and destroyed tents of displaced people with bulldozers. The courtyard in Ka-

mal Adwan is full of the clearly visible tracks of Zionist tanks and bulldozers.

Outside the courtyard, Abu Mohammed, who came to look for his son, stood crying. "They demolished the building. They killed the doctors. Even the doctors were not spared. They left nothing behind," he said. "My son is here. I don't know how I will find him," Abu Mohammed said, pointing to the rubble.

"Where are the Arab countries? Where is Sisi?" referring to President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi of neighboring Egypt, a key mediator between the Zionist entity and Palestinians. "We're fed up. They (Zionists) have been killing us since 1948 ... Let them kill us all so that we can rest instead of this torture." — AFP

US pushes naval force as Houthis vow more attacks

DUBAI: The United States pushed Tuesday to build up a multinational naval task force to protect a key global shipping lane from Yemen's Houthi rebels, who pledged to keep up their attacks on cargo ships in the Red Sea. The Iran-backed Houthis say their missile and drone strikes on passing container ships are in support of Palestinians in the Gaza war raging between the Zionist entity and militant group Hamas since Oct 7.

US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin condemned the "unprecedented" spate of attacks in waters leading to the Suez Canal, a chokepoint for about 10 percent of global trade, that have forced many shipping companies to divert their vessels. The task force, which Austin first announced late Monday, would include warships from the United States as well as Britain, Canada, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway and other countries.

The Pentagon chief, in Qatar on Tuesday after a visit to the Zionist entity, told a virtual meeting with 43 countries, the EU and NATO that the attacks "threaten the free flow of commerce". He urged other nations "to join US-led and other international initiatives... to restore security in the Red Sea to deter future Houthi aggression," the Pentagon said.

The Houthis voiced defiance and pledged to continue the attacks in the Bab al-Mandeb strait, a vital shipping lane between Asia and Europe. "Even if America succeeds in mobilizing the entire world, our military operations will not stop... no matter the sacrifices it costs us," senior Houthi official Mohammed Al-Bukhaiti said on X, formerly Twitter.

The Houthis will only halt attacks if the Zionist entity's "crimes in Gaza stop and food, medicine and fuel are allowed to reach its besieged population," said Bukhaiti. Rebel spokesman Mohammed Abdul Salam said the "US-formed coalition aims to protect (the Zionist entity) and militarize the sea. Whoever seeks to expand the conflict must bear the consequences of those actions." Britain said the Royal Navy destroyer HMS Diamond had joined the US-led task force, dubbed Operation Prosperity Guardian. — AFP



May Allah
Enlighten Your Path

His Highness Emir of Kuwait
**Sheikh Meshal
Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber
Al-Sabah**
May Allah Preserve and Bless You

talabat

International

Earthquake kills at least 127 in northwest China

Thousands of firefighters and rescue personnel have been sent to the disaster zone

DAHEJIA, China: Rescuers in remote villages of northwest China dug through the rubble of collapsed homes in freezing conditions on Tuesday after the country's deadliest earthquake in years killed at least 127 people. State media said the shallow tremor just before midnight had caused the deaths of at least 113 and injured more than 530 in impoverished Gansu province, as of Tuesday afternoon.

A further 14 died and 198 were injured in Haidong in neighboring Qinghai province, state-run newspaper the People's Daily reported. The quake damaged more than 155,000 buildings, according to state broadcaster CCTV, and sent residents running into the freezing streets for safety. At a village near the epicenter, AFP reporters saw huge cracks running through the exterior and interior walls of a brick home, and the roof of a building that had caved in completely.

"I am 70 and I have never experienced such a powerful quake in my life," resident Ma Wenchang told AFP. "I can't live (in this house) anymore because it's too dangerous. My relatives have been relocated somewhere else." At another location, the top of a mosque had collapsed askew, and another building was reduced to mere rubble. The roads were full of emergency vehicles, and the AFP team saw trucks covered in red banners reading "earthquake relief supplies".

As evening fell, volunteers scrambled to set up tents in a town square to make a base for rescuers. Two dozen military trucks were parked nearby. "The most urgent task for us is to make things ready quickly as temperatures will reach -17 (degrees Celsius) tonight," a volunteer told AFP.

The quake was China's deadliest since 2014, when more than 600 people died in southwestern Yunnan province. China's western hinterland carries the scars of frequent seismic activity, and a huge quake in Sichuan province in 2008 left more than 87,000 people dead or missing, including 5,335 schoolchildren.

The US Geological Survey said Monday night's magnitude-5.9 quake struck at a shallow depth at 11:59 pm local time (15:59 GMT) with an epicenter around 100 km from Gansu's provincial capital, Lanzhou. Footage showed emergency personnel going through debris by torchlight, unfolding orange stretchers for the casualties.

China's state news agency Xinhua reported the magnitude as 6.2 and said the shaking was felt as far away as the major city of Xi'an, about 570 km away. Dozens of smaller aftershocks followed, and officials warned that tremors with a magnitude of more than 5.0 were possible in the next few days.



DAHEJIA: People walk past a collapsed building after an earthquake in northwest China's Gansu province on Dec 19, 2023.— AFP

A quake measured at magnitude 5.2 by USGS was detected further northwest in the Xinjiang region on Tuesday morning.

Chinese President Xi Jinping called for "all-out efforts" as search and rescue work got under way early Tuesday. Rescuers should be on guard for secondary disasters in the difficult conditions in the high-altitude area, he said, according to CCTV. State media reported that power and water supplies were disrupted in villages around the epicenter but that some electricity had later been restored. Hundreds of people have been

evacuated in Gansu, officials said.

Thousands of firefighters and rescue personnel have been sent to the disaster zone, and state media said 2,500 tents, 20,000 coats and 5,000 rollaway beds had been sent to Gansu. CCTV added that the central government had preliminarily diverted 200 million yuan (\$28 million) in relief funding to "guarantee the security of people's lives and property, and minimize the impact of losses from the disaster". Earthquakes are not uncommon in China. In August, a shallow 5.4-magnitude tremor struck the eastern part of the country, injuring

23 people and collapsing dozens of buildings. In September 2022, a 6.6-magnitude quake hit Sichuan province leaving almost 100 dead.

And in 2010, a 6.9-magnitude quake in Qinghai left 3,000 people dead or missing. Russian President Vladimir Putin offered his "deep" condolences over the quake to his Chinese counterpart Xi. "In Russia, we share the pain of those who lost their loved ones in the disaster and hope for a speedy recovery for all those injured," said Putin in a letter, according to a statement from the Kremlin. — AFP

Ukraine army short of new recruits for front

NEAR BAKHMUT, Ukraine: After 22 months of war with a horrific human cost, the Ukrainian army is struggling to find recruits to battle Russian forces that are once again on the offensive. Some Ukrainians who joined the fighting at the February 2022 start are still in combat and exhausted, while volunteers to replace those killed or wounded are becoming rarer.

"Our units are understaffed. We need young, motivated people under 40," Major Oleksandr Volkov told AFP near the Russian-held frontline city of Bakhmut. The commander of a battalion in the 24th mechanized brigade opted to cancel an outdoor training session for new recruits because of frost, aiming to avoid injuries to his much-needed troops.

Volkov noted that some people may have been misled into believing Ukraine's war effort was nearing victory, even as concern grows in Kyiv that Western patience and backing could be cracking. "But the current situation is not that simple. The enemy is really very strong, very

powerful. And we're doing everything we can to hold him back and beat him," he added. Despite Ukraine's summer counter-offensive that employed billions of dollars' worth of Western weapons, the front lines have barely shifted in over a year. Russian forces have gone back on the attack since the fall, and were pressing to make gains, especially in the east.

Adrenaline and excitement

With more soldiers and ammunition at their disposal, the Russian army has slowly gained ground in areas around places like Kupiansk and Avdiivka, despite major losses in troops and equipment. Opposite them, the Ukrainians were struggling to defend themselves after two trying years that have inflicted a massive human cost of troops killed, severely wounded and battered mentally by trench warfare.

At the start of the war, "everything was adrenaline-fueled, in a kind of exaltation ... everyone rushed to fight, so there was no problem" with manpower, said company commander Lieutenant Igor Prokopiak. "But with time, things calmed down. People had access to social media, they saw the terrible, cruel side of war," the 32-year-old officer noted. "That initial adrenaline wore off, the brain woke up, fear appeared and, as a result, people began to fear for their lives," he added.

Volkov, the battalion commander, said that civilians "don't really want to join the armed forces," citing his unit's composition of 40 percent over-45s. "I've seen a lot of young people in civilian life. I don't know why they're not mobilized," he added.

'It's the others' turn'

"The state must respond, recruit, replace units, replace people who have already been fighting for two years, including me," Volkov said. For several weeks now, soldiers' wives have been demonstrating in Kyiv to demand their husbands' return from the front, with slogans such as "Now it's the others' turn".

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky asked at the start of December that the military command review the recruitment system. "It's not just a question of numbers, of people who can be mobilized ... It's a question of timing for each person who is currently in the army, for demobilization, and for those who will join" the units, he said. Volkov criticized mobilization offices for being too "Soviet", with an approach where quality was secondary. "They are focused solely on the quantitative result," he added. The system was also plagued by corruption, which allowed conscripts to escape the army. Last summer, Zelensky had to dismiss all the regional recruitment officers.

New recruit Taras, who just arrived



NEAR BAKHMUT: Ukrainian tank crews take part in a military drill not far from the front line in the Bakhmut direction, in the Donetsk region, on Dec 15, 2023. — AFP

in Volkov's unit, said he didn't know why he wasn't drafted earlier. "I was stopped in the street and received an invitation to the military registration office. So I went," said the 38-year-old municipal employee from a western region more than 1,000 kilometers (600 miles) from the front.

"To be honest, the closer I am (to the front), the more interesting it is, the more I understand the need for it. Back home, it's really far away from all that, so life there is very quiet," he noted. "Now I understand that I should have come sooner. Because Ukraine has to be defended." — AFP

S Korean troops in truce village to carry guns

SEOUL: Troops on the South Korean side of the Joint Security Area on the border with the North have been authorized to carry guns, the UN Command said Tuesday, after Pyongyang's soldiers reportedly started carrying weapons there last month. Soldiers from both countries face off at the JSA north of Seoul, which

is overseen by the US-led United Nations Command.

North and South Korea agreed to disarm their troops on the JSA in line with a 2018 military pact, but the North's troops have been reported to carry guns since November after the deal began to crumble. Last month, Seoul partially suspended the five-year-old accord following Pyongyang's launch of a spy satellite.

North Korea responded by scrapping the pact in full, pledging to deploy stronger armed forces and new weapons along the border. The decision to allow the UNC troops to carry guns came after North Korean soldiers resumed "an armed security posture", the UNC said in a statement.

"The UNC has authorized trained and quali-

fied members of the guard forces on the UNC side of the JSA to re-arm to protect both civilian and military personnel," it added. "This action is being taken out of an abundance of caution, but UNC has also informed the ROK (South Korean) government and KPA of its position that a disarmed JSA is safer and more peaceful."

Most of the border between the two Koreas is heavily fortified. But at the JSA, the frontier is marked only by a low concrete divider and is typically peaceful despite ongoing hostility between the two sides. It has also been a popular tourist site, with hundreds of visitors touring the South Korean side each day.

But South Korean tours were suspended after a

US soldier ran across the border into the North in July. Travis King was released by North Korea in September and later charged with desertion by the US Army. The tours partially restarted last month but were quickly suspended over security concerns after North Korea rearmed its troops, according to Yonhap news agency.

In 2017, a North Korean soldier drove a military jeep and then dashed on foot across the demarcation line at the JSA. The defector was shot multiple times by his fellow North Korean soldiers but survived. In 1976, two American soldiers were killed in the JSA by North Koreans with axes in a dispute over a tree. — AFP

Erdogan, Orban pledge deeper ties in Budapest

BUDAPEST: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Monday that he would seek deeper ties with Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban, during his second visit to the country within four months. Hungary and Turkey are the only holdouts in NATO to not have ratified Sweden's bid to join the defense alliance in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Hungary has still not voted to approve Sweden's entry into NATO, aligning itself with Turkey which had long blocked Stockholm's membership and has been vetoing the process even after Erdogan lifted his veto in June. Earlier this month, Erdogan made Turkey's ratification of Sweden's NATO bid conditional on the US

Congress "simultaneously" approving Ankara's request for F-16 fighter jets.

But the two leaders did not comment on the issue in an address to reporters after their meeting. NATO enlargement was discussed during Erdogan's visit, according to Hungarian President Katalin Novak, who also met the Turkish leader. Erdogan's visit coincides with the 100th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

"We wish to further strengthen our ties in areas such as defense and energy, where we already have fruitful cooperation," Erdogan said, adding that the two countries aimed to increase their trade volume to \$6 billion from \$4 billion currently.

Erdogan was received with military honors in Budapest's historic Heroes' Square before heading into a meeting with Novak and then with Orban. Orban presented Erdogan with the gift of a Nonius horse — though the Turkish leader fell off a horse in 2003. "The gift from one equestrian nation

to another," Orban wrote on Facebook.

