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Sheikh Dr Mohammad named as new premier

MPs hail appointment • Parliament to hold session on Tuesday



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



PM-designate Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Thursday named former foreign minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah as the new prime minister and asked him to form the new Cabinet. The Harvard-educated Sheikh Dr Mohammad replaces former prime minister HH Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah. Sheikh Dr Mohammad, 68, is the son of former Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, who ruled the country between 1965 and 1976. The new prime minister received his doctorate in economics from Harvard University. He returned to Kuwait and worked as a professor at Kuwait University and at Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research. In the early 1990s, he was appointed as Kuwait's ambassador to the United States.

In 2001, he was given his first ministerial post as minister of state for foreign affairs and two years later became a full foreign minister. In Oct 2011, he resigned from the government and remained outside politics for the last 12 years. Sheikh Dr Mohammad has no time limit to form his Cabinet. After the announcement, National Assembly Speaker Ahmad Al-Saadoun sent an invitation for a parliament session to be held on Tuesday, Jan 9. Lawmakers hailed the naming of Sheikh Dr Mohammad as the new premier and called on him to focus on development plans and establish good relations with the National Assembly. MIP Marzouq Al-Ghanem congratulated the new premier and called on him to adopt HH the Amir's address on Dec 20 as a roadmap to appoint ministers in his Cabinet.

MIP Osama Al-Shaheen also welcomed Sheikh Dr Mohammad's appointment, saying the Kuwaiti people are optimistic and are looking forward for cooperation to serve the country. MIP Mohannad Al-Sayer called on the new premier to meet the appointment with a strong line-up for the Cabinet to be able to serve the Kuwaiti people in the best way. MIP Majed Al-Mutairi expressed hope that the new premier will build on the previous understanding between the government and Assembly.

"His anti-corruption stance at a delicate time in Kuwait's history back in 2011 earned him the high respect of Kuwaitis," said Badr Al-Saif, a Kuwait University political analyst. According to Kuwaiti analyst Ayed Al-Mannaa, the new prime minister has "the diplomatic experience and academic qualifications necessary to implement the reforms envisaged" by HH the Amir. "We need... a government made up of competent people and statesmen who are not scared of being questioned by the parliament," he said.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Skill tests required for expats

KUWAIT: Expatriates will be required to pass skill tests in order to obtain work permits to work in Kuwait, according to a new decision announced by the Public Authority for Manpower on Wednesday. The new requirement will be gradually be rolled out for specific professions, starting with the contracting sector, the authority announced, adding that the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training has prepared a memorandum of understanding in this regard to be signed next week. The decision aims to improve the quality of technical manpower in Kuwait as part of efforts to develop the labor market, the authority noted.

Kuwait rejects Zionists' remarks

KUWAIT: Kuwait categorically rejects and denounces remarks of Zionist occupation officials on the forced displacement of Gazans, the foreign ministry said on Thursday. The ministry reiterated its warning of the Zionist occupation's intentions of evicting Palestinians, specifically Gazans, from their homeland, reaffirming that these remarks violate international laws and UN resolutions. It also reaffirmed Kuwait's supportive stance of the Palestinian people's legitimate rights in establishing an independent state with East Jerusalem as its capital. — KUNA

Kuwaitis in Lebanon cautioned

KUWAIT: Kuwait's foreign ministry urged citizens in Lebanon to exercise caution or leave willingly to avoid any potential military escalation in the area due to the continuous Zionist aggression on Gaza. In a statement, the ministry asked citizens to adhere to instructions of the Lebanese authorities in case of emergency and to contact the Kuwaiti Embassy in Beirut should they need any assistance on the following number: 0096171171441. — KUNA

Zionists pound Gaza as Mideast tensions rise

GAZA: Zionist bombing killed dozens of people in besieged Gaza, the health ministry of the Hamas-run Palestinian territory said Thursday, as regional tensions have surged over the almost three-months-old war. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken was due to head to the Middle East, a US official said on condition of anonymity, the top diplomat's fourth trip to the region since Oct 7.

The Zionist military, in its campaign to destroy the Islamist group, has reported more strikes in and around Gaza City, now a largely devastated urban combat zone, and Khan Yunis, the biggest city in the territory's south. The Gaza health ministry reported "dozens of martyrs and more than 100 wounded in the continued barbaric aerial and artillery bombardment of citizens' homes in the Gaza Strip".

Fires sparked by bombing raged in Gaza's central Deir al-Balah area and the Al-Maghazi refugee camp. "People were safe in their homes, the house was full of children," resident Ibrahim Al-Ghimri told AFP. "There were around 30 people. All of a sudden their houses fell on them... What have these children done?"

Tensions have also surged with the Zionist entity's northern neighbor Lebanon, where a strike in Beirut, widely assumed to have been carried out by the Zionist entity, killed Hamas deputy leader Saleh Al-Aruri, who was being buried Thursday, mourned

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GAZA: A young relative mourns over the bodies of the Salah and Abu Hatab families, killed when the tent where they were sheltering was hit by Zionist bombardment, at the morgue of the Nasser medical centre in Khan Yunis on Jan 4, 2024. — AFP

US backs Zionist entity, sees no genocide in Gaza

WASHINGTON: The United States on Wednesday criticized South Africa for bringing a genocide case against the Zionist entity before the UN's top court, rejecting accusations against its ally over the war in Gaza. The International Court of Justice in The Hague will next week hold hearings on a filing

by South Africa that alleges "genocidal acts against the people in Gaza" and seeks to order the Zionist entity to end the military operation.

"This submission is meritless, counterproductive and completely without any basis in fact whatsoever," White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby told a briefing. State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said separately that from a US assessment, "We have not at this point seen acts that constitute genocide." "Genocide is, of course, a heinous atrocity," Miller told reporters. "Those are allegations that should not be made lightly."

The Zionist entity has angrily rejected the accusation by South Africa, with the foreign ministry calling

it "blood libel", a reference to ancient anti-Semitic conspiracies. South Africa has often criticized the Zionist entity and alleged parallels to its own history of apartheid. In The Hague application, South Africa says that the Zionist entity has been acting "with the requisite specific intent... to destroy Palestinians in Gaza as part of the broader Palestinian national, racial and ethnical group."

US relations with South Africa have already been shaken over Pretoria's refusal to join Western pressure on Russia over its invasion of Ukraine. The US ambassador publicly accused South Africa last year of sending a ship of weapons to Russia, claims walked back by the State Department. — AFP

Imam shot dead outside US mosque

NEW YORK: An imam who was shot Wednesday outside a mosque in New Jersey has died, the US state's attorney general said, adding that the killing did not initially appear to be driven by "bias" or domestic terrorism. Hassan Sharif was shot multiple times near a mosque in Newark,

just west of New York, before being taken to hospital where he later died, New Jersey Attorney General Matt Platkin said.

"We do not yet know the motivation for this crime (but) the evidence collected thus far does not indicate that this was an act motivated by bias, or an act of domestic terrorism," said Platkin. He added that "in light of global events, and with a rise in bias that many communities are experiencing across our state — particularly the Muslim community — there are many in New Jersey right now who are feeling a heightened sense of fear." The state is home to 300,000 Muslim Americans, he said. Since the outbreak

of the Zionist-Hamas war, there has been an increase in Islamophobic and anti-Semitic attacks across the United States. The Essex County prosecutor, Ted Stephens, confirmed Sharif was shot more than once, and that "it does not appear the imam was the victim of a bias crime or that this is related to terrorism." "We are dedicated to bringing justice for the imam's family," said Stephens, who called it a "dastardly crime."

The United States Transportation Security Administration (TSA) earlier confirmed that Sharif had worked as a security screener at Newark airport since 2016. "We are deeply saddened to learn of his

passing and send our condolences to his family, friends and colleagues," said Lisa Farbstein, a TSA spokeswoman.

Images published by the New Jersey chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) showed police vehicles deployed outside the Masjid Muhammad-Newark, a two-story yellow and green complex. In a statement, CAIR described Sharif as "a beacon of leadership and excellence." "As always, and irrespective of this specific incident, we advise all mosques to keep their doors open but remain cautious especially given the recent spike in anti-Muslim bigotry," the organization said. — AFP



Local

Burgeoning wave of active young volunteers in Kuwait

Youths channeling their efforts in developing the community

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Volunteering plays a pivotal role in shaping lives by enhancing and developing individual capabilities. It extends beyond being a noble humanitarian act — serving as a fundamental pillar for building a robust and cohesive society. Through volunteering, individuals contribute their time, skills and efforts to various causes, fostering a sense of community and shared responsibility.

In Kuwait, a burgeoning wave of young volunteers is actively contributing to community betterment through their enthusiastic participation in various events. Thousands of energetic individuals are channeling their efforts to uplift and develop the community. Whether it is organizing charitable initiatives, environmental projects or educational endeavors, these young volunteers play a crucial role in addressing societal needs.

Farah Binjasim, 23, told Kuwait Times she started volunteering when she was 16. "I first volunteered when I was 16 years old; my mother took me to be a part of a cleaning campaign at Sulaibikhat Bay. When I saw how everyone was eagerly cleaning to make the place suitable for people and animals, I was attracted to such selfless behavior. Now I'm a part of a society called 'For Kuwait', gathering dozens of volunteers among citizens and residents to serve Kuwait," she said.

Meanwhile, Dima Abdeen, 29, actively volunteers during Ramadan, saying she and her sisters are spiritually involved in many campaigns during the holy

month. "Our humanitarian campaign includes distributing food supplies during the holy month of Ramadan to needy people. Sometimes we get together and participate in charities abroad to help refugees and poor people in neighboring countries," she said. Abdeen revealed that her love for volunteerism arose when she was a university student, where they used to participate in trips to help orphans and restore dilapidated houses.

For his part, Faisal Essa, 21, affirmed that even one person can make a difference. "This selfless engagement fosters a sense of social responsibility, empathy and solidarity. Volunteers often develop a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives and challenges, promoting a more interconnected society. Additionally, the collective efforts of volunteers contribute to positive social change," he noted.

Essa is highly active in cleaning campaigns. He participates in beach and desert cleanups, pointing out that his love for the environment is the reason he volunteers his effort and time for a pollution-free life. He called on the government to establish deterrent laws that prevent everyone from polluting the environment that we live in.

On the other hand, volunteering in election campaigns contributes to enhancing political awareness and civic participation, according to Ali Redha, 22, who confirmed that through volunteer work within political parties, young people have the opportunity to learn about the political scene in Kuwait and participate directly in the political process.

"This interaction helps create a generation that is



aware and actively involved in the political life of the country. During my participation in volunteer electoral campaigns, I helped in organizing and assisting special needs voters. The experience was huge. Feel-

ing proud of how much work you can accomplish is an indescribable feeling. I learned more when I was directly communicating with voters and officials — an experience to be repeated," he said.

Kuwait keen on playing leading role in UNHRC

KUWAIT: Kuwait is keen on leading an effective role during its membership in the UN Human Rights Council, said the country's top diplomat on Thursday. Being a member of this "significant" organization reflects the "illustrious" status that Kuwait enjoys, as well as the trust of the international community, said Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

His remarks came upon Kuwait starting its three-year membership (2024-2026) at the Geneva-based Council. It also reflects the confidence of Kuwait when it comes to serving Arab and Islamic causes in relation to human rights, nonetheless, on a global scale, he noted. This membership is yet another achievement throughout Kuwait's "balanced" foreign policy, Sheikh Salem said.

Last October, the UN General Assembly elected Kuwait, along with 14 other countries, to serve on the Human Rights Council. Kuwait, along with Albania, Brazil, Bulgaria, Burundi, China, Cote d'Ivoire, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, France, Ghana, Indonesia, Japan, Malawi and the Netherlands, were elected to serve for three years, beginning January 1, 2024. The Human Rights Council, the UN's premier rights body, is tasked with the responsibility to uphold and advance fundamental freedoms globally. It was created in 2006 and consists of 47 member states, elected via secret ballot by the majority of General Assembly members. — KUNA



Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah

Institutional reform, transparency 'key' to sustainable economy

KUWAIT: Chief Economist of the Arab Planning Institute, Dr Belkacem Al-Abbas, emphasized that the key to establishing a sustainable Arab economy lies in reforming government institutions and enhancing their transparency. He asserted that development in Arab countries is unattainable without instituting significant reforms. Dr Abbas delivered these remarks during a seminar organized by the Arab Planning Institute on Thursday titled "Arab Development and the Necessities of Institutional Reform," coinciding with the ongoing meetings of the institute's board of trustees in Kuwait.

Dr Abbas highlighted the substantial disparity between the effectiveness of government institutions in developing countries, particularly in the Arab region, and their counterparts in developed industrial nations. He stressed that economic development and market flexibility cannot be achieved without addressing the administrative inefficiencies and lack of transparency prevalent in these institutions.

The economist noted that a vast majority of countries worldwide struggle to achieve sustainable growth, with two-thirds of global income concentrated in developed nations, representing only 15 percent of the world's population. This imbalance in the global economy, according to World Bank data, underscores the urgency for reform.

Dr Abbas pointed out that 3.1 billion people, constituting nearly half of the world's population, reside in countries with well-performing institutions, contributing to a global income of around \$60 trillion. In contrast, the remaining \$40 trillion is distributed among the rest of the world's population, indicating a persistent gap between developed and developing nations.

The chief economist attributed this divide to the flexibility and transparency of government institutions in developed countries, which have clear goals and streamlined procedures, as opposed to developing nations, including many Arab countries grap-

'Toxicity' in gaming In the Middle East

By Nada Al-Hamazi

KUWAIT: Video games are not a recent trend; they have been around for decades. They are a source of entertainment, relaxation, and even the occasional lighthearted competition between friends. However, video games, like most things, have been affected drastically by the introduction of the internet; it offered the chance to play online with friends and strangers and meet all kinds of people. Online gaming, specifically Player Versus Player games, slowly took a turn for the worse as it became a highly competitive and even toxic environment that is unsafe for the casual player base.

Kuwait Times interviewed several people who played in the Middle Eastern region and asked them about their experiences: Nora, shared her opinion with Kuwait Times, saying she was glad for the addition of Middle Eastern servers as they made her game run smoother, but she found that the difference in communication between players of her region and other regions to be severe. People would only chat to share rude remarks. She discovered that there is a lack of sportsmanship as most players take losses to heart.

Meanwhile, Ahmed explained that racism in the Middle Eastern region is not punished as heavily as it is in other regions. He said that some players would type in racial slurs to get back at the other players, and "They do it to seem edgy", but because they would type these Arabic slurs in English letters, these words would get past the in-game filtering system that would result in them getting a ban.

Despite being good at the games she plays, Sha-



KUWAIT: Kuwaitis look at gold jewelry displayed at a shop in downtown Kuwait City. The key to establishing a sustainable Arab economy lies in reforming government institutions and enhancing their transparency, Chief Economist of the Arab Planning Institute, Dr Belkacem Al-Abbas said. — Yasser Al-Zayyat

pling with slow decision-making processes due to administrative laxity and corruption.

He emphasized that countries initiating institutional reforms are experiencing positive outcomes, such as political stability, economic prosperity, and the expansion of the middle class—a crucial factor in national development. Dr Abbas contended that poor institutional performance is the "root of economic and developmental underdevelopment in the world," citing experts like the American economist Dani Rodrik, who believes that institutional reform is a more potent driver of growth than explanations like free trade and geographical factors.

Dr Abbas underscored that governance, law enforcement, and anti-corruption efforts within institutions have a direct and swift impact on GNP income, economic quality, financial and social stability, and overall national progress. He urged de-

veloping countries, particularly those in the Arab world, to conduct comprehensive evaluations of their institutions, making them more flexible and effective to align with the demands of the global economy. He emphasized that Arab nations possess the necessary human resources, wealth, and intellectual capital to be economically attractive but stressed the urgency of initiating reforms, stating, "The world will not wait for us."

