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Amir meets PM, senior ministers

Govt rejects amendments to prisoners' rehabilitation law

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Tuesday received HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah, who submitted his government's resignation two weeks ago. He also received Defense Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Fahad Al-Sabah and Interior Minister Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Sabah.

HH the Amir has not yet assigned someone to form the new Cabinet, although he completed customary consultations last week. He can re-name the same premier or ask a new figure to form the government. The Assembly will not be able to meet until the new government is formed and sworn in by HH the Amir.

Meanwhile, the government on



HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah

Tuesday officially rejected key amendments to the prisoners' rehabilitation law which reduced rehabilitation pe-

riods, allowing jailed politicians to run for office earlier. The amendments, approved overwhelmingly by the National Assembly two weeks ago while ministers opposed it, reduce by at least half the duration required to rehabilitate prisoners after completing their jail terms.

Under the previous law, prisoners for any crime need to have waited for at least 10 years to be rehabilitated, while the amendments cut the required period by half. The amendments would have served former MPs and activists who were jailed and were required to wait for 10 years to be rehabilitated and allowed to contest elections. A number of former leading lawmakers would have benefited from the amendments immediately to be able to contest polls.

The government sent the amend-

ments back to the National Assembly, saying the reduction of the periods undermined public interests. HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal openly criticized the amendments in a speech after taking the oath in the Assembly to assume his constitutional powers, saying the amendments harm national interests.

MP Saud Al-Asfour said that the action is part of the government's constitutional powers. He added the Assembly committees will review the amendments again and send them back to the Assembly for a vote. To override the government's rejection, MPs need to approve the amendments again by a two-thirds majority, or a total of 42 members in the 65-member house, including the 16 Cabinet members who are allowed to vote on such matters although they are unelected members.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Egg exports banned amid shortages

KUWAIT: Minister of Commerce and Industry Mohammad Al-Aiban gave orders to suspend fresh egg exports from Kuwait in a bid to maintain supply in local markets and prevent shortages or price increases. According to the decision, supply in local markets and prices need to remain stable as a precondition to allow exports at certain times during the year.

Steep hike in iqama fees eyed

KUWAIT: The National Assembly is set to consider a new residency law, pending government formation, accompanied by increased residency fees. Significant fee hikes will impact private sector workers (article 18) and their dependents. Residency fees for dependents are expected to double, with a potential 200 percent increase. Residency fees may reach KD 800 for parents, while renewal fees will be KD 50.

PAM mulls direct iqama transfers

KUWAIT: The Public Authority for Manpower is proposing a significant change allowing expatriate workers to transfer their residence directly to another employer without the original sponsor's consent, provided there's evidence of contract violations. The measure aims to address labor shortages and prevent human trafficking without compromising the rights of employers or workers.

Kuwaiti hunters urged to follow rules

KUWAIT: Kuwaitis visiting Iraq for hunting are advised to comply with local laws and regulations to ensure their safety, the foreign ministry said on Tuesday, a week after a citizen was found dead while on a hunting trip to Iraq. Iraqi visa regulations stipulate that all tourists visiting the country are required to cite the purpose of their visit, the ministry added. — KUNA

Pharmacy licenses suspended

KUWAIT: Health Minister Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi has temporarily halted the issuance of licenses for private pharmacies pending an evaluation study. A committee will assess the status of these pharmacies, reviewing relevant laws and decisions, and submit reports to the minister within three months. Furthermore, a central electronic monitoring system will be established to track the prescription of psychotropic substances dispensed by private pharmacies, with mandatory registration for pharmacies dealing with such medications. — KUNA

Price of ultra gasoline reduced

KUWAIT: Kuwait National Petroleum Company announced that the committee tasked with re-evaluating subsidies decided prices of ultra gasoline will be reduced by 35 fils per liter from Jan 1 till March 31. Additionally, the prices for other petroleum products have been set as follows: Premium gasoline at 85 fils per liter, special gasoline at 105 fils per liter, and diesel and kerosene at 115 fils per liter.

Hamas deputy chief killed in Beirut; Gaza deaths top 22,100

BEIRUT: The Zionist entity's war against Palestinian militants reached into the Lebanese capital Beirut on Tuesday, where a Zionist strike killed Hamas' deputy leader, the group and security officials in Lebanon said. A high-level security official told AFP that Saleh Al-Aruri was killed along with his bodyguards in the strike by the Zionist entity.

A second security official confirmed the information, adding two floors of the targeted building and one car were damaged. Lebanese state media reported the strike hit a Hamas office in Beirut's southern suburbs, a stronghold of Lebanon's Iran-backed Hezbollah movement. Hamas TV also said the Zionist entity had killed Aruri in Beirut. And Lebanese media said a total of six people were killed in the strike.

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Saleh Al-Aruri



BEIRUT: People inspect the site of a Zionist strike targeting a Hamas office in a southern suburb of the Lebanese capital on Jan 2, 2024. — AFP

Turkey detains 34 for spying for Zionist entity

ISTANBUL: Turkey announced on Tuesday it had detained 34 people suspected of planning abductions and spying on behalf of the Zionist entity's Mossad intelligence service. The raids came just weeks after President Recep Tayyip Erdogan warned of "serious

consequences" should the Zionist entity try to target figures from Palestinian militant group Hamas living or working in Turkey.

Turkey does not view Hamas as a terrorist organization and has hosted the Islamic group's political leaders for much of the past decade. A Turkish security source told AFP that most of the 34 people detained were foreign nationals whom Mossad recruited for "operations targeting Palestinians and their family members". "We are determined to ensure that absolutely no foreign intelligence agency can operate on Turkish soil without proper authorization," the security source said.

Turkish government released video footage showing armed security service agents breaking down doors and handcuffing suspects in their homes. The Istanbul public prosecutor's office said 12 additional suspects remained at large. "There is an insidious operation and sabotage attempts being made against Turkey and its interests," Erdogan said after the raids were announced.

Relations between Turkey and the Zionist entity imploded following the outbreak of the war in Gaza nearly three months ago. Erdogan has turned into one of the world's harshest critics of Zionist Prime

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5 dead in Japan plane collision at Tokyo airport

TOKYO: Five people aboard a Japan coast guard aircraft died Tuesday when it hit a Japan Airlines passenger plane on the ground in a fiery collision at Tokyo's Haneda airport. All 379 passengers and crew on board the passenger plane which burst into flames were safely evacuated, Japanese transport minister Tetsuo Saito told reporters.

But five of the six crew members from the smaller plane — bound for central Japan after Monday's huge earthquake — died, Saito said. The captain escaped and survived but was injured, he said, cautioning

Continued on Page 6



TOKYO: A Japan Airlines plane is on fire on a runway of Haneda Airport on Jan 2, 2024. — AFP



Rights committee issues statistical review for 2023

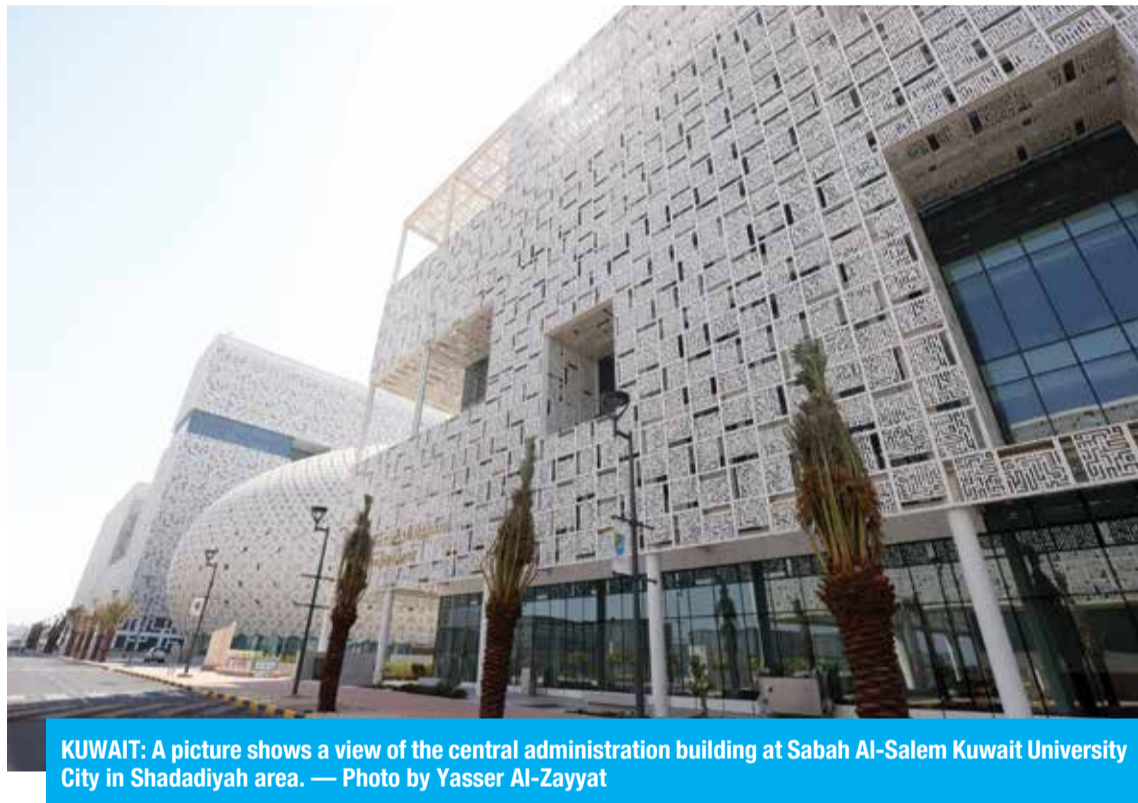
Committee raises public awareness about human rights

KUWAIT: The National Diwan for Human Rights' standing committee for complaints issued its statistical review for 2023 as stipulated in the provisions of Law 67/2015 that established the Diwan. Chairman of the committee, Dr Abdulredha Assiri, said that the committee had completed 146 tasks in 2023, of which 39 were complaints. The committee, as added in a statement, also presented two research studies about human rights issues, two seminars, and 19 field visits to correctional and social care centers.

The committee also visited 12 police stations, released 13 reports of its work, collaborated with three organizations of civil society, and participated in six events and media interviews, nine meetings and conferences abroad, and 26 meetings inside Kuwait. Dr Assiri added that through the committee's work, they were able to initiate different practical activities for prisoners in co-

operation with a number of civil society organizations and charities, including the Human Construction Society for Social Development.

The committee also raised public awareness about human rights issues by collaborating with the Center for Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies and handled the complaints positively, said Assiri. The committee has different educational and discussion programs to be announced in due time, directed to social care homes' residents, including the elderly, children with unknown parents, juveniles, and law enforcement officials, through collaborating with official institutions in the country, Dr Assiri added. The Committee is also keen on interacting with regional and international organizations by participating in various formal meetings and training programs to gain experience and learn about new policies and programs regarding humanitarian issues. — KUNA



KUWAIT: A picture shows a view of the central administration building at Sabah Al-Salem Kuwait University City in Shadadiyah area. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Kuwait University allows job-study

KUWAIT: The official spokesman of Kuwait University, Acting Secretary General of the University, Dr Fayeze Al-Dhafiri, announced "permission to combine the job and study in light of the approval of the Council of Public Universities."

Al-Dhafiri said in a press statement on Tuesday that this decision was made after the approval of the Council of Public Universities No. 3/2023 in June 2023 in light of the decision of the Civil Service Council No. 10 of 2023. He explained that the decision allows an employee to combine his or her job and study after the appointment at his or her own expense without taking study leave, taking into account the regulations and conditions set out. — KUNA

A journey of embracing cancer, finding joy in life

By Passant Hisham

KUWAIT: For six months, she walked into her chemotherapy sessions with confidence, spreading laughter and positivity all over the place, which left her care team wondering every time: "Aren't you feeling upset?" And her response was: "Why should I be? My body aches, but I must accept that all of this is just a temporary phase, and it shall pass very soon."

This is the power of acceptance that made the cancer and chemotherapy journey much more bearable for Kholoud Al-Rashedi, a 47-year-old assistant professor at the Higher Institute of Dramatic Arts in Kuwait. Rashedi reminisced the moment she received her diagnosis for the first time. "You have one of the most aggressive breast cancer types..." her doctor coldly said. She couldn't remember hearing anything after. Instead, waves of shock, numbness and disbelief washed over her right away.

The first question that crossed her mind was: "Does this mean I can never get married and have kids?" It took a while for her shock to wear off, until she rushed out of the hospital, called her mother, and immediately ran out of tears. She didn't remember crying again after that day, because from that moment



Kholoud Al-Rashedi

she realized that focusing on her fears would just hold her back. Rashedi had no idea what was waiting for her on the other side, but her faith in God's plan kept her moving forward. "I didn't really understand what I was passing through. All what I knew is that I had to move on and go through it all," she said.

Her first chemotherapy infusion wasn't easy at all. After a few hours of the session, she started feeling immense pain radiating all over her body. "My stomach ached as it bloated with trapped gas, and it felt like hammers hitting all over my bones, almost breaking them into pieces. For 10 days, I couldn't eat, drink or even cry, as if something was stuck into my throat but not turning into tears." Strange thoughts roamed in her head: "Why is this happening to me?" "Will this pain eventually kill me?"

While chemotherapy is a very effective treatment for curing cancer, its negative side effects are inevitable, and everybody reacts differently to it. After the second and third dose, Rashedi paid more attention to her body signs, which made her more familiar with the repeated pattern that her body went through after every treatment. She learned the importance of strengthening her immune system ahead of each session by getting enough food and rest to be able to handle the pain. "I also realized that resisting the pain makes things worse. I learned that whenever I find myself feeling exhausted, I must surrender to the fatigue and get some rest."

On the contrary, whenever she had the energy, she gave her all. "I refused to get someone to help me with cleaning the house. I used to clean, cook and bake all by myself. I wanted to immerse myself in any task that would take the feeling of pain away from me." Not only did Rashedi handle her household chores alone, but also, at that time she was the head of the set design department at the institute. She was responsible for teaching and supervising 150 students and 27 doctors, and none of them ever had any inkling about what she was going through.

Chemo kept gradually going after her body cells, where she gained more weight, lost all her hair and



Photo of Kholoud Al-Rashedi after chemotherapy.

KSPSC wins award at Arab Prize for Fighting Smoking

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Society for Preventing Smoking and Cancer (KSPSC) won second place at the Arab Prize for Fighting Smoking (first edition, 2023). "This prize is for the best non-government society in terms of awareness about smoking in the Arab world," said Dr Khalid Ahmad Al-Saleh, Chairman of the Board of the Kuwait Society for Preventing Smoking and Cancer. He said the society is proud of winning the award in its first edition as the best non-government society in the field of smoking awareness in the Arab world.

The prize is an initiative of the Arab Union for Humanities and Development, which includes a large group of success partners, including the Council of Arab Economic Unity, the International Society for Preventive Coronary Medicine, the Arab Medical Association Against Cancer and KSPSC. It aims at consolidating efforts against smoking while encouraging creativity



Official receives the award.

and innovation in confronting it.

This award is the result of Kuwait's interest in fighting smoking and its actions at the government and private levels. The society submitted its report, which included its activities under the umbrella of the Social Affairs Ministry, which has been supporting the society since 1980. The aim of the programs, conferences, campaigns, and initiatives is to spread awareness about smoking. The honoring ceremony was held in Ismailiyah, Egypt, in the presence of a large number of dignitaries.

Arabs call for end to Sudan violence

CAIRO: The chief of the Arab Parliament, Adel Al-Asoumi, has urged Sudan's warring parties to take the steps needed to deescalate the surging violence in the war-battered country, saying the Cairo-based legislative bloc backs any measure aiming to restore peace there. Against the backdrop of Sudan's Independence Day, he underlined that Khartoum is going through a "delicate and dangerous" phase that requires further pan-Arab cooperation to cease the bloodshed, subsequently leading to a political solution to the conflict. Sudan, since months ago, has been witnessing fierce fighting between army troops and a paramilitary squad after squabbles over mechanisms of power transfer from military to civil rule.

In another development, the Arab Parliament on Tuesday affirmed its support for the positions Egypt is taking to preserve its national security, which constitutes an integral part of Arab national security. This came in a statement by the Arab Parliament after its Speaker, Adel Al-Asoumi, met with the Egyptian Assistant Foreign Minister for Parliamentary Affairs, Ambassador Dina Al-Sehy, to discuss the latest developments in the Arab arena, especially the dangerous escalation taking place in the Gaza Strip. — KUNA

started sporting dark pigmentation under her eyes and on her nails. Yet, she embraced these changes as part of her recovery journey. "I accepted myself when I was bald, without eyelashes or eyebrows, and I didn't want to hide it from people. My appearance ceased to become one of my priorities anymore, because all what mattered the most for me was to feel genuinely happy from the inside."

Rashedi's family and friends were one of the main reasons behind her surviving this phase. "They treated me as if I was completely normal because they knew how much I hated being pitied. They gave me the space that I needed, and at the same time were always there for me. One genuine message from anyone of them was enough to help me to keep fighting," she said.

After months of chemotherapy, radiation therapy and surgical intervention to remove the tumor, Rashedi almost reached full recovery. She noted feeling grateful for the disease after all, because it taught her patience and helped her understand herself on the psychological and physical levels. It taught her to walk away from people and situations that didn't make her feel happy and alive. Finally, cancer brought Rashedi to the realization that life is too short to waste it in vain. "It simply made me want to focus on finding a moment of joy every day of my life," she said.



Photo of Kholoud Al-Rashedi during chemotherapy.

Kuwait 'has all the key requirements for advancement'

KUWAIT: From 2006 to the end of September 2020, 15 governments were formed, with an average of approximately 350 days' lifespan per government. From December 2020 until December 20, 2023, 8 governments were formed with an average lifespan of approximately 105 days per government, a decrease by 70 percent in the lifespan of one government.

The Kuwaiti government's role is greater than any government in the world as the public sector generates about 70 percent of the economy and employs about 84 percent of national workers. And because both are artificial and unsustainable, the country needs a stable government with clear and well-defined visions over every period. This is almost impossible unless the first and last criterion in its formation is efficiency, by which stability is achieved.

Other indicators are not any better, as public education lags by 4.8 years of study. Although public and higher education have the highest spending rates in the world, the only public university has lagged in its classification beyond a thousand rank. A recent report on their costs indicates that the average cost of a student in the public education is KD 5,300 and the average cost of a student at Kuwait University is KD 6,451 for the bachelor's level, and rises to KD 6,887 for postgraduate studies.

Nevertheless, the outcome of higher education does not have a strong relation with the needs of the labor market. After the failure to have a comprehensive repair for roads on announced schedules, the inability to simply repair potholes in main streets has become obvious. Despite Kuwait's semi-complete dependence on oil, the Oil Minister recently stated that the sector is flabby and that Kuwait's largest field - Burgan - may fail to achieve its production targets.

The reason why we mentioned the above is that Kuwait is at a crossroads. A new era has begun with the government resignation. As Kuwait has all the requirements and keys to advancement and excellence, the disease and cure lie in the content of its next executive administration. Kuwait deserves a public administration according to the best standards, even if the beginning will be tough after all the sabotage it has suffered over many decades.

Gross Domestic Product

GDP figures are the best and most important unit for measuring the progress or regress of a country's economy. Therefore, their up-to-date, accuracy and details are extremely important. They are just like x-rays and analysis of the human body and their importance increases if the conditions of the economy or body are unhealthy. The Central Statistical Bureau (CSB) published GDP figures for Q2 of 2023 compared to Q2 of 2022.