In return, Orban was gifted with an electric car made in Turkey, a photo of which he posted on X. "The best deal I've ever made! For one horse power, I got 435. Welcome to Hungary President Erdogan!" he wrote. During the press conference, Orban said his country was "looking for allies with whom we can win". "The big plan is that Turks and Hungarians will be victorious together in the 21st century," he said.

The two leaders signed a joint political declaration moving their relations to "advanced strategic partnership level", which Orban described as "the expression of the closest, friendly, fraternal and political cooperation".

In recent years, Hungary has pursued a policy of opening up to the east, not only toward Russia but also toward China and central Asian countries. The central European country of close to 10 million people is the only EU member state that has maintained close ties to the Kremlin since the beginning of the Ukraine war. — AFP



BUDAPEST: Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban (right) drives a car with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan prior to their joint press conference on Dec 18, 2023. — AFP

International

Iceland volcano erupts after weeks of intense earthquakes

Eruption misses town where thousands of people had been evacuated

REYKJAVIK: A volcano erupting close to an Iceland power plant shot geysers of molten lava into the dark winter sky Tuesday after weeks of intense seismic activity southwest of Reykjavik. The eruption only three kilometers (1.8 miles) from the evacuated fishing port of Grindavik on the Reykjanes peninsula began Monday at around 10:17 pm (22:17 GMT) after an earthquake "swarm" of small tremors, the Icelandic Meteorological Office said.

After weeks of warnings from scientists, the authorities built reinforcements around the Svartsengi geothermal plant, which is just two kilometers from the eruption. It supplies electricity and water to 30,000 people on the peninsula.

Live-streamed footage of the eruption showed glowing orange jets of lava spewing from a gash in the ground, surrounded by billowing clouds of red smoke against the dark morning sky. The December sun only rises at around 11:00 am in the area just south of the Arctic Circle. "We hope for the best but it is clear this is a considerable eruption," Prime Minister Katrin Jakobsdottir wrote on Facebook.

For weeks, the Nordic country had been anticipating an eruption in the area some 40 kilometers (25 miles) from the capital, prompting the authorities to evacuate thousands of people and close the Blue Lagoon geothermal spa famed for its turquoise waters.

The meteorological office estimated that the volcano had opened a fissure about four kilometers (2.5 miles) long, with the southern end just three kilometers away from the fishing port of Grindavik. By 3:00 am, the meteorological office said the intensity of the eruption had stabilized and "the activity is decreasing", although it was unable to estimate how long it would last. "We now wait to see what the forces of nature have in store," Iceland President Gudni Johannesson wrote on X, formerly Twitter. He added that protecting lives and infrastructure was the priority.

Vidur Reynisson, head of the Department of Civil Protection, urged people to stay away from the area, telling a local television station: "This is no tourist eruption." The volcano, which has yet to be given a name, was located near the Sundhnukagigar crater row. Unlike another major Icelandic eruption in 2010 that grounded thousands of flights across Europe and North America, this one did not create an ash plume. Reykjavik's international airport remained open on Tuesday.

New era

Since October, thousands of earthquakes had been detected on the Reykjanes peninsula, a possible precursor to an impending volcanic eruption. "Right now there is no immediate risk of infrastructure being threatened," Grindavik mayor Fannar Jonnasson told the daily Morgunbladid, amid reports on Tuesday morning that the southern end of the lava flow was petering out.

Roughly 4,000 people were evacuated from Grindavik on Nov 11 after scientists said a tunnel of magma was shifting beneath them. The series of small earthquakes — sometimes hundreds per day — had damaged roads and buildings, an AFP reporter in Grindavik said.

Authorities have organized occasional trips into the village since, escorting those with homes in the most perilous parts as they rescued everything from cherished pets to photo albums, furniture and clothing.

Volcanic eruptions are not uncommon in Iceland, which is home to 33 active volcano systems, the highest number in Europe. But the Reykjanes peninsula had not experienced an eruption for eight centuries until 2021. Since then, eruptions have struck in 2021, 2022 and earlier this year — all in remote, uninhabited areas. With no danger to infrastructure or lives, they drew large crowds of visitors.



REYKJAVIK: Billowing smoke and flowing lava turning the sky orange are seen in this Icelandic Coast Guard handout image. — AFP

Volcanologists say this could be the start of a new era of activity in the region. In 2010, the eruption of Iceland's long-dormant Eyjafjallajökull volcano — an ice-capped volcano more than 1,660 meters tall — shot huge amounts of ash into the atmosphere. Although no one died,

it forced the cancellation of around 100,000 flights and left more than 10 million travelers stranded. Situated in the North Atlantic, Iceland straddles the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, a crack in the ocean floor separating the Eurasian and North American tectonic plates. — AFP



SEOUL: This photo taken on Nov 28, 2023 shows a general view of a bedbug seen through the eyepiece of a microscope as people attend a lecture on bedbug control at the Korea Pest Control Association (KPCA) in Seoul.



Jang Young-jin (right), CEO of a pest control company, demonstrates how to treat a mattress affected by bedbugs. — AFP photos

Mapping bedbugs: Engineer fights insects with data

SEOUL: When news broke about a bedbug outbreak in his native South Korea, 29-year-old block-chain engineer and self-professed insectophobe Kang Jae-gu got straight to work — on the data. As authorities scrambled to install high-temperature steam heaters at the airport and approve industrial-strength insecticides for home use, Kang started mapping reported infestations.

South Korea has been largely bedbug-free for years, but it has seen a surge in infestations as travel has rebounded after the pandemic — with more than 100 cases of the bloodsucking pests reported since late November, official statistics show. And while the public has bugged out — and media coverage has spiraled — thousands of people have turned to Kang's website, bedbugboard.com, for a sober data-driven look at the outbreak.

"I am extremely sensitive to insects, so I sleep under a mosquito net throughout all four seasons," Kang told AFP. His fear of bedbugs drove him to create an interactive map that shows the approximate locations of reported infestations across the country, as well as real-time news stories on the issue.

The site now receives as many as 50,000 visi-

tors a day, up from around 40 when Kang launched it. He used a soothing olive-green color scheme to try and create "peace of mind" for readers, but he told AFP that having to look at photographs of the critters and their eggs to run the website still gives him "goosebumps".

From Paris

The bedbug invasion of Seoul comes on the heels of a similar outbreak in Paris, which is set to host the Olympic Games next year. A surge of reported sightings of the creatures sent a shudder through France during the summer and fall — prompting several school closures nationwide. Public concern has also spread to Britain and Algeria.

In South Korea, 44 percent of reported cases have been in so-called gosiwon — cheap, tiny housing units typically measuring less than five square meters. Other affected locations include student dormitories, public bathhouses, and extremely small housing units known as jkjobang, which often lack basic amenities such as bathrooms or kitchens.

Authorities have swung into gear, with Seoul city government allocating 700 million won (\$500,000) to defend residents in vulnerable housing from the invading pests. Incheon International Airport, the main airport serving the capital, plans to install high-temperature steam heaters this month to prevent the entry of the bugs into the country.

Seoul also recently approved Neonicotinoids, a class of insecticides used widely on farms, for home

use against bedbugs. "The city of Seoul defines the inconvenience and concern of citizens caused by bedbugs as a significant public health issue," said Park Yu-mi, an official at the Seoul Metropolitan Government. The city "seeks to take the lead in implementing countermeasures," she added.

Hard to remove

Bedbugs have appeared in greater numbers in recent decades, mostly due to high population densities, people taking more holidays and mass transit. In France, one in 10 households are believed to have had a bedbug problem over the past few years, usually requiring a pest control operation costing hundreds of euros that often needs to be repeated.

The critters bite people to feed on their blood, creating wounds that can be itchy but do not usually cause other health problems. But exposure to bedbug droppings can trigger asthmatic attacks while bites can cause rashes or more severe reactions such as anaphylaxis, and even depression.

South Korean experts said the insects are particularly hard to eradicate. "Bedbugs can live for over 100 days even if they do not eat properly. They are thin and also hide well," Kim Ju-hyeon, a professor at Seoul National University's school of tropical medicine, said in a YouTube video.

Kang plans to keep his website running until the South Korean outbreaks subside. He said he has never personally experienced an infestation, but "I can imagine how stressful it would be if that happened to me". — AFP

France paves way to repatriating human remains

PARIS: France's parliament has passed a bill that paves the way towards human remains contained in its museum collections being repatriated to their countries of origin for burial. The law, which received its final approval in the upper house Senate late Monday, is the culmination of years of debate on the ethics of keeping human body parts in French cultural inventories.

It allows for certain remains of people deceased after the year 1500 to be extracted from museum collections by decree to be returned home to their descendants for "funeral purposes". "It's a historic moment awaited by several foreign peoples," said Culture Minister Rima Abdul Malak. She said she hoped the decision would allow some reconciliation, as remains "sometimes entered our collections after having been acquired illegitimately or even violently".

The bill is to facilitate France returning the human remains of Aboriginals to Australia, as well as the skeleton of an indigenous Tehuelche chief to his descendants in Argentina. Madagascar has asked for three skulls of its Sakalava people to be brought home, including one it says is that of a king decapitated in 1897 during an attack by French colonial forces to quash a rebellion.

Several hundred French institutions, including museums and universities, are thought to have human remains in their collections. Until now only two exceptional laws had been passed to allow repatriations to South Africa and New Zealand.

In 2002, France returned the remains of Saartjie Baartman, the "Hottentot Venus", to South Africa to be buried. Baartman, a member of the indigenous Khoisan community, was taken from her homeland in 1810 by a British ship's doctor who told her she could earn a fortune in Europe by allowing foreigners to look at her body.

She was paraded in Britain and France for years as a sexual freak because of her large buttocks and genitalia, before she died a pauper in Paris in 1815. After her death, her body was dissected and her skeleton, skull and genitalia displayed in Paris' Museum of Mankind until 1974. — AFP

Radio sets make a comeback in war-torn Gaza

GAZA STRIP: Before war broke out in Gaza, Mahmud al-Daoudi could never have imagined the radio sets gathering dust in his shop would be in such high demand, offering his customers a precious link with the outside world.

Power cuts have long been a part of everyday life, but the besieged territory's 2.4 million people are now enduring long blackouts after the Zionist entity cut off electricity and fuel supplies. Its relentless assault has killed more than 19,450 Palestinians in the strip, mostly women and children, according to the Gaza health ministry.

The Zionist entity began its devastating air and ground offensive following the Oct 7 Hamas attacks, which killed around 1,140

people in the southern part of the Zionist entity, according to an AFP tally based on Zionist figures.

It is now impossible to plug in computers or television sets, recharge phones or access the internet without generators or solar panels, a luxury few Gazans can afford. But to keep up with the news, there's always the battery-powered radio. "We had a full stock but we've been completely out of them since the first week" of the war, Daoudi said. With the phone and internet cuts, "radio is the only way to find out what's going on," he said.

The long battery life is another plus, he said from his store in Rafah, at the southern end of the territory. Before the war, a radio cost around 25 shekels (\$7) — now, they go for around 60 shekels (\$16). "We've even resold the broken radios people returned to us," the 33-year-old said.

When the radio sets disappeared from the shelves, customers asked for old telephones with built-in radios and torches, a welcome help when night falls. "Now we're running out of phones," Daoudi told AFP.

'Moving backwards'

It's impossible to order new stock, with only limited humanitarian aid trickling into the territory. "People want to follow the news, hear where the shelling is taking place and find out about the fate of their families," said Hussein Abu Hashem, who has run out of radios at his shop too.

According to the UN, 1.9 million Palestinians have been displaced since the start of the war, around 85 percent of the population. Many of them are now forced to live in makeshift camps in the south of the territory where they lack basic supplies. "I don't know what's happening around us, where the strikes are, which houses are targeted, who's alive, who the martyrs are," Umm Ibrahim told AFP in the southern city of Khan Yunis.

"We want to receive news from anywhere in Gaza," she said. "When my battery runs out, I walk around the camp and listen out for other people's radios." Stations such as BBC Arabic and Al Jazeera have launched special



RAFAH: A Palestinian old man listens to his radio in a refugee camp in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on Dec 17, 2023. — AFP

channels to help keep displaced people up to date with the news.

Some Gazans, like 75-year-old Hebrew-speaker Mohammed Hassouna, manage to pick up the news from Zionist radio stations. He said it allows him to keep up with the latest "from the (Zionist) side". "I keep my children

and neighbors informed," he said.

Outside his tent, Salah Zorob, 37, spends his time flicking through radio stations on his mobile phone. "The world is moving forward with modern technology but here in Gaza we're moving backwards," he said. "They're going to take us back to the Stone Age." — AFP

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2023

India economy showed robust growth in 2022/23, says IMF

Financial sector resilient, but headline inflation remains volatile



WASHINGTON: IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva attends the regular meeting.

WASHINGTON: India's economy showed robust growth over the past year. Headline inflation has, on average, moderated although it remains volatile. Employment has surpassed the pre-pandemic level and, while the informal sector continues to dominate, formalization has progressed. The financial sector has been resilient—strongest in several years—and largely unaffected by global financial stress in early 2023, said an IMF report following the conclusion of its the Article IV Executive Board consultation with India.