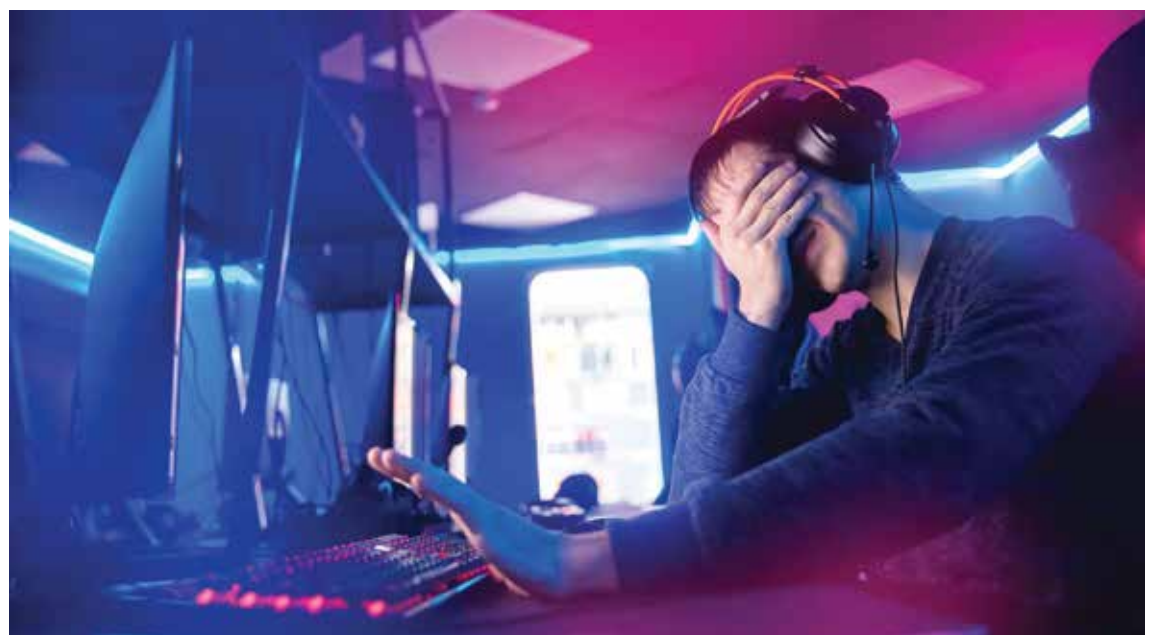
The Arab Planning Institute, established in 1980, is dedicated to supporting economic and social development in Arab countries through various means, including building local capacities, research, advisory services, institutional support, development meetings, and publications. The institute comprises a diverse group of Arab experts and scientists contributing to the development of plans and comprehensive research studies on the Arab economy. — KUNA

Kuwait seeks, supports peaceful, stable Libya

TROPOLI: The Kuwait ambassador to Libya, Ziad Al-Mashaan, confirmed on Thursday Kuwait's position and efforts aimed at enhancing stability, security, and peace in Libya. This came in a statement made by Ambassador Al-Mashaan to the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) after participating in a meeting held by the head of the Libyan national unity government, Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh, with a number of ambassadors of Arab and Islamic countries in Libya.

Ambassador Al-Mashaan said that during the meeting, he confirmed the position of Kuwait in support of all efforts aimed at strengthening stability, security, and peace in Libya, pointing to the visit he made on the instructions of Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to the flood-stricken city last September to see the extent of the destruction that occurred in the city and to confirm Kuwait's humanitarian stand.

He added that Dbeibeh stressed, during the meeting, Libya's pride in the close relationship it has with Kuwait and his government's efforts to strengthen it at all levels. Ambassador Al-Mashaan conveyed his congratulations to Amir His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, wishing His Highness all the best. Dbeibeh expressed his sincere condolences for the death of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, recalling his noble qualities. — KUNA



had claims that her experience playing online games is very bad, mainly as a woman. She has faced sexism when speaking in voice chat on multiple occasions; she claimed that people would resort to sexist remarks and stereotypes if she made an in-game call-out. She also shared that she feels obligated to consistently perform at her best in fear of enforcing the unfounded stereotype that women are bad at video games.

James, who has played games with his Middle Eastern friends on their server, said that the experience "wasn't great"—players were "very racist and angry for no real reason." He also claimed that the friendliness from other servers doesn't carry over. People would use anonymity over the internet to abuse toxic traits without repercussion.

When asked about combating this toxicity, most

interviewees agreed that it could efficiently be dealt with by implementing hardware bans and better filters that could detect the Arabic language and the Arabic words written in English letters. Many also wished that the in-game report system would work properly so that other people's experiences would not be affected as theirs have been.

To summarize, whether they are losing or winning a game, these toxic players in the Middle East would resort to racism, sexism, and hate speech, using slurs, baseless stereotypes, and the usual vulgarity to alienate other players and drive them away from gaming. They are getting away with this bigotry more than players from different regions because the in-game systems that work to filter out this behavior and language do not work in the Arabic language.

Local

Expats, employers welcome Kuwait's new part-time rules

New rule will save costs for employers, add extra cash for expats

By Ghadeer Ghloom & Chidi Emmanuel

KUWAIT: In a bid to regulate the private sector and correct the population imbalance, First Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Sabah issued a decree allowing private sector workers to take up part-time jobs in addition to their official jobs. The decree, which went into effect this month, proposes a maximum of four hours per day for the second job, with permission from the employer and an additional permit from the Public Authority of Manpower (PAM).

The new rule is aimed at making use of the manpower already available in Kuwait instead of recruiting more workers from abroad, thus addressing the demographic imbalance in the country and at the same time meeting the needs of the job market. Reacting to the new rule, Fawaz Ajmi, a Kuwaiti businessman, welcomed it as the right step in the right direction. "This is a good step. It will reduce the burden and the bureaucratic process of hiring more workers. We can employ the workers already in the country. It will save costs for employers and add extra cash for Kuwait's expats," Ajmi said.

The new rule also allows employers to permit employees to work online in jobs that can be done remotely without the need to report to the workplace in accordance with the regulations set to safeguard the rights of employers. "This is a significant move that is set to reshape the lives and opportunities of expats in Kuwait. This new decision opens new avenues for personal growth, financial stability and a thriving work-life balance," Ibrahim Ali, an expatriate engineer in Kuwait, told Kuwait Times.

Ali expressed a positive attitude towards the part-time rules, as he sees it as an opportunity for higher income for those who have the ability and passion, especially for recent graduates who are trying to build their finances and make their way in life. He also explained the situation before the rule. "I graduated as an engineer from a university in Lebanon and came to work in Kuwait, where my parents are residing. I turned to the private sector, as it is the first choice for expatriates in Kuwait. But unfortunately, the salary was not satisfactory and



KUWAIT: (File photo) Two workers conduct a high wire job as they connect the power lines on a high voltage transmission tower on the outskirts of Kuwait City. — AFP



greatly belied my expectations. Despite my university degree and special major, I only received a salary of KD 350, especially when the cost of living is so high," he said.

Ali elaborated on the bright side that this permission brings to fresh employees. "Such a law may be

a source of higher income and a better standard of living, as it serves as a solution to low salaries, in addition to being an additional source of income, which is very important in our current time, where no one should rely on a single source of income," he said.

Olivia George, a single mother and expatriate working as a teacher in Kuwait, said: "To be honest, I don't have a set plan for what I will do as a part-time job yet, but I will definitely search for something to do. This is a great step and supports the livelihood of expatriates in Kuwait. I am a single mother of two, and I work hard to provide them with a decent living. I have always wished that my salary would be higher, but I am grateful for this option as it at least serves as a beacon of hope for those who are struggling."

Recently, Kuwait toughened measures against companies that hire workers who are not under their sponsorship and expatriates who are work-



KUWAIT: Construction workers assemble steel meshes at the site of a tower under construction in the downtown district of Kuwait City in this file photo. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

ing outside in violation of the residency law. The measures range from huge fines to deportation of the expat workers. Foreigners make up around 3.2 million of Kuwait's overall population of 4.6 million. "The new rule will ease the pain and frustration. It is a win-win for both the employers and the employees. We thank the government for such a wonderful initiative," Adnan Mohammed, a Kuwaiti entrepreneur, told Kuwait Times.

The impact of social media on the society

By Mariam Al-Ayyoub

KUWAIT: In the vibrant tapestry of Kuwaiti society, the advent of social media has woven intricate patterns that significantly influence perceptions, expectations and values, especially among the younger generation. As the digital landscape evolves, it becomes imperative to scrutinize the profound impact of social media on critical aspects such as body image, financial expectations and the overall well-being of Kuwaiti youth.

In a world where visual content dominates social media platforms, the quest for the ideal body has taken center stage, influencing the psyche of Kuwaiti youth. Platforms like Instagram, with its visually-driven nature, often propagate narrow standards of beauty. The pervasive culture of filtered images and curated perfection sets unrealistic benchmarks, contributing to a distorted perception of body image among Kuwaiti youth. The consequences of this phenomenon are not merely skin-deep. A growing body of research suggests a direct correlation between exposure to idealized body images on social media and heightened body dissatisfaction among adolescents.

Beyond the realm of physical appearance, social media plays a pivotal role in shaping financial expectations in Kuwaiti society. The rise of influencers showcasing opulent lifestyles, luxury possessions and glamorous experiences can foster a culture of materialism and unattainable wealth. Kuwaiti youth, impressionable and ambitious, may find themselves caught in the tide of aspiring to match the lifestyle portrayed on their screens. Influencer marketing, a burgeoning industry on social media platforms, further exacerbates financial aspirations.

As Kuwaiti children and teenagers immerse themselves in the digital realm, the expectations placed upon them by social media become significant determinants of their well-being. The pressure to conform to idealized standards, whether in terms of appearance or financial success, can lead to heightened stress levels and mental health challenges among Kuwaiti youth. Parents, too, grapple with the responsibility of managing their children's exposure to so-



cial media, attempting to strike a balance between the benefits of connectivity and the potential pitfalls of unrealistic expectations.

Real-life stories offer poignant illustrations of the impact of social media on Kuwaiti society. Take, for instance, the tale of a Kuwaiti teenager whose journey for self-acceptance was impeded by the relentless pursuit of an unattainable beauty standard perpetuated on social media. Similarly, the experiences of families navigating financial pressures due to the influence of digital expectations provide compelling insights into the challenges faced by Kuwaiti society.

While acknowledging the potential drawbacks, it is essential to recognize the positive aspects of social media. The platforms serve as conduits for connection, empowerment and educational opportunities. The democratization of information and the ability to amplify diverse voices contribute positively to Kuwaiti society. Therefore, fostering a nuanced understanding of the role of social media is crucial.

He called for focusing on the preventive system to address the roots of extremism and the conditions leading to the spread of terrorism. Kuman called for Arab initiatives in this context and strategies, plans, and programs to build an Arab society capable of dealing with the repercussions of extremism and to dry up the sources of terrorism.

He stressed that the Council of Arab Interior Ministers has already adopted the Arab Strategy to Combat Terrorism in its executive plan by strengthening joint Arab security cooperation in accordance with strategies, specialized task forces, and databases, in addition to including the topics of extremism and terrorism on the list of priorities at conferences, events, and activities held in the general secretariat of the council.

He added that raising awareness of the dangers of extremism and terrorism requires the participation of all actors, including government agencies and non-governmental institutions such as families, schools, media, religious institutions, civil society organizations, and others, in order to spread sound moral values and the principles of coexistence and tolerance. — KUNA

Arab ministers seek comprehensive system to counter terrorism

TUNIS: The secretary-general of the Council of Arab Interior Ministers, Dr Mohammad Bin Ali Kuman, called on Thursday for the development of a preventive system based on strengthening security cooperation between Arab countries to address extremism and terrorism in the Arab region and their roots. This was stated in his message on the occasion of the Arab week to raise awareness of the dangers of extremism and terrorism, which falls on the first week of January every year.

He warned that terrorism has become one of the most prominent challenges facing the stability of states and peoples, threatens international peace and security, transcends borders, cultures, and religions, and requires a comprehensive and integrated response that depends on the concerted efforts of all relevant parties at national, regional, and international levels.

Center performs 140 transplants, rare operations

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Ministry of Health (MoH) said that the kidney transplant program at the Hamed Al Essa Center for Organ Transplantation has recorded a high number of cases. The center conducted 140 kidney transplants during the year 2023. The director of the Center, the official spokesman of the Ministry, Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad, said in a press statement that among these cases, new operations are being performed for the first time in Kuwait; the most prominent was the case of a pancreas transplant with kidneys.

He added that the center also performed other serious operations, including a pancreas transplant after a kidney transplant, a kidney transplant with urinary tract restoration, the formation of a new bladder from the intestine, and ureter transplantation, in addition to five cases of nephrectomy and new kidney transplantation. He stressed that all the previous cases were successful, expressing thanks to the teams working at the center. He also appreciated the role and efforts of the Kuwaiti society for organ transplantation.

In another development, the Ministry of Health announced on Thursday the completion of the new buildings as part of the Adan Hospital expansion project. The building consists of nine buildings. The director of the Health Communication Center and the official spokesman of the Ministry, Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad, said in a press statement that the delivery of buildings will be at different stages according to a schedule.

Al-Sanad explained that the building project includes the maternity, which contains 637 beds; the general and specialized surgery building; the physiotherapy and rehabilitation building; the building for physical therapy; as well as the health zone administration building and its parking lot. He added that the project will also include a building intended for the strategic storage of medicines with an area of about 12,000 square meters, the engineering affairs building, power generators, the medical gases building, and another separate parking lot. — KUNA

Drug suspect freed; Court jails bedoon for forgery

KUWAIT: Kuwait's criminal court has released a 22-year-old female citizen in a drug abuse case. The court, headed by Judge Dr Khaled Al-Omairah, told the defendant, "You are the daughter of a decent family. Live a decent life and don't ruin your life or that of your family." In another development, a criminal court headed by Judge Ahmed Al-Saddi sentenced a bedoon to three years in prison with labor for falsifying a ruling that was issued in 1972, obliging the Interior Ministry to issue a nationality certificate.

The accused tried to implement the judgment issued 'in an executive form' by going to the Department of Nationality and Passports. He demanded the implementation of the judgment issued in favor of his deceased father, and upon checking the judgment,



detectives found out that the judgment number does not exist and that the document was forged. He was referred to the Public Prosecution, which later investigated and charged him.



GAZA: Palestinian children walk in puddles on a muddy path at a makeshift camp housing displaced Palestinians, in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip, amid the ongoing conflict. — AFP

GCC rejects Zionist ministers remarks

RIYADH: Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Jassim Al-Budaiwi on Thursday voiced vehement rejection and condemnation of Zionist occupation ministers' remarks on the forced displacement of Gazans. In a press statement, Al-Budaiwi indicated that these remarks reflect the Zionist occupation's false and hostile intentions towards the Middle East peace process, calling it a threat to the stability of the region and a dangerous escalation causing mounting tensions.

He further stressed the necessity that the international community engage in collective action to find a fair and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian cause and put an end to these irresponsible, provocative statements. The GCC chief asserted his steady, unwavering support for the Palestinian people and their right to an independent, sovereign state with East Jerusalem as its capital.

In another development, the Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) condemned the "terrorist" twin bombings in the city of Kerman in southern Iran, which resulted in hundreds of dead and injured civilians. In a press release, Al-Budaiwi affirmed the GCC's firm position in rejecting all forms of violence, extremism, and terrorism that aim at disrupting security and stability.