These figures indicate a contraction of the Kuwaiti economy at constant prices by -1.3 percent. The GDP size, after the contraction at constant prices reached KD 9,981 billion, equivalent to \$32.6 billion. The main reason for the contraction according to the CSB is the sharp decline in oil prices from the \$113.5 per barrel during Q2 of 2022 to \$78.3 per barrel for Q2 of 2023. The contribution of oil at constant prices to that output scored 51.5 percent, approximately (48.1 percent at current prices).

That means that the overwhelming dependence on oil in the formation of the economy continues, changing only according to its movement, as the economy is completely subject to oil market variables, which are beyond the control of the local decision-maker. The contribution of other sectors is historically minor and still is, which means that there is no effort to diversify sources of income.

The contribution of basic industries scored about 7.4 percent of GDP volume, declining by -1.6 percent in constant prices; the financial brokerage and insurance sector contributed by 9.0 percent, rising from 8.7 percent for the second quarter of 2022; the wholesale and retail trade contributed about 3.8 percent, and the services sector, most of which is government, contributed about 16 percent. — Al-Shall Report

Local

Zain in 2023: A journey of fostering innovation, community engagement

Company concluded year with plethora of social programs and initiatives



Bader Al-Kharafi with ZGI entrepreneurs in Riyadh during the regional accelerator program.

KUWAIT: In 2023, Zain continued its pledge to actively participate in the nation's biggest and most vibrant segments, becoming closer to its customers and the entire Kuwaiti community. Throughout the year, the company has contributed a plethora of programs, initiatives, and campaigns that covered every aspect of the community to reflect the values of its brand and achieve its vision of creating 'A Wonderful World'.

To make this vision a reality, Zain has outlined a comprehensive sustainability and social responsibility strategy, which inspired every program and initiative the company undertook from the first day of the year. These contributions centered around a number of pillars, such as shouldering sports and local athletes, supporting volunteer efforts during Ramadan, fostering innovation and nurturing the youth's creativity, empowering entrepreneurs and accelerating tech startups, and doubling down on efforts to serve sustainable goals.

Zain believes that its success and distinguished track of social contributions during the year was only possible thanks to a solid and versatile ecosystem of strategic partnerships with civil society establishments, NGOs, international entities, volunteer groups, and key public and private sector players. Hand in hand with its partners, Zain contributed to empowering community members to pursue their passion and achieve outstanding successes under Kuwait's name in every field. In this report, Zain showcases some of its most notable social activities and community programs from 2023:

Shouldering sports and local athletes

In 2023, Zain took its support of sports beyond Kuwait's borders by supporting Kuwaiti athletes in the biggest local, regional, and international sporting arenas. In January, the company dedicated 10 buses and three trips to transport over 400 of Kuwait's loyal football fans to the Arab Gulf Cup competition 'Khaleeji Zain 25' held in Basra, Iraq with Zain Group as the title sponsor, where they cheered on Kuwait's National Team.

The company also continued its year-long support of the thrills of Kuwait's top football flight in partnership with the Kuwait Football Association. The partnership included the biggest two contests: the Kuwait Premier League (Dawri Zain) and the Zain First Division League, as well as support to HH the Amir's Cup, HH the Crown Prince's Cup, and the KFA Cup (Zain Cup).

The company continued its pledge to support athletes and promote excellence in the league, dedicating - this season alone - over KD 60,000 worth of cash prizes for players and fans, the biggest prize pool in the local league's history. Zain also interacted with fans through its special fan zones, hosting exciting activities to create the best atmosphere for fans, especially during big games like derbies and finals. Spectators at stadiums and followers on social media got the chance to compete in special contests and win valuable prizes.

Last year, Zain was also the proud Official Partner of Team Kuwait at the 19th Asian Games, held in Hangzhou, China, in collaboration with the Kuwait Olympic Committee. The company's team accompanied the nation's athletes and administrators to China, reflecting its unwavering support to local sports in the biggest international arenas.

The company was keen on being among the first



Zain Alshuhoor's volunteers built bridges during Ramadan.

Innovation Nation fostered youth's creativity; ZGI continued mission to support startups

to welcome the returning champions at Kuwait International Airport, expressing its utmost pride in the accomplishments of Kuwaiti athletes in the biggest competitions. Team Kuwait's total tally reached 11 medals at the end of the Hangzhou games, with three Golds, four Silvers, and four Bronzes.

Zain Alshuhoor Ramadan Campaign

In 2023, Zain concluded yet another successful season of its annual social campaign for the Holy Month of Ramadan, Zain Alshuhoor. The month-long program saw the company join the Kuwaiti community in sharing the blessings of the Holy Month with a plethora of social and humanitarian contributions. The campaign kicked-off by delivering 'Ramadan Machla' (food supplies) to underprivileged families in collaboration with three of Zain's non-profit strategic partners.

In addition, Zain's volunteers team directly distributed supplies at Taimaa, Jahra in partnership with KRCS. Zain's Iftar program also came back for its 16th year, where the company provided daily meals at the Iftar hall in Ardiya throughout month, while also distributing meals across Kuwait via trucks in partnership with the Kuwait Food Bank. The program saw nearly 40,000 meals distributed throughout Ramadan.

In one of the company's most notable social programs in Ramadan, Zain hosted a special event to celebrate the Kuwaiti tradition of Girgeaan (candy distribution) at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor's Social Care Centers. The event came in partnership with the Public Authority for Disability Affairs to share the joys and blessings of the Holy Month with foster care children, people with special needs, and the elderly.

In recognition of the tremendous efforts of frontliners during the Holy Month, Zain hosted a special Ramadan Iftar banquet for personnel operating at Nuwaiseeb Border Port. The step came

Innovation Nation and ZGI
In 2023, Zain kicked-off Innovation Nation, its new initiative under which all of the company's innovation and entrepreneurship programs fall, especially within STEM areas. The initiative mainly targets the youth, and centers around a number of pillars, including entrepreneurship, investment, startup acceleration, supporting inventors, fostering innovation, and more.

Under this initiative, Zain signed a MoU with Sabah Al Ahmad Center for Giftedness and Creativity (SACGC) to build a new strategic partnership that focuses on elevating the digital literacy of the youth, empower creativity and innovation, and enhance the local startup ecosystem in the community. The partnership saw many successful programs throughout the year, most notably a summer camp that developed digital and tech skills of over 800 children and young people through over 130 workshops and informative sessions.

Zain also signed a MoU with the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS) to reflect their unwavering efforts to support and grow the innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystems in the community. The two organizations joined forces to accelerate capacity building, upskill national talents in the private sector, grow research & development in innovation, enable social enterprises, and empower local entrepreneurs. One of the most notable programs under this partnership was Science Month, an initiative that encouraged Kuwaiti youth to pursue STEM careers.

2023 also saw the successful conclusion of the seventh season of the company's award-winning Zain Great Idea tech startup accelerator program, which early in the year was recognized with the E-Business Award from the prestigious Entrepreneur Middle East magazine. Zain's program was awarded 'Ecosystem Enabler of the Year' to acknowledge the company's ever-growing endeavors in accelerating the regional tech startups ecosystem and empowering entrepreneurs in Kuwait and the region throughout 13 years.

In its 7th season, ZGI continued on its core mission, but grew in its vision, and expanded its programs to new horizons. With it, the company opened a bridge to connect aspiring entrepreneurs to the biggest destinations that target business owners in the region, including Dubai, Riyadh and Cairo. In addition, Zain and SACGC became the official Kuwait Country Partners of Beban, the regional entrepreneur reality TV show, joining forces to include and enable Kuwaiti entrepreneurs' participation in the upcoming third season of the show which will air in January 2024.

Through Beban, Zain and SACGC offered 40 Kuwaiti entrepreneurs the opportunity to undergo an intensive 2-week training bootcamp at the Zain Innovation Campus (ZINC). During the bootcamp, entrepreneurs were provided with insights to enhance their business plans and ensure their readiness to pitch their businesses to a panel of investors for strategic business development and equity investment on the TV show, where 5 shortlisted Kuwaiti entrepreneurs were accepted to represent Kuwait in the program.



Innovation Nation initiative empowered youth's creativity and tech skills.

as a gesture of gratitude and appreciation to the staff of the Ministry of Interior and Customs who dedicate their time and effort to Kuwait's safety.

To promote fitness during the Holy Month, the company continued to present the Zain Ramadan Challenge at Al Shaheed Park, which featured walkathons and marathons throughout Ramadan, with advanced technology solutions used to monitor the participants' progress. Zain also organized a first-of-its-kind drive-thru Girgeaan celebration at its main HQ in Shuwaikh, which witnessed a great turnout.

Towards the end of the Holy Month, Zain partnered with the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs to present hospitality services and facilitate the transportation of worshippers at the Grand Mosque of Kuwait during Qiyaam prayers throughout the last 10 days of Ramadan. The company also shared the blessings of Eid prayers with worshippers during the first day of Eid.

Delivering on its annual promise to bring the most spectacular of theatrical performances to its loyal fans, Zain presented its all-new play "Nothing is Ever Like Zain" with daily mesmerizing shows throughout Eid holiday at the Arena Kuwait. Mixing stunning theatrical performances with the latest technologies, the company presented a show like no other, reflecting positive values and hosting top local and regional stars.



Zain travelled to the Asian Games in China with Kuwait's champions.



Company transported Kuwait's fans to Khaleeji Zain in Basra.

Message from India envoy on New Year

On the occasion of the New Year 2024, I extend my warm greetings and best wishes to the leadership and people of Kuwait, especially the large and vibrant Indian community in Kuwait. I believe with the advent of 2024, Kuwait will enter a new era of development and prosperity under the visionary leadership of the Amir His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the prospective new Government. I am also confident the bilateral relations between India and Kuwait will achieve new heights during this year.



Dr Adarsh Swaika
India Ambassador

As we start a new year with a new hope, I wish good health, success and happiness to all.

Ambassador to Jordan lays foundation stone

AMMAN: Kuwait Ambassador to Jordan Hamad Al-Merri has laid the foundation stone of an educational complex donated by Kuwait in the Sahab area east of the Jordanian capital. The project, financed by Kuwaiti Abdullah Yosif Bodai, is part of a charity project affiliated with the Educational Evacuation Academy, and it is the academy's sixth project in Jordan. It is held with a Kuwaiti donation and under the supervision of Jasim Al-Yaseen.

Ambassador Al-Marri said, in a statement to KUNA, after the ceremony, "This project comes within the framework of a series of Kuwaiti charitable works in Jordan, due to the strong relations that bind the two countries." He added, "Kuwaiti charitable work continues in Jordan wherever needed, and its features appear in the Arab world and globally." Ambassador Al-Marri stressed the importance of the project in serving the educational process in Jordan, noting that the project constitutes a gesture of gratitude to Jordan and its people. — KUNA

Photo of the day



KUWAIT: Flamingos take flight after feeding at a beach north of Kuwait City, on January 1, 2024. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Kuwaitis in Japan 'safe'

Foreign Ministry expresses sympathy with Japan

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has expressed Kuwait's sympathy with the Japanese government and people over the earthquake that hit central Japan and caused damage in several regions. The ministry affirmed in a statement that Kuwaiti citizens in Japan "were safe" in the wake of the quake. However, it was noted that the Japanese authorities warned of possible tsunamis. It appealed to the Kuwaiti nationals in Japan to be as cautious as possible, abide by guidelines declared by the local authorities, and communicate with the Kuwait Embassy in Tokyo if the need arises. (The embassy is reachable on the emergency phone number: +819088849650, and the regular number: +80334550361).

Meanwhile, Japanese rescuers battled the clock and powerful aftershocks Tuesday to find survivors

of a New Year's Day earthquake that killed at least 48 people and caused widespread destruction. The 7.5-magnitude quake that rattled Ishikawa prefecture on the main island of Honshu triggered tsunami waves more than a meter high, caused a major fire, and tore apart roads.

On the Noto Peninsula, the destruction included buildings damaged by fire, flattened houses, fishing boats sunk or washed ashore, and highways hit by landslides. "I'm amazed the house is this broken and everyone in my family managed to come out of it unscathed," said Akiko, standing outside her parents' tilting home in the badly hit city of Wajima. The way 2024 started "will be etched into my memory forever," she told AFP after what she called the "long and violent" earthquake on Monday. "It was

such a powerful jolt," Tsugumasa Mihara, 73, said as he queued with hundreds of others for water in the nearby town of Shika.

Local authorities put the death toll at 48, but the number was expected to rise as rescuers comb through the rubble. "Very extensive damage has been confirmed, including numerous casualties, building collapses, and fires," Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said after a disaster response meeting. "We have to race against time to search for and rescue victims of the disaster." Aerial news footage showed the terrifying scale of a fire that ripped through the old market area of Wajima, where a seven-storey commercial building also collapsed. Quake damage impaired rescue efforts to put out the blaze. — Agencies



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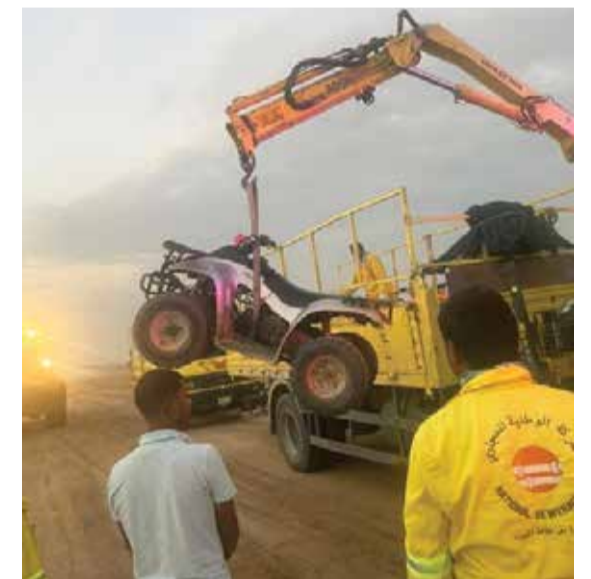


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Municipality team removes 46 camps over violations

KUWAIT: Kuwait Municipality team intensified their monitoring campaigns in spring camps during the New Year's holiday. The team visited sites in the governorates of Jahra and Ahmadi. Over 46 camps were removed for violations. Twenty mobile groceries were towed to the municipality's reservation sites in Al-Naayem and Mina Abdullah. 70 street vendors were fined for various violations and referred to competent authorities. The Municipality called on licensed spring camp owners to abide by the conditions and regulations of the Municipality and not hold any celebrations during the official mourning period. The inspection teams will not hesitate to remove any camp that does not comply with the conditions and rules.



Kuwait to witness two astronomical phenomena

KUWAIT: Al-Ojeiri Scientific Center said that the month of January will witness two astronomical phenomena, the first, will be the meteor showers on Wednesday and the second is the solar perihelion

(on Thursday). The center pointed out that this phenomenon in which the earth is at the closest point to the sun, will make the disk of the sun appear slightly larger than usual and brighter. The center added that the quad meteors will reach its peak on Thursday night. He explained that the quaternary meteors will produce about 120 meteors per hour and can be seen with the naked eye in the open and dark places during the night hours. He pointed out that, on Thursday, Kuwait will be on a date with another astronomical phenomenon known as perihelion, which coincides with the beginning of each new calendar year.



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Japan quake kills at least 50

Japan lifts Tsunami warnings as rescuers race against time to find survivors

WAJIMA: Japanese rescuers battled the clock and powerful aftershocks Tuesday to find survivors of a New Year's Day earthquake that killed at least 50 people and caused widespread destruction.

The 7.5 magnitude quake that rattled Ishikawa prefecture on the main island of Honshu triggered tsunami waves more than a meter high, sparked a major fire and tore apart roads.

On the Noto Peninsula, the destruction included buildings damaged by fire, houses flattened, fishing boats sunk or washed ashore, and highways hit by landslides. "I'm amazed the house is this broken and everyone in my family managed to come out of it unscathed," said Aki-ko, standing outside her parents' tilting home in the badly hit city of Wajima.

The way 2024 started "will be etched into my memory forever," she told AFP after what she called the long and violent earthquake on Monday. "It was such a powerful jolt," Tsugumasa Mihara, 73, said as he queued with hundreds of others for water in the nearby town of Shika.

Japanese news agency Kyodo put the death toll to 57, citing local officials, as rescuers comb through the rubble. "Very extensive damage has been confirmed, including numerous casualties, building collapses and fires," Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said after a disaster response meeting. "We have to race against time to search for and rescue victims of the disaster."

Aerial news footage showed the terrifying scale of a fire that ripped through the old market area of Wajima, where a seven-story commercial building collapsed. Quake damage impaired rescue efforts to put out the blaze.

Most of the houses in the coastal city of Suzu collapsed, according to officials cited by Kyodo. "The situation is devastating, as about 90 percent of houses have been completely or nearly completely destroyed," Suzu Mayor Masuhiro Izumiya was reported as saying at a prefectural government meeting.

Almost 33,000 households were without power in the region, which saw temperatures touch freezing overnight, the local energy provider said.

Many cities were without running water.

The US Geological Survey said the quake had a magnitude of 7.5. Japan's meteorological agency measured it at 7.6, and said it was one of more than 210 to shake the region through Tuesday evening. Several strong jolts were felt early Tuesday, including one measuring 5.6 that prompted national broadcaster NHK to switch to a special program. "Please take deep breaths," the presenter said, reminding viewers to check for fires in their kitchens.

Tsunami warning lifted

On Monday, waves at least 1.2 meters (four feet) high hit Wajima and a series of smaller tsunamis were reported elsewhere. Warnings of much larger waves proved unfounded and on Tuesday, Japan lifted all tsunami warnings.

Images on social media showed cars, houses and bridges in Ishikawa wobbling violently as terrified people cowered in shops and train stations. Houses collapsed and huge cracks appeared in roads while others were hit by landslides. Forecasters warned that rains could further loosen soil on hillsides.

A team of firefighters crawled under a collapsed commercial building in Wajima looking for survivors, television footage showed. "Hang in there! Hang in there," they shouted as they battled through piles of wooden beams with an electric saw. The fire in Wajima engulfed as many as 200 structures, reports said, with people evacuated in the dark, some with blankets and others carrying babies.

A duty officer at the Wajima Fire Department said authorities were overwhelmed Tuesday by rescue calls and reports of damage. Ishikawa Governor Hiroshi Hase wrote on social media that roads had been cut in widespread areas by landslides or cracking, while in the port of Suzu "multiple" vessels had capsized.

Suzu's mayor called the damage in the city "catastrophic" and said 1,000 houses had been completely destroyed there, with 4,000 to 5,000 residents unable to live in their homes, according to local media.



NANAJO, Japan: People walk past a badly damaged house in the city of Nanao, Ishikawa Prefecture, on Jan 2, 2024. — AFP

Bullet trains suspended

Monday's quake shook apartments in the capital Tokyo about 300 kilometers (186 miles) away, where a public New Year's Day greeting event by Emperor Naruhito was cancelled.

Overnight about 1,400 people were stuck on suspended bullet trains, including Georgia's ambassador Teimuraz Lezhava who praised the "kindness of the station staff and the passengers around us" on social media. Around 1,000 others were stuck in local express trains for almost 24 hours after they were halted on Monday, NHK said. About 500 people were also stranded at Noto's damaged airport, with access roads blocked and the runway riddled with cracks.

Japan experiences hundreds of earthquakes ev-

ery year and the vast majority cause no damage. The number of earthquakes in the Noto Peninsula region has been steadily increasing since 2018, a Japanese government report said last year. The country is haunted by a massive 9.0 magnitude undersea quake off northeastern Japan in 2011 which triggered a tsunami that left around 18,500 people dead or missing.