The current account deficit in FY2022/23 widened as the post-pandemic recovery of domestic demand and transitory external shocks outweighed the impact of robust services exports and proactive diversification of critical oil imports. While the budget deficit has eased, public debt remains elevated and fiscal buffers need to be rebuilt. Globally, India's 2023 G20 presidency has demonstrated the country's important role in advancing multilateral policy priorities, the report said.

Growth is expected to remain strong, supported by macroeconomic and financial stability. Real GDP is projected to grow at 6.3 percent in FY2023/24 and FY2024/25. Headline inflation is expected to gradually decline to the target although it remains volatile due to food price shocks. The current account deficit is expected to improve to 1.8 percent of GDP in FY2023/24 as a result of resilient services exports and, to a lesser extent, lower oil import costs. Going forward, the country's foundational digital public infrastructure and a strong government infrastructure program will continue to sustain growth. India has

potential for even higher growth, with greater contributions from labor and human capital, if comprehensive reforms are implemented.

Risks to the outlook are balanced. A sharp global growth slowdown in the near term would affect India through trade and financial channels. Further global supply disruptions could cause recurrent commodity price volatility, increasing fiscal pressures for India. Domestically, weather shocks could reignite inflationary pressures and prompt further food export restrictions. On the upside, stronger than expected consumer demand and private investment would raise growth. Further liberalization of foreign investment could increase India's role in global value chains, boosting exports. Implementation of labor market reforms could raise employment and growth.

Executive Directors broadly agreed with the thrust of the staff appraisal. They commended the Indian authorities for their prudent macroeconomic policies and reforms that resulted in the economy's strong economic performance, resilience, and financial stability, while also facing continued global headwinds. Noting that India is one of the fastest growing economies globally, Directors called for continued appropriate policies to sustain economic stability and for further progress in key structural reforms to unleash India's significant potential.

Directors welcomed the authorities' near-term fiscal policy, which focuses on accelerating capital spending while tightening the fiscal stance. While acknowledging that India's debt composition helps mitigate debt sustainability risks, Directors recom-

mended ambitious medium-term consolidation efforts given elevated public debt levels and contingent liability risks. In that context, improving revenue mobilization and spending efficiency would allow for continued improvements in digital and physical infrastructure and targeted social support. Directors also encouraged the authorities to put in place a sound medium-term fiscal framework to promote transparency and accountability and align policies with India's development goals.

Directors commended the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) proactive monetary policy actions and strong commitment to price stability. They agreed that the current neutral monetary policy stance, anchored on a data dependent approach, is appropriate and should gradually bring inflation back to target. Directors agreed that exchange rate flexibility should remain the first line of defense in absorbing external shocks, with foreign exchange interventions limited to addressing disorderly market conditions. Regarding staff's recent reclassification of India's de facto exchange rate regime for the period December 2022 to October 2023, many Directors noted the divergence of authorities' views with that of staff and encouraged continued staff engagement on this issue, with a few Directors encouraging staff and the authorities to resolve these differences. A few Directors explicitly supported the authorities' view that exchange rate stability reflects improvements in India's external position and that foreign exchange interventions have been used to avoid excessive volatility not warranted by fundamentals.

investing more in global equities and FDI and away from more traditional safe assets.

"Since the unveiling of Vision 2030 in 2015, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has pushed the Public Investment Fund into investing in riskier assets," the report said. Since then, investments in foreign equities and FDI have grown from 20 per cent of total foreign assets to over 40 per cent in the second quarter of 2023, it added. To finance these riskier investments, Saudi Arabia has been gradually reducing its foreign reserve assets.

Data shows GCC holdings of US Treasury securities have been on a decline in recent times. From February 2020 to September 2023 Saudi holdings of US debt fell nearly 40 per cent, the report said.

According to the IIF, the kingdom's push away from safer investment assets is driven by three goals. First, the returns on riskier assets will help PIF reach its goal of managing \$2 trillion in assets by 2030. Second, it allows Saudi Arabia to diversify away from oil and acts as a potential hedge against declines in the price of crude oil. Third, riskier investments would help fund many of the projects envisioned in Vision 2030.

The report also notes that GCC countries have begun to slowly diversify away from the US dollar as bilateral trade with other countries, most notably China and India, increases. "While trade is still mostly conducted in US dollars, GCC countries have slowly started to sign bilateral trade agreements that would allow them to settle trade in other currencies," the report said. "However, we foresee this shift to be limited in scope as all GCC currencies are pegged to the dollar, which provides an anchor for financial stability in the region. Furthermore, the currency composition of GCC assets held by BIS banks has remained stable at around 80 per cent, indicating that no drastic change has occurred."

GCC gross foreign assets will swell to \$4.4tn in 2024: IIF

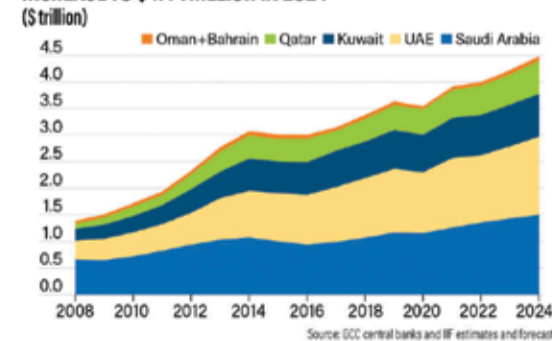
KUWAIT: The gross foreign assets of the six GCC countries are expected to swell to around \$4.4 trillion in 2024, supported by oil export-driven current account surpluses, projected at \$146 billion, according to a new report. The total foreign liabilities of the region will be much smaller at around \$1 trillion, leading to a net foreign assets position of \$3.4 trillion, the Institute of International Finance said.

"Almost two-thirds of the gross foreign assets are managed by sovereign wealth funds, with diversified portfolios of public equities and fixed income securities," said Garbis Iradian, chief economist, MENA, at the IIF. "The other third is in the form of official reserves and foreign assets of commercial banks invested in liquid assets."

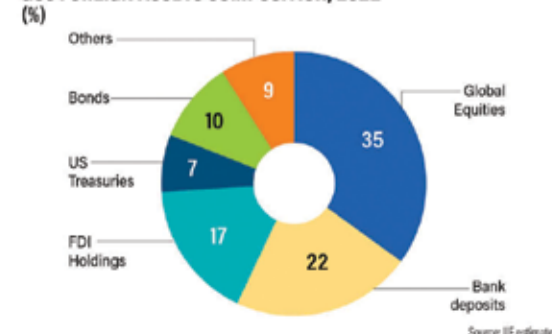
The IIF estimated the GCC's external investments based on data from multiple sources such as the US Treasury International Capital data on holders of US government securities; Bank for International Settlements data on cross-border assets and liabilities of international banks; UNCTAD data on source and destination of foreign direct investment; and information from national authorities where available.

"Our estimates are not precise, but they are indicative," said Iradian. "The main conclusion is that GCC investments are well diversified across asset classes." According to the IIF estimates, about 35 per cent of GCC investments are in equity, 22 per cent in bank deposits, 17 per cent in foreign direct investment abroad, 7 per cent in US Treasuries, 10

GROSS FOREIGN ASSETS OF THE GCC WILL CONTINUE TO INCREASE TO \$4.4 TRILLION IN 2024



GCC FOREIGN ASSETS COMPOSITION, 2022



per cent in bonds, and the remaining 9 per cent, in a range of less liquid investments, including non-US bonds, mergers and acquisitions, and hedge funds.

By region, 65 per cent of the investments are in North America and Europe, 20 per cent in Asia Pacific, 10 per cent in other Mena countries, and 5 per cent in Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America. The report shows that in recent years GCC SWFs, led in large part by Saudi Arabia, have turned towards

Apple pauses US sale of new Watch models over patent clash

SAN FRANCISCO: Apple on Monday said it will stop selling some of its smartwatch models in the United States while it fights a patent battle over technology for detecting blood oxygen levels. The move comes more than a month after the United States International Trade Commission (USITC) recommended banning imports of Apple Watch models that appear to infringe patents held by Masimo Corp. USITC issued a "limited exclusion order" set to go into effect after Christmas day if not nixed by President Joe Biden.

A presidential review is underway regarding the USITC order regarding imports of Apple Watch models with the blood oxygen sensing feature at issue in the patent dispute. "While the review period will not end until December 25, Apple is preemptively taking steps to comply should the ruling stand," an Apple spokesperson said in response to an AFP inquiry. Those steps include pausing US sales of Apple Watch Series 9 and Apple Watch Ultra 2 from the Cupertino-based tech titan's website starting December 21 and from US retail store locations after December 24, according to the spokesperson.

"The ITC's expert judgment in this matter should be respected," a Masimo spokesperson said in reply to an AFP inquiry. "The decision to exclude certain foreign-made models of the Apple Watch demonstrates that even the world's most powerful company must abide by the law protecting intellectual property rights."

Apple contends that the ITC finding was in error and should be reversed, something it will ask a federal court to do if necessary. The order stemmed from a complaint made to the commission in mid-2021 accusing Apple Watch of infringing on Masimo's patented technology for "light-based oximetry functionality." Apple in September released its Apple Watch Series 9, touting increased performance along with features such as the ability to access and log health data. — AFP



LOS ANGELES: Apple Watch Ultra 2 devices are displayed for sale at The Grove Apple retail store on release day in Los Angeles, California, on September 22, 2023. — AFP

Business

Nippon Steel's \$14.1bn deal for US Steel sparks criticism

Steelworkers' union and a top US politician come out against all-cash deal

WASHINGTON: Japan's Nippon Steel agreed to buy US Steel Corp for \$14.1 billion, the companies announced on Monday, sparking criticism about the firm's ownership in an industry crucial to US national security.

A major US steelworkers' union and a top US politician came out against the Japanese conglomerate's all-cash agreement to acquire the US firm for \$55 per share. The deal price marks a 40 percent premium on US Steel's closing price on Friday and represents an equity value of about \$14.1 billion, the companies said in a statement.

Meanwhile, shares in Japan's Nippon Steel sank more than six percent Tuesday after it announced a deal to buy US Steel for more than \$14 billion that will create the world's number two steelmaker.

US Steel's share price surged 26 percent to \$49.59 in New York but the reaction was not as welcoming in Tokyo, where Nippon sank 6.1 percent at one point before recovering slightly to sit 3.3 percent down at the break.

Nippon will also assume the US firm's debt, taking the total value of the agreement to \$14.9 billion. The US company's share price finished the trading day up more than 26 percent on Wall Street following the announcement.

While the markets responded positively to the deal, the United Steelworkers (USW) union—which represents 1.2 million US steelworkers and retirees—did not. In a statement, USW International President David McCall said the deal demonstrated “the same greedy, shortsighted attitude that has guided US Steel for far too long.” Neither US Steel nor Nippon “reached out to our union regarding the deal, which is in itself a violation of our partnership agreement that requires US Steel to notify us of a change in control or business conditions,” he added.

The US Senator for Pennsylvania John Fetter-

man, who represents a state with many steel plants, came out against the Nippon deal and vowed to try and block it from going ahead.

“It's absolutely outrageous that they have sold themselves to a foreign nation, and a company,” he said in a video posted to X, formerly Twitter. “Steel is always about security as well,” he continued, adding: “I'm going to fight for the steelworkers and their union way of life here.”

In a statement, Nippon Steel said it would honor all collective bargaining agreements with USW, as part of a “commitment to maintaining strong stakeholder relations.”

US Steel launched a strategic review in August after receiving several unsolicited offers for a partial or total takeover. It rejected an offer from its main US competitor, Cleveland-Cliffs, which valued the merger at around \$10 billion. USW had indicated it supported the deal put forward by Cleveland-Cliffs.

On Monday, Nippon Steel said the acquisition will significantly expand its current production in the United States to an annual crude steel capacity of 86 million metric tons.

“We are excited that this transaction brings together two companies with world-leading technologies and manufacturing capabilities, demonstrating our mission to serve customers worldwide,” Nippon Steel President Eiji Hashimoto said in a statement. He added that the deal also underscored the firm's “commitment to building a more environmentally friendly society through the decarbonization of steel.” “Today's announcement also benefits the United States—ensuring a competitive, domestic steel industry, while strengthening our presence globally,” US Steel President and CEO David Burritt said. “Our shared decarbonization focus is expected to enhance and accelerate our ability to provide customers with innovative steel solutions to meet sus-

tainability goals,” he added. US Steel's appeal, according to analysts and industry insiders, stems from the fact it is about to complete a costly investment plan, including the installation of electric arc furnaces instead of coal-fired blast furnaces, to reduce its carbon footprint. Both boards of directors have unanimously approved the deal, which is subject to approval by US Steel's shareholders, the firms said. Nippon Steel has some 160,000 workers glob-

ally in countries including Japan, India, Brazil, Thailand and Sweden. The firm has had a presence in the United States for around four decades, and currently employs around 4,000 people -- 620 of which are USW workers.

US Steel, which was founded in 1901 and had almost 23,000 employees at the end of last year, has its manufacturing facilities in the United States and Slovakia. — AFP



TOKYO: This picture shows an office building (center) where Nippon Steel's head office is located in Tokyo on December 19, 2023. — AFP

system collects commissions on transactions. A settlement was announced in September, but the deal's details were not disclosed. “Google will pay \$630 million into a settlement fund to be distributed for the benefit of consumers according to a Court-approved plan and \$70 million into a fund that will be used by the states,” Alphabet said in a statement Monday.