He added that such attacks are inconsistent with human values and principles, while expressing his sincere condolences and solace to the Iranian government and people, as well as the victims' families. Some 84 people were killed and 284 others injured in twin explosions that hit Iran's southern city of Kerman on Wednesday, according to Iranian media reports. — KUNA

Photo of the day



KUWAIT: A picture shows the National Assembly (Parliament) building in Kuwait City. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

NBK calls for protecting seniors from fraud with help of young generations

Bank pursues its advocacy of the 'Let's Be Aware' campaign'

KUWAIT: Within its active contribution to promote financial awareness and inclusion among the different segments of society, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) continues to advocate the "Let's Be Aware" campaign introduced by the Central Bank of Kuwait, in cooperation with local banks and Kuwait Banking Association (KBA).

NBK intensifies awareness by sharing educational content including posts, news and video clips on all its social media platforms and other digital channels, as well as reposting "Let's Be Aware" campaign and related CBK's communications, aiming to raise awareness among all segments of society and familiarizing them with the various fraudulent schemes and how to steer clear of these attempts.

In this regard, NBK calls on the younger generations to protect seniors from electronic fraud, since scammers often target retirees and seniors as they might be less familiar with current hacking and scamming trends. This includes pretending they are calling to reactivate customers' blocked cards, or to offer lucrative prizes and returns through fake ads, cloning the bank's IVR, impersonating government

officers or any other fraudulent tricks to steal banking information.

Therefore, NBK calls on the younger generations from family members and relatives to inform seniors about these new tricks and how to protect themselves from fraud effectively and do not provide any banking information to anyone as well as to follow the security tips shared by the bank on all its digital channels.

NBK also reaffirms that it will never ask customers for personal information via e-mail, phone calls or SMS, warning them of responding to such scamming messages aiming to obtain their banking information to steal their money or information. 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 urges customers to adhere to the general security tips and instructions to steer clear of electronic fraud, reminding them to always change bank card PINs and never share it with anyone pretending to be calling from the bank. In this context, the bank utilizes its tremendous ca-

الحملة التوعوية المصرفية



capabilities in communicating with customers as well as all its digital channels, which are the most popular among all Kuwaiti banks, to support the Central Bank's endeavors to protect customers and the economy.

NBK is a key advocate and participant in all CBK's campaigns and initiatives aiming to increase financial and banking awareness among different segments of society. As the 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.



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Kuwait Red Crescent Society distributes food, daily meals, medical supplies, and ambulances to Palestinians in Gaza.

Kuwait Red Crescent Society continues to support Palestinians

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) confirmed on Thursday that it will continue to receive donations to support Palestinians in Gaza through the society's website and at its headquarters in the Shuwaikh area. The president of the association, Dr. Hilal Al-Sayer, told the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that the Kuwait Red Crescent campaign continues to support the brothers in Gaza and alleviate the crisis there, especially during the winter, difficult climatic conditions, and the increase in the number of displaced and injured in the Gaza Strip.

Al-Sayer added that the association seeks to provide medical supplies for the treatment of the wounded, especially children, pointing out that the

association has taken the initiative since the beginning of the Zionist aggression. KRCS is distributing food, daily meals, medical supplies, and ambulances in cooperation with local and international partners.

Kuwait will continue to support humanitarian work and will spare no effort in providing assistance to Palestinians, which reflects the image of the honorable country under the leadership of Amir His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. Kuwait is one of the countries that has introduced relief aid to provide medical supplies and food-stuffs to the people in Gaza since the beginning of the Zionist aggression on October 7. — KUNA



Dr Hilal Al-Sayer



Iran mourns 84 killed in blasts

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KYIV: Volunteers work to cover broken window glass with film in a high-rise building destroyed following a Russian missile attack in central Kyiv, on Jan 3, 2024. — AFP

Ukraine, Russia swap prisoners in 'biggest' exchange of war

Russia keeps border schools shut as deadly strikes hit Ukraine

KYIV: Russia's Belgorod region bordering Ukraine said Thursday it would keep schools closed beyond the planned end of the winter holidays following unprecedented shelling by Kyiv's forces, as Ukraine reported several killed in strikes across the country.

The Kremlin has tried to maintain a semblance of normalcy on the home front, but recent deadly strikes on Belgorod were a reminder that Russian civilians can also be impacted by the conflict. Twenty-five people were killed in a Ukrainian strike Saturday on the regional capital, also called Belgorod, Moscow said, the deadliest in Russia since the conflict began in February 2022.

"I report the decisions that have been made: to extend the school holidays from January 9 to 19," governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said, ordering the move in several districts including Belgorod city. Russian schools have been closed this week as the country celebrates Orthodox Christmas on January 7.

"In technical colleges and universities located in these municipalities, it is recommended to hold class remotely," he continued, adding that the holidays may be extended further. Belgorod city lies about 30 kilometers (19 miles) from the border and has been repeatedly struck by what Moscow says is indiscriminate shelling by Kyiv's forces. Russian President Vladimir Putin vowed to intensify strikes in response to Saturday's attack, with Moscow's forces targeting areas across Ukraine throughout the week.

Renewed strikes

Ukrainian officials reported Thursday that at least four people had been killed across Ukraine, after sev-

eral days of deadly attacks that claimed dozens of lives. Kyiv says the latest attacks underline the need for Western allies to speed up delivery of air defense equipment, combat drones and long-range missiles.

A strike in the central Kirovograd region, far from the front, killed one person at an industrial facility and injured eight others on Thursday, regional governor Andriy Raykovych said. In the southern Kherson region, Russia shelled the town of Stanislav on the shores of the Dnipro River, regional head Oleksandr Prokudin said on Telegram. "A 61-year-old local resident died. My condolences to the family," Prokudin said.

Shelling killed one person in the village of Katerynivka in Donetsk region, officials said Thursday, after another person in the same region was killed by shelling Wednesday. Faced with renewed aerial assaults by Moscow, Kyiv's mobile defense commander has said they have enough ammunition to withstand a few more powerful attacks but would soon need more deliveries.

'Biggest' swap of war

The strikes come a day after Ukraine and Russia said Wednesday they had exchanged over two hundred captive soldiers each, in what officials described as the biggest prisoner swap of the war so far. The warring sides have carried out dozens of exchanges since Moscow invaded in February 2022, but the process stalled in the latter half of last year.

In near simultaneous statements, Russia and Ukraine announced they had received over 200 soldiers each following talks me-



This handout photograph taken and released by Ukrainian Presidential Press Service on January 3, 2024, shows Ukrainian soldiers released during a prisoner of war exchange with Russia. — AFP photos

diated by the United Arab Emirates. "More than 200 of our soldiers and civilians have been returned from Russian captivity," Zelensky said on Telegram, posting a video of uniformed men celebrating.

Neither side had announced an exchange in almost five months, prompting Kyiv to accuse Moscow of deliberately blocking deals for political reasons. "There was a long pause in the exchanges, but there was no pause in the negotiations," Zelensky said in a later message, hailing the swap as "good news". Moscow's defense ministry said 248 of its servicemen had been returned, and that they were being provided with "medical and psychological assistance". — AFP

Stabbed S Korean opposition leader 'recovering well'

SEOUL: South Korean opposition party leader Lee Jae-myung, who was stabbed in the neck, is recovering well but still needs close monitoring to avoid complications, a Seoul National University Hospital doctor said Thursday.

Lee was surrounded by journalists in the southern port city of Busan on Tuesday when his assailant, pretending to be a supporter, pushed through the crowd and lunged at him, stabbing him on the left side of his neck with a knife.

A court in Busan issued an arrest warrant Thursday for the 66-year-old suspect, identified by his surname Kim, who was detained at the scene, the Yonhap news agency reported. After the attack, Lee, who suffered a wound to his jugular vein, was first taken to a hospital in Busan, then flown to the capital Seoul where he underwent a nearly two-hour surgery.

Lee "is fortunately recovering well", said Min Seung-kee, the doctor who performed the surgery. Lee had suffered a "1.4 centimeter pierced wound that cut through his muscle", Min said at a press conference, adding that "bouts of bleeding were found" in his neck. The knife "cut about 60 percent of the internal jugular vein", the surgeon said. "But fortunately there were no signs of damage for artery, cerebral nerve, throat or airway."

While Lee is in recovery, close monitoring is still needed, Min said, as there could be complications from the wound. The briefing on Thursday, the first by the Seoul hospital since Lee's surgery, follows the party leader's transfer from the intensive care unit to the general ward on Wednesday.

Lee's Democratic Party has said he could have been killed if the assailant's knife had struck his artery, rather than his vein, calling it "pure fortune". Lee lost in 2022 to President Yoon Suk Yeol in the tightest presidential race in South Korea's history.

Flight risk

Seoul's Yonhap news agency reported that the Busan court had issued an arrest warrant against suspect Kim, citing "concerns" that he may flee. The prosecution had requested the arrest warrant on charges of attempted murder. The warrant allows authorities to continue to hold the suspect, who was overpowered and arrested at the scene.

Kim told journalists on Thursday that he had submitted an eight-page "statement of defense" to the police, and that the press should refer to the document for his reasons behind the attack. Police have not made the document public.

According to Yonhap, Kim had been working as a real estate agent in South Chungcheong province, around 115 kilometers (71 miles) south of Seoul. Citing delivery messages for registered mail from banks at his office, among other materials, Yonhap reported that Kim was facing financial difficulties and had been unable to pay rent for his office for seven months.

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. — AFP



RAFAH: A displaced Palestinian family takes shelter near an animal cage at the zoo in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip, on Jan 2, 2024. — AFP photos



Lions are seen in their cage at the zoo in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip, on Jan 2, 2024.

Refugees, animals starve in Gaza zoo

RAFAH: Hunger is everywhere at Rafah zoo, in Gaza's far south, as internally displaced Palestinians seek shelter from the war between cages and animals die of starvation. "The situation is very tragic, there's no food, water, medicine, or anything," its owner Ahmed Jumaa said, a parrot perched on his shoulder.

The World Health Organization has warned of the risk of famine and disease, with only a minimal amount of aid entering the Palestinian territory nearly three months into the Zionist attack on the besieged strip.

And with the Zionist entity's relentless bombardment driving ever more Gazans south to Ra-

fah, near the Egyptian border, Jumaa opened his doors to those in need. "The zoo was closed after the war, but we opened it to host displaced family and friends," Jumaa said.

The newcomers have set up makeshift tents between the cages and hung their colorful clothing on laundry lines in view of pacing lions and emaciated monkeys. As the adults cook whatever food they can find, children peer through the bars at the animals — many of whom are going hungry.

"Food is not available, and some animals have died," Jumaa said. "The lioness gave birth, but we couldn't provide food for it, so the cubs died," he added. "And the same thing happened with the monkeys and the birds."

The shortages have forced the zoo to get creative just to keep the animals alive. "Our last method was to bring them dry bread and wet it with water to get by," Jumaa said. "We also try to bring (them) something from here and there."

'Out of control'

The Zionist entity's relentless ground and air military campaign in Gaza has killed more than 23,000 people, mostly women and children, according to the territory's health ministry. The entity claims the bombardment is aimed at destroying Hamas after the Palestinian resistance group attacked southern Zionist communities and military bases on Oct 7. Around 1,140 people, mostly civilians, died in the attack and subsequent Zionist military operation aimed at regaining control of communities targeted by Hamas.

The United Nations says 85 percent of the population of the Gaza Strip has been displaced. "At the beginning of the war, we were able to manage, then it got out of control," Jumaa said. The war has led to a scarcity of meat and a steep rise in feed prices, from 70 shekels (\$19) to 400. Jumaa said the zoo is awaiting assistance from animal welfare organizations. For some of the animals, it may be their last hope. — AFP

International

Exiled opposition leader slams Bangladesh's election as 'sham'

Son of two-time premier Khaleda Zia says vote has 'predetermined' outcome

LONDON: Bangladesh's election on Sunday will be a "sham" designed to cement Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's rule, exiled opposition leader Tarique Rahman has told AFP in an exclusive interview defending his party's boycott.

Rahman is heir to one of the country's two main political dynasties — the other led by Hasina — and has helmed its largest opposition party since the 2018 jailing of his mother, two-time premier Khaleda Zia. Six years ago he was convicted in absentia of masterminding a deadly grenade attack on a campaign rally for Hasina — a charge he insists is fabricated — and sentenced to life imprisonment.

His party staged a months-long protest campaign last year demanding the prime minister's resignation that saw at least 11 people killed and thousands of its supporters arrested. In his first interview with a major international media outlet for several years, Rahman, 56, said it would be inappropriate to have his party participate in a vote with a "predetermined" outcome.

"Bangladesh is approaching another sham election," he told AFP by email from London, where he has lived since 2008. "Participating in an election under Hasina, against the aspirations of the Bangladeshi people, would undermine the sacrifices of those who fought, shed blood and gave their lives for democracy."

Rahman said the odds against his Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and dozens of other parties which joined the boycott had been overwhelmingly

stacked against them by the ruling Awami League. He accused it of fielding "dummy" opposition candidates aligned with the ruling party to give the election a patina of legitimacy. This would create "an impression of competition even though all results are predetermined", he said.

He also claimed the party was attempting to drive up turnout by threatening to withhold government benefits from those who did not vote for Awami League candidates. The United States, which sanctioned Bangladeshi security forces in 2021 over allegations of rights abuses, and other countries have also voiced their concerns about the conduct of this week's vote.

Hasina, in power since 2009, has repeatedly vowed that the election would be credible, after observers said previous polls won by her party in 2014 and 2018 were marred by irregularities. "Go to the polling stations and cast votes in the morning to show the world that we know how to hold the election in a free and fair manner," she told a Saturday campaign rally.

Twin dynasties

Rahman and Hasina's families have between them ruled the world's eighth-most populous nation for all but 12 years since 1971. Rahman's father, a former army chief, took the reins of the country after the assassination of Hasina's father, serving as president until his own assassination in 1981.

His mother Zia once teamed up with Hasina to restore democracy after a peri-

od of military rule, before the two became bitter adversaries as they competed for political power from the 1990s onward. Rahman has kept a low profile in London since leaving his country shortly before Hasina took power. He is rarely seen in public outside of weddings for prominent members of the Bangladeshi diaspora or events marking national holidays.

But with Zia jailed for corruption in 2018 and now confined to a Dhaka hospital in deteriorating health, Rahman has led the South Asian country's largest opposition party in her stead, speaking daily with cadres through video and phone conferences.

Last year the BNP mounted huge rallies, industrial strikes and road blockades that brought the capital to a standstill. The campaign demanded Hasina resign and appoint a neutral caretaker government to oversee the election, an earlier convention in Bangladeshi politics that her government had abolished.

One rally in October ended in bloodshed and the BNP said around 25,000 opposition activists had been arrested in the ensuing crackdown. The government puts the figure at 11,000. Hasina has accused Rahman of orchestrating violence that accompanied the protest campaign and raised the prospect of banning the BNP after the vote. "We will not allow him to give orders from London to harm and kill people," she said on Saturday.

'Brutal and blatant'

Rahman denied accusations that his



LONDON: Acting chairman of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), Tarique Rahman, poses for a portrait in a park in south-west London on Dec 30, 2023. — AFP

party was responsible for a spate of arson attacks during the protests, which he described as a pretext for the government's crackdown. But his own political career has long been under a cloud.

A leaked US embassy cable from 2008 calls him a "notorious and widely feared ... symbol of kleptocratic government" who had "flagrantly" demanded bribes in return for procurement decisions and political appointments.