It also swamped the Fukushima atomic plant, causing one of the world's worst nuclear disasters. Japan's nuclear authority said there were no abnormalities reported at the Shika atomic power plant in Ishikawa or other plants after the latest quake. China on Tuesday joined the United States and other countries in expressing condolences. — AFP



BARBERA, Somalia: Somaliland security Personnel stand watch in front of shipping containers being stored at Berbera Port on Aug 31, 2021 in this file photo. — AFP

Somalia rejects Ethiopia-Somaliland deal as 'aggression'

MOGADISHU, Somalia: Somalia on Tuesday vowed to defend its territory after a controversial deal between Ethiopia and the breakaway state of Somaliland that it branded an "aggression". The government in Mogadishu also said it had recalled its ambassador to Ethiopia and issued an appeal to the international community to stand by its side over the "blatant assault" on its sovereignty.

The deal was announced in Addis Ababa on Monday only days after Mogadishu agreed to resume dialogue with the separatist northern region after years of stalemate. Somaliland, a former British protectorate of about 4.5 million people, has been seeking full statehood since claiming independence from Somalia in 1991.

But the move has not been recognized internationally and is fiercely opposed by Mogadishu, although in reality the central government exercises little authority over the region's affairs. The "historic" memorandum of understanding (MOU) signed by Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and Somaliland leader Muse Bihi Abdi gives Ethiopia access to the Red Sea port of Berbera and a leased military base.

Abdi said in a statement that in return, Ethiopia would formally recognize Somaliland, something that Addis Ababa has not confirmed. The Somalia cabinet denounced the MoU as a "blatant assault on the independence, sovereignty and unity of the Federal Republic of Somalia", and announced it was recalling its ambassador to Ethiopia for consultations.

The cabinet also said it was seeking urgent meetings of the UN Security Council and the African Union to discuss "Ethiopia's aggression and interference against the sovereignty of our country". The two Horn of Africa neighbors have a history of stormy relations and territorial feuds, fighting two wars in the late 20th century.

'Defend our land'

In an address to the nation, Prime Minister Hamza Barre called for the people of Somalia to stay calm. "We will not allow an inch of land, sea and skies to be violated," he said. "We will defend our land with any legal means possible."

President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud made a similar

declaration to an emergency session of parliament, rejecting the deal as a violation of international laws but insisting Somalia bore the people of Somaliland no animosity. He warned however that the deal could open the way to a "revival" of Al-Shabaab, the Islamist militant group that has been waging a bloody insurgency against the Somali government for more than 15 years.

Al-Shabaab itself, which has been the target of a major military offensive since late 2022, denounced Abiy's "expansionist agenda". There was no immediate comment from the Ethiopian government to Somalia's reaction.

No more 'nests of conflict'

The deal comes months after Abiy said his country, Africa's second most populous with about 120 million people, would assert its right to access the Red Sea, sparking concerns among its neighbors. Ethiopia was cut off from the coast after Eritrea seceded and declared independence in 1993 following a three-decade war.

Addis Ababa had maintained access to a port in Eritrea until the two countries went to war in 1998-2000, and since then Ethiopia funnels most of its trade through Djibouti. Ethiopia's economy has been constrained by its lack of maritime access, and Berbera port offers a gateway to the Red Sea and further north to the Suez Canal.

Abiy's national security adviser Redwan Hussein said Ethiopia would have a military base on the Red Sea, with Somaliland saying it would lease 20 kilometers (12 miles) of sea access for 50 years.

Somaliland would have the opportunity to take stakes in Ethiopian telecoms and airline companies, Redwan added. It was not clear when the pact would take effect. In 2018, Ethiopia acquired a 19-percent shareholding in Berbera port, which is managed and majority owned by Dubai-based DP World, although the deal later lapsed.

On Friday, Somalia and Somaliland agreed to resume dialogue after two days of talks mediated by Djibouti President Ismail Omar Guelleh, the first of their kind since 2020 when similar negotiations stalled. In a post on X, Guelleh's adviser Alexis Mohamed said the region "does not need other nests of conflict," without specifically referring to any country.

Somaliland prints its own currency, issues its own passports and elects its own government but has been left poor and isolated without international recognition of its quest for statehood. Although it has often been seen as a beacon of stability in the chaotic Horn of Africa region, political tensions surfaced there last year, spilling over into deadly violence. — AFP

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03 JANUARY - 09 JANUARY 2024

- Nutella Chocolate Spread 825gm: From 01 to 04.01.2024, \$2.200, \$1.750
- Lipton Tea Powder 400gm 2's: \$3.320, \$2.490
- Rainbow Evaporated Milk Condensed / Lite 100gm 6's: \$1.560, \$0.990
- McCain Super Spreads / McCain Super Crisps Fried potato Spirals 1.5 kg: \$1.990, \$1.490
- Diamantina Burger Assorted 150gm 7pc: From 03 to 07.01.2024, \$0.845
- Tanzania Chilled Lamb Bone In/kg: \$2.350
- Shrimps (Medium) Saudi/kg: From 03 to 05.01.2024, \$1.990
- White Pomfret (Medium)/kg: From 03 to 05.01.2024, \$4.790
- Head & Shoulders Assorted Shampoo 700ml + 400ml: \$3.470, \$1.490
- Ariel Washing Powder 2.5kg 2's - Liquid 1Ltr: From 03 to 06.01.2024, \$5.885, \$3.850
- Pomegranate (India) per kg: \$1.495, \$0.995
- Alvocado Hass (Medium) per kg: From 03 to 06.01.2024, \$2.495, \$1.795
- Carrot (Australia) per kg: From 03 to 06.01.2024, \$0.545, \$0.390
- Tomato (New Zealand) Box: \$0.750, \$0.395
- iPhone 12 Pro: \$409.900, \$369.900
- Apple iPhone 15 Pro 256GB: \$25.700, \$159.900
- Apple iPhone 12 128GB: \$299.900, \$11.150, \$159.900
- Apple iPad: \$156.900, \$124.900
- Samsung 65" 4K UHD TV UA65UJ000UKXN: \$249.850, \$179.900

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International

South Korean opposition leader recovering in ICU after stabbing

Lee expected to run for president after losing to Yoon in country's tightest presidential race

SEOUL: South Korean opposition leader Lee Jae-myung was recovering in intensive care after he was stabbed in the neck on Tuesday by a man who pushed through a crowd pretending to be his supporter, his party said.

Lee was surrounded by journalists when a man lunged and struck him on the left side of his neck, Busan police official Son Je-han said at a press briefing. Lee was first taken to hospital in Busan, then flown to the capital Seoul where he underwent a two-hour surgery, Kwon Chil-seung of Lee's Democratic Party told reporters. "Damage to the internal jugular vein was confirmed," Kwon said. Lee was conscious after the surgery and is "currently admitted to the intensive care unit and is recovering", Kwon added. The attacker was arrested at the scene.

Police official Son told reporters that he was a man in his 60s who "used an 18-centimeter knife — its blade is 13 centimeters long — which he purchased online". In footage aired on South Korean television stations, police were seen wrestling the suspect, who displayed a pro-Lee slogan, to the ground. South Korean authorities plan to bring attempted murder charges against the assailant, the Yonhap news agency reported. The attacker told the police, according to Yonhap, that his intention was to kill Lee.

The 59-year-old politician was "walking to his car while talking to reporters when the attacker asked for his autograph", a witness told local broadcaster YTN. In TV footage, Lee was seen collapsing to the ground as people rushed to help him. Yonhap earlier reported, citing fire department officials, that Lee suffered a one-centimeter laceration in the attack.

Several high-profile South Korean politicians have been attacked in public in past years. An elderly man hit Song Young-gil, who led the Democratic Party before Lee, in the head with a blunt object in 2022. In 2006, Park Geun-hye, then the leader of the conservative party who later became president, was assaulted with a knife at a rally. The attack left a scar on her face.

Presidential contender

Lee lost in 2022 to conservative Yoon Suk Yeol in the tightest presidential race in South Korea's history. Yoon expressed "deep concern" for Lee's safety after hearing of the attack, the president's spokeswoman Kim Soo-kyung said. "Yoon emphasized our society should never tolerate this kind of act of violence under any circumstances."

A former child factory worker who suffered an industrial accident as a teenage school drop-out, Lee rose to political stardom partly by playing up his rags-to-riches tale. He is widely expected to run for president again in 2027, and recent polls have indicated that he remains a strong contender.

Lee has, however, faced some calls from within his own party to step down as its leader ahead of legislative elections this year. His bid for the top office has been overshadowed by a string of scandals. He avoided arrest in September when a court dismissed a request from the prosecution for him to be taken into custody pending trial on various corruption charges.

Lee still faces trial on charges of bribery in connection with a firm that is suspected of illicitly transferring \$8 million to North Korea. He is also accused of breaching his duties, allegedly resulting in a loss of



BUSAN: South Korean opposition party leader Lee Jae-myung is attended to after being attacked in Busan on Jan 2, 2024. — AFP

20 billion won (\$15 million) for a company owned by Seongnam city during his term as its mayor. Lee has denied all allegations against him.

In August last year, he launched a hunger strike

against what he called the Yoon government's "incompetent and violent" policies. He was hospitalized because of fasting-related ailments after not eating for 19 days. — AFP

Tycoon Jimmy Lai pleads not guilty to all charges in trial

HONG KONG: Hong Kong pro-democracy tycoon Jimmy Lai pleaded not guilty Tuesday to "sedition" and "collusion" charges in a high-profile national security trial that could see him jailed for life. The charges against Lai — founder of the now-shuttered popular Chinese-language tabloid Apple Daily — revolve around the newspaper's publications, which supported pro-democracy protests and criticized Beijing's leadership.

The 76-year-old is accused of two counts of colluding with foreign forces by calling for international sanctions against Chinese and Hong Kong officials. "Not guilty," Lai said in English for each of the three charges read out. Wearing a white shirt and a navy blue jacket, the septuagenarian was surrounded by three prison guards in the defendant's dock. His wife and some of his children sat in the courtroom gallery, which was packed with reporters and members of the public.

Lai's trial, which began in late 2023 after he was jailed for more than 1,100 days, is being closely watched as a barometer of Hong Kong's political freedoms and judicial independence. Other defendants in the case include three Apple Daily companies that have been taken over by the Hong Kong government, six former executives of the newspaper and two young activists related to an advocacy group called Stand With Hong Kong Fight For Freedom (SWHK).

"This case is about a radical political figure ... who conspired with others to bring into hatred and stir up opposition to the government and the central authori-

ties," lead prosecutor Anthony Chau told the court Tuesday. He accused Lai of attempting to "collude with foreign countries or external elements to endanger national security". Chau branded Lai a "mastermind" who used his media business "as a platform to pursue his political agenda ... and orchestrated a conspiracy" with SWHK. The prosecution cited 161 publications of Apple Daily between April 2019 and the newspaper's last day in June 2021 as "examples of seditious publications... with a view to polluting the minds of the impressionable ones". Lai was also accused of providing instructions and financial support for SWHK to lobby foreign countries for sanctions.

Foreign 'connections' alleged

Prosecutors named dozens of politicians, activists and academics — based in Hong Kong, the US, Britain, Canada, Japan and Taiwan — as Lai's "connections", showing a color-coded chart on overhead projector screens. At least seven have been alleged as Lai's agents or intermediaries.

Prosecutors highlighted Lai's meeting with former US vice president Mike Pence and secretary of state Mike Pompeo in 2019 to say that he had "vast foreign and external connections". They also went through a list of Lai's "overt acts" of collusion, which included dozens of his op-eds, 24 chat show episodes and 811 tweets.

Lai sat cross-armed in the dock and wore headphones, which his lawyer previously explained were to help him hear more clearly. As the court adjourned for lunch, Lai blew kisses to his family members, who smiled and waved back.

Prosecutors also played video clips of media interviews where Lai called for American sanctions to deter Beijing from cracking down on Hong-kongers' rights. At the start of Tuesday's hearing,



HONG KONG: Hong Kong pro-democracy media tycoon Jimmy Lai (center) is led into a police van in this file photo. — AFP

prosecutors finalized the charges against Lai: one count of "conspiracy to produce seditious publications" and two counts of "conspiracy to collude with foreign forces to endanger national security". The latter offence carries a penalty of up to life in prison under the security law Beijing imposed in 2020 to quell dissent after huge democracy protests erupted the year before.

Aside from the three Apple Daily companies that stand charged as corporate defendants, the remaining defendants have pleaded guilty. Five are expect-

ed to testify against the media mogul. Lai is a British citizen, and a few representatives from foreign consulates were present to observe the trial.

His case has drawn widespread condemnation from the international community but Beijing has dismissed the criticism as interference. "Certain countries ... have slandered Hong Kong's press freedom, attacked the government's legitimate law enforcement and supported and recruited anti-China elements such as Jimmy Lai," China's foreign ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said Tuesday. — AFP

Hamas deputy chief killed in Beirut...

Continued from Page 1

The strike will add to persistent fears that the nearly three-month-old Zionist-Hamas war could become a wider conflagration. The Zionist entity's relentless bombardment and ground offensive in Gaza has killed at least 22,185 people, mostly women and children. On Tuesday in Gaza, Zionist forces battled Hamas fighters among the ruins of the heavily-bombed Gaza Strip.

Gaza's health ministry said 70 people were killed and more than 100 wounded in the previous 24 hours during Zionist raids. In the southern city of Khan Yunis, the Zionist entity twice struck the Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS) headquarters, PRCS said, resulting in "five casualties and three injuries" among displaced people who had sought refuge there and at a nearby hospital. The health ministry in Gaza said four people were killed including an infant.

"They told us to go to the south that is safe, but they are liars," shouted Fathi Al-Af, pointing to his daughter on a stretcher on the floor of Nasser Hospital after the strike. "The entire Gaza Strip is not safe." United Nations agencies have voiced alarm over Gaza's spiraling humanitarian crisis that has left 2.4 million people under siege and bombardment, most of them displaced and crowded into shelters and tents. The World Health Organization has warned of the risk of famine, and disease.

The Zionist army says 173 of its soldiers have been killed inside Gaza in the battle against Hamas. Qatar-based Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh, speaking on Tuesday before Aruri's death, said Zionist captives will only be freed "on terms set by the resistance". Aruri, in early December, had said: "The price to pay for the release of Zionist prisoners will be the release of all our prisoners — after a ceasefire."

Aruri, who lived in exile, is accused by the Zionist entity of masterminding numerous attacks. He was elected deputy to Haniyeh in 2017, before being officially named the group's number two. In October the Zionist army demolished Aruri's home

in the occupied West Bank. In a televised address Tuesday, Haniyeh also said Hamas is "open to the idea of a national government for the West Bank and Gaza".

In the West Bank, violence since Oct 7 has surged to a level unseen in nearly two decades. At least 321 Palestinians have been killed by Zionist troops and settlers since the Gaza war began. In the latest clash Tuesday, Zionist forces killed four Palestinians, the health ministry said.

Britain's former prime minister Tony Blair has strongly denied a Zionist media report linking him to talks last week about the resettlement of Palestinians from Gaza in other countries. Channel 12 claimed on Sunday that Blair, who left office in 2007 and served as a Middle East envoy charged with building up Palestinian institutions, was in the Zionist entity last week.

The news channel said he held meetings with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and war cabinet member Benny Gantz about a mediation role after the war with Hamas. He could also act as a go-between with moderate Arab states about the "voluntary resettlement" of Gazans, it added. Expelling civilians during a conflict or creating unlivable conditions which force them to leave is a war crime.

The Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, a non-profit organization he set up in 2016, said the report was "a lie". "The story was published without any contact with Tony Blair or his team. No such discussion has taken place," it said in a statement on Monday night. "Nor would Tony Blair have such a discussion. The idea is wrong in principle. Gazans should be able to stay and live in Gaza."

The Palestinian presidency in Ramallah lashed out at the report. The presidency said it would demand that the British government "not allow this meddling with the fate and future of the Palestinian people". "We also consider Tony Blair to be an unwelcome person in the Palestinian territories," it said, according to official Palestinian news agency Wafa. The Channel 12 report came after two far-right Zionist government ministers called for Jewish settlers to return to the Gaza Strip after the war with Hamas, and said Palestinians should be encouraged to emigrate. The ministers' comments drew condemnation from Hamas. — AFP

Turkey detains 34 for spying for...

Continued from Page 1

Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The Turkish leader last week compared Netanyahu to Adolf Hitler and demanded that the Zionist entity's Western allies drop their support for the "terrorism" being conducted by Zionist troops in Gaza.

Erdogan has also recalled Ankara's envoy to Tel Aviv, and pushed for the trial of Zionist commanders and political leaders at the International Criminal Court in The Hague. The president's ruling Islamic, conservative AKP party also led tens of thousands of protesters out on the streets of Istanbul on Monday for one of Turkey's biggest rallies against the Zionist government of the entire war.

The war in Gaza has put an end to a gradual thawing in Turkish-Zionist relations that culminated with

the reappointment of ambassadors in 2022. The Zionist entity and Turkey resumed long-stalled talks about a major Mediterranean Sea natural gas pipeline project that could have reshaped geopolitical alliances across parts of the Middle East.

Turkey won words of gratitude from the Zionist entity in 2022 for detaining a group of Turkish and Iranian nationals who were allegedly planning to murder and kidnap Zionist tourists in Istanbul. Erdogan and Netanyahu met briefly on the sidelines of a United Nations meeting in New York in September and were discussing holding a formal summit this year.

The Turkish MIT intelligence service conducts periodic raids against suspected Zionist operatives working in major cities such as Ankara and Istanbul. Most are accused of conducting surveillance work on Palestinians living in Turkey. Istanbul served as one of Hamas' foreign political offices until the outbreak of the Gaza war. Turkey informally asked Hamas leaders to leave, days after militants conducted raids into the Zionist entity on Oct 7. — AFP

5 dead in Japan plane collision...

Continued from Page 1

that "we're not at the stage to explain the cause" of the accident. Television and unverified footage shared on social media showed the Japan Airlines (JAL) airliner moving along the runway before a large eruption of orange flames and black smoke burst from beneath and behind it. Video posted to social media platform X showed people sliding down an inflatable emergency slide from the side of the passenger plane while flames shot out from the rear of the aircraft. All 367 passengers plus 12 crew onboard were swiftly taken off the plane before dozens of fire engines with flashing blue lights sprayed the fuselage. They however failed to put out the flames coming out of windows near the wings and the blaze soon engulfed the entire aircraft.

The plane, reportedly an Airbus 350, had arrived from New Chitose Airport serving Sapporo on the northern island of Hokkaido. Those on board included eight children. "Smoke began to fill the plane, and I thought, 'this could be really bad'", an adult male passenger told reporters at the airport. "An announcement said doors in

the back and middle could not be opened. So everyone disembarked from the front," he said. A female passenger said it had been dark on board as the fire intensified after landing. "It was getting hot inside the plane, and I thought, to be honest, I would not survive," she said in comments shown on broadcaster NHK.

The coast guard plane had been preparing to fly to Ishikawa prefecture to deliver supplies after the devastating New Year's Day earthquake which killed at least 48 people. Prime Minister Fumio Kishida praised the deceased crew members on their way to help the victims of the quake. "These were employees who had a high sense of mission and responsibility for the affected areas. It's very regrettable," he told reporters. "I express my respect and gratitude to their sense of mission," Kishida said.

JAL said the passenger plane either collided with the other aircraft on a runway or a taxiway after it touched down. Kyodo reported. There was also burning debris on the runway at Haneda, one of the world's busiest airports. Haneda suspended domestic flights, according to its website, but most international takeoffs and landings were still operating. A transport ministry official said investigations into the incident were ongoing, including exchanges between the flights and air traffic control. Japan has not suffered a serious commercial aviation accident in decades. — AFP

International

Deadly strikes hit Kyiv, Russian border region

Bombardment followed unprecedented Ukrainian attack on the Russian city of Belgorod

KYIV: Deadly strikes hit residential buildings in Ukraine and a Russian border region Tuesday as an escalation of aerial attacks also wounded dozens and prompted Kyiv to urge speedier Western weapons shipments. The bombardment of Kyiv and northeastern Kharkiv came less than 24 hours after Russian President Vladimir Putin vowed to step up strikes following an unprecedented Ukrainian attack on the Russian city of Belgorod.