The settlement fund will be used to distribute money to eligible consumers across the United States. Eligible consumers who made a purchase on the Play store between August 16, 2016 and September 30, 2023 will receive a minimum of \$2, according to the court settlement. Apps will also now be able to charge Android users directly for in-app purchases. “App and game developers will be able to implement an alternative billing option alongside Google Play's billing system for their US users who can then choose which option to use when making in-app purchases,” the statement read.

In addition to the US states who filed the case, all 50 States, the District of Columbia and two territories have joined the settlement. Last week, Epic Games, the maker of Fortnite, won a major US court



battle against Google when a jury decided that the search engine giant wields illegal monopoly power through its Android app store.

Alphabet said Monday that they “are challenging that verdict and our case with Epic is far from over.” Epic sued Google and Apple in 2020, accusing the tech titans of abusing control of their respective shops selling apps and other digital content on mobile devices. — AFP

Google to pay \$700m to US consumers, states

SAN FRANCISCO: Google parent Alphabet has agreed to pay \$700 million as part of an antitrust settlement made public on Monday, with the funds going to US customers of its Android app store and state governments. As part of the settlement, the company will make changes to its Google Play app store to reduce competition barriers for developers, including the ability for apps to bill users directly.

Dozens of US states joined forces in a lawsuit filed in July 2021 that accused Google of abusing its power regarding consumer access to apps on mobile devices running its Android operating system.

The lawsuit backed by 37 attorneys general accused Google of using anti-competitive tactics to discourage Android apps from being distributed at shops other than its Play store, where its payment

France pushes nuke energy, raising German hackles

BRUSSELS: France stood up for nuclear power as part of the EU's low-carbon energy mix on Tuesday, raising the hackles of anti-nuclear Germany.

“We rather believe that this is an expensive experiment,” Germany's minister for economic affairs and climate action, Sven Giegold, said as he arrived for a Brussels meeting of EU energy and transport ministers. On Tuesday, France signed a nuclear co-operation memorandum with Sweden. Stockholm, like Paris, is banking on using nuclear power to meet its climate goals.

The memorandum “will let us tighten our links on the issue of nuclear power,” France's energy minister, Agnes Pannier-Runacher, said after signing the document with her Swedish counterpart, Ebba Busch. “We must continue to make nuclear power one of the elements of our energy policy to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions,” she said.

France's fleet of 56 reactors—which supplies the country with 70 percent of its electricity—has received a boost after the EU's member states agreed that atomic power should be part of the bloc's energy mix going forward. Its inclusion in a reform of the EU's energy market, which is shifting from fossil-fuel dependency to a greener, more renewable one, underlined both Paris's lobbying efforts and



urgency over energy security sparked by Russia's war in Ukraine.

Germany, though, has phased out its nuclear power plants and is under an unexpected budget squeeze that is crimping spending. Its ruling coalition also needs to keep Green partners on side.

Giegold, a Green politician, said the use of nuclear power is “a sovereign decision of member states” though he argued renewable energy sources should be used instead. “We need very flexible and supplemental resources, and that means that so far nuclear

technology is not ready to deliver that,” he said.

He also expressed concerns about nuclear sectors in France and other countries benefiting from state subsidies whereas Germany is facing a spending squeeze because of a court decision crimping its budget. “This needs to be controlled to avoid negative fallout” for the EU single market, Giegold said.

Pannier-Runacher, for her part, said that France's debt-laden EDF company, which builds and operates nuclear plants, was “competitive” and that was “a benefit for the French, a benefit for Europe”. — AFP

‘Catastrophic risks’ of AI: OpenAI releases guidelines

NEW YORK: ChatGPT-maker OpenAI published Monday its newest guidelines for gauging “catastrophic risks” from artificial intelligence in models currently being developed. The announcement comes one month after the company's board fired CEO Sam Altman, only to hire him back a few days later when staff and investors rebelled.

According to US media, board members had criticized Altman for favoring the accelerated development of OpenAI, even if it meant sidestepping certain questions about its tech's possible risks.

In a “Preparedness? Framework” published on Monday, the company states: “We believe the scientific study of catastrophic risks from AI has fallen far



short of where we need to be.”

The framework, it reads, should “help address this gap.” A monitoring and evaluations team announced in October will focus on “frontier models” currently being developed that have capabilities superior to the most advanced AI software.

The team will assess each new model and assign it a level of risk, from “low” to “critical,” in four main

categories. Only models with a risk score of “medium” or below can be deployed, according to the framework. The first category concerns cybersecurity and the model's ability to carry out large-scale cyberattacks. The second will measure the software's propensity to help create a chemical mixture, an organism (such as a virus) or a nuclear weapon, all of which could be harmful to humans.

The third category concerns the persuasive power of the model, such as the extent to which it can influence human behavior. The last category of risk concerns the potential autonomy of the model, in particular whether it can escape the control of the programmers who created it.

Once the risks have been identified, they will be submitted to OpenAI's Safety Advisory Group, a new body that will make recommendations to Altman or a person appointed by him. The head of OpenAI will then decide on any changes to be made to a model to reduce the associated risks. The board of directors will be kept informed and may overrule a management decision. — AFP

Oil cuts weigh on Iraq's overall growth: IMF team

WASHINGTON: Iraq's economic activity is recovering, although oil production cuts are weighing on overall growth, and at the same time inflation has declined, said an end-of-mission press release issued by IMF. The large fiscal expansion in the three-year budget law poses significant risks to fiscal and external sustainability over the medium term. Fiscal prudence and structural reforms are critical to safeguard macroeconomic stability, ensure sustainability, and achieve durable and more inclusive growth, the report said.

A staff team of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) led by Jean-Guillaume Poulain met with the Iraqi authorities in Amman, Jordan during Dec 12-17 to discuss recent economic developments and outlook as well as policy plans.

At the end of the mission, Poulain issued the following statement: “Against the background of a large fiscal expansion, non-oil GDP is expected to grow by 5 percent in 2023. Continued budget execution should help sustain strong non-oil growth in 2024. However, lower oil production, following the closure of the Iraq-Turkey pipeline and OPEC+ production cuts, will reduce overall GDP growth in 2023 and 2024. Inflation has declined from its January peak and is projected to stabilize in the coming months—helped by the Central Bank of Iraq's (CBI) tighter monetary policy, pass through from the exchange rate revaluation, lower international food prices, and normalization of trade finance as compliance to the new anti-money laundering/combating the financing of terrorism (AML/CFT) [GMI] framework improved.

“The three-year budget approved in June 2023 marked a shift in Iraq's budgeting practice, envisaged to improve fiscal planning and continue important development projects over the medium term. Despite a late start of budget implementation, the fiscal balance is expected to shift from a large surplus in 2022 to a deficit in 2023. Staff projects that the deficit would widen further in 2024 reflecting the full year impact of recent measures. The large fiscal expansion, including a substantial increase in public hiring and pensions creates permanent spending that will put pressure on public finances over the medium term.

“Ensuring fiscal sustainability, in context of uncertain outlook for oil prices, requires gradually tightening the fiscal policy stance while safeguarding critical infrastructure and social spending needs. This would require mobilizing additional non-oil revenues, containing the large government wage bill, and reforming the pension system. These measures should be supported by moving toward a more targeted social safety net that better protects the vulnerable.

“The mission welcomed the government's plans to strengthen public financial management including steps towards the establishment of the Treasury Single Account. In this context, the mission reiterated the importance of adhering to the framework for managing government guarantees.

“The CBI has appropriately tightened its monetary policy, including by increasing its policy rate and reserve requirement. The mission welcomed the progress in strengthening the domestic liquidity management framework and encouraged continued efforts to mop up excess liquidity and develop an interbank market to strengthen monetary policy transmission.

“Structural reforms to spur private sector led economic diversification and job creation remain pivotal for sustainable and inclusive growth. Priorities include creating a level playing field for the private sector through banking and electricity sector reforms, reducing distortions in the labor market, and continuing efforts to enhance governance and reduce corruption.

Business

Second-hand clothing pop-up stores finally take off in Japan

Local aversion to used garments is finally fading



INASHIKI, Japan: This picture taken on October 31, 2023 shows logistics manager Osamu Ubakai posing with bundles of secondhand clothes at a warehouse in Inashiki city, Ibaraki Prefecture. — AFP photos



This picture taken on October 31, 2023 shows staff members inspecting secondhand jeans at a warehouse in Inashiki city, Ibaraki Prefecture.

TOKYO: A second-hand pop-up store in Tokyo by casual clothing giant Uniqlo was a first for the Japanese firm, but also a sign that a local aversion to used garments may finally be fading. Uniqlo is a major player in an industry blamed for immense carbon emissions and other pollutants like microplastics. It has ridden a wave of consumers buying, and throwing away, ever more clothes.

But in Japan, the world's third-biggest clothes market, growing awareness of the sector's huge environmental impact has yet to spark much interest in second-hand options. Uniqlo's Aya Hanada said the 10-day pop-up in the hip Harajuku district, where second-hand clothes were a third of their original price—with some dyed for a "vintage" look—showed attitudes were changing.

"I think the feeling of resistance to used clothing has disappeared in Japan, mainly among young people," said the 45-year-old, who works for the firm's recycling programme RE.Uniqlo.

The change is in part thanks to the internet, she told AFP outside one of Uniqlo's major stores, which allows customers to access items "without having to go all the way to a second-hand clothing store."

There is still a long way to go, however. In Japan, 34 percent of discarded clothing is recycled or reused, according to the environment ministry. But this includes exports to developing countries, where the waste also often ends up in tips or is incinerated.

Globally, the equivalent of a truckload of clothes is burnt or buried in landfill every second, according to the Ellen

MacArthur Foundation, a charity focused on eliminating waste and pollution. JapanConsuming, a market research firm, estimates that the Japanese second-hand segment represents less than six percent of the \$75-billion market, albeit with strong growth in recent years.

For a long time in Japan, used clothes were a small niche confined to hipsters, JapanConsuming's co-founder Michael Causton said. "Maybe compared to somewhere like France and UK where the ecological, environmental factors probably came first, in Japan, it was a fashion thing," Causton told AFP. In Japan "there is a very strong concern with hygiene, that is a fixture of Japanese culture. And that definitely was a barrier for the average consumer," he added.

Alongside Fast Retailing-owned Uniq-

lo, which touts efforts to transform second-hand clothes into new products and also donates them to refugees and others in need, used garment specialist 2nd Street has expanded to 800 stores across Japan. There has also been growth in online sales between individuals, driven mainly by the popular Japanese platform Mercari, where around a third of transactions by value are fashion items. Second-hand Japanese clothes are even popular in China and elsewhere, Causton said, "because people know the Japanese look after their stuff and what they will send is a high level of quality."

"I feel like in Japan, used clothes have a high quality... and if it's not, it's clearly stated if there's any damage," said Charlotte Xu, 18, an Australian tourist looking through a thrift store in Harajuku.

"In my home country everything is just in a pile, you have got to search it for yourself. Whereas here everything is nice and neat, and you can find what you want."

Rising prices, which after years of deflation have been hitting Japanese wallets since 2022, have also helped some to drop their opposition to second-hand. "We conducted a user survey last year and it showed that clothes was the number one voted category for purchase on Mercari as a countermeasure against rising prices," a Mercari spokesperson said.

But the biggest factor for many is simply whether something looks good or not. "I am aware of the sustainable side of things, but I often buy them simply because they are stylish," shopper Yamato Ogawa, 28, told AFP at the Uniqlo pop-up. — AFP

Hyundai to sell sole Russian auto plant

SEOUL: South Korean carmaker Hyundai Motor said Tuesday it was selling its manufacturing plant in Russia, which has been idle since March last year after Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

"Hyundai Motor Company today held a Board of Directors meeting, approving a plan to sell its entire stake in Hyundai Motor Manufacturing Rus (HMMR LLC) to Art-Finance LLC," the firm said in a statement. "Hyundai is currently making final arrangements with Art-Finance for details of the deal," it added. The war in Ukraine has sparked an exodus of foreign companies from Russia, including many major car manufacturers, as sanctions by the European Union, the United States and others have made it increasingly difficult to do business with Moscow.

The Hyundai plant in Saint Petersburg, launched in 2010, suspended operations in March 2022, citing difficulties with sourcing component supplies after the start of the war. Sales of Hyundai cars have since tumbled in Russia. It sold about 45,000 units last year, compared to the company's previous average annual sales of 200,000 vehicles, according to the Association of European Business.

In August, the automaker's monthly sales in Russia dropped to an all-time low of six vehicles, the AEB said. Several international carmakers ventured into Russia in recent decades to capitalize on the country's expanding economy, but many of those plants have now been forced to shut down.