He was frequently accused of corruption during his mother's last premiership and was convicted of graft while in exile.

He maintains his innocence. Rahman was also convicted while abroad of organizing a 2004 grenade attack on a political rally that injured Hasina and killed at least 20 others.

He insists the verdict was politically motivated and accused Hasina of rewarding the police officer who led the probe against him with a parliamentary nomination for this week's election. "I am being targeted in a brutal and blatant manner," he said. "Even after fifteen years of power, this regime has failed to produce (any) single genuine evidence." — AFP

Ode to father: Bangladesh's personality cult

NEW DELHI: Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina still grieves the assassination of her father — the country's founder — nearly 50 years ago, and her government ensures the nation grieves with her. Once sidelined from official history, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is now the subject of a personality cult that designates him "Father of the Nation".

Hasina has foregrounded his legacy in what critics say is an effort to entrench her ruling Awami League, which dominates national politics and is set to sweep elections Sunday following an opposition boycott. Her government has also enacted stiff punishments for any comments, written work or social media posts that could be construed as defaming his legacy.

"She has basically introduced a secular blasphemy law in the country for her father — the kind we see in one-party states," a senior human rights activist in Bangladesh told AFP, asking for anonymity out of fear of retribution.

Since his daughter returned to office in 2009, Mujib's visage has appeared on every banknote and in hundreds of public murals across the

South Asian nation of 170 million people. Dozens of roads and institutes of higher learning have been named after him, and Hasina's government changed the constitution to require that his portrait be hung in every school, government office and diplomatic mission.

At the center of this project of national commemoration is Hasina's childhood home in an upmarket neighborhood of the capital Dhaka. Now a museum, the residence is where her father, uncle and three brothers were gunned down by disgruntled army officers at the break of dawn in August 1975.

The walls are still pockmarked with bullet holes from that day, in rooms that otherwise faithfully preserve the books, smoking pipe and other artefacts of Mujib's life, with hundreds visiting daily to pay their respects. "I could see how he and his family were brutally murdered," student Abdur Rahim ibne Iftokhar, 21, told AFP inside. "It was heart-wrenching."

'Betrayal of the hopes'

Mujib was the key political figure during a period of growing agitation for independence from Pakistan, which had governed the territory now known as Bangladesh since the 1947 end of British colonial rule. He was imprisoned by Pakistan's military regime at the outset of a horrific 1971 war that liberated his country and killed as many as three million people — most of them

civilians in present-day Bangladesh.

Mujib was the first post-independence leader but the tumultuous years that followed saw Bangladesh struggle through the economic devastation imposed by the war, including a famine in which hundreds of thousands of people died. Towards the end of his life he abolished multi-party democracy and imposed media restrictions that shuttered all but four state-controlled newspapers. Hasina refers to his assassination in a 1975 military coup in almost every speech she gives, her voice often choking with emotion. It was "the betrayal of the hopes and aspirations of the people of the soil", she once wrote.

'Cannot be questioned'

In 2018, Hasina's government enacted a cybersecurity law that has been used to arrest numerous people accused of defaming Mujib's legacy. A city mayor from her party was arrested in 2021 for refusing to approve a mural of Mujib, because the traditions of some among Bangladesh's majority Muslim faith consider depictions of people in murals or statues to be idolatry.

Opposition parties say that the veneration of Mujib and the laws protecting him from criticism reflect a broader erosion of civil liberties under Hasina and the consolidation of her party's grip over democratic institutions. "It is a clear tilt towards an authoritarian one-party state," a senior opposition official, who also asked for anonymity, told AFP.



DHAKA: A statue of Bangladesh's founding father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is pictured in this photo taken on Jan 3, 2023. — AFP

Some analysts believe Hasina's motivations to be more personal. Mujib's contributions to Bangladesh's independence struggle were minimized by the military government that replaced him. Some of his killers received coveted diplomatic postings and all were controversially indemnified from prosecution—a law revoked by Hasina's government.

All five were hanged after she returned to office. "Hasina wants to make sure that this and future generations do not encounter such a situation," Ali Riaz, a professor at Illinois State University, told AFP. "The objective is to ensure that Sheikh Mujib's standing and contributions in history cannot be questioned." — AFP

Zionists pound Gaza as Mideast...

Continued from Page 1

by large crowds. Aruri was killed Tuesday in the south Beirut stronghold of the powerful Iran-backed Hezbollah movement, which has traded tit-for-tat fire across the border with the Zionist entity for months.

Hezbollah has vowed that the killing of Aruri and six other Hamas operatives on its home turf will not go unpunished, labelling it "a serious assault on Lebanon... and a dangerous development". Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah warned the Zionist entity against all-out conflict, after Zionist army chief Herzi Halevi, in a visit to the Lebanese border, said troops were "in very high readiness".

Nasrallah said that "for now, we are fighting on the frontline following meticulous calculations" but warned that, "if the enemy thinks of waging a war on Lebanon, we will fight without restraint, without rules, without limits". The Lebanese group said on Thursday another four of its fighters were killed overnight, raising its death toll to 129 since the out-

break of border hostilities. Mossad chief David Barnea warned on Wednesday that the Zionist spy agency "is committed to settling the score with the murderers" who carried out the Hamas attack.

The Zionist entity's relentless bombardment and ground invasion has reduced swathes of Gaza to rubble and claimed at least 22,438 lives, according to the health ministry. The United Nations estimates 1.9 million Gazans are displaced, and the World Health Organization has warned of the risk of famine and disease, with only a minimal amount of aid entering the territory.

The UN's human rights chief, Volker Turk, said on Thursday he was "very disturbed" after two Zionist cabinet ministers separately called for Palestinians to leave Gaza, raising fears of forced expulsion. Displaced Palestinians living in tents in Gaza's south were killed in a strike, said bereaved residents who were mourning the dead, wrapped in shrouds at a hospital in Khan Yunis. Baha Abu Hatab said his nephews were killed. They had been living in "a tent to protect them from the cold weather, but (Zionist) airstrikes hit them in their sleep", he added. "Why?" he asked. "Because they threaten (the Zionist entity) and the United States?" — AFP

'US strike' kills senior Hashed leader in Iraq

BAGHDAD: A US strike in Baghdad on Thursday killed a military commander of the Hashed al-Shaabi, an ex-paramilitary faction of the grouping said, with an Iraqi security official reporting two deaths in a drone attack. The Iraqi government, supported by pro-Tehran factions, decried an "aggression". It accused a US-led international coalition but stopped short of pinning the blame on Washington, as regional tensions soar amid the Zionist-Hamas war.

"A drone targeted the logistical support headquarters of Hashed al-Shaabi," mainly pro-Iranian former paramilitary units integrated into the Iraqi armed forces, said the security official. The strike killed "two members and wounded seven others", said the official, speaking on condition of anonymity. A Hashed source, also asking not to be named, confirmed the death toll and charged that the United States was behind the attack.

Harakat Al-Nujaba, one of the Hashed's factions, said in a statement that "the deputy commander of operations for Baghdad, Mushtaq Talib Al-Saidi", had been "martyred in a US strike". Contacted by AFP, a US official neither confirmed nor denied that Washington was behind the strike. "The United States is continuing to take action to protect our forces in Iraq and Syria by addressing the threats they face," said the official, who also spoke on condition of anonymity.

The strike came amid heightened regional tensions since war broke out between US ally the Zionist entity and Iran-backed Hamas fighters in the Gaza Strip. US forces in Iraq and neighboring Syria have faced a surge in attacks since the start of the Gaza war. Videos shared on a Telegram channel linked to the Hashed showed columns of smoke rising above the area of the strike on Baghdad's Palestine street, normally a bustling commercial road. The site was cordoned off by Hashed forces, who blocked journalists' access to the site, an AFP photographer said.

Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani's office accused the US-led anti-jihadist coalition of the



BAGHDAD: Members of Iraq's Hashed al-Shaabi stand outside the entrance of their headquarters on Jan 4, 2024. — AFP

strike, labelling it "a blatant aggression" as well as "a dangerous escalation and assault". "The Iraqi armed forces hold the global coalition forces responsible for this unwarranted attack," a spokesperson for Sudani said in a statement. Hadi Al-Ameri, a senior Hashed commander, condemned what he described as a "heinous crime committed by the criminal American forces", demanding the "immediate departure" of the international coalition.

Washington has counted more than 100 attacks against US targets in Syria and Iraq since mid-October. Many have been claimed by the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, a loose alliance of Iran-linked armed groups that oppose US support for the Zionist entity in the Gaza war. The United States has around 2,500 troops in Iraq and 900 in Syria as part of the multinational coalition fighting the Islamic State group since 2014.

The US military has responded to recent attacks by launching air strikes targeting sites used by Iran and its proxy forces in Iraq and Syria, including Hashed sites. A US drone strike in Baghdad four years ago killed Iran's Revolutionary Guards general Qasem Soleimani, whose commemoration on Wednesday in southern Iran was hit in a bomb attack claimed by the Islamic State.

Soleimani headed the Quds Force, the foreign operations arm of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, overseeing military operations across the Middle East. The twin blasts in the southern Iranian city of Kerman on the anniversary of Soleimani's death killed at least 84 people, according to Iranian authorities. — AFP



GAZA: A woman mourns over the body of her husband killed by Zionist bombardment in Khan Yunis on Jan 4, 2024. — AFP

International

Iran mourns 84 killed in blasts

Islamic State claims responsibility for deadly twin explosions

TEHRAN: Iran observed a day of mourning Thursday for the at least 84 people killed when twin blasts ripped through a crowd commemorating the slain Revolutionary Guards general Qasem Soleimani. The death toll was revised down from around 100 the day after what Iranian authorities labelled a "terrorist attack" that also left hundreds wounded near Soleimani's tomb in the southern city of Kerman.

The Islamic State jihadist group on Thursday claimed responsibility for twin bombings that killed 84 people in Iran. In a statement on Telegram, the group said two of its members "activated their explosives vests" at a gathering near the grave in the southern city of Kerman of slain Revolutionary Guards general Qasem Soleimani.

The blasts ripped through crowds who had come to honor Soleimani, four years after a US drone strike in Baghdad killed the veteran senior commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Wednesday blamed "evil and criminal enemies" of the Islamic republic, without naming them, and vowed a "harsh response".

Regional tensions have surged amid the three-month Zionist attack on Gaza, which it claims is aimed at destroying Hamas after the Palestinian group attacked communities and military bases in the Zionist entity's south. Tehran had welcomed the Hamas attack while denying any involvement. President Ebrahim Raisi's political deputy, Mohammad Jamsheidi, charged on social media platform X that "the responsibility for this crime lies with the US and Zionist regimes, and terrorism is just a tool".

The United States rejected any suggestion that it or its ally the Zionist entity were behind the deadly blasts, while the Zionist entity declined to comment. "The United States was not involved in any way, and

any suggestion to the contrary is ridiculous," said State Department spokesman Matthew Miller.

"We have no reason to believe that (the Zionist entity) was involved in this explosion," he added, expressing sympathies to the victims of the "horrific" explosions and their families. Soleimani, who headed the Guards' foreign operations arm the Quds Force, was also a staunch enemy of the Sunni extremist Islamic State group which has carried out attacks in majority-Shiite Iran.

'Desperate enemy'

Iranian authorities called for mass protests over the Kerman blasts after weekly prayers on Friday, the day when local officials also said the victims' funerals will be held. Revising down the death toll, Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi cited forensic data and said "the number of martyrs ... has been announced as 84 so far," official news agency IRNA reported.

Iran's emergency services chief Jafar Miadfar pointed to difficulties identifying dismembered bodies and said some victims were mistakenly counted "several times". He said 284 people were wounded and "195 are still hospitalized".

Revered by many Iranians, Soleimani oversaw military operations across the Middle East, and millions came to his funeral in 2020. Current Quds Force commander Esmail Qaani suggested the Kerman crowd was "attacked by bloodthirsty people supplied by the United States and the Zionist regime".

He pointed to two recent killings widely blamed on the Zionist entity — a Beirut strike on Hamas deputy leader Saleh Al-Aruri, and the killing near Damascus of senior Guards commander Razi Moussavi in December. "The killing of Aruri and people like Razi Moussavi and the crime in Kerman



KERMAN: A man mourns a loved one killed when two explosions in quick succession struck a crowd marking the anniversary of the 2020 killing of Guards general Qasem Soleimani, at a hospital in the southern Iranian city of Kerman on Jan 3, 2024. — AFP

show how desperate the enemy is," Qaani said.

Tehran regularly accuses its arch-foes the Zionist entity and the United States of inciting unrest in the country, and authorities last month executed five people convicted of collaborating with the entity.

In July, Iran's intelligence ministry said it had dis-

banded a network "linked to (the Zionist entity)'s spy organization" that it said had been plotting "terrorist operations" across Iran, IRNA reported. In September, the Fars news agency had reported that an IS-affiliated key "operative", in charge of carrying out "terrorist operations" in Iran, had been arrested in Kerman. — AFP

Hundreds mourn Hamas deputy leader at funeral

BEIRUT: More than a thousand mourners attended the funeral in Beirut on Thursday of Hamas number two Saleh Al-Aruri who was killed in a Lebanon strike blamed on the Zionist entity. Calling on Hamas to avenge his death and the killing of five other members of the Palestinian militant group on Tuesday, the mourners gathered at a mosque to recite the prayer of the dead before marching to Shatila refugee camp where three of them were buried.

The coffins of the three, Aruri, Azzam al-Aqraa of the Hamas military wing Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades, and Mohammad al-Rais, were draped in Palestinian and Hamas flags. A machine gun was laid on top of each coffin and heavy gunfire rang out as the funeral procession made its way to the cemetery, drowning out chants of "Allahu Akbar" (God is Greatest) by mourners waving Palestinian flags and those of Hamas ally Islamic Jihad.

"Abu Obeida, bomb Tel Aviv," the mourners shouted, addressing the Gaza spokesman of the Hamas military wing by his nom de guerre. Aruri and the six other Hamas members were killed in a strike in a south Beirut stronghold of the Iran-backed armed group Hezbollah. Hamas and Lebanese security officials accused the Zionist entity of launching the attack, with one high-level Lebanese security official saying they were targeted by guided missiles. A US defense official told AFP on Wednesday that the Zionist entity was behind the attack. The Zionist entity has not claimed responsibility.

Aruri is the most senior Hamas figure to be killed since the Gaza war broke out on October 7 after Hamas attacked the Zionist entity. "The



BEIRUT: Mourners carry the coffins of Hamas officials, killed on Jan 2, 2024 in a strike in Beirut's southern suburbs, during their funeral procession in Lebanon's capital on Jan 4, 2024. — AFP

assassination of Saleh Al-Aruri and of any other Palestinian is a failed act because the resistance will continue to produce new leaders," one of the mourners, Oman Ghannum, told AFP. The 35-year-old Palestinian said he wanted to take part in the funeral procession "to denounce the genocide underway in Gaza and the violation of Lebanese sovereignty by (the Zionist entity)".

'They have failed'

In a pre-recorded speech broadcast at the funeral, the Hamas political bureau chief Ismail

Haniyeh, said: "The enemy thinks that with the assassination of Saleh Al-Aruri, it can defeat the resistance and impose its conditions. "But it has failed, and it will never be able to force Hamas to abandon its demands, its vision and its strategy," he said from his base in Qatar.

Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah warned the Zionist entity in a speech on Wednesday against starting a war in Lebanon, vowing that his group would fight back without restraint. Several Hamas figures in exile reside in Lebanon, under the protection of Hezbollah. — AFP

Hopes fade for survivors 3 days after Japan quake

WAJIMA, Japan: Thousands of Japanese rescuers on Thursday battled rubble and blocked roads as hopes faded for dozens listed as missing three days after a devastating earthquake that killed at least 84. Hundreds of people in more than a dozen communities remained cut off in Ishikawa prefecture in central Japan, devastated by the 7.5-magnitude quake on New Year's Day.