A fresh Ukrainian strike on Russia's border Belgorod region killed at least one person Tuesday and wounded five, the local governor said. Moscow claimed to have struck only targeted military installations, but Ukraine's Defense Minister Rustem Umerov said Russia is deliberately hitting critical infrastructure and residential neighborhoods. Kyiv urged Western allies to respond to the bombardment by speeding up the delivery of air defenses, combat drones and long-range missiles at a time when allied backing has wavered.

In Tuesday's attack, Kyiv said Moscow fired 99 missiles but 72 were downed, while Russia said it had shot down nine Ukrainian-fire missiles over the Belgorod border region. Firefighters and rescue workers were on the scene in Kyiv, with smoke billowing from one of the buildings. "It's a residential building. They hit a residential building," said Violetta Solovyova, 56.

Galyna Solovyova, 79, suffered a head wound in the strike but was left without a home. "It's a real horror to be left without ... everything. And we don't know about the neighbors. They're people we know. How are they?" she asked, her head bandaged.

Two people were killed and 49 injured in the capital, said Kyiv mayor Vitaly Klitschko, Ukraine's interior minister Igor Klymenko said two people were killed in the Kyiv region. National energy company Ukrrenerg said 250,000 consumers were without electricity in Kyiv and surrounding areas after the strikes. Temperatures in the region were hovering around three degrees Celsius (37.4 degrees Fahrenheit). Strikes in Kharkiv killed one person and wounded over 40, as well as damaging multi-story buildings, said the head of the city's military administration, Oleg Sinegubov.

In a sign of growing concern, Poland on Tuesday scrambled four F-16 fighter jets to its border with Ukraine to protect its airspace. Poland — a NATO and EU member — is a staunch ally of Ukraine as the Russian invasion nears its second anniversary. During the last wave of deadly attacks on Ukraine on Friday, Poland said a Russian missile had passed through its airspace. Tuesday's attacks came after an escalation in the war in recent days. Putin on Monday called an unprecedented Ukrainian attack on the Russian city of Belgorod a "terrorist act" and vowed retaliation. Moscow also attacked Ukraine with a barrage of drones on New Year's Eve. Ukraine is seeking assurances from its backers that military aid will continue as any new budget for support is stalled in Washington.

'Critical we support Ukraine'

"Putin is ringing in 2024 by launching missiles at Kyiv and around the country as millions of Ukrainians take shelter in freezing temps. Loud explosions in Kyiv this morning," US Ambassador to



KYIV: Ukrainian firefighters attempt to extinguish a fire after a missile strike in Kyiv on Jan 2, 2024, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine. — AFP

Ukraine Bridget Brink wrote on X. "It's urgent and critical that we support Ukraine now—to stop Putin here."

Kyiv mayor Klitschko reported multiple explosions and debris from downed missiles hitting the capital as residents were advised to stay in underground shelters. In the Pechersk district, debris hit the roof of a nine-story

building and another building, the military administration said. Fires also broke out in a supermarket and a warehouse measuring 2,000 square meters, the mayor said. "As soon as the security situation allows it, we will definitely restore electricity to everyone," the city's military administration said.

In the city's Podil district, main wa-

ter pipes have been damaged, it added. The attacks came after Russia on December 29 launched a wave of strikes across Ukrainian cities, including Kyiv, which killed 39 people. Moscow also hit Ukrainian cities on New Year's Eve, with Kyiv saying it had foiled a "record" number of drones launched by Russia. — AFP

Karabakh refugees hold little hope for Azerbaijan peace

NOYAKERT, Armenia: Before fleeing the advancing Azerbaijani troops for Armenia, Suren Martirosyan glanced back one last time at his fruit garden in Nagorno-Karabakh, and the momentary vision has haunted him ever since. "That image of our beautiful garden, which I saw for the final time, still lingers in my eyes: pomegranates and persimmons gleamed brightly on the trees under the brilliant sun," he said, looking at his calloused hands.

The 65-year-old's family of eight is among more than 100,000 ethnic Armenians who fled Karabakh after Azerbaijan recaptured the long-disputed region in a September lightning offensive against Armenian separatist forces. The exodus of the entire Armenian population from the mountainous enclave has sparked a refugee crisis in Armenia.

On Sept 19, "we heard machine-gun fire and artillery shells exploding close to our house," said Suren's daughter-in-law Arevik. "At first, we thought it was just another skirmish with the Turks," she said, referring to Turkic-speaking Azerbaijanis. "But then our panicked village headman came in and said we must all run away as the Turks were already in the village outskirts." The Martirosyans now live in a decrepit house they rented thanks to government aid in the village of Noyakert, some 50 kilometers from the Armenian capital Yerevan.

'Living separately'

After just one day of fighting, Armenian separatist authorities, which had controlled Karabakh for three decades, surrendered and agreed to reintegrate with Baku. Suren blamed Russian peacekeepers —



NOYAKERT: Refugees from Karabakh, Suren Martirosyan (left) and his wife Maina (right) have dinner with their family at a rental house in the village of Noyakert in Ararat province of Armenia, on Dec 22, 2023. — AFP photos

deployed in Karabakh after Armenia's ally Moscow brokered a ceasefire in autumn 2020 — and the Yerevan government for the fall of the breakaway Karabakh republic. "Our army fought bravely to protect our motherland, it was Russia and the Armenian government who suffered defeat in Karabakh."

Azerbaijan's victory marked the end of the protracted territorial dispute, which had long been seen as unresolvable. On Sept 26, separatist president Samvel Shahramanyan signed a decree ordering that the breakaway republic "will cease to exist" by the year's end. But in a surprise move in late December, he rolled back on the announcement in comments given in Yerevan.

The statement appeared to undo a historic move by the separatists to dissolve the disputed territory that was at the center of two costly wars between Armenia and Azerbaijan in 2020 and the 1990s. It

will have no effect on the ground, as Karabakh is now under full Azerbaijani control, and Yerevan is unlikely to support the continued functioning of separatist institutions on its territory.

But Shahramanyan's decision resonated with many Karabakh refugees who still cherish their decades-long dream of secession from Azerbaijan. "Kids are constantly having nightmares, crying at night and keep asking me when we will return home," said Arevik. "We will return under the sole condition: if we will be living separately from the Turks, and when our children's safety will be guaranteed 100 percent."

'Don't believe in peace'

Arch-foes Armenia and Azerbaijan have said they are close to signing a peace agreement based on the recognition of each other's territorial integrity. But

few among Karabakh refugees share the hope, as deeply-rooted ethnic hatred still poisons relations between Armenians and Azerbaijanis after decades of enmity. "I don't believe in peace" with Azerbaijanis, said 65-year-old refugee Boris Dolukhanyan, whose son was killed in the 2020 war with Azerbaijan.

"How can we live alongside Turks who killed my child?" he added. "We must become strong enough to retake our land by force." Dolukhanyan said his family "lived a prosperous life" in Karabakh's main city of Khankendi (Stepanakert in Armenian), where they had several houses, land plots, and a farm of exotic birds.

"We left behind our paradise," he said, adding that they now rent a three-room apartment in Yerevan, which they can no longer afford, and are looking for cheaper housing. His 10-year-old granddaughter, Ruzanna, said her Christmas wish was for "Santa to make a miracle so that we can return home". — AFP



Refugee from Karabakh, Hayk Martirosyan (left) looks after his children at a rental house in the village of Noyakert in Ararat province of Armenia, on Dec 22, 2023.

2023 deadliest year for forest fires worldwide

PARIS: As the deadliest year this century for forest fires comes to a close, attention is turning to how to prevent such infernos happening again. In 2023 forest fires destroyed nearly 400 million hectares (988 million acres) of land around the world, killed more than 250 people and emitted 6.5 billion tons of the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide.

Pauline Vilain-Carlotti, a researcher in geography and wildfires, told AFP 2023's fires had been "out of control" and showed that firefighting capacities were inadequate. Efforts should now be focused on prevention rather than cure. "We are no longer capable of coping under current conditions with the current firefighting manpower, thus the importance of acting beforehand on prevention, rather than afterwards on firefighting and extinguishing," she said.

Records tumbled on the American continent this year as it went through a forest fire season in which nearly 80 million hectares (198 million acres) had burned by Dec 23. That is one and a half times the surface area of Spain, and 10 million hectares (24 million acres) more than the average from 2012-2022 on the same date, according to the Global Wildfire Information System (GWIS). Canada, where 18 million hectares (44.5 million acres) went up in smoke over the year, drove the increase. The fires were caused by drier and hotter weather conditions driven by climate change.

With 97 dead and 31 missing in fires in Hawaii in August, 34 killed in Algeria, and at least 26 dead in Greece, the year with more than 250 deaths overall was the dead-



LAHAINA, Hawaii: Davilyn Severson and Hano Ganer look for belongings through the ashes of their family's home in the aftermath of a wildfire in Lahaina, western Maui, Hawaii on Aug 11, 2023. — AFP photos

liest of the 21st century, according to the Emergency Events Database (EM-DAT) run by the Catholic University of Louvain in Belgium. Vilain-Carlotti told AFP the rate of excess deaths risks increasing in the coming years, as wildfires come dangerously close to towns and cities.

In 2023 the wildfires engulfed not only areas usually susceptible to forest fires like Greece, Italy, Tunisia, and Algeria in the Mediterranean basin and North America and Australia, but also areas which are usually spared like Hawaii or Tenerife. In August, Hawaii's historic royal seat of Lahaina was levelled by a wildfire.

As the fires spread even further, vegetation has less time to regrow, leaving the forests liable to lose their capacity to absorb carbon dioxide. According to recent studies, the fires reduce the storage of carbon dioxide by around 10 percent, Solene Turquetly, a researcher at France's LATMOS (Atmospheres, Environments, Space Observations Laboratory), said. And as they burn, the trees suddenly release all of the CO2 that they have stored.

Since the beginning of 2023, wildfires have released



WEST KELOWNA, British Columbia: A helicopter drops water as the McDougall Creek wildfire continues to burn in West Kelowna, British Columbia, on Aug 19, 2023.

some 6.5 billion tons of carbon dioxide, according to GWIS. That compares to 36.8 billion tons from fossil fuels like oil, gas and coal and cement. As a rule, around 80 percent of carbon generated by the forest fires is then reabsorbed by the vegetation which grows again the next season. The remaining 20 percent then builds up in the atmosphere, contributing to the climate change.

Immediate health impact
Apart from CO2, fires release a string of dangerous particles, from carbon monoxide to ash, soot, and organic carbon. "These emissions very heavily alter the air quality, over hundreds of kilometers (miles) in the case of the most intense fires," Turquetly said.

She said there is "an immediate health impact" on top of "the destruction of ecosystems, property and infrastructure". According to a study published in September in Nature, the populations of the poorest countries, in particular in central Africa, are by far more exposed to the air pollution caused by these fires than those in industrialized countries. — AFP

'Syrian Mandela' Riad Turk dies at 93 in France

BEIRUT: Syrian dissident Riad Turk, who has been compared to Nelson Mandela for spending years in prison for his staunch opposition to the government, died Monday in exile in France, his daughter said. "My father died peacefully and satisfied of what he has accomplished, surrounded by his two daughters and his grandchildren," Khuzama Turk told AFP. He was 93.

France's ambassador to Syria Brigitte Curmi wrote on X: "The Syrian Mandela Riad Turk just left us after a whole life of struggle for a free and democratic Syria. "May his aspirations for a dignified life for Syrians continue to inspire our work."

Turk fled to France in 2018 after being exfiltrated out of Syria by militants into neighboring Turkey. He had gone into hiding after being freed from his last spell in jail in 2002 for declaring "the dictator is dead", following the death of former president Hafez al-Assad.

In total he had spent 17 years imprisoned, often without trial, on claims of various offences under Hafez al-Assad and later his son Bashar when he became Syria's president. Turk was the longtime leader of the dissident Syrian Communist Party - Political Bureau, which was outlawed by Bashar al-Assad and later renamed the Syrian Democratic People's Party.

He supported peaceful anti-government protests which broke out in Syria in 2011, and backed the Syrian National Council which brought together opponents of Assad as the country's civil war intensified. — AFP

Business

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 3, 2024

World stock markets stumble
at start of new trading year

Oil prices rally on supply concerns as Iran sends warship to Red Sea

LONDON: Global stock markets mostly fell on Tuesday, the first trading day of the year, as a global equity rally stumbled. Meanwhile, the dollar rose while oil prices jumped as tensions ratcheted higher in the Red Sea.

Despite the drop in stocks on Tuesday, investors are eyeing more gains in 2024 as central banks prepare a series of interest-rate cuts as inflation cools. Stock market records tumbled in the final months of last year in New York, Frankfurt, Paris and Tokyo as investors piled into equities in anticipation of rate cuts. US stocks fell on Tuesday, the first trading day of the year, as interest rates rebounded slightly and investors took some money off the table following a surprisingly strong 2023 that saw the S&P 500 rally 24 percent. Apple shares led the pullback after Barclays downgraded the member of the Magnificent 7 market leaders basket to an underweight rating. Markets were closed Monday for New Year's Day.

The stock market finished 2023 with a bang, as the S&P 500 climbed for nine weeks in a row to end the year, notching its best weekly win streak since 2004. Risk assets enjoyed a big relief rally as the economy remained resilient and inflation cooled, while the Federal Reserve signaled an end to rate hikes and forecasted rate cuts later this year. The market also endured a regional banking crisis as well as wars in Ukraine and the Middle East.

"Notwithstanding the extended winning streak, we are not sure this negative disposition is all that surprising to market participants, who recognized that there was some performance chasing at the end of 2023 and that some profit taking was bound to happen in the wake of a profitable advance," said Briefing.com analyst Patrick O'Hare.

Nevertheless, investors retain a positive outlook, according to analysts. "There remains an increasing belief that Fed rate cuts, which have bullishly marked all capital market trends in the last eight weeks, are still fully ingrained in stock market sentiment," said SPI Asset Management's Stephen Innes.

He added that there was a question on how investors would reconcile the difference between market expectations of 150 basis points of cuts and the Fed's forecast of 75. Despite the upbeat outlook on rates, Asian markets started the year with little fanfare. Hong Kong and Shanghai each extended last year's

주식명	현재가	전일대비	매도호가	매수호가	거래량(주)
우산로보틱스	112,700	▼ 3,400	112,800	112,700	581,973
SK스퀘어	51,800	▼ 800	51,800	51,700	25,266
현대글로비스	187,700	▼ 3,800	187,800	187,700	33,752
삼성중공업	7,890	▲ 140	7,900	7,890	1,759,104
한화솔루션	38,500	▼ 1,000	38,500	38,450	270,594
카카오페이	48,800	▼ 500	48,800	48,750	26,816
롯데케미칼	150,300	▼ 2,900	150,300	150,200	11,681
금양	107,300	▼ 1,900	107,300	107,200	182,174
한화에너지	126,100	▲ 1,600	126,200	126,100	78,762
한미반도체	62,800	▲ 1,100	62,900	62,800	542,343
DB손해보험	82,500	▼ 1,200	82,600	82,500	10,737
현대건설	208,500	▼ 3,000	209,000	208,500	37,090
삼성전자	219,500	0	219,500	219,500	132,612
SK하이닉스	80,300	▼ 400	80,300	80,200	58,228
한국타이어	45,450	▼ 400	45,450	45,400	35,693
LG화학	350,500	▼ 4,500	350,500	350,000	10,128
삼성바이오	72,500	▲ 400	72,500	72,400	55,563
SK이노베이션	22,320	▼ 120	22,320	22,310	318,666
현대자동차	238,000	▼ 200	238,000	237,500	22,204
삼성카드	31,900	▼ 450	31,900	31,900	33,000
삼성증권	38,250	▼ 250	38,250	38,200	48,000
SKC	90,300	▼ 300	90,300	90,200	27,000
NH투자증권	10,190	▼ 140	10,200	10,190	5,000
강원랜드	15,840	▼ 160	15,870	15,850	9,000
한국항공우주	51,600	▲ 1,600	51,600	51,500	218,491
현대제철	36,050	▼ 450	36,100	36,050	47,104
한진칼	74,100	▲ 1,300	74,100	73,800	22,544
코스모신소재	144,900	▼ 2,400	145,000	144,900	30,000
미래에셋증권	7,520	▼ 110	7,530	7,520	61,711
오리온	115,200	▼ 900	115,300	115,200	7,191
LG디스플레이	13,150	▲ 410	13,150	13,140	677,211
LG유플러스	10,190	▼ 40	10,190	10,180	104,911
한미약품	352,000	▼ 500	352,000	351,500	21,000
코웨이	55,500	▼ 1,700	55,500	55,300	30,111
현대차2우B	113,400	▼ 800	113,500	113,400	26,911
한온시스템	7,210	▼ 80	7,210	7,200	89,111
현대건설	34,500	▼ 400	34,500	34,450	108,111
GS	40,550	▼ 350	40,550	40,500	23,111
금호석유	130,400	▼ 2,500	130,400	130,200	11,111

SEOUL: A man takes video of a stock index board after a ceremony celebrating the New Year's opening of the South Korea stock market at the Korea Exchange in Seoul on January 2, 2024. — AFP

losses. Traders were unmoved by a speech by Chinese President Xi Jinping in which he said the economy had become "more resilient and dynamic".

Observers warned that while Beijing has pledged a series of measures to kickstart growth, much more was needed to instill confidence, particularly regarding the property sector. Tokyo was closed for a holiday, though investors are keeping an eye on developments in Japan a day after a huge earthquake that Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said caused "extensive" damage and numerous casualties.

All tsunami warnings from that quake were lifted on Tuesday. Oil prices rallied more than 2 percent before paring gains on supply concerns after Iran dispatched a warship to the Red Sea in response to the US Navy's destruction of three Houthi boats. Tehran's move comes as tensions still run high in the waterway, where the Yemeni rebels have launched attacks on several international container ships, causing some firms to stop using it.

However, a number of shipping companies have resumed transit following efforts by a US-led naval

coalition to police the maritime route. Bitcoin broke \$45,000 for the first time since April 2022 on optimism that the United States would allow wider trading of the world's biggest cryptocurrency.

"Crypto looks to be setting itself up for a big year ahead, with bitcoin rising into a fresh 21-month high on anticipation of the likely approval of the spot bitcoin ETF product that will see Wall Street finally gain a strong presence in the industry," noted Joshua Mahony, chief market analyst at Scope Markets. — Agencies

China's first domestically
built cruise ship
begins maiden voyage

SHANGHAI: China's first domestically built cruise ship set sail on its maiden voyage from Shanghai on Monday, a sign of the nation's growing prowess in sophisticated construction as it seeks self-sufficiency in key technologies. The Adora Magic City left port on its first commercial cruise late afternoon, en route to South Korea and Japan.

Equipped with a mahjong lounge and hotpot restaurant, the luxury vessel is aimed squarely at China's expanding middle class and their appetite for international travel.

State media have hailed the 16-deck behemoth as a "major milestone for the country's shipbuilding industry" and a "crown jewel". Its construction was delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic, according to Lloyd's Register (LR), which provided marine services for the ship. It is China's first foray into a sector dominated by European shipbuilders. The country's first homegrown passenger jet, the C919, also made its debut outside mainland China last month.