Earlier this year, Volkswagen and Toyota also sold their Russian operations, exiting the market. Japanese carmaker Nissan sold its assets in the country to the Russian government last year, while French automaker Renault has also handed over its Russian assets to Moscow for a symbolic one ruble. — AFP

Panama Canal realizes \$2.5bn despite drought

PANAMA CITY: The Panama Canal delivered \$2.5 billion to the national treasury for last year's operations, the government said Monday, despite record-low water levels that limited ship transits. About six percent of global maritime trade passes through the canal each year, and the Panama Canal Authority earns money from tolls and services rendered to ships.

This year's contributions are the highest amount that the Panamanian state has received from the Canal, inaugurated by the United States in 1914. The Canal Author-

Bank of Japan stands pat on monetary policy

TOKYO: The Bank of Japan on Tuesday maintained its long-standing, ultra-loose monetary policy and offered no guidance on its plans in the new year, sending the yen down against the dollar and boosting stocks. Speculation had been swirling for weeks that officials would shift away from negative interest rates and tight grip on bond yields as inflation picks up.

That came after governor Kazuo Ueda this month said handling monetary policy would "become even more challenging from the year-end and heading into next year". While most other major central banks hiked borrowing costs for more than a year in a bid to tame prices, the BoJ has refused to budge as it looked to kickstart the world's number three economy.

After a two-day meeting, the bank said on Tuesday: "With extremely high uncertainties surrounding economies and financial markets at home and abroad, the Bank will patiently continue with monetary easing."

Chairman of Taiwan chip giant TSMC to retire next year

TAIPEI: The chairman of Taiwan's semiconductor giant TSMC, Mark Liu, will retire from the company next year, the firm announced Tuesday.

Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) controls more than half of the world's output of microchips—the lifeblood of the global economy which powers everything from smartphones to cars and missiles. Liu has been chairman since 2018, taking over the position after the retirement of founder Morris Chang. "The past 30 years with TSMC has

been an extraordinary journey for me. I want to extend my sincerest thanks to our incredibly talented team who made the company the global leader it is today," Liu said in a statement issued by TSMC.

"I am confident that TSMC will continue to perform outstandingly in the years to come," he added. CEO and vice chairman CC Wei has been recommended to succeed Liu after the company's annual shareholders meeting, the statement said. Board elections scheduled for June next year will ultimately decide his replacement. Under Liu's steerage, TSMC—whose clients include Apple, Intel and Nvidia—has in recent years navigated geopolitical tensions between the United States and China.

The two countries have tussled over a range of issues, including technology, trade and semiconductor powerhouse Taiwan—which Beijing claims as its territory. In June, Liu said Taiwan's semiconductor indus-



TOKYO: Japanese national flag flutters at the Bank of Japan headquarters in Tokyo on December 19, 2023. — AFP

"Looking at the increasing speculation on policy adjustments, January 2024 seems an appropriate time to begin policy modification," he added. "The bank doesn't want to start hiking at the same time the (United States) begins cutting, so ideally it wants to begin its own policy changes before the US switches its policy."

The Federal Reserve last week voted to hold interest rates at a 22-year high for the third straight meeting but signaled three rate cuts in 2024. The yen weakened to 143.46 yen after the BoJ announcement, from 142.65 yen in early trade, though the Nikkei 225 index jumped more than one percent in the afternoon. — AFP



Mark Liu

try "plays a stabilizing role amid global geopolitical tensions". "Whether it's China or the United States... they all hope that TSMC is around," he said. — AFP



ity earlier said it had received \$3.3 billion in total revenue in the period from October 1, 2022, to September 30, 2023, \$319 million higher than a year earlier.

Of that amount, after deducting operating costs, it passed along \$2.5 billion to the Panamanian government. In 2023, 510 million tons of cargo passed through the Panamanian waterway, eight million less than in the previous year.

The number of transits also fell from 13,003 vessels to 12,638. This decrease is due to measures that the Canal Authority has taken to restrict vessel traffic due to water shortages resulting from climate change and the El Nino phenomenon. The canal operates entirely from water collected through rainfall. According to authorities, 2023 is the second-driest year in the Canal watershed's recorded history. The drought has caused the Canal Authority to reduce transit from 39 ships per day to 24 as of January. — AFP

The feline frontier: NASA sends cat video from deep space

NASA on Monday announced it had used a state-of-the-art laser communication system on a spaceship 19 million miles (31 million kilometers) away from Earth—to send a high-definition cat video. The 15-second meow-vie featuring an orange tabby named Taters is the first to be streamed from deep space, and demonstrates it's possible to transmit the higher-data-rate communications needed to support complex missions such as sending humans to Mars.

The video was beamed to Earth using a laser transceiver on the Psyche probe, which is journeying to the main asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter to explore a mysterious metal-rich object. When it sent the video, the spaceship was 80 times the distance between the Earth and Moon.

The encoded near-infrared signal was received by the Hale Telescope at Caltech's Palomar Observatory in San Diego County, and from there sent to NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) in Southern California. "One of the goals is to demonstrate the ability to transmit broadband video across millions of miles. Nothing on Psyche generates video data, so we usually send packets of randomly generated test data," said Bill Klipstein, the tech demo's project manager at JPL.

"But to make this significant event more memorable, we decided to work with designers at JPL



Members of the DSOC team react to the first high-definition streaming video to be sent via laser by the DSOC transceiver aboard the Psyche spacecraft, nearly 19 million miles from Earth, featuring a cat named Taters at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California. --AFP

to create a fun video, which captures the essence of the demo as part of the Psyche mission." Space missions have traditionally relied on radio waves to send and receive data, but working with lasers can increase the data rate by 10 to 100 times.

Giant pounce for catkind

The ultra-HD video took 101 seconds to send to Earth at the system's maximum bit rate of 267 megabits per second—faster than most home broadband connections. "In fact,

after receiving the video at Palomar, it was sent to JPL over the internet, and that connection was slower than the signal coming from deep space," said Ryan Rogalin, the project's receiver electronics lead at JPL. So why a cat video? First, there's the historic connection, said JPL. When American interest in television began growing in the 1920s, a statue of Felix the Cat was broadcast to serve as a test image. And while cats may not claim the title as man's best friend, few can dispute their number-one position when it comes to internet videos and meme culture.

Uploaded before launch, the clip shows Tabby, the pet of a JPL employee, chasing a laser light on a couch, with test graphics overlaid. These include Psyche's orbital path and technical information about the laser and its data bit rate.

While laser transmission has been demonstrated in low Earth orbit and as far away as the Moon, the Psyche mission is the first time it's been deployed in deep space. Aiming a laser beam from millions of miles away requires extremely precise "pointing," a major technical hurdle engineering teams had to solve. The technology demonstration even needs to compensate for the fact that in the time it takes for light to travel from the spacecraft to Earth, both the probe and the planet will have moved—so the uplink and downlink lasers need to adjust for the change accordingly. —AFP



A worker carries a bag of hazelnuts at the Guido Castagna laboratory where he is making the famous chocolate treat shaped like lingots, the 'Gianduiotto' with cacao, sugar and hazelnut. — AFP photos



A worker takes freshly toasted hazelnuts at the Guido Castagna laboratory.



A picture shows chocolate treats 'Giunott', the 'Gianduiotto' version made by Guido Castagna in his laboratory.

Chocolate wars as Italian artisans battle Swiss giant

Turin's famed gianduiotto, a small, creamy chocolate that melts on the tongue, is at the centre of a battle for European recognition pitting Italian artisans against Swiss giant Lindt. In his workshop outside the northwestern Italian city, Luca Balesio kneads chocolate with spatulas before expertly slicing off pieces and lining them up on a tray. The 42-year-old is one of the last chocolatiers who makes gianduiotto the old-fashioned way, a hand-made approach which gives the sweets their typical prism shape.

He is part of a committee of around 40 artisan chocolatiers, as well as companies such as Ferrero, Venchi and Domori, who are seeking to obtain a Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) for the gianduiotto from the European Union. The goal is to raise the profile of the chocolate, increase sales—already estimated at around 200 million euros (\$219 million) a year—and continue the chocolate tradition in Turin.

But they are facing opposition from Lindt, owner since 1997 of Italian producer Caffarel, which claims to have invented the gianduiotto. The plan is currently blocked at Italy's ministry of agriculture. "This battle is important in promoting a historic product of Turin," Balesio told AFP. The committee has devel-



Guido Castagna shows a 'Gianduiotto' in the laboratory where he is making the famous chocolate treat shaped like lingots with cacao, sugar and hazelnuts.

oped some very detailed criteria, which would have to be met by anyone hoping to secure the hoped-for PGI to their products.

Heresy

Faithful to tradition, it advocates a return to the original gianduiotto -- 30 to 45 percent roasted hazelnuts from Piedmont, at least 25 percent cocoa,



Guido Castagna toasts hazelnuts in his laboratory where he is making the famous chocolate treat shaped like lingots, the 'Gianduiotto' with cacao, sugar and hazelnut in Giaveno near Turin, Northwestern Italy.

plus sugar. The 200-year-old recipe is not, however, to the tastes of Lindt, which requires the addition of powdered milk and wants to reduce the hazelnut content to 26 percent.

The addition of powdered milk for many here is heresy. "For us, adding powdered milk to chocolate is like diluting wine with water," said Guido Castagna, president of the Gianduiotto Committee in Turin. With Christmas just a few days away, production in 49-year-old Castagna's workshop in Giaveno, near the city, is in full swing. Castagna pours bag after bag of hazelnuts into a machine which roasts them before they are ground up and mixed with cocoa.

The chocolate mixture then passes through a machine which slices it and pours it directly onto a conveyor belt without using moulds. Each chocolate is then wrapped by hand in shiny aluminium foil, ready to be placed under the Christmas tree. "We don't want to take anything away from Caffarel. We're not fighting a war against Caffarel. For us Caffarel can easily continue its production," Castagna told AFP.

Naval blockade

"But it must be clear to Caffarel that we are defending the gianduiotto as it was originally made," Caffarel, for its part, insists it had never opposed the recognition



An employee prepares chocolate treats shaped like lingots, the famous 'Gianduiotto', before to be individually wrapped, at Guido Castagna laboratory.



Guido Castagna is pictured in his laboratory where he is making the famous chocolate treat shaped like lingots, the 'Gianduiotto' with cacao, sugar and hazelnut.



An employee prepares a tray of the famous chocolate treat shaped like lingots, the 'Gianduiotto' at Guido Castagna laboratory.

of a PGI certificate, which it says would "contribute to the prestige of gianduiotto in Italy and across the world". But the Lindt subsidiary already has its own brand, "Gianduia 1865 -- the authentic Gianduiotto of Turin" and fears the creation of a similar PGI, "Gianduiotto of Turin", will cause confusion. —AFP



US actor Jonathan Majors (center) leaves a courtroom after being found guilty of assault and harassment of his former girlfriend, at the Manhattan criminal courts in New York City. — AFP

Marvel drops actor Jonathan Majors after assault conviction

Rising Hollywood star Jonathan Majors was convicted Monday of assaulting and harassing his ex-girlfriend Grace Jabbari, prompting Marvel to drop him from a prime role in its superhero blockbusters. Majors's conviction could see the actor facing up to one year imprisonment and has upended Marvel's plans for the franchise, which had his character Kang the Conqueror front and center in multiple upcoming films.

Majors debuted as Kang the Conqueror in "Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania" earlier in 2023, and was set to appear in at least two subsequent Avengers films—the top franchise

in the Marvel universe. The studio will not be moving forward with Jonathan Majors, a source briefed on the decision told AFP after it was reported by US entertainment media. Majors was arrested in late March over a confrontation involving 30-year-old Jabbari during a car ride in Manhattan. The court heard that Majors had received a text message and Jabbari had sought to take his phone, believing the contact to be from another woman, local media reported.

There was then a struggle, with the pair's legal representatives trading accusations over who attacked whom in the ensuing tussle over the device. "Jonathan Majors was found guilty by a

Manhattan Criminal Court jury of assault in the third degree and harassment in the second degree," the prosecutor's office said in a statement. Majors will be sentenced on February 6, it added. "The evidence presented throughout this trial illustrated a cycle of psychological and emotional abuse, and escalating patterns of coercion," Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg said.

"A jury determined that pattern of abuse and coercion culminated with Mr. Majors assaulting and harassing his girlfriend." The jury of six people spent more than five hours deliberating over three days, local media reported. Majors has appeared in several major films, including "Creed III," "Lovecraft Country," for which he was nominated for an Emmy, and "Magazine Dreams," a film presented at the Sundance Film Festival. — AFP

'Tombstone' hats remind whirling dervishes of their death



Whirling dervishes, wearing the symbolic hat "sikke", perform the "Sema" ritual as part of a ceremony to celebrate the 750th anniversary of the death of Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi.



Yunus Girgic (right) delivers a symbolic hat "Sikke", worn by whirling dervishes, to his customer Ashmi Benmehidi (left), a French musician who left an insurance job in Montpellier, South of France, to practice the art of the ney, in a workshop in Konya. — AFP photos

The tall light brown hats worn by whirling dervishes are as intriguing as the elliptical dance performed in honor of the Sufi poet and mystic Rumi. In Konya, a sprawling city in Turkey's central Anatolian plain where Rumi spent most of his life and died 750 years ago, one of the last workshops makes these special "sikke" hats to order. Yunus Girgic refuses to sell sikkes to tourists because they are exclusively reserved for real dervish dancers. And he makes sure they do not reach amateurs' hands, quizzing potential clients about their motives for wanting the distinctive hat.