Regional governor Hiroshi Hase told a disaster management meeting that as of 4:00 pm (0700 GMT), 72 hours after the quake, "the survival rate of those in need of rescue is said to drop precipitously". Many cheered on social media late Thursday news reports that a woman in her 80s trapped on the ground floor of her house had been rescued three days after the quake. "Incredible! Hope she'll get better," one user wrote on X, formerly Twitter. "Rescue team, thank you!", said another.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida told a press conference that the quake is "the worst catastrophe" in the current imperial Reiwa era in the Japanese calendar, which began in 2019. "Access to this area was extremely difficult, partly due to the geographical constraints of the affected area being a peninsula, and partly due to the intermittent occurrence of major quakes," he said. "The situation remains difficult, but we will continue to do our utmost to support the victims."

The powerful main tremor, followed by hundreds of aftershocks,

injured at least 330 people, local authorities said. Authorities published a list on Thursday of 179 people whose whereabouts were unknown.

With hundreds sleeping in emergency shelters, further scenes of destruction were seen by AFP in the coastal towns of Anamizu and Wajima, including burnt-out cars in a market area ravaged by fire. Thousands of soldiers, firefighters and police officers from across Japan, assisted by sniffer dogs, combed through the rubble of collapsed wooden houses and toppled commercial buildings for signs of life.

Yasuhiro Morita, working with a rescue unit in Wajima, said that his dog Elza was trained to bark when it finds a body. "But today, she just wandered off toward bystanders instead, which likely means there was no body inside," Morita told AFP.

No power

"This is where my grandma's house used to be, but it's all burned down," said Shinichi Hirano, 47. "She passed away a while ago so her house has long been vacant, but still, this area is full of fond memories for me," he said.

Military hovercraft delivered heavy construction equipment and vehicles to the devastated port city by sea. Around 30,000 households were without electricity in Ishikawa on the Sea of Japan coast, and 89,800 homes there and in two neighboring regions had no water.

Access was blocked to small



WAJIMA: People walk in front of a collapsed building in the city of Wajima, Ishikawa prefecture on Jan 4, 2024. — AFP

communities in the hardest-hit Noto Peninsula region — with 300 people desperately waiting for aid at a school in the town of Ooya in the Suzu area. "Even if I give my food to my children, it is not enough at all. I have eaten almost nothing for the past two days," a woman in her 30s with three children in Suzu told the Asahi Shimbun newspaper.

'Critical' 72 hours

In the city of Nanao, police managing traffic told drivers that one of the main roads leading to Wajima had been prioritized for emergency vehicles. "Either reconsider carrying on, or risk facing a huge traffic jam ahead," an officer was heard warning drivers.

At a nearby gas station, a long queue of cars was waiting outside for it to open as the clock ticked past 8 am. Although there were no fuel shortages at the station for now, workers there told AFP they

were rationing nonetheless.

Monday's main shockwave triggered tsunami waves at least 1.2 meters (four feet) high in Wajima, and a series of smaller tsunamis were reported elsewhere. Broadcaster NHK reported that one person was swept away by the tsunami in Noto's Suzu area, with the coast-guard investigating.

Japan experiences hundreds of earthquakes every year and most cause no damage, with strict building codes in place for more than four decades. Earthquakes have hit the Noto region with intensifying strength and frequency over the past five years. The country is haunted by a massive 9.0-magnitude undersea quake 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 worst nuclear disasters in history. — AFP

UK party leaders kick off general election year

LONDON: UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said on Thursday he had penciled in later this year for a general election, as he and his main political rival to be Britain's next leader effectively kicked off campaigning. Sunak and opposition Labour leader Keir Starmer both made their first public appearances of 2024, Sunak travelling to Mansfield, in the English Midlands, and Starmer to Bristol, in the West Country.

Sunak's ruling Conservative party has been in power for 14 years but is widely expected to lose the vote, which must be held before the end of January 2025. He has already ruled out leaving it until the last minute to go to the country, not just to secure a fifth consecutive term of office for the Tories but his own mandate with the electorate.

The former finance minister was elected in an internal party ballot in October 2022, taking over from the short-lived Liz Truss after Boris Johnson quit following a series of scandals. Speculation has been mounting about when Sunak will decide to hold the vote, as he tries to drive down inflation that peaked at nearly 11 percent and reboot economic growth. — AFP

Myanmar junta to release more than 9,000 prisoners

YANGON: Myanmar's junta announced an amnesty for more than 9,000 prisoners on Thursday, part of an annual release to mark the country's Independence Day. The traditional event comes as the army, which took power in a military coup in 2021, faces growing resistance from allied groups in the country's north. A coalition of ethnic armed groups has said it has captured military positions and border hubs vital for trade with China, posing a serious threat to the junta, according to analysts.

Independence Day in Myanmar has previously been marked by a parade in the capital Naypyidaw, followed by an address from junta chief Min Aung Hlaing. But the junta leader was absent this year, leaving a subordinate to read prepared remarks in his stead.

In a statement Thursday, the State Administration Council, as the junta calls itself, said it had "granted amnesty to 9,652 prisoners from respective prisons and jails as a gesture for the 76th Independence Day and to respect the peace in peoples' hearts and minds". There was no immediate indication that political detainees were among those to be released.

In a separate statement, the junta said that 114 foreign prisoners were among those granted amnesty and would be deported "on bilateral relations and humanitarian grounds". No further details were given.

In the commercial capital Yangon, friends and family members of prisoners gathered outside Insein prison, where detainees were to be released. Myanmar declared independence from British colonial rule on January 4, 1948, after a long fight championed by General Aung San, ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi's father. — AFP



YANGON: Relatives celebrate with a released prisoner outside Insein prison on Myanmar's Independence Day in Yangon on Jan 4, 2024. — AFP

Business

FRIDAY, JANUARY 5, 2024

French oyster sales clam up

Consumers shunning oysters as contamination scare spreads



MANCHE: Oyster farming nets are pictured in Saint-Vaast-la-Hougue, northwestern France. The prefectures of Calvados and Manche temporarily banned the consumption and marketing of oysters produced in certain coastal sectors of the two departments due to health problems. (Inset) French oysters are pictured at the port of La Teste on the bay of Arcachon, southwestern France. — AFP photos

RENNES: When Philippe Le Gal brought his oysters to market this weekend, he expected them to sell quickly. It was, after all, New Year's Eve, a day when the delicacies are a crucial ingredient for champagne-soaked celebrations in French homes and restaurants. But not this time. "We barely sold 10 percent, almost nothing," the oyster farmer told AFP.

The reason consumers are shunning French oysters is a health scare that hit the industry last week, when local authorities in the Gironde region observed a wave of gastroenteritis cases due to food poisoning. An investigation identified as the culprit the norovirus - a highly contagious virus causing vomiting and diarrhoea - detected in oysters from the Arcachon Bay west of Bordeaux on France's southwestern Atlantic coast.

The authorities quickly banned the harvesting and sale of oysters from the area, and from two other oyster production sites further north, Calvados and Manche, "until further notice". They also told producers there to stop selling the oysters already harvested, and consumers to return them urgently. The contamination was a result of flooding in waste

water treatment plants due to high rain water levels, which pushed untreated waste water into the ocean where it contaminated the oysters.

'Crisis without precedent'

The authorities promised they would lift the ban "as soon as the sanitary quality of the shellfish is completely satisfactory again". But the local shellfish producer association warned that "an economic crisis without precedent" was descending on the sector fast. "People are panicking," said Le Gal, who is also president of the National Shellfish Farming Federation. "They have stopped buying," he said. "It's a catastrophe."

Le Gal said less than 10 percent of France's overall oyster production is affected by contamination, representing around 8,000 tons per year. But the impact has rippled across the entire industry. Philippe Morandau, who runs the regional shellfish producers association in the western region of Charente-Maritime, said he too suffered a collapse in sales although his region has not been affected by any contamination. "I was on a market in La Pallice, near La Ro-

chelle, and my sales were down by 25 to 30 percent compared with previous years," he told AFP.

Producers point out that the contaminations are not their fault, but down to insufficient waste water treatment capacity which is the responsibility of local authorities.

"The biggest factor is indeed investment by local authorities in waste water treatment," acknowledged the French government's junior minister for maritime affairs, Herve Berville. "The temporary bans are not linked to the work of shellfish farmers. They are linked to viruses, not the quality of the oysters," he told regional daily Ouest France at the weekend.

'Not just a glitch'

Oyster farmers feel they are victims of what they say are decades of under-investment in water treatment facilities. "This has happened to us twice in two years. This is not just a glitch," said Olivier Laban, an oyster farmer who also runs the regional shellfish producer association in Arcachon, the main target area for the ban. "This can't go on," he told AFP. Berville promised that the government would sit

down with local authorities "to accelerate investments where necessary".

The oyster industry's 375 production sites in France make it "an essential sector for the local economy", he said. "We want to protect consumers as well as reassure French people concerning the unaffected sites," he said. The government was, he added, ready to help offset losses sustained by farmers. But beyond the devastating financial impact of the health measures and their fallout, oyster producers also worry about the reputational damage they say will be even harder to repair. "With every announcement they see on television, people cancel their orders," said Morandau.

"People just see the word 'oyster' in a headline and don't pay attention to any geographical distinction," he said. Le Gal said what he called "scare-mongering" may even remove oysters from French tables indefinitely. France is Europe's biggest producer of oysters as well as the continent's biggest consumer. It is the fifth largest producer in the world, after China, South Korea, Japan and the United States. — AFP

Chevron to take up to \$4 billion impairment impact in 4th quarter

NEW YORK: Oil giant Chevron said 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 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



AUSTIN: A Chevron gas station is shown in Austin, Texas. — AFP

takeovers of midsized 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 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

GM rides 'strong demand' to grow US auto sales

NEW YORK: US automaker General Motors reported Wednesday a jump in vehicle sales for 2023, citing robust demand in a year also boosted by easing supply issues. The company logged sales of 2.6 million vehicles last year, a 14 percent rise from 2022, to hold on to its title of top US automaker. Toyota, the second-largest auto seller in the country, sold 2.2 million vehicles in the past year, marking a seven percent increase, the company said in a separate statement. GM's performance comes as it shakes off a hit from a six-week strike led by the United Auto Workers union, affecting the "Big Three" automakers, including Ford and Stellantis.

Private sector funding 'is key to climate transition'

WASHINGTON: The World Bank is working to slash how long it takes to get financing projects off the ground as part of a push to speed up and scale up the 79-year-old development lender, its president told AFP on Wednesday. It currently takes 27 months, on average, before "the first dollar goes out the door," Ajay Banga said in an interview in his brightly lit office in the Bank's headquarters close to the White House. "If I can bring it down by one third over the first couple of years, that would be pretty good," he said. "The Bank needs to change and evolve."

Banga, an Indian-born, naturalized US citizen who previously ran the payments company Mastercard, took over the management of the bank in June on a pledge to boost its lending firepower by

The strike mobilized some 45,000 union members at one point, before ending in late October. In the fourth quarter last year, GM vehicle deliveries in the United States were virtually stable at 625,176. "We grew our market share in 2023, maintaining strong pricing and low incentives," said GM senior vice president Marissa West. West added that the company expects strong industry sales this year as well. GM now claims a market share of 16.3 percent, slightly higher than a year earlier.

On Wednesday, it also highlighted a sharp rise in total electric vehicle sales, of nearly 76,000 units. According to a recent Cox Automotive forecast, US auto sales for 2023 is expected to finish around 15.5 million units, up from 2022. "The new-vehicle market has been supported by growing deliveries, improving supply levels and higher incentives," Cox said. But Cox senior economist Charlie Chesbrough warned that "high vehicle prices and high interest rates remain the industry's Grinch," a trend expected to persist in 2024. — AFP

encouraging greater private investment in the fight against climate change. In the seven months since, the 64-year-old has made some big changes, altering the development lender's mission statement to include a reference to climate change, and setting up a private sector advisory body to recommend solutions to address the "barriers to private sector investment in emerging markets."

He's also explored new ways to "sweat" the bank's existing balance sheet in order to boost lending capacity without additional funding from donor countries. On Wednesday, Banga repeated a previous pledge to "fix the plumbing" of World Bank, and said he plans to "create the credibility" needed for the developed world to increase its capital investment in it. "For that you have to become a better bank. You have to be quicker, faster, more focused on impact, less focused on input," he said. "Then you can say with credibility, 'I'm now ready to absorb more capital.'" As part of a push to increase its climate financing, the World Bank Group recently raised its target for climate-related projects from 35 percent of its annual financing to 45 percent. — AFP

Business

Most Asian markets fall

US Fed minutes dent early rate cut hopes

HONG KONG: Most Asian markets fell Thursday, tracking another loss on Wall Street after minutes from the US Federal Reserve's December meeting dampened hopes for an early interest rate cut. Oil prices built on their rally the previous day after deadly blasts in Iran that Tehran described as a "terrorist attack" fanned geopolitical fears and added to already high tensions in the Middle East. The global rally that characterized the last months of 2023 has petered out at the start of the new year owing to worries the buying may have run a little ahead of itself, leading traders to take a breather.

The selling pressure was enhanced Wednesday when the Fed minutes showed officials expect to keep rates elevated for some time as they want to make sure they have inflation under control. That dealt a blow to confidence on trading floors, where investors had been betting on a cut as soon as March after the bank's post-meeting statement last month showed they envisioned three reductions in 2024.

"Participants viewed the policy rate as likely at or near its peak for this tightening cycle," the minutes said, adding there was growing optimism among decision-makers that there was "clear progress" on inflation, which continues to fall. Officials were keen to begin cutting this year but gave no indication of when. Still, data Wednesday provided fresh evidence that policymakers' measures were kicking in but not enough to send the economy into a recession, with job openings falling in December, while the factory sector remained in contraction.

Focus now turns to the release of key non-farm payrolls data due on Friday. "Overall, the labor market remains strong, but demand is cooling, coming into better balance with supply," said Rubeela Farooqi at High Frequency Economics. "These data will be welcome news for policymakers and support the Fed's view that the next move in rates will be lower, likely in the second quarter."

Oil rallies further

Laura Rosner-Warburton, of Macropolicy Perspectives, added: "What December taught us is they are willing to pivot." Meanwhile, Richmond Fed boss



BANGKOK: Construction workers leave a construction site in the back of a truck in Chinatown in Bangkok on January 3, 2024. — AFP

Tom Barkin said the likelihood of a so-called soft landing was "increasingly conceivable but in no way inevitable". Wall Street's three main indexes all fell, with the Nasdaq down more than one percent as tech firms continue to retreat after a strong advance in recent weeks. And Asia was no different, though traders pared morning losses while some bounced back. Tokyo dipped on Japan's first day back from a long break, while there were also losses in Shanghai, Sydney, Seoul, Singapore, Taipei and Bangkok.

Wellington, Manila, Mumbai and Jakarta rose while Hong Kong was flat. London, Paris and Frankfurt rose at the open. Oil prices jumped again, having climbed more than three percent higher Wednesday after twin bomb blasts ripped through a crowd commemorating Revolutionary Guards general Qasem Soleimani,

pace in November. There had been "acceleration... in the price of energy and services," Insee said, although price growth slowed for manufactured goods and the closely-watched food items in the consumer basket.