The complex projects are key to Beijing's decades-long ambitions to compete with European and US rivals and cut down China's reliance on foreign technology. Many of Adora Magic City's components were provided by international suppliers. But in the future, "China has the opportunity to build its own supply chain", Marco Scopaz, LR's on-site



SHANGHAI: China's first domestically built cruise ship "The Adora Magic City" sets sail on the maiden voyage in Shanghai, on January 1, 2024. — AFP

project manager, said in an article on Lloyd's website. The Adora Magic City "marks the beginning of the country's inevitable and rapid development in cruise design and construction", he said. — AFP

place over the coming decade. "We believe it is now probable and estimable that a portion of these obligations will revert to the Company," Chevron said. The actions are, in total, estimated to result in charges of \$3.5 billion to \$4.0 billion in Chevron's fourth quarter 2023 results. It expects to treat the financial impacts as special items, excluding them from adjusted earnings. Chevron shares rose 0.4 percent in early trading on Tuesday.

Last October, Chevron and ExxonMobil reported lower profits in quarterly results compared with the year-ago period—even though the figures remained big. Chevron scored profits of \$6.5 billion, 42 percent lower than the same period a year prior. The lower profits reflected an ebbing in commodity prices, which had soared after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. While the petroleum heavyweights in recent times also unveiled major takeovers of mid-sized fossil fuel players, there are signs of some challenges ahead. In October ExxonMobil said it was buying out rival Pioneer Natural Resources for some \$60 billion, in a bid to strengthen position in the coveted Permian Basin.

A few days later Chevron announced the purchase of oil and gas producer Hess for \$53 billion. But it is unclear if they can gain quick approval, with



NEW YORK: Oil giant Chevron said Tuesday it would take an accounting hit to part of its US assets and recognize some losses, resulting in an impact in its fourth quarter results of up to \$4 billion.

Chevron saying in a December filing that the Federal Trade Commission has requested for additional information and materials relating to the merger.

The FTC is also reviewing ExxonMobil's proposed acquisition. Such moves are taken typically when the agency is considering if a merger could be anti-competitive. — AFP

BYD overtakes
Tesla as world's
top EV maker

NEW YORK: US car maker Tesla has lost its crown as the top maker of all-electric vehicles to Chinese firm BYD, according to sales figures released Tuesday. The US-based car manufacturer run by billionaire Elon Musk delivered 484,507 vehicles in the fourth quarter of 2023, said a company filing -- up more than 11 percent from the previous quarter.

But this increase was not enough to maintain Tesla's crown as the world's top battery electric vehicle producer and seller, as Chinese rival BYD reported sales on Monday of 526,409 for the same period. These figures underscore the challenges Tesla will likely face this year, from competitors keen to capitalize on the growing demand for EVs.

Tesla's stock slipped after the news was announced, before regaining ground. As well as besting Tesla in pure electric vehicle sales, BYD sold more than 400,000 plug-in hybrid electric vehicles in the fourth quarter. In total, it sold more than three million passenger vehicles last year. However, Tesla was still the top seller of EVs on an annual basis, delivering more than 1.8 million vehicles to customers in the year to December, well above BYD's sales figure of just under 1.6 million. — AFP

Google glitch
undervalues
zloty by a fifth

WARSAW: Google provided information that incorrectly undervalued the Polish currency the zloty by over a fifth, prompting authorities on Tuesday to calm the public and demand the search engine giant provide an explanation. On Monday evening, Google's currency converter showed a rate of up to 5.20 zloty per euro and 4.70 zloty per dollar, which represented a drop in value of more than a fifth from the rate on the previous trading day on Friday. The information set off a storm of speculation on X, formerly Twitter, and although Poles did not rush to buy dollars on Tuesday, officials called for calm.

"Relax. This zloty rate that is causing panic is a 'fake' (a data source error)," Poland's Finance Minister Andrzej Domanski said on X. Poland's central bank on Tuesday said the exchange rate published by Google was "fictitious", adding the currency exchange rates and charts on the platform "are not always precise". The finance ministry said it had officially asked Google Poland to explain how the incorrect exchange rate was published. — AFP

Chevron to take
\$4bn impairment
impact in Q4

NEW YORK: Oil giant Chevron said Tuesday it would take an accounting hit to part of its US assets and recognize some losses, resulting in an impact in its fourth quarter results of up to \$4 billion. The impairment of US assets, mainly in California, was "due to continuing regulatory challenges in the state," while the loss relates to oil and gas production assets earlier sold in the US Gulf of Mexico, said the company in a filing.

The regulatory difficulties resulted in lower anticipated future investment levels in its business plans, Chevron said. But it expects to keep running the assets for "many years to come." Meanwhile, the loss involves "abandonment and decommissioning obligations," after companies that bought the production assets filed for protection under Chapter 11 of the US Bankruptcy Code.

The decommissioning activities are to take

Business

Global trade growth likely to pick up in 2024: WTO

Supply chain fragmentation could threaten positive outlook of 2024

GENEVA: Global trade growth is expected to pick up in 2024 accompanied by slow but stable GDP growth. Sectors that are more sensitive to business cycles should stabilize and rebound as inflation moderates and interest rates start to come down, a report issued by World Trade Organization said. However, the WTO said signs are starting to emerge of supply chain fragmentation, which could threaten the relatively positive outlook for 2024.

"World trade and output slowed abruptly in the fourth quarter of 2022 as the effects of persistent inflation and tighter monetary policy were felt in the United States, the European Union and elsewhere, and as strained property markets in China prevented a stronger post-COVID-19 recovery from taking root. Together with the consequences of the war in Ukraine, these developments have cast a shadow over the outlook for trade. The trade slowdown appears to be broad-based, involving a large number of countries and a wide array of goods," the report said.

The share of intermediate goods in world trade, an indicator of global supply chain activity, fell to 48.5 percent in the first half of 2023, compared to an average of 51.0 percent over the previous three years. Furthermore, the share of Asian bilateral partners in US trade in parts and accessories — a key subset of intermediate inputs — fell to 38 percent in the first half of 2023, down from 43 percent in the same period of 2022.

WTO Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala said: "The projected slowdown in trade for 2023 is cause for concern, because of the adverse implications for the living standards of people around the world. Global economic fragmentation would only make these challenges worse, which is why WTO members must seize the opportunity to strengthen the global trading framework by avoiding protectionism and fostering a more resilient and inclusive global economy. The global economy, and in particular poor countries, will struggle to recover without a stable, open, predictable, rules-based and fair multilateral trading system."

WTO Chief Economist Ralph Ossa said: "We do see some signs in the data of trade fragmentation linked to geopolitical tensions. Fortunately, broader de-globalization is not here yet. The data suggest that goods continue to be produced through complex supply chains, but that the extent of these chains may have plateaued, at least in the short run. Positive export and import volume growth should resume in 2024, but we must remain vigilant," he said.

World commercial services trade is not covered by the forecast. However, preliminary data show that growth in the sector may be moderating following last year's strong rebounds in transport and travel. World commercial services trade was up 9 percent year-on-year in the first quarter of 2023 compared to a 19 percent year-on-year rise in the second quarter of 2022. High commodity prices reduce real incomes but they also threaten low-income countries with food insecurity. Despite the recent easing of prices, in August 2023, the average price of food products was 46 percent higher than in 2019, while fertilizer prices were up 93 percent. Farmers could be forced to choose between using less fertilizer or planting fewer crops, both of which would reduce yields and increase the risk of hunger around the world. Declines in prices for food and energy have helped bring down headline inflation rates in many countries, but core inflation (excluding these volatile items) remains sticky. In August 2023, headline inflation in the United States dropped to 3.7 percent but core inflation was stuck at 4.3 percent.

Inflation was higher in the euro area (headline 5.2 percent, core 5.3 percent) and lower in Japan (headline 3.3 percent, core 2.8 percent), but in all cases it was above central bank targets. Some central bankers have signaled that interest rates might remain high in order to ensure that inflation stays under control, which could have negative consequences for trade and output in the forecast periods. In contrast to developed economies, China had edged towards deflation, with prices declining in July 2023 before ticking up in August. Inflation and commodity prices can strongly



Signs are starting to emerge of supply chain fragmentation, which could threaten the relatively positive outlook for 2024, according to WTO.

investors of the currency risks involved. CLCV was separately pursuing legal action to get the abusive clauses of the mortgage contracts nullified. The consumer association said in a statement that BNP Paribas would offer all the affected borrowers a settlement. According to a source, most borrowers would receive between 120,000 and 150,000 euros, which would put the total cost to BNP Paribas at between 400 and 600 million euros.

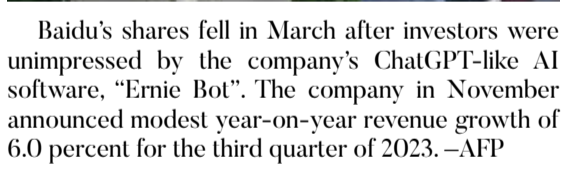
BNP Paribas did not want to comment on the financial aspects of the accord. CLCV welcomed the deal, which it said was in the interest of the consumers and would not force them to wait for all legal proceedings to be exhausted before receiving financial compensation.

Lenders in a number of countries issued mortgages in Swiss francs in the run-up to the global financial crisis as interest rates in Switzerland were lower. Polish borrowers won an important ruling from the EU's top court last year in their legal fight against local banks that had issued Swiss-franc mortgage loans. — AFP

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Baidu's shares fell in March after investors were unimpressed by the company's ChatGPT-like AI software, "Ernie Bot". The company in November announced modest year-on-year revenue growth of 6.0 percent for the third quarter of 2023. — AFP

Williams, in justifying the decision to drop the second trial, said that the Bahamas had still not given approval regarding those charges, and that prosecutors wanted to bring a "prompt resolution" to the file. In a letter Friday to Judge Kaplan, Williams said a second trial would also have meant delays in any restitution of funds to SBF's victims. And Williams noted that much of the evidence alleging illegal campaign contributions by Bankman-Fried had been brought out in the first trial, and would play a factor in his sentencing. Bankman-Fried was accused of authorizing the payment of around \$150 million in bribes to Chinese officials to unblock FTX's frozen assets in China. He was also accused of using clients' funds to make political donations, notably to Joe Biden. — AFP

Portugal's renewable power generation hit record level in 2023

LISBON: Portugal obtained a record quantity of its electricity from clean sources in 2023, with renewables accounting for 61 percent of power use, national grid operator REN said on Tuesday. Wind provided 25 percent of the electricity consumed in Portugal last year, ahead of hydropower (23 percent), solar photovoltaic (7.0 percent) and biomass (6.0 percent), REN said.

The strongest growth was in hydropower. Output rose 70 percent as the sector bounced back from the 2022 drought. Photovoltaic rose 43 percent on the back of growing instalments of solar panels.

Although Portuguese electricity demand last year hit its highest level since 2018, only 19 percent of its consumption was met by non-renewable domestic

influence regional trade volume developments. In the first half of 2023, North America recorded the fastest export growth of any region, up 5.4 percent compared to the same period in the previous year. It was followed by South America (1.4 percent), Africa (0.9 percent), Europe (0.5 percent), the Middle East (0.2 percent), Asia (-2.3 percent) and the CIS region (-3.5 percent). Asia's export growth is expected to turn positive in the second half of the year while Europe's is expected to flip into negative territory, the report said.

Google agrees to settle \$5bn lawsuit over 'incognito' mode

SAN FRANCISCO: Google has agreed to settle a consumer privacy lawsuit seeking at least \$5 billion in damages over allegations it tracked the data of users who thought they were browsing the internet privately. The object of the lawsuit was the "incognito" mode on Google's Chrome browser that the plaintiffs said gave users a false sense that what they were surfing online was not being tracked by the Silicon Valley tech firm.

But internal Google emails brought forward in the lawsuit demonstrated that users using incognito mode were being followed by the search and advertising behemoth for measuring web traffic and selling ads. In a court filing, the judge confirmed that lawyers for Google reached a preliminary agreement to settle the class action lawsuit—originally filed in 2020 -- which claimed that "millions of individuals" had likely been affected.

Lawyers for the plaintiffs were seeking at least \$5,000 for each user it said had been tracked by the firm's Google Analytics or Ad Manager services even when in the private browsing mode and not logged into their Google account. This would have amounted to at least \$5 billion, though the settlement amount will likely not reach that figure, and no amount was given for the preliminary settlement between the parties. Google and lawyers for the consumers did not respond to an AFP request for comment.

The settlement came just weeks after Google was refused a request that the case be decided by a judge. A jury trial was set to begin next year. The lawsuit, filed in a California court, claimed Google's practices had infringed on users' privacy by "intentionally" deceiving them with the incognito option.

The original complaint alleged that Google and its employees had been given the "power to learn intimate details about individuals' lives, interests, and internet usage."

"Google has made itself an unaccountable trove of information so detailed and expansive that George Orwell could never have dreamed it," it added. A formal settlement is expected for court approval by February 24, 2024. Class action lawsuits have become the main venue to challenge big tech companies on data privacy matters in the United States, which lacks a comprehensive law on the handling of personal data.

In August, Google paid \$23 million to settle a long-running case over giving third-parties access to user search data. In 2022, Facebook parent company Meta settled a similar case, agreeing to pay \$725 million over the handling of user data. — AFP

generation. As a result, the country's natural gas imports, which come mostly by LNG tanker from Nigeria and the United States, fell 21 percent last year. A further 20 percent of Portugal electricity use last year was met by imports, mostly from Spain. Portugal is aiming to generate 85 percent of its electricity from renewable sources by 2030. It hopes to decommission all of its natural gas-fired power stations by 2040 and become carbon neutral by 2045 - five years earlier than its original commitment. In October, renewable energy generated 67 percent of the country's power needs, mostly due to favorable conditions for hydropower and wind power, according to REN. Wind alone had a historic high last month in Portugal, breaking a record for how much energy it produced in one day.

Since the beginning of the year, renewables have satisfied 56 percent of the country's energy requirements. Wind made up 24 percent of that, hydropower 18 percent, solar power 8 percent and biomass 6 percent. Natural (or fossil) gas produced 21 percent of Portugal's energy and the remaining 23 percent was imported from other countries. — AFP

BNP Paribas faces 600m-euro hit over Swiss franc loans

PARIS: French bank BNP Paribas could pay out 600 million euros after reaching a deal to compensate clients judged to have been deceived over mortgages issued in Swiss francs. Both BNP Paribas and the CLCV consumer association confirmed Tuesday that a deal had been reached to compensate the approximately 4,400 clients who had contracted the mortgages which carried low interest rates.

The mortgages, issued in 2008 and 2009, were denominated in Swiss francs, and reimbursement was made in euros at current market rates.

The Swiss franc is widely considered a safe haven investment, and during the global financial crisis it strongly appreciated against other currencies as investors sought refuge from the market carnage.



As a result, BNP Paribas customers with those mortgages faced sharply higher costs to reimburse their mortgages. The deal between BNP Paribas and the CLCV was reached after an appeals court in late November ruled that the BNP Paribas subsidiary that issued the mortgages had not properly warned

filing on Monday that it would terminate the purchase agreement. It explained that "the closing of the proposed acquisition is subject to certain conditions including, among others, obtaining necessary regulatory approvals from governmental authorities".

As of December 31, 2023, it said, those conditions had not been reached.

The deal was originally expected to be completed by 2021. Livestreaming is a multimillion-dollar business in China, generating huge profits for e-commerce giants and popular influencers.

Baidu has faced increased competition in recent years from domestic rivals including Tencent—which operates the WeChat messaging platform—and ByteDance, which owns short-video app TikTok and its mainland Chinese equivalent, Douyin. The company has sought to diversify into cloud computing, autonomous driving, artificial intelligence (AI) and other sectors—with mixed results.

dollars of his clients' funds without their consent. He was found guilty in early November of seven counts including fraud, conspiracy and money laundering.

Bankman-Fried, who is widely known as SBF, will face up to 110 years in prison when Judge Lewis Kaplan pronounces sentence on March 28. A second trial, including charges that federal prosecutor Damian Williams excluded from the earlier trial, had been scheduled to open on March 11.

It was to have addressed counts including conspiracy to bribe foreign officials and conspiracy to commit bank fraud. Those charges were not included in the first trial because they were not part of an agreement by which Bahamian officials agreed to extradite Bankman-Fried in December 2022.

Citing unnamed sources, financial news agency Bloomberg News reported that US officials contacted the Dutch government and ASML late last year in a bid to halt the shipments.

In Beijing, foreign ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin lashed out Tuesday at what he called Washington's "bullying behavior." Such action "seriously violates international trade rules, seriously damages the global semiconductor industry layout, and seriously impacts the security and stability of international industrial and supply chains," said Wang.

ASML said the export curbs would not have a "material impact" on its financial outlook. However, shares in the firm dropped 1.6 percent in early trading, the only loser on the Amsterdam stock market.

Amid trade tensions with China, there are also concerns that Beijing may introduce its own export controls on gallium and germanium—two rare earth metals critical for the manufacture of semiconductors. China said last month it would halt the export of a range of rare earth metal processing technologies. Wang warned the US would "inevitably suffer the consequences of its own actions." — AFP

China's Baidu cancels \$3.6bn purchase of livestreaming site

BEIJING: Chinese internet giant Baidu has said it was cancelling the planned multi-billion-dollar purchase of livestreaming platform YY Live, partly blaming its inability to get government approval. Baidu, the country's top search engine company, agreed in 2020 to buy JOYY Inc's Chinese live video business YY Live for \$3.6 billion.

Baidu founder Robin Li said at the time the deal would "catapult Baidu into a leading platform for live streaming and satisfy our revenue source".

But Baidu said in a Hong Kong stock exchange

No second trial for crypto fraudster Bankman-Fried

NEW YORK: A federal prosecutor in New York has decided against pursuing a second trial, this one over corruption and illegal political donations, against former crypto mogul Sam Bankman-Fried.

The founder and CEO of the FTX cryptocurrency exchange platform, Bankman-Fried had been charged earlier with misappropriating billions of

ASML chip machines blocked from export to China

THE HAGUE: Cutting-edge chip manufacturing machines from Dutch semiconductor giant ASML have been blocked from export to China, according to the firm, amid a report of US pressure in the strategic sector. ASML said in a statement late Monday the Dutch government had recently revoked a license for shipping an unspecified number of machines "impacting a small number of customers in China."

Semiconductors, which power everything from mobile phones to cars, have become a geopolitical battleground, with the West seeking to restrict China's access over fears they could be used for advanced weaponry. In October, the United States announced tighter export curbs on state-of-the-art artificial intelligence chips, sparking fury in Beijing.

Global economies on course for a 'softish' landing: UBS

A continued inflation slowdown is the main economic story for 2024

GENEVA: The last month of 2023 was marked by equity and bond rallies. The economic outlook did not really change, but the language of Federal Reserve Chair Powell did. Because Powell's past policy errors comprehensively trashed forward guidance, investors can choose which guidance they wish to follow. Other Fed members trying to dilute the reaction to Powell have been ignored, according to UBS Insights.

A continued inflation slowdown is the main economic story for 2024. Enhancing real wage growth helps create a softish economic landing. However, central banks can claim only a small part of the credit for bringing inflation down. Transitory durable goods inflation ended automatically. Energy inflation was more a supply issue. Profit-led inflation is fading in the face of consumer rebellion. Higher rates slow inflation by slowing credit and raising unemployment. These effects have been very muted so far. The Red Sea will be a focus for investors, with more attacks on shipping in recent days. Reducing European demand for Asia's durable goods lessens the economic impact of having to divert sailings.

The data calendar is quiet—there is background noise courtesy of business sentiment polls. The UK BRC December shop price index showed slowing food price inflation as profit-led inflation retreats; this may not fully translate into official price data.