"I ask a few basic questions and immediately see who I am dealing with," Girgic told AFP. At the start of the "sema" dance ritual, dervishes take off their long black coats but retain the sikke, which signifies the tombstone. The manufacturing secrets of these deeply symbolic felt hats—each one 26 to 27 centimeters (about 10 inches) tall—have been passed down for four generations to Girgic.

Each one is produced



Ashmi Benmehidi poses with his new traditional hat "Sikke" worn by whirling dervishes, in a workshop in Konya.

from a kilo (half a pound) of goat or sheep wool, which is patiently stretched, dipped several times in soapy water and then rolled flat, like pie crust. This centuries-old felting technique allows the fibers to be tightened and strengthened, said Girgic, who works with two apprentices. The resulting square of wool—now reduced to 350 grams—is molded onto wooden shapes whose size is adjusted to the customer's head size, and left to dry for up to two days.

The material, relatively heavy and itchy on the forehead, is a "reminder of the discomforts of life on Earth", Girgic said. His workshop produces "80 percent of the sikkes in the world", the artisan added. Musician Ashmi Benmehidi comes to collect his first sikke and tries it on with pride.

He left an insurance job in Montpellier in the south of France to practice the art of playing the "ney"—a reed flute which accompanies the sema ritual. "I have just been invited to play in a dedicated group," he said, adjusting his headdress. "I'm very moved," he added. Girgic's workshop produces 30 to 80 sikkes a year. Each one sells for 2,000 liras (almost \$70) and is designed to last around 45 years.—AFP



Yunus Girgic (right) works with his assistant in a workshop to make the symbolic hat "Sikke".



Yunus Girgic works in a workshop to make the symbolic hat "Sikke".



Moulds used to make the symbolic hat "Sikke", worn by whirling dervishes, are displayed on the table of a workshop in Konya.



Yunus Girgic (right), who makes the symbolic hat "Sikke" worn by whirling dervishes, stands next to his customer Ashmi Benmehidi (center).



The assistant of Yunus Girgic who makes the symbolic hat "Sikke", worn by whirling dervishes, stands in a workshop in Konya.



Symbolic hats "Sikke", worn by whirling dervishes, are displayed on the shelf of a workshop in Konya.



Yunus Girgic (right) adjusts as he delivers a symbolic hat "Sikke", worn by whirling dervishes, to his customer Ashmi Benmehidi (left).



Yunus Girgic works in a workshop with moulds used to make the symbolic hat "Sikke", worn by whirling dervishes in Konya.



Yunus Girgic (left) works with his assistant in a workshop to make the symbolic hat "Sikke", worn by whirling dervishes in Konya.



Yunus Girgic works in a workshop to make the symbolic hat "Sikke", worn by whirling dervishes in Konya.

Lifestyle

'Third way': Turkey's whirling dancers celebrate mystic Rumi's tolerance



Whirling dervishes perform a spiritual Dhikr "Devran-i Serif" ritual during a ceremony.

The skirts of whirling dervishes swirl in a symphony of disco colors celebrating mystic Sufi poet Rumi at a cultural centre in central Turkey's Konya. Every year, the "Sebi Arus" ("Wedding Night") festival honoring Rumi's death on December 17, 1273, draws so many people that traditional venues are not large enough to contain the crowds. Pilgrims, tourists, meditation enthusiasts and the curious flock to this vast Anatolian city, where Rumi—or Mevlana as he is known in Turkey—spent most of his life after being driven out of modern-day Afghanistan in the 12th century by Mongol invaders.

His writings have gradually spread well beyond central Asia and won acclaim in the West. Pop legend Madonna adapted one of Rumi's poems and Beyonce named her daughter after him. "Rumi's works have been translated into almost every language, and in the United States alone more than 250 books are

ly been invited to lecture in places as distant as Hawaii, Australia, India and Pakistan. Every year, she also receives film scripts, and hopes one day to see a biopic of Rumi brought to the screen. Everywhere in Konya, souvenirs bearing the image of Rumi and dervishes fill stalls. Ironically, the most famous master of Sufism—who taught tolerance with the words "come, come, whoever you are, wanderer, worshipper, lover of leaving"—is honored in a city with one of Turkey's most staunchly conservative Sunni traditions.

Under a headdress lined with 20 meters of braided green ribbons, he presides over more spiritual "semas" at the Irfan Study and Research Centre in Konya, where prayers are interspersed with music and songs. "We don't just twirl around all day," laughed the sheikh, who was recently invited to perform at Oxford University by its art history department.



dedicated to him," said Nuri Simsekler, a specialist in Persian literature at Konya's Selcuk University. "Rumi speaks to all humans, telling us about ourselves," Simsekler said of Rumi's enduring popularity seven centuries after his death.

Dance ritual

The "sema" rituals—which honor Rumi's legacy—are performed by whirling dervishes who don a tall light brown hat, with their arms elegantly spread. The order was established after Rumi's death by his son and descendants. To the sounds of reed flutes and tambourines, the dervish takes off his long black cloak to dance, but keeps his cylindrical felt hat on. The "sikke" represents the tombstone which will one day stand at the head of his grave. Then the dance begins. Extending his right hand toward the sky and his left towards the ground, the whirling dervish forms a link between the two.

"Rumi is the first person on Earth whose death is not mourned but celebrated," Simsekler said. From her office window, Esin Celebi Bayru has a clear view of the turquoise dome that tops the mausoleum of her illustrious ancestor. Large crowds from Turkey and Iran—where the poet is also a national icon—but also Britain and Singapore are expected to celebrate Rumi's 750th "Wedding Night".

Such a major anniversary of his death was "an opportunity to make him even better known," said Celebi Bayru, a 22nd generation descendant of the Sufi poet. She and her brother co-chair the Mevlana International Foundation, created in 1996 in Konya to perpetuate Rumi's legacy. "In these times of war, Mevlana's word is like a light for us," she said of his many appeals for tolerance and peace. "People come here from all over the world."

Prayer or meditation

Celebi Bayru said she has recent-

"But as long as we stick to our discipline, we don't mind the public," he added, saying that "between art and love, Mevlana offered us a third way. "Everyone interprets him in their own way," he said. "But if he were better understood, would the world be in the state it is in today?"—AFP



Whirling dervishes perform a spiritual Dhikr "Devran-i Serif" ritual during a ceremony, one of many marking the 750th anniversary of the death of Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi, the father of Sufism who lived in the 13th century, at Mevlana Cultural Center in Konya. — AFP photos



Whirling dervishes perform a "Sema" ritual during a ceremony.



Whirling dervishes perform a spiritual Dhikr "Devran-i Serif" ritual during a ceremony.



Whirling dervishes perform a spiritual Dhikr "Devran-i Serif" ritual during a ceremony.



Sheikh Fatih Citlak (center) leads as whirling dervishes perform a spiritual Dhikr "Devran-i Serif" ritual during a ceremony.



Whirling dervishes perform a "Sema" ritual during a ceremony.



Whirling dervishes perform a spiritual Dhikr "Devran-i Serif" ritual during a ceremony.

Sports

Australia's Starc, Cummins set salary records at IPL auction

New Zealand all-rounder Daryl Mitchell third-top player at the auction

DUBAI: Australian fast bowlers Mitchell Starc and Pat Cummins became the most expensive players in Indian Premier League history Tuesday, with franchises dishing out millions of dollars for their services at the glitzy Twenty20 tournament.

Starc, who last played in the IPL eight years ago, made a smashing comeback when he was snapped up by Kolkata Knight Riders for 247.5 million rupees (\$2.98 million), setting an all-time IPL auction record. "We won, Mr Starc!" the franchise posted on X, formerly Twitter.

Starc, 33, broke the record set by Cummins earlier in the day when Sunrisers Hyderabad paid 205 million rupees (\$2.47 million) for the World Cup-winning skipper. Before Tuesday, England all-rounder Sam Curran was the most expensive player after being bought for \$2.23 million last year by Punjab Kings.

"Pumped to be joining SRH for the upcoming IPL season," Cummins, who skipped this year's IPL because of a packed calendar, said in a video posted by the franchise on social media. "I have played in Hyderabad a few times and always loved it so can't wait to get started."

Hyderabad beat Royal Challengers Bangalore in a fervent bidding session for Cummins, to claps and cheers from other franchises participating in the auction, held this year in Dubai. Both Australians were key members of the team that led Australia to ODI World Cup victory in November, beating hosts India in the final at Ahmedabad.

Cummins had silenced a crowd of nearly 100,000 when he bowled out star batsman Virat Kohli, and was widely lauded for leading Australia to the title. The 30-year-old made a previous auction record of \$2.17 million when he signed with the Kolkata Knight

Riders in 2019. Both Starc and Cummins had entered this auction with a base price of \$240,000, the top tier at which players can start the bidding for their services. New Zealand all-rounder Daryl Mitchell was the third-top player at the auction, grabbed by Chennai Super Kings for \$1.6 million. Mitchell, 32, was also one of the breakout stars at the World Cup, scoring two centuries against India—in the group stage and in the semi-final.

Bumper salaries

Chennai coach Stephen Fleming said Mitchell's performances over the last 18-24 months had "warranted this type of a price". "He is an unfashionable player, often goes under the radar. With his ability to play spin he is competitive and he is also a handy bowler." West Indies star Rovman Powell went to Rajasthan Royals for \$890,000 and Travis Head of Australia will play alongside Cummins for Hyderabad after being sold for \$818,000. South African paceman Gerald Coetzee was sold to Mumbai Indians for \$602,000.

But up-and-coming New Zealand all-rounder Rachin Ravindra failed to arouse much interest, with Chennai paying an underwhelming \$216,000 for his services. Former Australia skipper Steve Smith went unsold in the first round, along with fellow wicketkeeper Josh Inglis.

More than 300 players were up for grabs at Tuesday's auction for the cash-rich tournament, likely to be held from March next year. The IPL is a huge earner for Indian cricket and the tournament makes more than \$11 billion for the economy each year, according to pre-pandemic estimates.

Last June, the Board of Control for Cricket in In-



Pat Cummins

dia (BCCI) sold the broadcast rights for the next five IPL seasons to global media giants for an eye-watering \$6.2 billion. Mumbai Indians are the richest and most successful side in IPL history, with five titles to their name. Attracting some of world cricket's top stars with bumper salaries, the pioneering IPL

helped make Twenty20 hugely popular, attracting hundreds of millions of viewers and spawning copy-cat events worldwide. This year, the BCCI staged its inaugural women's edition of the T20 tournament, earning nearly \$700 million in combined franchise and media rights. — AFP

Pakistan's Shadab dropped for New Zealand T20s

LAHORE: Spinning all-rounder Shadab Khan was left out of a 17-man squad announced Tuesday for the Twenty20 internationals in New Zealand as Pakistan look to build back ahead of the World Cup. Shadab disappointed with just two wickets and 121 runs from six World Cup (50 overs) matches in India in November before injuring an ankle in domestic competition.

"We have given chances to players who have done well in the domestic tournament as we want to build a good back-up for the Twenty20 World Cup," chief selector Wahab Riaz said while announcing the squad. The Twenty20 World Cup will be held in the West Indies and the United States in June next year.

Fast bowler Shaheen Shah Afridi will skipper the side after Babar Azam stepped down as captain in all three formats following Pakistan's exit from the 50-over World Cup. The five-match New Zealand series will be played on January 12 (Auckland), January 14 (Hamilton), January 17 (Dunedin) and January 19 and 21 (Christchurch).

The squad includes wicketkeeper-batter Haseebullah Khan, fast bowler Abbas Afridi, and spinners Abrar Ahmed and Usama Mir, who have not played Twenty20 internationals before. Sahibzada Farhan, who played three T20 internationals in 2018, earns a recall after being the top scorer in the last three editions of the national Twenty20 competition.

Also recalled is Azam Khan, who flopped in the five T20 internationals he has played in the last two years but has again played well at the domestic level. Squad: Shaheen Shah Afridi (captain), Babar Azam, Mohammad Rizwan, Fakhar Zaman, Iftikhar Ahmed, Haseebullah Khan, Azam Khan, Sahibzada Farhan, Saim Ayub, Aamer Jamal, Abbas Afridi, Mohammad Nawaz, Abrar Ahmed, Haris Rauf, Mohammad Wasim, Usama Mir and Zaman Khan. — AFP

Wales rugby great Price dies at 86

LONDON: Former Newport and Wales captain Brian Price has died at the age of 86, his former club announced Tuesday. The lock led Wales to a Triple Crown in what was then the Five Nations in 1969, six years after leading Newport to a celebrated 3-0 victory over New Zealand.

Price won 32 Wales caps from 1961-69 at a time when far fewer international matches were played annually by major countries than is the case in the professional era. He also toured Australia and New Zealand with the 1966 British and Irish Lions, appearing in all four Tests of the series.