With food inflation still running at 7.1 percent last month, many shoppers have been switching to lower-cost alternatives or scouring supermarkets for special offers. In response, Paris has brought forward annual talks between food producers and retailers, hoping lower costs for food inputs can be passed through more swiftly to the public. "We're going

who was killed four years ago in a US strike in Iraq. The explosions, which killed at least 95 people, came with tensions already sky-high in the crude-rich region owing to the Zionist-Gaza war and following the killing of Hamas's deputy leader in Lebanon this week.

They added to supply concerns after the closure of a Libyan oil field. The "attack has the potential to heighten instability in the already volatile region, which has experienced conflicts such as the Hamas-Zionist war, attacks by the Houthi militia on commercial vessels in the Red Sea, and ongoing violence in Iraq, Syria, and this week, in Beirut", said SPI Asset Management's Stephen Innes. "Yet, unless a substantial supply disruption occurs in the Middle East, poor macroeconomic data could act as the ultimate rally dampener." — AFP

to be looking for areas to bring prices down, we're going to kick inflation in the teeth," Michel-Edouard Leclerc, head of the E.Leclerc supermarket chain, told broadcaster France 2 on Tuesday.

Measured using the Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices, the preferred yardstick of the European Central Bank, French inflation also rose from 3.9 percent year-on-year in November to 4.1 percent last month. In line with other major central banks, the Frankfurt-based institution has increased its benchmark deposit rate to a record high of four percent in a bid to tame price growth in the 20-nation euro-zone. — AFP

German emissions at 70-year low as coal use drops

BERLIN: German emissions were at their lowest point in around 70 years, as Europe's largest economy managed to reduce its dependence on coal faster than expected, a study published Thursday showed. Europe's biggest economy emitted 673 million tons of the greenhouse gases last year, 73 million tons fewer than in 2022, according to the energy think tank Agora Energiewende.

The figure was at its lowest point "since the 1950s", Agora said in a statement, while warning that Germany had work to do to further reduce its emissions. The drop was "largely attributable to a strong decrease in coal power generation", Agora said. Germany had resorted to the fuel in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, when Moscow cut off gas supplies to the European giant. But since then, Germany has pared down its use of the fossil fuel significantly.

Electricity generation from renewable sources was over 50 percent of the total in 2023 for the first time, while coal's share dropped to 26 percent from 34 percent, according to the federal network agency. The cut in coal use accounted for a reduction of 46 million tons in CO2 emissions, the think tank estimated. At the same time, industrial emissions fell by 20 million tons, as production in energy-intensive industries dropped sharply. The renewables record brought Germany closer to its target to produce 80 percent of its electricity from wind and solar by 2030, Agora chief Simon Mueller said.

But the reduction in emissions from industry did not reflect a "sustainable development", Mueller said. "The crisis-related slump in production weakens the German economy. If emissions are subsequently relocated abroad, then nothing has been achieved for the climate," he said. In all, the think tank estimated that only 15 percent of the reduction in 2023 constituted a "permanent emissions savings". To hit its climate targets, Germany needs a "barrage of investments" to modernize industry and reduce the carbon footprint from heating, Mueller said. — AFP

French inflation ticks up in Dec

PARIS: Inflation in the euro-zone's second-largest economy France accelerated in December, official data showed Thursday, with food prices a persistent sore point for consumers. Prices grew 3.7 percent year-on-year last month, statistics authority Insee said in preliminary figures, up from the 3.5 percent

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US interest rates likely to stay high 'for some time'

Manufacturing sector contracts at slower pace

WASHINGTON: US Federal Reserve officials expect interest rates will need to remain high "for some time" to tackle stubborn inflation, according to minutes of the most recent rate decision published on Wednesday. The Fed announced last month that it would continue to hold interest rates at a 22-year high, and penciled in up to three rate cuts in 2024, sending US stock markets surging to new records.

Since then, Fed officials have looked to dampen the buoyant market expectations that cuts were imminent, stressing that inflation remains stuck above the central bank's long-run target of two percent. In December, the Fed's rate-setting committee "re-affirmed that it would be appropriate for policy to remain at a restrictive stance for some time until inflation was clearly moving down sustainably" towards target, according to minutes of the meeting published Wednesday.

The document did not delve into details of a discussion Fed Chair Jerome Powell alluded to in last month's press conference, about when it would be appropriate to start cutting rates. Since peaking in 2022, the Fed's favored inflation gauge has fallen sharply, reaching an annual rate of 2.6 percent in November. So-called core inflation, which strips out volatile food and energy prices, also cooled last month to an annual rate of 3.2 percent.

At the same time, economic growth has shown signs of moderating, the job market appears to be softening, and the unemployment rate has remained close to record lows. These facts have fueled hopes the Fed is on track to bring down inflation while avoiding a damaging recession, a rare feat known as a "soft landing."

Speaking at a conference in Raleigh, North Carolina, on Wednesday, Richmond Fed President Tom Barkin said a soft landing "is increasingly conceivable but in no way inevitable." But Barkin, who is a

voting member of the Fed's rate-setting committee this year, added that there was "no autopilot," and that policymakers would continue to be guided by the incoming data. Futures traders have assigned a probability of more than 90 percent that policymakers will vote to hold the Fed's key lending rate steady again when they meet later this month, according to CME Group data.

Manufacturing contracts

Manufacturing activity in the United States remained weak in December, shrinking for a 14th consecutive month according to survey data released Wednesday. The Institute for Supply Management's (ISM) manufacturing index was 47.4 percent in the final month of 2023, up from November's 46.7 percent figure.

The figure, though slightly higher than the consensus estimate, was still firmly under the 50-point mark separating growth from contraction. "The US manufacturing sector continued to contract, but at a slightly slower rate in December," said ISM survey chief Timothy Fiore in a statement. "None of the six biggest manufacturing industries registered growth in December," he added. Fiore noted that demand eased as well, with the new orders index contracting at a quicker rate and the new export orders index "essentially flat." Overall, the manufacturing sector has been weak "thanks in large part to constrained capital spending," said economists at Pantheon Macroeconomics.

But sentiment should improve with a fall in interest rates this year. "Anticipation of the US Federal Reserve holding off on interest-rate changes will encourage more companies to spend on capital investments again," said an ISM respondent in the computer and electronic products sector. "As budgets get approval after the start of the calendar year, this



NEW YORK: Tourists browse through vendor stalls along a street after they were forced to move from the Brooklyn Bridge on the first day that a new law outlawing vendors on the bridge went into effect on January 03, 2024 in New York City. The new law is designed to clear the heavily packed pedestrian walkway on the bridge, one of Manhattan's top tourist attractions. — AFP

should help drive investment and increase manufacturing activity once again," the respondent added.

The Fed has lifted the benchmark lending rate rapidly since early 2022, making borrowing more expensive as it sought to cool demand and curb surging inflation. But the central bank has held rates steady at recent policy meetings, while optimism grows that

rate cuts are on the way. Economists at Pantheon expect an eventual rebound in manufacturing and the interest-sensitive housing sector. They warned however that the boost to GDP growth would likely be "offset by softer growth in real consumption spending, where the lagged effect of the prior surge in rates has yet to fully work through." — AFP

Spain's Telefonica to slash 3,421 jobs

MADRID: Spanish telecoms giant Telefonica said Wednesday it had reached a deal with unions to lay off up to one-fifth of its domestic workforce as part of its efforts to reduce costs. The 3,421 job cuts are expected to take place during the first quarter of 2024 and will mainly involve employees who are 56 years or older in 2024 and have been with the company for at least 15 years, Telefonica said in a statement.

The former state monopoly estimated the layoff plan will cost around 1.3 billion euros (\$1.4 billion) before taxes and will generate average yearly savings of around 285 million euros from 2025. Spain's largest telecoms company employs about 16,500 people in its home country, while its

global workforce is over 100,000. It is present in 12 nations including Brazil, Britain and Germany.

The cuts were less severe than initially expected, with unions warning in December that Telefonica was looking to axe nearly 5,100 positions in Spain. Telefonica also announced Wednesday it had reached a new collective bargaining agreement with unions which runs until 2026 and can be extended for another year, "with the aim of moving towards a more digital, flexible and prepared company for future challenges in a highly competitive context and in deep transformation."

Several European telecoms firms, including BT and Vodafone, have announced job cuts this year as they grapple with intense competition in an



MADRID: Pedestrians walk in front of the Telefonica headquarters in Madrid. — AFP

increasingly low-cost market that is facing new technologies such as artificial intelligence. Like most of its European peers, Telefonica is struggling

with heavy debt loads, partly due to the hefty cost of building national fibre networks and introducing high-speed 5G mobile services. — AFP



TotalEnergies to review land buyouts in Africa projects

PARIS: French energy giant TotalEnergies on Thursday said it had launched a review of its land acquisition practices for controversial \$10-billion projects in Uganda and Tanzania slammed by environmentalists. TotalEnergies is pushing ahead with its Tilenga drilling project in Uganda and the 1,443-kilometre East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP) to transport it to the coast in Tanzania in the face of opposition from activists and environmentalists.

"This mission will evaluate the land acquisition procedures implemented, the conditions for consultation, compensation and relocation of the populations concerned, and the grievance handling mechanism," the statement said, adding that it would submit its report by April. Tilenga targets oil under the rich Murchison Falls nature reserve in western Uganda with a planned 419 wells, triggering fears for the region's fragile ecosystem among the people who live there and environmentalists. Drilling began in mid-2023 and production is slated to begin in 2025.

TotalEnergies, which is working with Chinese oil company CNOOC on the project, says that its 6,400-hectare acquisition plan affects "19,140 households and communities owning or using plots of land and includes the relocation of 775 primary residences".

"To date, 98 percent of the households concerned have signed compensation agreements, 97 percent have received their compensation, and 98 percent of households to be relocated have taken possession of their new homes," the company added. Resistance to the project has rallied opponents of fossil fuel development as well as conservationists and those fearing the effect on local populations.

Human Rights Watch called in July for the plans to be halted, saying in a report that it had already "devastated thousands of people's livelihoods in Uganda". The oilfield would "ultimately displace over 100,000 people," it charged. Four environmental groups—Darwin Climax Coalitions, Sea Shepherd France, Wild Legal and Stop EACOP—filed a criminal complaint in France in September accusing TotalEnergies of "ecocide".

A first case filed in 2019 was thrown out last year by a Paris court, while TotalEnergies says the Tanzania-based East African Court of Justice has also rejected a complaint. Other aid groups and 26 individual Ugandans filed a further French civil case in June calling for "reparations". TotalEnergies said Thursday it had named Benin's former Prime Minister Lionel Zinsou to lead its land acquisition assessment, calling him a "recognised expert in African economic development". Zinsou has worked with TotalEnergies in the past through his consulting company. — AFP

NBK Economic Report

Crude prices fall on demand concerns

KUWAIT: Brent futures fell 7 percent in December, reversing gains from a higher geopolitical risk premium earlier in the month due to attacks on vessels in the Red Sea and rising hopes of faster interest rate cuts next year. Demand growth forecasts between OPEC and the IEA remain highly divergent, raising uncertainty around the outlook for 2024.

Oil prices fell into the year-end, continuing a trend of weakening momentum as demand concerns outweighed the impact of renewed geopolitical risks and faster interest rate cuts next year. Brent futures ended December at \$77/bbl (-7 percent m/m), closing lower for the third consecutive month and ending the year down 10.3 percent, in sharp contrast to 2023's gain of 10.4 percent. Kuwait Export Crude (KEC), meanwhile, ended the month at \$79.6/bbl (-8.9 percent m/m; -3 percent ytd).

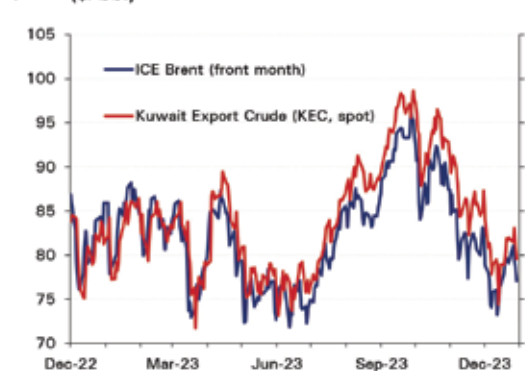
Prices during the month were initially boosted by Houthi rebel attacks on merchant shipping in the Red Sea, causing many cargoes to be diverted to lengthier and costlier routes around Africa, and by hopes that 2024 would see central banks cut interest rates sooner and by more than previously anticipated. The latter followed the release of inflation prints in the US and Europe, which surprised on the downside. Ultimately, however, bearish impulses from easing geopolitical concerns prevailed as shipping resumed through the Red Sea.

Brent futures and options data showed a marked shift in participant positioning, with speculative net length (the difference between the number of bullish "long" and bearish "short" contracts) abruptly reversing course with a sharp, 59 percent w/w increase to 155k contracts (week-ending 19th December). The turnaround was on the back of a drastic pullback in the number of short contracts, which had been the dominant story since mid-October.

The marked deceleration in inflation rates (down to +2 percent y/y in the US and the euro-zone), coupled with fairly resilient US economic data—Q3 GDP expanded by an annualized 4.9 percent—has raised not only hopes of a so-called soft landing but that monetary policy could shift to a more accommodative and thus economically supportive stance in 2024 following nearly two years of rising interest rates.

The International Energy Agency (IEA), citing resilient US economic activity and lower oil prices, revised up its forecast for oil demand next year, pegging growth at 1.1 mb/d (+130 kb/d). This is still less than half of the IEA's expected growth rate for 2023 of 2.3 mb/d, howev-

Chart 1: Oil prices (\$/bbl)



Source: Refinitiv, KPC

Chart 2: Brent money manager net length (million futures and options contracts)



Source: Bloomberg; *futures contracts only

er, a reflection of macro headwinds including normalization of Chinese oil consumption after a robust rebound in 2023. Nevertheless, consensus on the potential rate of oil demand growth in 2024 has been difficult to establish, with the US Energy Information Administration (EIA) projecting 1.3 mb/d but from a lower forecast baseline and OPEC expecting growth to clock in at a robust 2.2 mb/d, which appears counter-intuitive given the group's decision in late November to reduce supplies ostensibly to balance weaker demand.

On the supply side, combined data from OPEC secondary sources and S&P Global show aggregate OPEC+ production (quota-bound members) falling to 35.8 mb/d (-153 kb/d) in November. The declines were led by Iraq (-77 kb/d) and Angola (-38 kb/d). Non-quota bound members Iran, Libya and Venezuela, meanwhile, boosted output by a combined 51 kb/d in November and by 0.7 mb/d in aggregate in the year to November, a not inconsiderable volume that has had the effect of diluting OPEC+'s supply tightening efforts.

Within OPEC, Angola's decision to exit the group after 16 years has exposed underlying tensions and laid bare the challenges facing Saudi Arabia as it attempts to rein in global supplies while attempting to maintain cohesion among a bloc of oil producers with widely differing production capacities and capabilities. Angola's decision to leave OPEC was sparked by disagreement over its potential production capacity, which was assessed by independent energy houses to be far lower than it believed and closer to the level the country was producing at now. Angola was thus unwilling to accept a sharply reduced production quota for 2024, especially one it believed was forced on it in order to make room for a higher UAE quota.

While Angola's decision to leave the coalition may not have an outsized impact on oil prices given the country's

limited capacity, OPEC's inability to garner a group-wide consensus to reduce production highlights members' unwillingness to stomach further output cuts. This could certainly be needed if oil demand growth proves far less robust than envisaged by the group.