According to UBS Insights, Korean export data for early December strengthened. Exports to the US grew quickly (exports to Europe slowed), hinting at restructuring supply chains within Asia. This implies less economic impact from the attacks in the Red Sea, with fewer sailings from Asia to Europe. The Wall Street Journal reported the Biden administration is considering taxing US consumers of Chinese

electric vehicles (adding to the Trump administration's extensive consumer taxes).

US third quarter GDP revisions are due. Markets pay little attention to such updates, but revisions matter. Real time data is increasingly unreliable, and econometric models rarely consider changing data quality.

Europe agreed on new fiscal rules, updating the Stability and Growth Pact. The 60 percent debt-to-GDP target remains—although if government now plays a larger role in economics, a higher debt ratio is natural. The most impressive thing about the negotiations is the way the finance ministers pretend the rules will not be broken. This marks the final morning audio comment of 2023. Normal service resumed on Tuesday. I would like to take this opportunity to wish you all as prosperous a 2024 as circumstances will allow. And to everyone who has tuned in from time to time over the course of the past year, thank you for listening. UK consumer price disinflation was more than expected. This is a global trend. As consumers rebel against profit-led inflation, retailers scramble to shore up customer loyalty by means of price discounts. UK inflation is probably still overstating reality, as price discounts under supermarkets' two-tier pricing structures are not currently captured in the data.

German producer prices fell more than expected, with disinflation or deflation across the main sectors. UK producer prices fell less than consensus expectations, but as the consensus was built from only seven forecasts it was probably not very consensual.

US conference board consumer confidence data is due. This is not very economically useful. Consumers say one thing and do another (consumption is slowing, there is resilience). Sentiment is influenced by



A woman shops at a supermarket. Consumers continue to rebel against profit-led inflation in the New Year.

political partisanship and the media cycle, causing people to answer questions the way they feel they are expected to answer them. This does mean that sentiment has a political use.

The US state of Colorado's Supreme Court has ruled former US President Trump ineligible to

stand for election for president (in that state) under the constitutional prohibition against supporters of an insurrection running for office. Investors are not yet focusing on the 2024 election so this is more entertainment than market relevant at this stage, UBS Insights said.

NBK warns customers of scam calls offering fake lucrative prizes

KUWAIT: As part of its ongoing efforts to promote financial literacy and awareness among the different segments of society, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) intensifies its support of the "Let's Be Aware" campaign introduced by the Central Bank of Kuwait, in cooperation with Kuwait Banking Association (KBA), using its social media platforms and all communication channels to warn customers of all kinds of fraud and how to steer clear of these threats.

In this regard, NBK highlights scam calls and identity theft, as scam calls often involve fake companies pretending to be genuine, persuading individuals to invest in a small amount or pay fake bills. Therefore, the bank advises customers to protect themselves by verifying caller authenticity before sharing personal information or making payments, as well as to avoid immediate actions and clicking links before verification, which can help prevent falling victim to these scams. NBK warned of scam calls, notifications,

and e-mails offering fake lucrative prizes, or fake ads impersonating well-known companies aiming to trick them into investing in attractive stocks and bonds with high returns, provide false information about a real investment, or entering trading sites and registering personal information to obtain profits, as all these are fraudulent schemes for identity theft, and obtaining personal and banking information.

To this end, NBK raises awareness about all scams by sharing content including video clips and text communications on all its digital channels, as well as reposting CBK's communications related to the "Let's Be Aware" campaign. The bank also reaffirms that it will never ask customers for personal information via e-mail, SMS or phone calls, warning them of responding to such messages representing fraud attempts to obtain their banking information to steal their money or data.

NBK's role is not limited to warning, but also extends to providing various safe investment and savings alternatives that suit all customer segments. It is worth mentioning that NBK makes consistent endeavors to raise awareness among customers, being a fundamental part of its strategy. To this end, it always stresses on following the general security tips and instructions to steer clear of electronic fraud, reminding them to always change bank card PINs and

الحملة التوعوية المصرفية



never share it with anyone pretending to be calling from the bank. Launched by the Central Bank of Kuwait, in cooperation with local banks and KBA, the "Let's Be Aware" campaign is the largest across the GCC region that aims to raise banking and financial awareness among banks' customers. The campaign covers a variety of crucial topics including: anti-fraud tips, ways to maximize benefit from banking services, promoting the savings and investment culture, among other related topics.

NBK is a key supporter and partner in all CBK's campaigns and initiatives aiming to increase financial and banking awareness among different segments of society. As a leading financial institution in Kuwait, NBK frequently organizes various activities to raise awareness on all topics related to the banking sector, as well as various training courses for its employees to enhance their knowledge and expertise in the areas of combating fraud and financial crime.



Deliveroo attains full population coverage across Kuwait

KUWAIT: Deliveroo, the leading food delivery platform, proudly announced that it now provides delivery services to all permanent population centers. This remarkable milestone marks a significant step forward for Deliveroo's continuous growth and commitment to delivering exceptional convenience and delightful dining experiences to its valued customers.

With over four prosperous years in the local market, Deliveroo has accomplished a significant expansion of its delivery services to the southernmost regions of Kuwait. This now includes coverage of permanent population areas, such as Sabah Al-Ahmad, Ali Sabah Al-Salem, Khairan, Sabah Al-Ahmad Sea City, Wafra, Julaia, Bnaider, Dubaeeya, and beyond. Customers can now relish the convenience of ordering their beloved choices from restaurants, grocers, coffee shops, pharmacies, flower shops, and more, all delivered directly to their doorsteps.

The decision to extend delivery coverage to these new areas reflects Deliveroo's devotion to catering to the diverse palates and preferences of residents in every corner of Kuwait. By expanding its reach, Deliveroo ensures that local residents have access to an extensive range of cuisines bursting with flavor, from highly sought-after local delicacies to globally acclaimed international favorites. No matter where customers are located, they can now effortlessly indulge in their preferred culinary delights through Deliveroo's impeccable service.

Seham Al-Husaini, General Manager of Deliveroo Kuwait & Qatar, said: "We are incredibly proud to be able to serve our customers no matter what area of the country they're in. Whether you are craving your favorite burger from Kuwait City or a quick cup of coffee at the chalet on the weekend, Deliveroo is here to deliver." To download the Deliveroo app and start taking advantage of the most convenient way to order, customers can visit the App Store for iOS devices or Google Play for Android devices.

Sri Lanka raises taxes ahead of foreign debt deal

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka slapped a new 18 percent value added tax (VAT) on fuel, mobile phones and computers from Monday to raise desperately needed revenue ahead of a foreign debt restructuring. An earlier VAT of 15 percent on other consumer goods was also increased to 18 percent as the government sought to shore up its finances while Sri Lanka emerges from its worst economic crisis.

"In order to achieve economic stability, we must continue to forge ahead in this demanding path—one that is not adorned with flowers but presents formidable challenges," President Ranil Wickremesinghe said in his New Year message.

Months of civil unrest sparked by the economic crisis forced the resignation of then-president Gotabaya Rajapaksa when protesters stormed his residence in July 2022. His successor Wickremesinghe has raised taxes and cut government subsidies to comply with an International Monetary Fund bailout and cracked down on anti-government protests.

The IMF rescue program requires him to finalize by May a restructure of the island country's \$46 billion external debt after a government default in 2022. The higher taxes kicked in as the government negotiated with its bilateral lenders and sovereign bond holders to reschedule repayments, a key condition of the IMF bailout.

The central bank official was reiterating what President Wickremesinghe said earlier in the month. "There was no alternative to the IMF program for the cash-strapped island nation to get



COLOMBO: A vendor holds Sri Lankan bank notes while working at a market in Colombo on December 13, 2023. — AFP

out of its economic bankruptcy," the President said on December 17. Notably, he is also the finance minister for the island nation. The main opposition party Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) has promised to renegotiate the terms of the bailout stating that the conditions attached to the program were given a nod by the President and has created economic hardships for the public.

As part of the program, Wickremesinghe introduced strict economic reforms like increasing personal taxes and high utility tariffs. A higher Value Added Tax will also be implemented from

January 2024, covering items like fuel, which were earlier VAT-free.

The President insisted that these methods were the only way to achieve long-term relief, even as they create short-term difficulties. Regarding the renegotiating, Wickremesinghe said, "There was renegotiation after the first review and it will be reviewed at the time of the second review too." He added that it was crucial to maintain the IMF program to continue receiving support from the global community to help resolve the crisis the country is going through. — AFP

HSBC France retail bank sold to US fund Cerberus

PARIS: After more than two years HSBC transferred on Monday for an undisclosed amount its retail banking network in France to My Money Group, controlled by US private equity fund Cer-

berus. The operation will see HSBC France's nearly 250 retail branches with their 800,000 clients and 3,500 staff become CCF, a brand that HSBC shelved when it began operations in France some two decades ago.

The move is part of London-headquarters HSBC's efforts to simplify and refocus operations on its major region of Asia. When announcing the planned sale in June 2021, HSBC said the transfer for a nominal one euro would see it incur a hefty charge. But the rise in global interest rates complicated negotiations, with HSBC finally booking

a charge of \$2.4 billion against third quarter 2022 over the French unit.

The terms of the final deal were not disclosed. In a statement released Monday the groups said CCF would seek to cater to professionals. My Money Group traces its history in France back more than a century, originally helping people finance their purchases of Citroen cars, then spending two decades under General Electric's control before the US conglomerate pulled out of finance activities. Cerberus acquired the group in 2018. — AFP

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 3, 2024

TAKANAKUY, THE ANDEAN 'FIGHT CLUB' THAT CLEARS THE AIR FOR A NEW YEAR



The fighting begins and ends with a hug, part of a singular ritual that has residents of the Peruvian Andes punching and kicking in a year-end fight competition known as Takanakuy. Before the dueling starts in an open-air arena, male fighters remove their elaborate headgear — stuffed birds, foxes or even goat heads worn as symbols of strength or to bring good luck. Many participants in the holiday tradition come from the town of San Juan de Lurigancho in Chumbivilcas province, part of the Cusco department southeast of Peruvian capital Lima.

The atmosphere is more celebratory than grim. Wearing traditional costumes or leather jackets and boots, men and women join to do the Huaylia, a traditional Andean dance. The party, however, will end in a fight.

Settling neighborly disputes

It's all part of the Takanakuy, a Quechua-language word that means "to hit each

other". The tradition, which dates to Spanish colonial times, evolved over the centuries to become a means of settling accounts between neighbors in areas where there was no authority. Before, the fights were "about land disputes, and this was the way to resolve problems between families, between neighbors," 33-year-old hairdresser and fighter Froilan Rosas told AFP.

Some people fight to defend personal or family honor. The Takanakuy takes place every December 25 in the Peruvian regions of Cusco, Apurimac, Huancavelica and Arequipa, as well as in the Bolivian Andes. Some regions stage a variation: the women-only Warmi Takanakuy. The goal is to end the year in peace, residents say.

'Ends with a hug'

The party pauses, and the fighting begins. A fighter challenges another by calling out his or her first and last name. The person challenged is free to refuse, and may offer a substitute. Before stepping into the ring, male fighters — some shirtless — bind their

hands with cloth and swap their shoes for boots. In this club, duels are brief, lasting no more than a minute, with only punching and kicking allowed.

A referee presides over the fight, and four judges decide the winner. "This is a ritual," said Julio Boza, a burly 72-year-old and one of the organizers. "It starts with a fight and, after fighting, ends with a hug." Above all, Boza added, "It is a way to resolve everything that we have had in the year. This is the time to resolve it."

On this day there were 10 fights before dozens of fans. Anyone, even foreigners, can join in. One enthusiastic Romanian challenged a local resident. Wearing a Peruvian soccer T-shirt bearing the name of his idol Paolo Guerrero, he won his bout. Although Takanakuy once was based largely on existing rivalries, today it is more a sport for the young. "We're boys, so we want to measure our strength, to know how we're doing," said Omar Huachaca, 30, a merchant from Cusco. "More than anything, the blood in our veins brings us to the party." — AFP



Inhabitants of the province of Chumbivilcas, in Cuzco, southern Peru, celebrate Takanakuy (Quechua for "to hit each other") in San Juan de Lurigancho on the outskirts of Lima on Dec 25, 2023. — AFP photos



People wear animal hats while celebrating Takanakuy.



Arevalo plays Free Fire, a popular online video game, at home.



Arevalo talks with her TikTok social media followers, accompanied by her grandson Hector Carrasco.

'I'll keep going': Chile granny finds solace, celebrity in online gaming

Few players of the online video game Free Fire would know that one of their most ferocious opponents — a lithe, gun-wielding warrior in a short kimono and fang mask — is in reality an 81-year-old grandmother from rural Chile. From her professional gaming chair at home in a small village, the soft-spoken Maria Elena Arevalo becomes a merciless hunter, mowing down rivals in a game in which tens of millions of players shoot it out to survive on an imaginary remote island.

Wearing an apron over a frilly skirt, Arevalo bears little resemblance to her online alter-ego "Mami Nena" — the nickname she got from her only grandson, Hector Carrasco, 20. It was Carrasco who introduced Arevalo to the digital world of gaming that has given her a new lease on life after falling into deep loneliness following the death of her husband of 56 years in 2020. "I didn't even know what a mouse was," she told AFP at her home in the town of Llay-Llay in central Chile.

"Afterwards, I got excited. We started to play whenever he (Carrasco) could. I felt better because I didn't think so much about my late husband anymore." At first "I didn't want to hurt anyone," she added, but with time, she developed



81-year-old Maria Elena Arevalo poses for a picture during an interview with AFP at her home in Llay-Llay, Valparaiso Region, Chile, on Dec 19, 2023. — AFP photo

a taste for virtual blood. Today, Arevalo plays at the "Heroic" level — just one short of the topmost "Grandmaster" level that only 300 players compete in.

She has four million followers on TikTok and 650,000 on YouTube, where she shares tips with fellow players. Last year, she visited Mexico City on an all-expenses-paid trip as a Free Fire ambassador for the game's anniversary celebrations — her first-ever journey abroad. "All

the kids asked me for autographs... It was beautiful. The day I die, I'll take that with me," she reminisced.

Earlier this month, Arevalo was named one of Chile's 100 most important elderly people by the El Mercurio newspaper and the Catholic University for helping break down age stereotypes. Carrasco is in awe of his famous grandmother. "It's totally cool, and I don't know, I feel like she's like my best friend and all that," he said.



'I'll keep going'
Three years after starting her Free Fire journey, Arevalo says she no longer feels lonely. In a nod to her dead husband, a bird named "Benito" in his honor accompanies "Mami Nena" on her campaigns of conquest. Almost half of people over 80 in Chile declare feeling lonely, according to a recent study, a major mental health risk. Ever more older people are finding solace in gaming: A Ukrainian team known as "Young Guard" are

prolific Counter Strike competitors, while 93-year-old Japanese Hamako Mori — also known by her alias Gamer Grandma — is thought to be the oldest gamer in the world.

For Arevalo, the online campaigns are becoming harder due to worsening scleroderma, a disease that causes a hardening and tightening of the skin. But she is not planning on slowing down. "I love doing this. I'll keep going as far as I can," she insisted. — AFP

OSCAR-TIPPED 'SOCIETY OF THE SNOW' GIVES VOICE TO ANDES PLANE CRASH DEAD



Production stills courtesy of Netflix show a scene from the shooting of Netflix's movie "Society of the Snow".



Picture of the cross on the grave of the victims of the Andes flight disaster of 1972, in the Valley of the Tears in the remote Andes Mountains in the Argentine province of Mendoza, on the border with Chile, taken on Feb 3, 2023.

Roberto Canessa has spent most of his life recounting the astonishing tale of how he survived a plane crash, two avalanches and a diet of human flesh before trekking across freezing mountains to save himself and his friends. Now the infamous tragedy — or miracle — in the Andes that hit Canessa, just 19 at the time, and the other members of his Uruguayan rugby team is the subject of a major new Netflix movie, out Jan 4 and expected to contend for awards including Oscars.

And Canessa, 70, is only too happy to see it told again, convinced that one of the most incredible survival stories of all time still contains important messages for future generations. "We all have our own personal mountain range," Canessa told AFP. "And there are many people who are climbing the mountain right now. We must tell them not to be discouraged, to keep going."

"Society of the Snow," from Spanish director J A Bayona (also behind "Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom"), focuses on the odyssey that the young, amateur team went through when their plane to Chile crashed in the frozen, high Andes in 1972. The film's title and story are taken from a book of the same name by Uruguayan writer Pablo Vierci, who collected the testimonies from various members of the "society".

For Canessa, the name represents the pact that was born when the survivors realized that "civilized society had left us aside". "When you're in a rugby team on a plane to Chile to play a match, and suddenly you crash... of course, as human beings, you assume that people will come to rescue you," he recalled. "But the days begin to pass... you have to make your own water, you have to eat the dead because otherwise you will die. The dead are there, next to you. You begin to see the death of another person not with sadness for him, but sadness for you, because it is like you are on a waiting list."

Trapped for 72 days

On Oct 13, 1972, a plane with 45 people on board — members of the Old Christians rugby team, plus some family members and crew — crashed on the Argentine side of the Andes. The dramatic impact tore the plane apart, and killed several people including the pilot immediately. Survivors took shelter in the plane's fuselage, but freezing temperatures — particularly at night — thwarted any attempts to trek down the

local actors, and felt there was still "something that was missing to tell". "It was giving those who had not returned the chance to express themselves. Finding that twist gave meaning to our film," he said.

'Suffering' during filming

Numa Turcatti, who survived the initial plane crash and helped marshal his increasingly desperate friends throughout their ordeal in the Andes, is the main hero of "Society of the Snow".

as us... with the advantage that they got to leave at the end of each day," joked Canessa. "It is a super-light version of what happened on the mountain. We had it much worse. If I had a movie of how we had it, audiences would leave the theater," he added.

Oscar buzz, and more

The movie was selected as the closing film at the Venice film festival, and has earned nominations for January's Golden Globes



Uruguayan Roberto Canessa, one of the 16 survivors of an airplane crash in the Chilean Andes in 1972 and who remained lost in the mountains for 72 days, speaks during an interview with the AFP before the inauguration of an exhibition to commemorate 40 years of their tragedy, in Montevideo on Aug 22, 2012.

mountain to safety.

Others died during the 72 days they remained trapped in the Valley of Tears, from avalanches, infected wounds and dire conditions. "What happened to us in the Andes is absurd," said Canessa, ultimately one of just 16 who lived to tell the tale. Eventually, Canessa and another survivor endured a remarkable 10-day trek over a mountain peak and into Chile to find rescue, using improvised equipment.

The accident and their feat have been addressed previously on the big screen, with the 1993 film "Alive", starring Ethan Hawke. But Bayona wanted to tell the story in his native language, with

For 30-year-old Uruguayan actor Enzo Vogrincic, it was the role of a lifetime, but an intensely difficult challenge. To portray the impact of the hostile mountain environment, the actors gained and shed considerable weight, and spent hours immersed in the snow. "There's no way to tell this story unless you go through suffering," he told AFP.

Hungry and constantly cold on set, Vogrincic — who even shot scenes while feverish — described filming the scenes of the two avalanches that struck the survivors as "torture". "It was almost a scientific film, an experiment to make the poor actors go through the same hardships



Director J A Bayona arrives at the premiere of Universal Pictures and Amblin Entertainment's "Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom" at the Walt Disney Concert Hall on June 12, 2018 in Los Angeles.

and Critics Choice Awards. It is also Spain's official entry for the Oscars, and has made the final shortlists of possible nominees for best international film, best visual effects, best score, and best makeup and hairstyling. Academy Award nominations will be unveiled in January.