"We are extremely saddened to hear that Brian Price, one of the greatest players to have worn the Black & Amber jersey, has passed away," Newport RFC posted on X, formerly known as Twitter. "We send our sincere condolences to Brian's family, friends and everyone privileged enough to have known him." — AFP

Arab Tennis Federation mourns with sadness the loss of late Amir

KUWAIT: The Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Arab Tennis Federation, Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah, mourned with great sadness and sorrow the loss of Kuwait and the Arab and Islamic nations of the late Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, may God rest his soul.

Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jaber said, on his behalf and on behalf of the members of the Board of Directors of the Arab Tennis Federation, that Kuwait, the Arab nation, and the entire world lost the late Amir, a symbol and a wise leader who devoted his life to serving the people of his country and nation, adding that the path of Sheikh Nawaf, may God have mercy on him, was full of achievements

and a honorable national and Arab supporter, noting that he remained distinguished throughout his career by his keenness to promote virtues, values, and belief in the importance of the unity and solidarity of all the people of the nation, so that Kuwait remains strong through the unity and cohesion of its people.

Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jaber stated that Kuwaiti sports during the reign of Sheikh Nawaf witnessed remarkable development in light of his interest in his athletes and his support and encouragement for them to make achievements and represent Kuwait honorably in all international forums. He was also keen to support Arab sports and bring together Arab brothers. He called on God Almighty to



shower with mercy and forgiveness, and may he reside in spacious Firdous. We ask God Almighty to bless

His Highness the Amir, Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, may God protect him.

Paris 1924 'Chariots of Fire' stadium ready for Games century on

PARIS: The stadium that was the main site for the 1924 Paris Olympics is ready, a century later, to welcome hundreds of participants and tens of thousands of spectators for next year's Summer Olympic Games in the French capital.

The Yves-du-Manoir stadium, in the northwestern Paris suburb of Colombes, became on Monday the first sporting venue to be formally handed over by developers to local authorities ahead of the Games. It will host the competitions in field hockey, a sport which may not be the number one activity in France but has a huge following in northern Europe and Asia, in particular India.

The stadium was specially renovated for the 1924 Paris Games, when it hosted the opening ceremony, athletics and other sports ranging from equestrian to gymnastics. During those Games it was the scene of the epic sprint races involving British athletes Harold Abrahams and Eric Liddell, famously portrayed in the 1981 film "Chariots of Fire".

According to the organisers, it will be the only 2024 Olympic venue to be hosting the Games for a second time. It also hosted the 1938 World Cup football final, where Italy beat Hungary, and had its capacity expanded to 60,000 after the end of World War II. But the opening of the Parc des Princes stadium in 1972 in the west of Paris signalled its decline and three of the four stands were demolished at the end of last century.

'New destiny'

It now stands in a location that belies the stadium's mythical status, squeezed between 15-storey buildings and a motorway. Its selection to host the field hockey events in 2024 has given the stadium a new lease of life.

Two years of work enabled the historic stand, with a capacity of 6,000 seats, to be brought up to standard and a new stand of 1,000 seats to be built as

Mallinder to step down as Scottish Rugby chief

LONDON: Scottish Rugby performance director Jim Mallinder has decided to leave his post at the end of the season, it was

announced Tuesday. Former Northampton rugby director Mallinder, 57, was appointed in 2019 after joining from England's Rugby Football Union, where he was the player pathway coach.

"I have pretty much gone back-to-back in jobs from Premiership director of rugby to the RFU to Scottish Rugby, and so I have decided to stop, take a pause, be-

fore looking for something new," Mallinder, who will step down in June, said in a statement.

"As anyone working in elite sport will tell you, there are a lot of time and travel commitments, so I would like to spend some time at home once this role ends." Scottish Rugby chief executive Mark Dodson added: "Jim has given a lot to this role, and so I respect that he now wants

to take time out and reflect before deciding what the next step is he wants to take in his career."

Scotland finished third in last season's Six Nations but failed to get out of a tough pool, also featuring Ireland and eventual champions South Africa, at this year's World Cup in France. The Scots begin their 2024 Six Nations campaign away to Wales on February 3. — AFP



COLOMBES: Georges Siffres (C), president of the Haut-de-Seine district Council receives from Lionel Christolomme (R), chairman of the Leon Grosse board, the keys of the renovated and modernised Yves-du-Manoir stadium, one of the venue for the Paris 2024 Olympic Games, in Colombes, northwest of Paris, on December 18, 2023. — AFP

well as training pitches for hockey and other sports.

Temporary stands to be installed between February and April will bring the total capacity to 13,500 seats, said Edouard Donnelly, head of operations at Olympics organising committee COJO. The total cost of the work amounted to 101 million euros (\$110 million) -- 87.4 million financed by the local authorities and the remaining 13.6 million from Solideo, the public establishment responsible for delivering the Olympic building works.

On Monday, construction group Leon Grosse, which carried out the renovations, symbolically handed over the keys to the new complex to its owner, France's Hauts-de-Seine department. Marc Guillaume, the top state-appointed official for the Paris region, said the handover was just the first of several.

There would be "many other ceremonies of this nature in the coming weeks", he said. The stadium is named after French rugby player Yves du Manoir, who died in a plane crash in 1928, aged 23. "The Olympics were an opportunity to completely renovate this stadium," said the head of the Hauts-de-Seine department, Georges Siffres.

It will host the men's and women's Olympic hockey tournaments between July 27 and August 9. Some 300,000 spectators are expected to attend over the fortnight of competition, said COJO head Donnelly.

Other facilities will be declared ready during the first months of 2024. The Arena Porte de la Chapelle, which will host badminton events, is to be handed over in January, the Olympic village in February and the aquatics centre at the end of March. — AFP

Sports

Nkunku won't be instant fix, warns Chelsea boss Pochettino

Pochettino urge supporters to show patience with their new forward

LONDON: Mauricio Pochettino has urged Chelsea fans not to expect Christopher Nkunku to instantly solve his team's problems as the France forward prepares for a possible debut in Tuesday's League Cup quarter-final against Newcastle. The 26-year-old has not yet played competitively for the club after injuring his knee on their pre-season US tour, weeks after joining from RB Leipzig for £52 million (\$66 million).

Nkunku, last season's Bundesliga top scorer, was named in Pochettino's squad for Saturday's 2-0 win against Sheffield United as the team registered back-to-back Premier League home wins for the first time in more than a year.

He did not feature but is set to make his competitive debut on Tuesday for Pochettino's side, who struggled to break down their opponents at the weekend. "I can tell you maybe he can play 20 minutes," the Chelsea boss said at his pre-match press conference on Monday. "How I saw him before Saturday in my mind I had one percent to two percent of doubt. That's why I didn't want to take a risk. "I need to be 100 percent, then things can happen."

Chelsea have scored 28 goals in 17 league games this campaign, but they have come in bursts, with the team, 10th in the Premier League, failing to net at all in the league during September. Pochettino urged supporters to show patience with their new forward,

who scored 16 goals for Leipzig last season.

"(Nkunku has trained) only in the last few weeks, after four or five months he was out," said the Argentine. "The team has evolved and the situation has changed. "My worry is to put too much pressure on him, to say 'now has arrived the guy to make us win every single game, to change everything'. I don't believe it's going to be like that."

"He needs time to recover his fitness. Hopefully he'll play tomorrow and score three goals, then be consistent. But the most important thing is not to put too much pressure on him."

Nicolas Jackson is the top-scorer for Chelsea this season, with eight goals in all competitions, while the impressive Cole Palmer and Raheem Sterling each have six. Newcastle boss Eddie Howe hopes his team can draw on the disappointment of losing last season's League Cup final against Manchester United. "I'm just devastated we didn't get over the line in the end," he said.

"I think it's helped us for this year and we know this game's going to be very difficult but we know the prize if we can get through." The Chelsea match at Stamford Bridge will mark Howe's 100th game in charge of Newcastle since he was appointed in November 2021. "I've loved every second of it," he said. "When you look back at a group of games, so many highlights, memories." — AFP



LONDON: Chelsea's French striker #18 Christopher Nkunku (C) sits on the bench during the English Premier League football match between Chelsea and Sheffield United at Stamford Bridge in London. — AFP



PITTSBURGH: (FILES) Derrick Henry #22 of the Tennessee Titans runs the ball while defended by Damontae Kazee #23 of the Pittsburgh Steelers in the first half at Acrisure Stadium. — AFP

Steelers' Kazee suspended for rest of season after hit

MIAMI: Pittsburgh Steelers safety Damontae Kazee has been suspended without pay for the rest of the season by the NFL for what the league called "repeated violations of player safety rules". Kazee was ejected during the Steelers 13-30 loss at the Indianapolis Colts on Saturday for a violent hit that knocked out receiver Michael Pittman. NFL Vice President of Football Operations Jon Rnyan said that repeated

offenses from Kazee had led to the suspension which will see the player miss the rest of the regular season plus the play-offs, should the Steelers (7-7) qualify. Kazee had already been fined five times this season for 'unnecessary roughness' charges.

"When players violate the rules intended to protect player safety on a repeated basis, and particularly when the violations carry with them a significant risk of injury to an opposing player, it is appropriate to impose substantially greater penalties," Rnyan wrote in a letter to Kazee, published by the league.

Rnyan said Kazee's challenge, where he flew helmet-first high into his opponent at high-speed, was a clear example of a flagrant breach of the rules. "The video of the play shows that you delivered a forcible blow to the head/neck area of Colts' receiver Mi-

chael Pittman Jr., who was in a defenseless posture. You had an unobstructed path to your opponent and the illegal contact could have been avoided. Your actions were flagrant, and as a result, you were disqualified from the game," he said.

Steelers head coach Mike Tomlin had earlier defended Kazee after criticism of the hit. "The target was low and both guys were going. It was just unfortunate. I know he is not a dirty player. He doesn't aspire to do some of the things that came to light under those circumstances," he said. "Sometimes it's just professional football today and how difficult it is to operate, but the National Football League is really clear. "They put a hundred percent of the onus on the defender in those circumstances. It's unfortunate, but we understand it," he said. Kazee can appeal the suspension. — AFP

Quique Sanchez Flores appointed Sevilla coach

BARCELONA: Spaniard Quique Sanchez Flores has taken over as the new coach of Sevilla, the club announced on Monday. "We have reached an agreement for Quique Sanchez Flores to become our new head coach, signing until 2025," wrote the club in an announcement on its website.

The 58-year-old former Atletico Madrid boss arrives at the struggling Andalusian side, following Saturday's sacking of coach Diego Alonso. Despite only

arriving in October, replacing Jose Luis Mendilibar who led the team to a record-extending seventh Europa League triumph in May, Alonso was dismissed in the wake of a 3-0 home defeat by Getafe.

Ex-player Sanchez Flores spent 10 years at Valencia, before signing for Real Madrid in 1994 and ending his career three years later at Real Zaragoza. As a coach, his greatest success came in 2010 when his Atletico Madrid side, boasting stars Sergio Aguero and Diego Forlan, won the Europa League.

He most recently served as coach of Getafe until April this year. His previous managerial roles include Valencia, Benfica, Espanyol and two brief spells at Premier League side Walford. Sevilla have had a difficult start to the season and after being eliminated from all European competition, by finishing bottom of their Champions League group,



Quique Sanchez Flores

they also sit just above the drop zone in La Liga. Sanchez Flores will be in the hot seat for Sevilla's next match, a relegation six-pointer at 19th-place Granada on Tuesday. — AFP

Bills end Dallas win streak but Cowboys reach NFL playoffs

WASHINGTON: Buffalo quarterback Josh Allen made NFL history to ignite the Bills' 31-10 rout of Dallas on Sunday to snap a five-game win streak even as the Cowboys clinched a playoff berth. James Cook ran 25 times for 179 yards and a touchdown and Bills defenders dominated the Cowboys in improving Buffalo to 8-6, still out of playoff spot with three games remaining, while Dallas slid to 10-4.

"That James Cook. What a game from him," Allen said. "He ran the ball so hard. Our offensive line gave him holes to run through. Our guys on the perimeter blocked their tails off... and our defense came out and played so well."

Despite wind and heavy rain, Cook was the first Bill with a rushing and reception touchdown and more than 200 total yards in a game since Thurman Thomas in 1991. "Every opportunity that came my way, just had to make it count," Cook said. "Once you get the ball, you can't hesitate. You have to go."

After marching 75 yards on their first drive to

grab the lead on Latavius Murray's 2-yard touchdown run, the Bills got an 18-yard Allen touchdown pass to Cook and a 1-yard Allen touchdown run to seize a 21-3 lead, the largest Dallas halftime deficit in three years. That gave Allen an NFL-record 10th game this season with touchdowns rushing and passing. "It wasn't a pretty passing game," Allen said. "We had the rain and wind and when in doubt, give it to our running backs to grind out some yards. We were smart with the ball."

The Cowboys, who haven't won the NFL crown since the 1995 season, secured a third consecutive playoff appearance before the start thanks to losses by Atlanta and Green Bay, but lost ground in their quest to overtake San Francisco for the NFC top seed and first-round playoff bye.

Playoff-bound San Francisco, powered by Brock Purdy's four touchdown passes, captured the NFC West division crown and improved to 11-3 by beating host Arizona 45-29.