Meanwhile in the US, crude oil production rose to a record 13.3 mb/d in December, EIA weekly data showed. US output growth in 2023 topped 1.1 mb/d (+9 percent), a remarkable turnaround from the pandemic and the US oil sector's best performing year since 2019. It may not be repeated next year, though, if the EIA's forecasts of a significant slowdown in output growth to just 0.2 mb/d—due to expected declines in the number of active oil rigs and relatively higher cost of credit—bears out.

The outlook for oil prices in 2024 is far from clear. The widely divergent forecasts for oil demand next year underline the uncertainty surrounding oil market fundamentals going into 2024. Easing inflation in the US and EU could allow for a soft landing in the former and perhaps a more aggressive monetary policy loosening in the latter, all potentially boding well for oil demand prospects. Oil supply will remain largely dependent on OPEC policy choices after the first quarter voluntary cuts are set to expire and as non-OPEC supply growth decelerates.

Risks to the demand outlook include a stronger-than-expected consumption growth in India and the Middle East, offset slightly by slower economic activity in OECD economies. On the supply side, OPEC cuts are the main factor for higher prices supported by potentially a stricter US enforcement of sanctions on Iranian crude given recent geopolitical developments, both outweighing the impact of (slowing) US crude production growth. We therefore forecast Brent at \$85/bbl in 2024, slightly above \$82.6/bbl third party consensus forecasts and up from current prices.

Weekender

FRIDAY, JANUARY 5, 2024

Machboos diyay on the chula? Rich tapestry of Kuwaiti Arabic

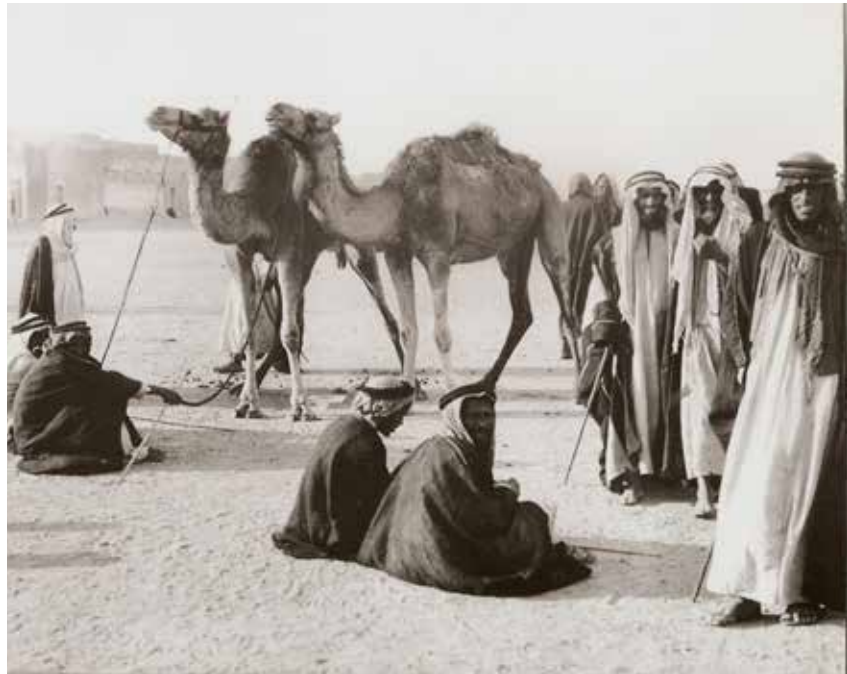
Linguist explains nuances of the Kuwaiti dialect, welcomes new words

By Shakir Reshamwala

The Kuwaiti dialect is a captivating blend of expressions shaped by centuries of trade, migration and cultural exchange. Foreign loanwords are seamlessly woven into the fabric of Kuwaiti Arabic, creating a linguistic mosaic that reflects the historical connections between Kuwait and the wider world.

Kuwaitis are often fluent in both Kuwaiti Arabic and Modern Standard Arabic, and they may switch between the two in different contexts. Standard Arabic is typically used in formal settings, education and media, while Kuwaiti Arabic is used in everyday conversation. Additionally, the use of colloquial expressions and slang is common, creating a dynamic and vibrant linguistic landscape.

“Due to the popularity of Kuwaiti TV serials for more than six decades, the Kuwaiti dialect is widely understandable in the region, simi-



lar to the Egyptian dialect, which is understood throughout the Arab world due to Egypt’s prolific film industry,” Khaled Al-Rashaid, a historian and expert in Kuwaiti dialect, told Kuwait Times.

According to Rashaid, there are six different Kuwaiti subdialects – Awazem, Failakawi, Sharq, Qibla, Qrouya and Bedu. Among these, the Qibla (or Jibla as it is pronounced) dialect is most prevalent in the media, as it is the closest to classical Arabic, while the Failakawi dialect died out when the islanders were relocated from Failaka after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990.

The pronunciation of Kuwaiti Arabic also differs from Standard Arabic, with unique sounds and intonations that give it a distinct musicality. The letter kaf (ك) is pronounced ch (چ), while qaf (ق) is pronounced as jeem (ج) or gayn (غ). There are also differences in pronunciations among the hadhar (urbanites) and the bedu (bedouins). “The hadhar pronounce the letter jeem (ج) as ya (ي), while the bedu don’t,” Rashaid explained.

Migration

There have been three waves of migration to Kuwait, each shaping the language of the land and contributing to the cultural, economic and demographic landscape of the country. The early bedouin migration from Najd in present-day Saudi Arabia laid the cultural foundations of Kuwait, influencing traditional customs, social structures and the overall way of life. The bedouins had a nonmaritime vocabulary, but after



Khaled Al-Rashaid, a historian, researcher and expert in the Kuwaiti dialect, is surrounded by books in his study. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

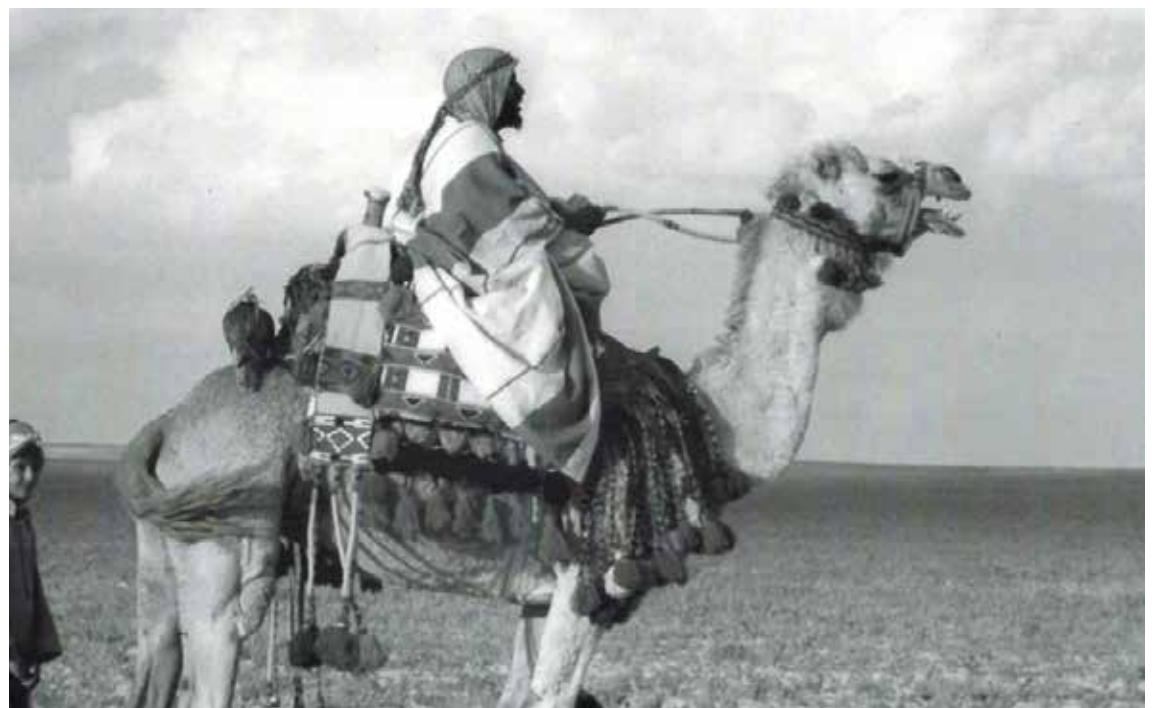
settling for decades on the coast, first in Qatar and later in Kuwait, they learned to build ships and sailed as far as India and Serendib (the old Persian name for Ceylon, later Sri Lanka).

Migrants from places like Persia (modern-day Iran), India and East Africa were drawn to Kuwait to participate in pearl diving. This second wave of migration brought a diverse workforce to Kuwait, contributing to the multicultural fabric of the society. The discovery of oil in Kuwait in the mid-20th century marked a transformative period for the country. The oil boom led to rapid economic development, attracting a large influx of foreign workers in a third wave to support the expanding industries and infrastructure projects.

Loanwords

Indian, Persian, English and Turkish influences can be found in Kuwaiti Arabic, adding layers of complexity and diversity to the language. Trade with India added a plethora of Hindi/Urdu words to the lexicon, including chai (tea), pankah (fan), bima (insurance), chula (stove), rang (color), etc. Darwaza (door) from Farsi and geri (back) from Turkish are also common words. Technological advances introduced a large number of English words, from television to computer to mobile.

Words in the Kuwaiti dialect have evolved over time, while others have been forgotten or fallen out of favor. “The name of a noun can change depending on the circumstances and interaction with the object. A car was called trambel (from automobile) in Kuwait in the olden days. It was later called motor, and now siyarah (from the



The Kuwaiti dialect has been shaped by bedouins, seafarers, merchants and other migrants who have called Kuwait home over the centuries. — Photos courtesy Mahmoud Zakaria Abu Alella

original Arabic term),” Rashaid pointed out. “A ball used to be called tambakhiya earlier but is now called kurah (the Arabic term),” he added. Also, words like pankah are not familiar to the new generation, as most homes do not have ceiling fans anymore.

Ism (noun), fi’l (verb), and harf (preposition) are fundamental concepts in Arabic grammar, representing different parts of speech and lin-



guistic elements. According to Rashaid, while a noun can change, a verb can never change, though others can be added. Also, there are 14 primary prepositions.

Wordsmith

An accidental linguist, Rashaid has authored nine publications, including encyclopedias and dictionaries. “I have no background in languages. I majored in computer science and worked as a programmer and system analyst. All the books

I had – except the Holy Quran – were in English, mostly on computers. Surrounded by Asians and Westerners and conversing mostly in English at the workplace, I realized I had forgotten my native tongue and had difficulty understanding Kuwaiti words spoken by my friends,” he told Kuwait Times.

“So I shifted from creating software to creating dictionaries. Initially, I started compiling words and their meanings on MS Access, going back to the root of each word. I found myself in a deep ocean where I had to swim or sink. After nine years of efforts, my first book was published – an encyclopedia of the Kuwaiti dialect – in 2009. My latest books were published in 2023,” he added.

Even as technology and social media are impacting the Kuwaiti dialect and many “progressive” parents and youth are exclusively speaking English or a mix of Arabic and English, Rashaid is unconcerned, unlike many other linguists. “Let them learn new languages. Eventually as Arabs, they will learn Arabic. Also, new words are added, but the original Arabic words remain unchanged,” he said.

The linguistic landscape is constantly evolving, and with globalization and increased communication, the vocabulary and expressions of Kuwaiti Arabic are changing too. These are signs of a living language, but the changes have to be documented for posterity. However, Rashaid lamented the lack of support from the government to research and preserve the Kuwaiti dialect. “We are left to fend for ourselves,” he rued.



A Day in the Life

Weaving a historical narrative: Volunteering at Al-Sadu House



Abdullah Gholoum explaining the Sadu weaving technique at Sadu House.



Sadu yarns in earthen colors.



Sadu yarns colored in dyes brought from India.



Camel head decorative accessory that was exclusively used by elites and merchants.



Materials from which yarns to weave Sadu are dyed.

By Ghadeer Ghouloum

Volunteering is not only a learning adventure — it is an emotionally fulfilling and rewarding experience, as it attracts kind and goodhearted individuals. With these words, Abdullah Gholoum expressed to Kuwait Times the beauty of volunteer work and its psychological impact, as well as its practical benefits on an individual.

Gholoum, an active volunteer at Al-Sadu House and an English student, gave Kuwait Times an inside look into his full day. He begins his day by attending university, where he studies English literature. He then heads to a nearby coffeeshop to complete his assignments and relieve himself of worrying about deadlines for the rest of the day. "After I'm done with my morning work, I head home for lunch with my family, pray and rest before I delve into my online German language classes, as I am learning a third language to invest in my personal growth," he explained.

After sunset, his adventures at Sadu House begin. "I am volunteering as a guide for visitors, particularly visitors who don't speak Arabic. This decision was made after the leader found out that I am capable of speaking multiple languages. I take visitors on a tour, explaining the significance of each item in every room at Sadu House, and I offer them an insight into Kuwait's history of Sadu weaving, where the materials and colors come from, and showcase examples of woven Sadu that draw inspiration from different cultures like India, Palestine and others," Gholoum said.

Besides the interesting historical informa-



Abdullah Gholoum

tion Gholoum imparts while volunteering at Sadu House, he cherishes the friendships he has made during his time volunteering. "The people I meet at Sadu House are very kind. I have made many new friendships with people from different parts of the world, but the most remarkable ones are Germans, as I tend to use their native Deutsch language while guiding them around the place to make them feel at home. This never fails to bring joy to them and I," he said.

Sadu House holds a special place in his heart, not only because it is one of the most significant touristic attractions in Kuwait, but also because it allows him to interact with people from all around the world. Gholoum recalled a heartwarming moment at Sadu House.



Material from which textiles are made, alongside a brush that helps with the weaving.

"I was once guiding two elderly German couples around Sadu House. At the end of the day, one of the women decided to give me a tip as a memento for the unforgettable experience. I am keeping the tip she gave me as a cherished keepsake," he concluded.

Pushing boundaries: Unveiling Kuwait's artistic visionaries

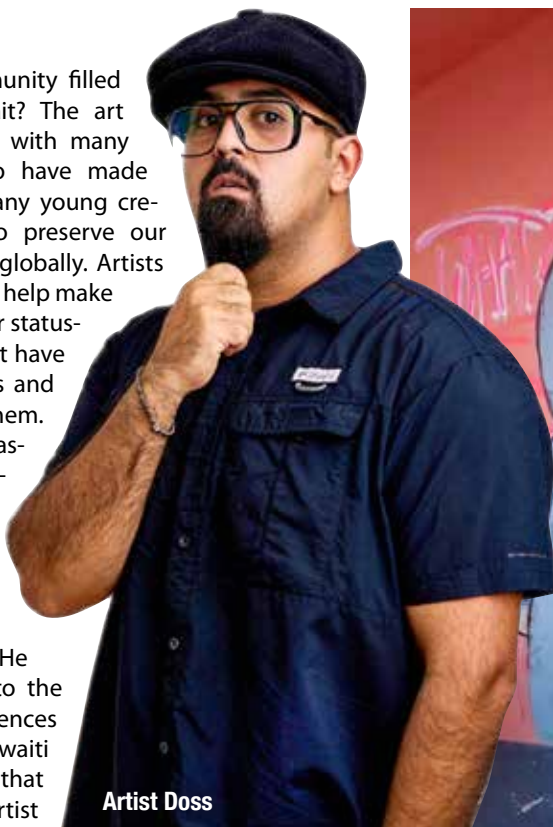
By Lulu Al-Wahaib

Is there a hidden community filled with creatives in Kuwait? The art scene in Kuwait is rich with many contemporary artists who have made headlines and inspired many young creatives. They've learned to preserve our culture while spreading it globally. Artists now turn to social media to help make connections and grow their statuses. Modern artists in Kuwait have adapted to these practices and learned how to utilize them. Kuwait Times spoke with Jassem Al-Sane, a young artist attending the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) as a fine arts major.