Canessa says the rescue trek through the Andes taught him to take life step by step, and he believes the film serves as a useful metaphor for people watching to think about how they can react to their own challenges. "Sit in the cinema and let yourself be carried away by thinking about what you would do if the plane in your life crashed," he said. — AFP

Lifestyle

Dr Esraa Al-Shatti: A passion for luxe

Kuwaiti professor teaches the IM Luxe master's program in France

By Faten Omar

In Kuwait, the perception of luxury is deeply intertwined with a rich cultural heritage and a contemporary flair for opulence. Kuwait Times spoke with Esraa Al-Shatti, a professor and researcher in luxury, to learn more.

Kuwait Times: Tell us more about yourself.

Dr Esraa: I grew up in a family that values education a lot, which made me realize how education can open up opportunities in life. I am very close to my parents, and luckily with the wisdom of my dad and the warmth of my mother, I understood from a young age my true passion and the direction of what I wanted to be. To me, teaching is the broader concept of education, because through teaching, I'm being engaged in a two-way process that involves a learner and me as an educator, and through creating content, preparing the subjects and sharing this knowledge and concepts, of course I am learning every day. I moved to Paris in 2017 to continue my graduate studies and that's where all it started.

KT: When did you show interest in exploring luxury brands?

Dr Esraa: As I am coming from Kuwait, I think we pay attention to details and have an eye for beauty. When I moved to Paris, I saw that I was craving something beyond education. Every walk I took in the heart of Paris was telling me a story, the buildings, streets, the culture, museums, the fashion houses — there was something ineffable. The charm of the City of Light made me realize that I needed to learn something more than just fashion and aesthetics; the fundamental nobility of luxury and the profound history that I wanted to explore and take this field to the next level.

KT: Tell us more about your career background?

Dr Esraa: My academic career started in the 2019 fall semester. I was teaching EM-Normandie Business School Master 2 students, right after the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, I returned to Kuwait and started teaching at Gulf University for Sciences and Technology (GUST). Dreams do come true, and in 2023, I got selected to teach at the international luxury management master's program in France. I focused on where I come from — the luxury market in the GCC.

KT: Who inspired you?

Dr Esraa: I get my inspiration from a lot of things; I am constantly learning new things and falling in love with beauty all the time! Especially in artists, and I appreciate details that tell stories, but I believe that education complements everything we do. When it comes to luxury, I believe the inspiration came from Paris, and being an active researcher, it made me recognize that this field is booming in the GCC, which led me to discover the luxury industry and dive into fashion houses.

KT: Can you share your insights into the intricate world of luxury and how your second PhD contributes to your expertise in this field?

Dr Esraa: Luxury does not have a universal definition; the concept is related to both time and person. For example, what used to be a luxury in one generation may be a necessity for a newer generation. For centuries, luxury focused on artisan production, craftsmanship, unique design and super-quality materials. My main topic of expertise is impression management (IM). According to Canadian Sociologist Erving Goffman, IM is the tendency to behave in a certain way to control how others perceive you. Building on my initial research, I was eager to see how luxury consumption is positively correlated to impression management. In other words, are people buying luxury products/services to indulge in the luxury experience or to show off?

As we all know in the old days, accessibility was



Esraa Al-Shatti speaks about her passion for luxury and educating students in this field

limited and luxury was created for a certain type of people like the nobles and the elites of their time. Nowadays, individuals have the purchasing power and the desire to spend on products/services that might not be necessary but provide prestige, elegance and social status, which is increasing tremendously with the prevalence of social media. This sector is gaining incredible visibility in our societies. The competition starts with the people in the society before the brands themselves.

Another important point is that individuals in Kuwait and GCC are considered high net worth individuals (HNWIs), and the society's way of showing status. The global luxury market is worth €1.5 trillion, and the GCC luxury market's value is \$11 billion, which makes luxury retail one of the leaders in contributing to a country's economy. The reason why

education can erase challenges, because if you have the knowledge and skills, you will deal with all situations in life in the best manner. I also believe challenges are in every sector and industry. First, educating students about the industry as a whole from all its facets. The GCC market is rising rapidly and coming from this region made me extend my research; thus students in this program have more knowledge and real-life cases in this field. Also, working on projects as a team gives students insight and exposure to the current market trends to be prepared for the workplace.

KT: How do you integrate your knowledge and research into your teaching methodologies for this prestigious dual-degree program?

Dr Esraa: Being active in both research and the

ry industry that you find particularly critical for professionals entering this field to understand?

Dr Esraa: Understanding generational and market nuances is needed to excel in the luxury field, especially since the new generation is always seeking more and they're well connected to social media platforms and technology in general. Direct selling and clienteling are on trend, especially if you combine it with a unique personalized experience. The second-hand market revenue is expected to grow by 20 percent, according to Bain & Co.

KT: Tell us more about the dual-degree program between NEOMA Business School in Reims and Polimi Graduate School of Management in Milan.

Dr Esraa: The curriculum of the program concentrates on how to understand, create and manage value and build executive skills in the luxury sector.

KT: In your role as a content creator for Kuwait Times and Kuwait News on social media, how do you bring attention to the world of luxury brands and contribute to public understanding of this sector?

Dr Esraa: Passion is what led me to create videos that tell stories about the history of luxury brands, from creation to market value, as well as the recent news in the industry that I believe are new to the audience. Being aware of how my society loves luxury brands from all sectors gave me insight into telling them stories of intensive research I have done based on reliable sources about luxury brands and fashion houses.

KT: What advice would you give to students aspiring to excel in this dynamic and prestigious field?

Dr Esraa: My advice is if you have passion and interest in this field, you will enjoy every part of your journey. My advice is to join one of the master's programs in this field to grow your knowledge and understanding of the luxury industry,



Esraa Al-Shatti at Louvre



understanding the key drivers of the luxury market on an international scale is mandatory is that fashion houses and brands follow specific strategies. Therefore, during my life abroad and meeting with professionals who have been in the field for years, I learned that the luxury industry is a challenging and trending field. You cannot thrive if passion and creativity are not part of your personality.

KT: As a professor teaching in the International Master's Program in Luxury Management, how do you approach educating students about the unique challenges and nuances of managing luxury brands in an international context?

Dr Esraa: In my point of view, life with edu-

field of luxury gives me strengths in delivering the right information and directing them toward using the right methods to get their dream job. I make sure that students understand the concepts and topics clearly. I also put them in contact with experts in the field, whether through seminars, projects, luxury house visits or case studies. Students mainly join this program to excel in the field of luxury, as both France and Italy are pioneers in fashion and luxury. I am proud to demonstrate my experience and information when it comes to data collection or even real-life experience, as my mentors and professors worked with me closely to reach this point at a young age.

KT: Could you highlight some trends in the luxu-

because this is going to give you exceptional experience and learning methods from both academics and professionals in the field. As a result, you will get your dream job in one of the prestigious luxury brands.

KT: How do you see the luxury market faring in the GCC?

Dr Esraa: The luxury market in the GCC is growing rapidly, with a focus on high-end fashion and lifestyle products. The Gulf region is home to some of the world's most wealthy consumers, who have a strong appetite for luxury goods. Therefore, paying attention to this industry can increase the economic growth of the country. The luxury market in the GCC is expected to grow annually by 3.57 percent (compound annual growth rate 2023 – 2028).



Esraa Al-Shatti reads research in the Fashion Magazines



Esraa Al-Shatti writing her research

Sports

GIG holds major fitness event in Kuwait in alliance with Circuit+ and Suffix

Kuwait Times joins as one of the media partners



KUWAIT: Children participating in the jiu-jitsu competition.



Participants and volunteers taking part in the event.

By Passant Hisham

KUWAIT: The 10th year edition of GIG Battle Fitness Festival by Gulf Insurance Group, one of the leading insurance service providers in Middle East and North Africa region, was held last month in collaboration with Circuit+ and Suffix events.

The first day of the event at Kuwait Motor Town gathered around 2,300 athletes from over 35 countries. The inclusive battle combined Super Team Cup, athlete games, Saracen race, powerlifting combat and jiu-jitsu duel, where a diverse range of participants were welcomed — men, women and children.

Co-founder of Circuit+ Bader Al-Banna said: "It's been 10 years now and that's special for us. There's a massive difference from the first year's edition, as we kept improving year to year, and hopefully this is the best year we can bring out for people." He noted that this year they tried to open as many competition categories as possible to attract more athletes, which made this edition of the event the biggest in terms of the venue space, participants and volunteer numbers.

One of Banna's aspirations is to take the festival to the next level by not just limiting the event's



Co-founder of Circuit+, Bader Al-Banna.

hosting rights to Kuwait, but have the opportunity to make it travel overseas and host it in different countries around the world.

Mohamed El-Tarkeet, a powerlifting champion, has joined the GIG Battle Fitness Festival four times in the past, where he stood first two times in a row. He explained to Kuwait Times that he considers the battle as a not-to-be-missed event. "It's the first battle that I ever got introduced to in my life. It's the only one that makes me feel close to my sup-



Audience cheering one of the participants.

porters, where I am in my own land among my own spectators," he said. He added he's so attached to the battle, that he feels it's made specially for him to prove his success every year. "If you want to compete with me, you can win over me in any other battle, but here — this is my battle."

Abrah Al-Fahad, member of Kuwait Weightlifting National Team and an Arab and West Asia champion, who is participating in GIG Battle Fitness Festival for the seventh time, spoke about the event's

significance. "It's a great opportunity for a high-intensity competition with a great atmosphere. I encourage all women to join even if they feel that they don't fit with the required standards. At the end, the experience is really worth the try." She noted that what she loves the most about this battle is that every time she participates gives her a new chance to meet up with high-achieving athletes who motivate her to exceed her potential and break her records.

Volodymyr Molochko, a Ukrainian representative of the Circuit+ team in the Super Team Cup, participated for the second time in the battle. "It's really nice to come back on the floor since 2019, and from now on I am planning to join every year," he noted. Since there are few competitions in the region, this battle is not just a game for him, but the only chance for him to boost his self-confidence, evaluate his skills, spot his weak points, and most importantly, it's a reminder for him to keep going and work on developing his performance.

The annual fitness festival, which was scheduled to run for two days, didn't proceed due to the demise of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and was postponed until further notice.

Bangladesh's Shakib bats for ruling party in elections

MAGURA: Turning his star sports power to politics, colourful Bangladeshi cricketer Shakib Al Hasan is all but guaranteed to become a ruling party lawmaker with general elections on Sunday boycotted by the opposition.

Better known as the leading all-rounder of his era, the 36-year-old skipper has been on a whirlwind campaign for the ruling party of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. The result is barely in question.

Opposition parties withdrew from a vote they said would be neither free nor fair, accusing Hasina of ruling with an iron fist. Shakib conceded he was not facing any serious obstacle to his election, but told AFP while on the hustings that the contest still made him anxious.

"The competition and challenges are always there, be it a small team or big team," he said in his hometown Magura, where he is contesting a seat for Hasina's Awami League. "Even when we know we will win against a team, we still feel our heart beat before the game."

Shakib's campaign obliged him to take a temporary leave of absence from cricket. He skipped a New Zealand tour where the team has shone without him, making history with their first one-day and Twenty20 wins against the Black Caps on the hosts' soil. Instead, he has been pounding the streets from morning till late, surrounded by cheering party loyalists and boys keen to meet their sporting hero.

But he bristled at the suggestion he would not be able to balance his duties as a lawmaker and a cricket captain. "Did I retire?" he asked. "If I haven't retired, then where does this question come from?"



MAGURA: In this photograph taken on December 27, 2023, Shakib Al Hasan (R), national cricket team captain and election candidate of the ruling Bangladesh Awami League speaks with the media before the start of his campaign ahead of the 2024 general elections, in Magura. — AFP

Dressed in a traditional white tunic, he playfully lobbed tennis balls into excited crowds as teenagers broke through security cordons to pose for selfies. But while the crowds out to meet him were cheering, the few thousand who gathered were relatively small for a sporting star of his stature.

'Work together'

Shakib is the only person to have been ranked the number-one all-rounder in all three formats simultaneously by the International Cricket Council. He was a teenager when he was recruited to the country's premier sports academy and just 19 at his international debut in 2006 as a batting all-rounder. By the following year, he was already a star when he hit a fifty in a David-and-Goliath show against India in the World Cup—a victory still spoken of reveren-

tially by Bangladeshi fans. He has also garnered a reputation for ill-discipline, with a rebellious streak that once saw him threaten a spectator with a bat, and that earned him a three-match ban after making a lewd gesture to a television crew.

But his focus for now is the election, urging people to "work together" and to offset the impact of the boycott by the main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). Police have arrested opposition officials and activists en masse over charges of violence following months of protests that left at least 11 people dead. The BNP says thousands of its leaders and activists have been detained, effectively snuffing out credible opposition in the polls. For Shakib, what matters is not criticism of Hasina's rights record but rather Bangladesh's impressive economic growth over her tenure. — AFP

Niger celebrates unity in the wrestling arena

AGADEZ: The winner falls to his knees, arms raised triumphantly. After just eight minutes, his opponent's knee and elbow have touched the sand, handing "Issaka Issaka" an historic win in Niger's king of sports.

The annual wrestling tournament in the northern city of Agadez enthralled the vast West African nation. It's more than just a sporting event. The prime minister is joined by his counterparts from fellow military-led neighbours Mali and Burkina Faso to watch the competition. Now in its 44th year, the National Sabre event takes place this time under the banner "safeguarding the homeland". It comes at the close of a turbulent year for Niger which saw military officers seize power on July 26.

A few days later, the Economic

Community of West African States (ECOWAS) threatened an armed intervention to restore democratically elected president Mohamed Bazoum. The regional bloc also imposed tough sanctions against Niger, which has one of the world's poorest populations despite having major resources.

But for 10 days, those troubles are forgotten as all eyes are on the skill and manoeuvres of the wrestlers. "It's true we're facing a difficult economic situation but the Nigerien people are resilient," regional councillor Alhassane Youssoufa, who is among the spectators, said.

Opportunity

Around the giant screen showing the matches, on posters and billboards, the portraits of the leaders of Niger, Burkina and Mali are an indicator of a defence pact struck in September. Arenas are decked out in the colours of the three Sahel states, which are all fighting in a jihadist insurgency that erupted in northern Mali in 2012.

Warm messages of support for Niger's ruling National Council for the



AGADEZ: Wrestlers fight during semi final of the National Sabre, a traditional wrestling competition in Agadez, Niger, on December 31, 2023. — AFP

Safeguard of the Homeland (CNSP) and its leader General Abdourahmane Tiani play constantly over the speakers. "Everyone is tuned in to the wrestling, in offices, taxis," said sports journalist

Issoufou Kodo, who is covering the event live for national radio and in Hausa, one of Niger's national languages. "It's the perfect time to run all possible communications," he added. — AFP

Elgar to bow out on winning note, seal series win

CAPE TOWN: Dean Elgar will bid to bring the curtain down on his Test career by skipping South Africa to victory in the second and final Test against an India side who are likely to make at least two changes. The tourists' hopes of achieving their first ever series success in South Africa were comprehensively dashed as they lost the first Test by an innings-and-32 runs last Thursday.

South Africa will be revved up to give Elgar a victorious farewell. The 36-year-old will captain the side—standing in for the injured Temba Bavuma—and is in fine fettle having scored a majestic 185 in the first Test.

India look set to revamp their bowling attack. Left-arm spin bowling all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja is expected to return in place of off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin. Jadeja suffered a back spasm before play on the first day of the first Test. Jadeja will add depth to India's batting, which crumbled in Centurion, as well as being a capable bowler.

India are also likely to make at least one more change to their bowling line-up. Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Siraj maintained reasonable control in Centurion but lacked support from all-rounder Shardul Thakur and newcomer Prasidh Krishna. At least one of Mukesh Kumar and Avesh Khan is in line to play at Newlands. Avesh was added to the squad after impressive performances in India's one-day series win which preceded the Test matches, which he followed with a five-wicket haul for India A against South Africa A last week. With the exception of Virat Kohli and KL Rahul, India's batsmen looked ill-equipped to deal with South Africa's all-pace attack. Captain Rohit Sharma continued to struggle in South African conditions, being dismissed twice by Kagiso Rabada for five and nought.

In five Tests in South Africa, Sharma has only scored 128 runs at an average of 12.80, compared to an overall Test average of 45.45. Young batsmen Yashasvi Jaiswal, Shubman Gill and Shreyas Iyer all looked vulnerable against the fast bowlers. Conditions at Newlands are unlikely to favour fast bowling as much as they did at Centurion but bowlers can still expect some assistance. The pitch had a covering of green grass on Monday although the surface would be mowed before the match.

Aside from Bavuma the hosts will also be without fast bowler Gerald Coetzee who suffered a pelvic injury during South Africa's win, achieved in three days. South Africa will want to accommodate left-arm spin bowler Keshav Maharaj and will have to decide whether to pick a specialist batsman in Bavuma's place. Either Zubayr Hamza or Tristan Stubbs could come in as a batsman or they may opt for five bowlers with Marco Jansen filling the all-rounder position, batting at number seven. Lungi Ngidi, who was judged not to have fully recovered from an ankle injury, is expected to be fit for selection. Squads:

South Africa

Dean Elgar (capt), Aiden Markram, Tony de Zorzi, Keegan Petersen, David Bedingham, Tristan Stubbs, Zubayr Hamza, Kyle Verreynne (wkt), Marco Jansen, Wiaan Mulder, Keshav Maharaj, Kagiso Rabada, Lungi Ngidi, Nandre Burger.

India

Rohit Sharma (capt), Yashasvi Jaiswal, Shubman Gill, Virat Kohli, Shreyas Iyer, KL Rahul (wkt), Ravindra Jadeja, Ravichandran Ashwin, Shardul Thakur, Mohammed Siraj, Mukesh Kumar, Prasidh Krishna, Avesh Khan, KS Bharat (wkt), Abhimanyu Easwaran. — AFP

Sports

Kraken blank reigning NHL champion Vegas

Daccord played only 19 NHL games over four seasons but has nine wins

LOS ANGELES: Seattle goaltender Joey Daccord made 35 saves and the Kraken blanked the reigning Stanley Cup champion Vegas Golden Knights 3-0 on Monday in the 2024 NHL Winter Classic. The 27-year-old American netminder became the first goalie to post a shutout in the NHL's annual New Year's Day outdoor game.

"This is the coolest thing that has ever happened to me in my whole life," Daccord said. "I'm pretty emotional right now. This is an absolutely amazing day." The NHL's newest expansion clubs played before 47,313 fans in the home stadium of Major League Baseball's Seattle Mariners.

"It was huge," Kraken center Yanni Gourde said. "It has been amazing for us playing in this venue." Daccord was named winner of the first Winter Classic Most Valuable Player award after posting six wins and two overtime losses in his past eight appearances for Seattle, with fans chanting his name after his biggest saves.