Ravens reach playoffs

The 49ers stretched their win streak to six games and that combined with Atlanta and Green Bay losses secured a playoff berth for the Philadelphia Eagles (10-3), who visit Seattle on Monday. The Baltimore Ravens became the fourth team to qualify for the playoffs with a 23-7 victory at Jacksonville and

stayed atop the AFC at 11-3.

The Los Angeles Rams kept Detroit from sealing a playoff spot by defeating Washington 28-20. Two-time NFL Most Valuable Player Patrick Mahomes threw for 305 yards and two touchdowns in defending champion Kansas City's 27-17 victory at New England.

"There's some stuff we've got to clean up, like all season long, but we're going to try and get better and keep it rolling," Mahomes said. "When we're executing well, we're hard to beat." The Miami Dolphins, without top NFL receiver Tyreek Hill due to an ankle injury, blanked the New York Jets 30-0 with Raheem Mostert rushing for two touchdowns and Tua Tagovailoa throwing for 224 yards and a touchdown.

"It's tough not having one of your star guys out there," Tagovailoa said. "We have a lot of other guys we believe in and that's what happened out there—it's just the trust we have in each other." The Dolphins reached 10-4 for the first time in 23 years but remain a game behind Baltimore for the AFC top seed with Kansas City next at 9-5.

Baker Mayfield completed 22-of-28 passes for 381 yards and four touchdowns to lead Tampa Bay's 34-20 victory at Green Bay. New Orleans stayed level with Tampa Bay atop the NFC South by beating the New York Giants 24-6 as Derek Carr threw for 218 yards and three touchdowns. — AFP

Today's Matches

SPANISH LEAGUE

FC Barcelona v UD Almeria 21:00
beIN Sports HD 3

Villarreal CF v Celta de Vigo 23:30
Premier Sports 1 HD

Athletic de Bilbao v Las Palmas 23:30
Sport Premium 1 HD
beIN Sports HD 3

GERMAN LEAGUE

FC Union Berlin v FC Koln 20:30
beIN Sports HD 4

Bayer 04 Leverkusen v VFL Bochum 22:30
beIN Sports HD 2

Eintracht Frankfurt v Borussia Mönchengladbach 22:30
beIN Sports

VfL Wolfsburg v FC Bayern Munich 22:30
beIN Sports HD 5
beIN Sports FR HD 2

VfB Stuttgart v FC Augsburg 22:30
beIN Sports

FC Heidenheim 1846 v SC Freiburg 22:30
beIN Sports

FRENCH LEAGUE

Paris Saint-Germain v FC Metz 23:00
beIN Sports

RC Strasbourg v LOSC Lille 23:00
beIN Sports HD Xtra 1

Toulouse FC v AS Monaco 23:00
beIN Sports HD 7

Olympique Lyonnais v FC Nantes 23:00
beIN Sports HD Xtra 3

OGC Nice v RC Lens 23:00
beIN Sports HD Xtra 2

Clermont Foot 63 v Stade Rennais FC 23:00
beIN Sports

PSG goalkeeper targeted in burglary

VERSAILLES: Four burglars targeted the home of Paris Saint-Germain goalkeeper Alexandre Letellier early Tuesday, threatening him and his wife, police and prosecutors said. The burglars hit the wife of Letellier—who is a substitute goalkeeper at Ligue 1 leaders PSG—in the face and demanded jewellery and money as they threatened the couple with a knife, according to a police source.

Letellier's two young children were in the home at the time. The alarm in the house located in Hardcourt, west of Paris, went off at 2:00 am (0100 GMT) and the couple tried to contact police by telephone.

"The alarm worked perfectly well and police intervened quickly as did the club's security service," a source close to the case said. Three of the four were arrested, prosecutors said. Two members of the group are minors. Celebrity footballers have been targeted by burglars several times in recent years.

In July, PSG goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma was slightly injured during a burglary, with goods stolen estimated at 500,000 euros (\$550,000). "Unfortunately all big club are targets for this kind of attacks," said a source close to PSG who declined to be named, adding: "Each and every criminal who ever attacked PSG players has been apprehended." — AFP

Old heads lead Fluminense into Club World Cup final

'I think it is this mix of young players and experience that has helped Fluminense a lot'



JEDDAH: Ahly's Tunisian defender #21 Ali Maaloul heads the ball during the FIFA Club World Cup semi-final football match between Brazil's Fluminense and Egypt's Al-Ahly at King Abdullah Sport City in Jeddah. — AFP

JEDDAH: Fluminense coach Fernando Diniz credited his side's experience for riding out an Al Ahly storm to reach the final of the Club World Cup with a 2-0 win on Monday. Two goals in the final 20 minutes in Jeddah by Jhon Arias, from the penalty spot, and then John Kennedy carried the Brazilians into Friday's final against European Champions League winners Manchester City or Japanese side Urawa Reds.

Al Ahly were left to rue a number of missed chances as the African champions failed to find a way past 43-year-old Fluminense goalkeeper Fabio. But he was not the only veteran to shine for the Copa Libertadores champions.

At the age of 40, Felipe Melo became the oldest outfield player in Club World Cup history, while ex-Real Madrid captain Marcelo, 35, won the decisive penalty. Former Brazil international Ganso, 34, and striker German Cano, 35, also played their part.

"Did the age of our players help? I think it absolutely did," said Diniz, who has combined his roles as

Fluminense boss with a spell as interim Brazil manager. "Marcelo was decisive, especially for the penalty."

Marcelo also believes it is a mix of youth and experience that has led Fluminense to an all-time high this year as they won the Copa Libertadores for the first time. "They call us the 40-somethings, but we aim to help the younger players with this experience," said the left-back.

"I think it is this mix of young players and experience that has helped Fluminense a lot." The last 10 Club World Cups have been won by European sides. But if the gulf is growing between Europe's elite and the rest of the world at club level, the gap between South America's best and the rest of the world has narrowed significantly.

Twice in the past three years, the Copa Libertadores winners have failed to qualify for the final and Fluminense could easily have followed suit. Al Ahly had dumped out a star-studded Al-Ittihad featuring Karim Benzema, N'Golo Kante and Fabinho on their

home patch in the previous round. And roared on by thousands of travelling fans from just across the Red Sea, they were the more energetic and enterprising side throughout. "We should have conceded goals, they played really well and our goalkeeper saved us several times," added Diniz. "But we have a very strong characteristic: we never give up."

Nothing to fear

Fluminense still came closest to scoring before half-time as Arias twice hit the post. But Al Ahly should have made their first-half ascendancy count when Kahraba headed a glorious chance straight at Fabio. The chances continued to come and go for the Egyptians after the break.

Kahraba fired too close to Fabio before the veteran keeper denied Emam Ashour. Al Ahly were made to pay for that profligacy when a rare moment of quality from Marcelo lured Percy Tau into a mistimed challenge inside the box. Mohamed Elshenawy

had saved a penalty from Benzema in the quarter-finals, but this time was beaten by Arias' accurate spot-kick into the bottom corner.

Tau had an immediate chance to make amends but headed straight at Fabio. Substitute Taher Mohamed was next to waste a big opportunity to equalise, but Al Ahly failed to find a way through despite having 18 attempts on goal.

Kennedy, whose goal won the Copa Libertadores final against Boca Juniors last month, then showed the poise Al Ahly had been missing in front of goal by coolly turning inside his marker and slotting into the far corner.

Diniz has previously described his style of football as the opposite of Pep Guardiola's. The Manchester City boss begins his quest to win the Club World Cup with a third different club on Tuesday. But on this evidence there is little for Guardiola's City to fear in the final should they see off Asian champions Urawa. — AFP

Bulls shock Sixers, Timberwolves rally to beat Heat

LOS ANGELES: The Chicago Bulls withstood a 40-point double-double from Philadelphia star Joel Embiid on Monday to snap the 76ers' six-game NBA winning streak with a 108-104 victory. Coby White scored 24 points and Nikola Vucevic added 23 for the Bulls, who saw a 12-point lead to start the fourth quarter whittled to one point on Tyrese Maxey's three-pointer with 33.2 seconds remaining.

DeMar DeRozan, who finished with 15 points, drained a trio of free-throws to give Chicago some breathing room, and reigning NBA Most Valuable Player Embiid came up empty on two possessions in the waning seconds.

Embiid added 14 rebounds to notch his 11th straight game of at least 30 points and 10 rebounds, but the Sixers could not maintain the momentum after racing to a 16-4 lead in the opening minutes. "I think we kind of forgot our fundamentals," Embiid said. "I thought we made a pretty good run. We came back in the game... we had opportunities, we came back. We fought. Just came up short."

The Minnesota Timberwolves rallied late for a 112-108 victory over the Heat in Miami to match Boston for best record in the league at 20-5. Anthony Edwards scored 32 points and Karl-Anthony Towns added 18 for the Timberwolves, who tightened the defensive screws in the second half to overcome an early 17-point deficit.

Down by six going into the final period, the Timberwolves took the lead on Michael Conley's three-pointer with 8:37 to play. Miami would edge ahead again before Naz Reid's turnaround shot gave Minnesota a one-point advantage and they would not trail again.

The Wolves notched their league-leading seventh win when trailing by double digits at any point in the game and Minnesota center Rudy Gobert said the team needs to find a way to start stronger. "I think we have to start the game better," Gobert said. "It

takes for us to get punched in the face for us to wake up and then do the things that we need to do.

"Every time we do the things we're supposed to do, especially defensively, we put ourselves in position to win the game." Miami were buoyed by the return of Tyler Herro and Bam Adebayo. Herro scored 25 points in his first outing after missing 18 games with a sprained left ankle. Adebayo, who missed seven games with a bruised hip, added 22.

In Indianapolis, James Harden scored 21 of his 35 points in the fourth quarter as the Los Angeles Clippers powered to a 151-126 victory over the Pacers. Harden scored 18 straight points for the Clippers in little more than three minutes in the fourth, with Los Angeles pushing their lead to as many as 33.

Pistons lose again

Benedict Mathurin led Indiana with a season-high 34 points, but Tyrese Haliburton—back after missing one game with a bruised knee—had just eight points with 11 assists and four turnovers. The Cleveland Cavaliers had to work overtime to beat the Houston Rockets 135-130.

Donovan Mitchell scored 37 points and Sam Merrill had a career-high of 19 off the bench for the Cavs, who out-scored Houston 13-8 in the extra session and have now won 11 straight overtime games. In Atlanta, the Hawks piled more misery on the Detroit Pistons, handing them a 24th straight defeat 130-124.

Trae Young scored 31 points and handed out 15 assists for the Hawks, who led wire-to-wire. Cade Cunningham scored a career-high 43 points for Detroit, but the Pistons are two defeats away from matching the league's longest losing streak in a single season -- 26 games by the 2010-11 Cleveland Cavaliers and 2013-14 Philadelphia 76ers.

In Denver, the reigning champion Nuggets used a balanced attack to overcome a big night for Dallas's Luka Doncic in a 130-104 victory over the Mavericks. Jamal Murray scored 22 points, Aaron Gordon added 21 and six Nuggets players scored in double figures. Nikola Jokic had a quiet night with eight points, nine rebounds and seven assists, but with the rest of the Nuggets firing it was enough to withstand Doncic's 38 points, 11 rebounds and eight assists. — AFP



PHILADELPHIA: Patrick Beverley #22 of the Philadelphia 76ers gets a rebound past Dalen Terry #25 of the Chicago Bulls during the fourth quarter at the Wells Fargo Center in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. — AFP

Thomas Mueller extends with Bayern until 2025

MUNICH: Veteran Bayern Munich attacker Thomas Mueller has extended his deal by one year to 2025, the Bavarian club announced on Tuesday. "I'm happy my journey at FC Bayern is continuing. I want to play my part in us remaining successful, both as a team and the whole club," Mueller said in a statement.

Mueller's contract was set to expire at the end of this season. Calling Mueller "quality and reliability personified", Bayern sporting director Christoph Freund said the veteran was "a leader on and off the pitch, always a role model and incredibly valuable for the entire team".

Despite wearing the captain's armband several times this season, the 34-year-old has received less game time under coach Thomas Tuchel, enjoying just five league starts. Mueller has become synonymous with the Bavarian giants and has been at Bayern for more

than two decades, having joined as a 10-year-old in 2000 from village club TSV Paehl, located just 50 kilometres from Munich.

A two-time Champions League winner, Mueller has won 12 Bundesliga titles with Bayern in a career spanning 684 games, scoring 237 goals and providing 261 assists. Only former Bayern goalkeeper Sepp Maier has played more games for the club and only Gerd Mueller, with 568, and Robert Lewandowski, with 344, have more goals for the club.

For Germany, Mueller was first called up in March of 2010, where he played in a 1-0 defeat to Argentina. Since then, the attacker has played 126 games, scoring 45 times and winning the 2014 World Cup in Brazil.

Mueller was left out of the Germany squad after their group-stage exit at the 2022 Qatar World Cup, with many expecting his time with the four-time World Cup winners was over. However, he was recalled in September, scoring a goal in a 2-1 win over France, and looks likely to play a role in next year's home European Championship under former Bayern boss Julian Nagelsmann.

In November, Mueller's captain and long-time teammate Manuel Neuer, 37, also extended his deal by a season to 2025. — AFP