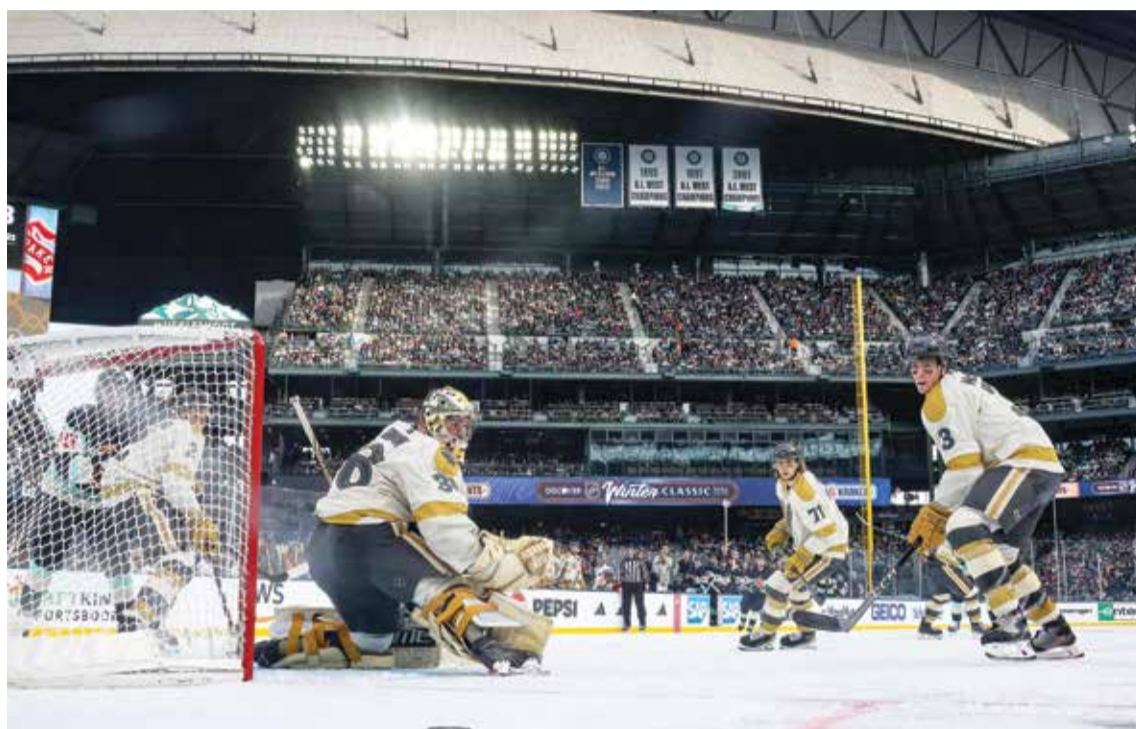
"This was something else," Daccord said. "It was amazing. (Teammates) made my life really easy—some amazing sticks, big blocks and selling out for the team." Finnish left wing Eeli Tolvanen opened the scoring 4:50 into the first period, then assisted on US defenseman Will Borgen's first goal of the season, which came 2:19

into the second period.

Canadian Gourde added an unassisted goal 2:10 into the third period for the final Kraken tally, then praised Daccord's work between the pipes. "He has been great for us lately," Gourde said. "He's so confident back there. It's amazing. He deserves every bit of this joy."

The Kraken, in only their third NHL campaign, improved to 15-14 with nine overtime losses for 39 points, moving one point behind Arizona for the final Western Conference playoff spot after stretching their point streak to nine consecutive games. "This run we've been on as a group has been awesome. It's a collective effort from all of us," Daccord said. "Things have been going our way here this last little bit. We've been playing awesome. It has been a lot of fun." Vegas fell to 22-11-5, level with Vancouver and Colorado atop the Western Conference.

Daccord had played only 19 NHL games over the past four seasons but has nine wins in 23 contests for Seattle this season. He said playing outdoors made the puck more difficult to see than in regular arenas, but was thankful for Seattle's trademark overcast skies. "Today was really tricky. Anything above the boards was really hard," Daccord said. "I'm thankful there was no sun in my eyes." — AFP



SEATTLE: Logan Thompson #36 of the Vegas Golden Knights watches the puck against the Seattle Kraken during the third period at T-Mobile Park in Seattle, Washington. — AFP

Rooney hit hard by 'setback' after Birmingham sacking

LONDON: Wayne Rooney said it would "take some time to get over this setback" after he was sacked as manager of Championship side Birmingham City on Tuesday following a disastrous spell in charge.

The 38-year-old former Manchester United and England star was appointed in October but oversaw just two wins in 15 matches with Monday's 3-0 thumping by Leeds, their ninth defeat under him, proving the final straw.

Birmingham—who have NFL legend Tom Brady as a minority shareholder—are embroiled in a battle against relegation, slumping to 20th from sixth since Rooney took over. "Despite their best efforts, results have not met the expectations that were made clear at the outset," read a statement from the club. "Therefore, the board feels that a change in management is in the best interests of the football club."

Rooney replaced John Eustace, who was sacked just after he had guided Birmingham to two successive wins which propelled them into the play-off places. "Football is a results business—and I recognise they have not been at the level I wanted them to be," said Rooney.

"However, time is the most precious commodity a manager requires and I do not believe 13 weeks was sufficient to oversee the changes that were needed. "Personally, it will take me some time to get over this setback. "I have been involved in professional football, as either a player or manager, since I was 16. "Now, I plan to take some time with my family as I prepare for the next opportunity in my journey as a manager."

Rooney's chequered managerial career is in stark contrast to his stellar playing days. He was credited with doing a decent job at Derby in tricky circumstances. He saved them from relegation in 2021 -- by a point—after four months in the role.

However, his first full season in charge (2021/22) the club was penalised 21 points for being in administration and English Football League breaches, while they were barred from dealing in the transfer market. Although they made a decent fight of it they



Wayne Rooney

were relegated to the third tier League One and Rooney left in June 2022 with the club still in administration. His next destination was the MLS club DC United in July 2022. They finished bottom of the Eastern Conference, but they improved in the 2023 campaign, finishing 12th. His overall record, though, as a manager is unimpressive with just 41 victories and 73 defeats in 152 matches. — AFP

Hermoso testifies about Rubiales' World Cup kiss

MADRID: Spanish World Cup-winning star Jenni Hermoso told a judge on Tuesday that the kiss forced on her by disgraced former Spanish football chief Luis Rubiales was "at no point consensual" and that she had come under pressure to defend his actions.

After arriving at the Audiencia Nacional in Madrid just before 10:00 am (0900 GMT), the 33-year-old went to testify before Judge Francisco de Jorge, who is investigating Rubiales on allegations of sexual assault and coercion.

"At the end of her declaration, she ratified the statement made at the public prosecutor's office that the kiss was completely unexpected and at no point was it consensual," a judicial source told AFP. During the incident on August 20, the then head of Spain's RFEF football federation held her head in both hands and forcibly kissed her on the lips after Spain won the World Cup in Australia.

He has said the act was "a consensual peck" but Hermoso has insisted it was

not. She filed a lawsuit against him in September and told the judge she had come under pressure to defend Rubiales, both on the flight back from Australia and on a subsequent team holiday to Ibiza in the Balearic Islands. "After the event, the situation experienced by the victim, both on the flight back to Spain and during her stay in Ibiza was one of constant harassment by the parties under investigation, which disrupted her normal life, causing her anxiety and distress," the source said, quoting Hermoso's testimony.

Under Spanish law, a non-consensual kiss can be considered sexual assault—a criminal category that groups all types of sexual violence. Penalties for such a kiss range from a fine to four years in prison.

The 46-year-old Rubiales, who is subject to a restraining order banning him from being within 200 metres (yards) of Hermoso, is also accused of "coercion" for allegedly pressuring her to justify his actions, which were broadcast live round the world. The kiss provoked widespread



MADRID: Spain's player Jennifer Hermoso (L) leaves after an audience at the Audiencia Nacional court in Madrid on January 2, 2024. — AFP

outrage and prompted his suspension by world football governing body FIFA. Rubiales appeared in court on September 15 and in October.

The judge quizzed three others over allegations they also pressured Hermoso—former women's coach Jorge Vilda,

men's team director Albert Luque and RFEF marketing boss Ruben Rivera. Numerous other witnesses have testified in court over the pressure faced by Hermoso, among them two-time Ballon d'Or winner Alexia Putellas and two other Spanish teammates. — AFP

Washington's Michael Penix Jr. completed 29-of-38 passes for 430 yards and two touchdowns with no interceptions. "The guy was on a mission," Huskies coach Kalen deBoer said. "Each and every drive he made the plays to help us win."

Dillon Johnson ran for 49 yards and two touchdowns before getting hurt in the final seconds, an injury that prevented Washington from running out the clock, giving Texas a final chance. "You've just got to move on when tough breaks come your way and not let negative thoughts get in your head," deBoer said. "I'm just proud of the way the guys were out there just battling." — AFP

Leicester surge 10-point clear as Southampton, Ipswich stumble

LONDON: Leicester opened up a 10-point lead at the top of the Championship with a 4-1 thrashing of Huddersfield as promotion rivals Ipswich and Southampton failed to get 2024 off to a winning start. Everton loanee Tom Cannon scored twice on his full debut for the Foxes as Leicester stretched their unbeaten run to 10 games.

Cannon was signed by Enzo Maresca on deadline day in August despite carrying a back injury that delayed his debut until three weeks ago. The Irishman was keen to make up for lost time as he blasted home the opener five minutes before half-time and then made the points safe with another clinical finish on the hour mark.

By that point Ricardo Pereira had already made it 2-0 and Stephy Mavididi's free-kick rounded off the scoring after Michal Helik had pulled a goal back for Huddersfield. "It hasn't been easy for Tom, he was two or three months out with the injury," said Maresca.

"Tom's had to wait for his chance and, yes he scored two goals. But when you don't play games, and suddenly you get your chance, everyone is expecting big things. "I told him to 'just go out there, and don't think it's your first time and you need to show people, or me, that you're good. Because if you're here, we think you're good enough. Just enjoy it'."

Ipswich are now without a win in five games as their push for back-to-back promotions has stalled. Kieran McKenna's men were unable to make the most of a man advantage for the final half hour after Jordan Thompson was sent off in a 0-0 draw at Stoke.

Southampton missed the chance to close to within a point of the automatic promotion places as their winning streak came to an end in a 1-1 draw at Norwich. Josh Sargent cancelled out Adam Armstrong's opener for the Saints.

Leeds closed the gap on Ipswich to seven points with a comfortable 3-0 win over Wayne Rooney's Birmingham. Patrick Bamford, Dan James and Crysencio Summerville scored the goals for the home side at Elland Road.

Rooney has won just two of his 16 games since taking charge of Birmingham in October with the Blues now just six points above the relegation zone. "I'm a fighter and I get football fans' opinions," said the former England captain on calls for him to be sacked.

"I have to draw on my career. My playing career wasn't always about success." Sunderland climbed into the playoff places with a 2-0 win over Preston in a timely boost for the Black Cats ahead of their huge FA Cup clash with local rivals Newcastle on Saturday.

Hull dropped out of the bottom six after a 3-1 defeat at Sheffield Wednesday, that brought the Owls back to within three points of safety at the bottom of the table. Fifth-placed West Brom succumbed to a 1-0 defeat at Swansea. — AFP

Michigan to meet Washington for US college crown

LOS ANGELES: Undefeated Michigan and unbeaten Washington will meet next Monday in the US College Football Playoff championship game after capturing

dramatic semi-final thrillers on Monday. Michigan's J.J. McCarthy threw three touchdown passes and Blake Corum ran for the winning overtime touchdown as the Wolverines beat Alabama 27-20 in the Rose Bowl at Pasadena, California.

"We were going to overcome anything that was inside this stadium," said Michigan coach Jim Harbaugh, whose team lost in the semis the past two seasons. In next Monday's final at Houston, the Wolverines will face the Washington Huskies, who outlasted Texas 37-31 in the Sugar Bowl at New Orleans, stretching their two-season win streak to 21 games.

Classifieds

Clinics & Hospitals

Clinics

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

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

Hospitals

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

Change of Name

I TASNEEM, holder of Passport No. R7728875 do hereby change my name to **TASNEEM** (as Given name) **LOKHANDWALA** (as Surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name **TASNEEM LOKHANDWALA** and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents.
(#4561) 3-1-2024

I, Zahiya Ameer holder of Indian Passport no. UO204458 having permanent address 12-5-172 /1 south Lalaguda, Vijaypuri colony Secunderabad, Hyderabad. Pin code 500017, Telangana, India residing in Kuwait at present, here by declare that henceforth my name will be read as under given Name: **Zahiya Ameer** and surname: **Syed (#4582) 3-1-2024**



LIVERPOOL: Newcastle United's Dutch defender #04 Sven Botman (L) fouls Liverpool's Colombian midfielder #07 Luis Diaz (C) for a penalty to Liverpool during the English Premier League football match between Liverpool and Newcastle United at Anfield in Liverpool, north west England. — AFP

Salah sends Liverpool three points clear atop English Premier League

Newcastle remain down in ninth and 11 points off the top four

LIVERPOOL: Mohamed Salah scored twice as Liverpool stretched Newcastle's miserable run with a 4-2 victory at Anfield to open up a three-point lead at the top of the Premier League on Monday. Jurgen Klopp's team should have run out even more convincing winners as Martin Dubravka saved Salah's first-half penalty among 10 stops.

But Salah made amends from the spot after he, Curtis Jones and Cody Gakpo had netted in the second half to inflict a seventh defeat in eight games on Newcastle. Liverpool head into the Premier League's winter break five points clear of title rivals Manchester City and Arsenal, with Aston Villa posing an unexpected challenge in second place.

"A special game, special night," said Klopp. "It was a sensational game from my team. We started extremely lively. Everyone saw Dubravka or we ourselves made sure the score didn't get too clear. "Super game. I loved so many aspects of the game bar the goals we conceded."

Newcastle, by contrast, remain down in ninth and 11 points off the top four as the spotlight grows on Eddie Howe. The Magpies have the second worst away record in the Premier League this season with just five points from 10 games.

Howe's men were fortunate not to be blown away by an embarrassing scoreline in stormy conditions at Anfield as Liverpool registered the highest expected goals ever in a Premier League game of 7.53. "We're battling to get our best levels back. The effort and determination was there. As long as we continue to see that we'll be fine," said Howe. "We're missing a lot of players and we've had a lot of tough fixtures in a congested December."

Dubravka denies Darwin

Dubravka has struggled to deputise for the sidelined Nick Pope as Newcastle's form has slumped in recent weeks while battling an injury crisis. But the Slovakian was in top form as he denied

Darwin Nunez on a handful of occasions.

Luis Diaz did have the ball in the net midway through the first half, but the goal was ruled out for offside against Nunez. Diaz was then upended in the box by Sven Botman. But Dubravka bailed out the Dutch defender by denying Salah his 150th Premier League goal for Liverpool from the spot.

The Egyptian, who was playing in his final game before heading out to the African Cup of Nations, has now missed four of his last 10 spot-kicks for the Reds. "I thought 'are you going to be leave for the national team with that performance?'" said Salah of his first-half display.

"I just had to really focus, step up and make the difference and managed to do so." Finally Liverpool's pressure told early in the second period as for once Nunez showed a cool head to pick out Salah for a tap in. But completely against the run of play, Newcastle equalised just five minutes after falling behind.

Alexander Isak timed his run to

perfection to latch onto Anthony Gordon's through ball and the Swedish striker slotted confidently past the advancing Alisson Becker. That shock did not change the course of the game as the one-way traffic towards the Newcastle goal continued.

Nunez's night ended in frustration as another golden chance came and went with his final touch as he headed wide. Klopp sent on Diogo Jota and Gakpo and they delivered what Nunez could not in front of goal. Jota teed up Jones for a tap in before Gakpo's scuffed finish from Salah's cross wrong-footed Dubravka.

Botman's header briefly brought Newcastle back within one goal. But any hope of a remarkable fightback was extinguished in controversial fashion as Jota won a second penalty despite a delayed reaction to contact from Dubravka. Klopp could not watch on the touchline, but this time his talisman did not disappoint to ensure the start to 2024 was a very happy new year for Liverpool. — AFP



Rafael Nadal

Nadal roars back with 'emotional' win over Thiem

BRISBANE: Rafael Nadal won his first match back from a year-long injury layoff when he defeated former US Open champion Dominic Thiem at the Brisbane International on Tuesday, calling it an "emotional and important day".

The 22-time Grand Slam winner looked in superb touch with a clinical 7-5, 6-1 victory over the Austrian in front of a full house at Pat Rafter Arena. The 37-year-old Spaniard has not played singles since a second-round loss at the Australian Open last year, undergoing two rounds of hip surgery.

"Today, honestly, is an emotional and important day for me after probably one of the toughest years of my tennis career, without a doubt," he said. "To have the chance to come back after a year and play in front of an amazing crowd, and play I think at a very positive level for the first day is something that makes us feel proud."

"For myself, all the team and my family who have been there every single day during the last year." The long layoff raised fears that his career could be over, but Nadal said this week he was always determined to make it back for the 2024 season.

He conceded before the match there was "a high percentage" that it would be his last season, but left the door open to play on should his body hold up. "I missed being healthy, I missed feeling competitive and to play in front of full crowds like this," he added courtside after beating Thiem in 89 minutes.

"Crowds in Australia all my career have been an amazing support for me. I can't thank everyone enough." Nadal spent time at his academy in Kuwait to prepare for the Australian summer and trained there with fast-rising French teen Arthur Fils.

He looked like he had never been away as he lost only six points on serve throughout the match and made few unforced errors in an almost perfect display against a quality opponent. Former world number three Thiem, who has had injury concerns of his own, came through qualifying to make the main draw and matched Nadal throughout the first set. — AFP

Serbia squeeze into quarters

PERTH: Novak Djokovic led Serbia into the quarter-finals of the United Cup on Tuesday despite struggling with a sore right wrist which required on-court treatment. The world number one dropped a set in grinding past the Czech Republic's Jiri Lehecka 6-1, 6-7 (3/7), 6-1 and required several visits from the trainer. He did not take part in the deciding mixed doubles, instead watching from the team bench as Olga Danilovic and Hamad Medjedovic defeated Czech pair Miriam Kolodziejova and Petr Nouza 4-6, 7-6 (7/2), 10-8. It put Serbia into a last-eight clash with Australia on Wednesday. The result means that defending champions the United States are out, with one more day of play in Perth to go before the event shifts to its weekend finish in Sydney.

"I managed to play through the wrist problem," 24-time Grand Slam champion Djokovic said of his wrist issue, which comes barely a week ahead of the Australian Open. "It's not the first nor the last time," he said. "These things happen. I have to manage it and find a solution." "I finished the match, now we'll see what happens." Czech Wimbledon winner Marketa Vondrousova started the tie by defeating Danilovic 6-1, 3-6, 6-3, handing Djokovic a comeback assignment as he took on Lehecka to take it to the deciding doubles.

"It was amazing, I didn't have luck in singles but thank god we have Novak with us," Danilovic said after sending Serbia through. "Hamad and I came back, we fought so hard, I'm happy to get the win and go into the quarter-finals." The 113th-ranked Medjedovic added: "I know how tired Olga was, she gave everything she could, and did it for us." Poland will face Chi-



PERTH: Serbia's Novak Djokovic serves during their men's singles match at the United Cup tennis tournament in Perth. — AFP

na in the other Perth quarter-final on Wednesday.

Tsitsipas fitness worry

In Sydney, Australian Open contender Stefanos Tsitsipas also struggled with an injury, to the lower back. The Greek world number six was expected to meet Chilean number one Nicolas Jarry, but sat it out, leaving teammate Stefanos Sakellaridis to step up.

Sakellaridis, just 19 years old and ranked 416, put up an outstanding fight against the 19th-ranked Jarry, but fell short 6-3, 3-6, 7-5. Greek world number eight Maria Sakkari had earlier earned a commanding 6-0, 6-1 victory over Chile's outclassed Daniela Seguel.

Tsitsipas returned for the crucial mixed doubles de-

vider with Sakkari, but they lost 6-7 (5/7), 6-3, 10-6 to Seguel and Marcelo Tomas Barrios Vera. "It's amazing, amazing," Barrios Vera said. "It's our second match as a team, so we're super happy."

Tsitsipas, who reached the Australian Open final last year, losing to Djokovic, was clearly struggling to serve late in the match, grimacing as he held his back. While watching Sakkari's singles, he told the host broadcaster "there are a few chances I might not play and there are a few chances that I might" against Chile.

"I'm kinda 50-50 so far. We'll wait and see." A six-time Grand Slam semi-finalist, Tsitsipas has 10 ATP Tour titles to his name, but is still searching for a first major win. — AFP