Jassem said he found inspiration for his art from his personal background. He states he is "very drawn to the collective cultural experiences and histories we hold as Kuwaiti people and parts of society that are silenced". The young artist has created pieces made of mixed materials such as silicone and vinyl. He has created pieces that memorialize the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. The artwork is political yet beautiful in the sense that people are left wanting to know more about this hyper-realistic figure in front of them.

Beyond his incredible artwork, Jassem said that being an artist in Kuwait comes with both benefits and drawbacks. Art that isn't "marketable" doesn't seem to do well, even if it is beautiful. Jassem finds that the issue in Kuwait is that "the artistic scene is heavily reliant on capital and sales". Seemingly, it is hard to break through as an artist without relying on the market. A piece of advice from Jassem would be to "encourage parents to make it normalized to be able to pursue art as a career instead of just a hobby."

Jassem is not the only Kuwaiti artist making his mark. Doss, a well-known artist with over 12,000



Artist Doss



Doss' artwork.



Artist Jassem Al-Sane

followers on Instagram, has been creating jaw-dropping graffiti art. The artist just finished his own workshops in the Netherlands. When asked about finding like-minded creatives in Kuwait, he said "the power of social media is there to help". Like Jassem, Doss speaks of how there is a lack of marketing with certain art, and it is best to seek artwork in galleries.

Doss creates graffiti in a very modern style, but his inspiration stems from his own traditions and culture. Statues and traditional artists seem to inspire Doss' work. Modern artists like Doss have been able to revive cultural themes in their own modern art with current artistic styles. As a graffiti artist, Doss has struggled as his unique art form requires different art forms and ideas than other artists. Doss pushes the boundaries of what people expect art to be. The world is truly his canvas.

Artists like Jassem and Doss, using unconventional art forms, create art globally and successfully. Many of Kuwait's citizens should be realizing their potential as culture-rich creatives. The sky is the limit for Kuwait's arts.



Jassem's hyper-realistic artworks created at RISD.



Doss' inspiration as an artist.

Mamluki Lancet Mosque:

An exquisite interplay of historical and modern architecture



The exterior of the Adlah Mohammed Abdulrahman Al-Bahar Mosque reveals the building's segmentation into five stone masses and its alignment to the qibla and the site. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By Passant Hisham

Inspired by the traditional Islamic architecture of Egypt, the Mamluki Lancet Mosque (Adlah Mohammed Abdulrahman Al-Bahar Mosque) reflects a unique mélange of historical and modern architecture that honors Arab heritage while embracing the present. Located within the heart of a residential neighborhood in Masayel in Kuwait, the mosque offers a spiritual and functional worship space for the local community.

Kuwait Times joined the designer of the mosque, architect Jassim Al-Saddah, on an exclusive architectural journey to explore this magnificent work of art which took him three years to bring to fruition. At first glance, the exterior of the mosque reveals the building's segmentation into five stone masses stacked and rotated in alignment to the qibla (prayer direction towards the Kaaba in



Jassim Al-Saddah

Makkah) and the site.

The choice of five wasn't made randomly, but because it is considered a sacred number in Islam. "The fractal relationship between the five different masses is intended to symbolize the five pillars of Islam," Saddah pointed out, referring to the core beliefs that form the foundation of a Muslim's life.

Inspired by the historic era of the Mamluk Empire, the color palette of the mosque embraces a modern approach through the harmonious blending of gray stone and white clay that adorn both the interior and exterior, along with enriched ornate detailing. The building replicates a series of lancet arches that are applied in different aspects, such as in the shapes of windows, doors and other structural elements. "The repetition of pattern gives a sense of unity, which is a reminder of Divine unity," Saddah said, adding "unity gives a distinctive identity to worship places as it creates synchronicity among the design elements, adding an aesthetic touch to it."



Water coolers next to the mosque.



Multiple lancet arches symbolizing Divine unity.



A grand wooden door marks the main entrance of the mosque.

The main entrance of the mosque is made of a grand wooden door inviting worshippers into the sacred space. The door's shape and design automatically direct one's attention to one of the most significant elements of mosques — the dome — which lies behind the door. Domes in Islamic architecture represent a form of worship and connection to the sky. Unlike traditional mosques, the dome here is constructed as a half dome, featuring the symbolic Islamic moon inside it. Embodying the mosques' essence, a stately minaret stands tall, descending to the indoor mihrab area to provide an unhindered open space for prayers. The minimal and calm interior gives a sense of familiarity and belonging with the place, "Places of worship should be simply designed and structured to radiate peace and

tranquility, as these features reflect the purity of Islam," Saddah said.

The place is naturally illuminated by sunlight penetrating through the roof. According to Saddah, this light symbolizes the power of God's light. The interior walls complement the minimalistic design of the mosque, with engraved Quranic phrases in calligraphic strokes that are elongated to give a modern relief effect.

The mosque's design embodies a solid structure that perfectly integrates all its parts in a seamless manner, reflecting meaningful messages. Saddah said finding the perfect balance between traditional and modern elements of design was the most challenging part of building this mosque. But he is proud of the unique structure that came into being. He believes in the world of architecture, it's very crucial to get back to your roots before creating any design, because the richness and deepness of Arab heritage makes it a great source of inspiration for all architects out there.



Quranic calligraphy engraved on the walls.



The door with the name of the mosque.



The mihrab, where the imam leads prayers.



The calm and minimalistic interior of the mosque.

Sports

India level Test series despite Markram's herculean effort

Victorious India are a danger anywhere in the world

CAPE TOWN: India beat South Africa by seven wickets despite a stunning century by Aiden Markram on the second day of the second Test at Newlands on Thursday and level the series. Set to make 79 to win, India needed just 12 overs to secure the victory.

South Africa won the first Test in Centurion by an innings and 32 runs. Chasing a small target on a difficult pitch, Indian opening batsman Yashasvi Jaiswal went on the attack from the first ball, making 28 off 23 deliveries before being caught on the boundary off Nandre Burger.

Shubman Gill (10) and Virat Kohli (12) fell to Kagiso Rabada and Marco Jansen before Shreyas Iyer hit the winning boundary with his only scoring stroke. Captain Rohit Sharma was unbeaten on 16. Markram hit 106 off 103 balls before South Africa were bowled out for 176 shortly before lunch.

Jasprit Bumrah took six for 61 — and was denied the wicket of Markram when the batsman, on 71, edged a drive and wicketkeeper KL Rahul could not hold a catch above his head. Markram defied a pitch with pace, extravagant seam movement and uneven bounce, on which the highest score of any of his teammates in either innings was 15.

He hit 17 fours and two sixes, one of

which, off Prasidh Krishna, sailed out of the ground and onto a railway line beyond square leg. The 29-year-old opening batsman was eventually out caught at mid-off by Sharma off Mohammed Siraj attempting another big shot.

Siraj set up India's win when he took six for 15 as South Africa were bowled out for 55 before lunch on Wednesday. Twenty-three wickets fell on the first day.

Indian captain Rohit Sharma said his team's seven-wicket win inside two days over South Africa in the second Test at Newlands on Thursday had shown their ability to play anywhere in the world.

Apart from Markram, who hit 106 off 103 balls in South Africa's second innings of 176, batsmen struggled throughout the match on a pitch with pace, seam movement and uneven bounce. "Even though the conditions were tough for the batters the bowlers still had to get the ball in the right areas," said Sharma.

"We battled well to get a hundred run lead. We knew it was going to be a short match and every run mattered. To get that lead was very important for us. "To come to this part of the world is always challenging but in the last four or five years we have become a very good travelling



CAPE TOWN: South Africa (L) and India (R) players pose with the trophy after drawing the series at Newlands stadium in Cape Town on January 4, 2024. — AFP

team. "For us to come out here and win like this gives us a lot of confidence that we can perform under any conditions."

Dean Elgar, South Africa's stand-in captain in his last match before retiring from international cricket, admitted the hosts had misread the pitch in deciding to bat first after winning the toss. "To the

naked eye it looked like quite a nice one but it played totally different from what everyone thought it would play," said Elgar, who was named along with Jasprit Bumrah as players of the series. "It was a tough one for us. "We were pretty positive coming into this game.

"The first innings killed us with the

bat. India brought their intensity and used the conditions superbly." After 23 wickets fell on the first day, the second morning turned into a battle between Markram and Bumrah. Markram defied a pitch on which the next highest individual score was 46 by Virat Kohli in India's first innings. — AFP

Third round of Equestrian League starts today

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The third round of the Equestrian League for Showjumping will kick off on Friday at the Hunting and Equestrian Club at 8:30 am.

Competitions today will be at the heights of 90, 105, 115, 125, and 135 cm while on Saturday there will be four heats at 110, 120 and 130 cm, while the grand prize heat will be at 140 cm. The total prize money for first place winners is KD 10,000.

International Judge, Secretary of Kuwait Equestrian Federation Nabila Al-Ali said "the third round of the league will be highly competitive between several riders to win first place". She said the season has eight rounds giving everyone a chance to win.

Al-Ali thanked government and private sectors for supporting the equestrian sport encouraging guardians to attend and support their loved ones in all competitions.

Rider Ali Al-Kharafi shares first place with Abrar Al-Musallam with 45 points follow with 28 points by Abdulrahman Al-Fuzaie and Ghazi Al-Juraiwi with 28 points.



Nabila Al-Ali

England bring in NZ's Strawbridge for Six Nations coaching stint

LONDON: New Zealand's Andrew Strawbridge will join England coach Steve Borthwick's backroom staff for the first few weeks of the Six Nations, the Rugby Football Union announced on Thursday. The 59-year-old, a skills consultant to the All Blacks side that finished runners-up at last year's World Cup, will be a consultant coach for matches against Italy, Wales and Scotland in February.

England also face Ireland and France the following month. Strawbridge helped the New Zealand Under-20s secure two world titles and was an assistant coach when the Waikato Chiefs won successive Super Rugby titles, in 2012 and 2013. After a spell with Samoa, he returned to Waikato in 2019 as head coach, a position he held for two years before becoming director of rugby in 2021.

"Andrew is another coach with a wealth of knowledge," said Borthwick, who has already added Felix Jones, fresh from helping South Africa win back-to-back World Cup titles, to his staff. "He (Strawbridge) has worked extensively and successfully in Super Rugby and international rugby, most recently with New Zealand to help them to the final of the 2023 Rugby World Cup.

"Andrew has an incredible reputation in player development and has helped a large number of players progress to be amongst the best in the world. His work around the contact area is incredibly highly regarded, ensuring teams have the quick ball needed to launch a threatening attack."

Jones will be responsible for England's defence with Kevin Sinfield, Borthwick's longtime assistant, moving to coaching individual skills and the kickers. Richard Wigglesworth continues as attack coach and Tom Harrison remains in charge of the scrum.

Warner out for 34 to 'a ripper' in farewell Test

SYDNEY: Pakistan captured the key wickets of Australia openers David Warner and Usman Khawaja before rain washed out the second day's play in the third Test in Sydney on Thursday.

Marnus Labuschagne was on 23 and Steve Smith six in their team's 116 for two before play was ended by bad light and rain before tea. The hosts trailed by 197 runs on a day where Warner was denied a crack at a cherished century in his 112th and final Test match.

Warner was dismissed for 34 and looked annoyed as he left the Sydney Cricket Ground to a standing ovation from his home crowd. The 37-year-old opener, known in cricket as 'the Bull', was beaten by the extra bounce and turn out of the rough by offspinner Agha Salman to edge off to a delighted Babar Azam at slip.

"I always love batting with Davey (Warner), and it's nice to see him leave on a high," said his long-time friend and opening partner Khawaja. "He just got a ripper of a ball. "It's really good to watch that people are getting around him because I believe he deserves it. It's nice to see people give him the accolades he deserves and going out on a high."

Warner, who still has a potential second innings to bat in his last Test, has now scored 8,729 Test runs since his 2011 debut at an average of 44.53 with 26 centuries. He did have a reprieve when he was put down on 20 by young debutant Saim Ayub at first slip in Aamer Jamal's first over. It continued a wretched time for Pakistan in the field in this series

Teen darts star Littler eyes future glory after defeat

LONDON: Teenage darts sensation Luke Littler says he has what it takes to become a world champion after falling at the final hurdle in his history-making bid. The 16-year-old debutant set London's Alexandra Palace alight during the PDC World Darts Championship, which began in mid-December.

He was one win away from becoming the youngest world champion after a gripping run to the final. But new world number one Luke Humphries came out on top on Wednesday, winning 7-4 to lift the

Golf players, fans hope for PGA-LIV unity

LOS ANGELES: World number five Patrick Cantlay has sympathy for golf fans, but the PGA Tour Policy Board member had no big news for them on Wednesday at the PGA's 2024 season-opening event. Negotiations involving the board began after last June's announcement of a framework merger agreement to unite the PGA and DP World Tour with Saudi backers of the LIV Golf League but have yet to produce any final deal.

With golf's future in limbo as the PGA season begins in Hawaii and LIV planning a Mexico launch in four weeks, Cantlay could relate to fans seeking

Sid Waddell trophy for the first time.

Littler said the experience had been "unbelievable", apologising for not being able to "give the crowd what they wanted". "I just wanted to win one game and come back after Christmas, that was the only goal I set, so this is a massive bonus," he said.

"No one likes losing. I have not really lost much, so to lose on that stage I can't really be angry. The only thing I am angry about is that I lost a lot of legs on my throw and I was just chasing Luke. "I have won six games here so why can't I go and win seven here in years to come? I have gained a lot of experience and stage experience."

Littler, who left school last year to concentrate on his darts, said he wants to be an inspiration to other youngsters. "I hope I have caught lots

of young people's minds to get on a board and just try it out," he said.

"If they don't like it that's fine but I'd advise them to give it a go because it is a good sport and once you get into it you'll always love it."

Celebrity status

Littler won £200,000 (\$255,000) for finishing second at Alexandra Palace and now has even more earning power due to his celebrity status. "I have just got to be myself and be the Luke Littler I have been here for the last three to four weeks," he said.

"It has changed me a lot. I have broken into the top 32, I have got a bit of money now, which is going to help. "Getting into the top 32 will definitely help me qualify for pretty much every event in the year." It



SYDNEY: Australia's David Warner (R) and Usman Khawaja walk onto the field at the start of the second day's play of the third cricket Test match between Australia and Pakistan at the Sydney Cricket Ground on January 4, 2024 in Sydney. — AFP

with a number of dropped chances.

Ayub put his head down in anguish after fluffing the simple chance, which came after his two-ball duck in Wednesday's first innings of his first Test match. Khawaja, who averages 130 in Tests at the SCG, fell to a gloved catch down the leg-side off Jamal for 47, that was detected on review after a patient 143 balls at the crease.

Australia still have a strong batting line-up to come with Smith averaging 72 in 11 Tests at

the famous SCG and Labuschagne 76 at the ground. Travis Head and Mitchell Marsh, who already has scores of 90, 63 not out and 96 in this series, will be next in.

The rain interruption continued the Sydney Test's soggy weather reputation. The SCG has suffered 26 washed-out days, the most of any Australian Test ground. Australia clinched the three-match series with a tense 79-run win in the second Test in Melbourne over Christmas. — AFP

an end to the uncertainty. "I feel for the fan," Cantlay said. "There has been a ton of confusion not only for players out on tour in the last year or two, but I can only imagine for the fan at home.

"I think the fan is rooting for the attention to go back squarely onto golf and squarely onto the tournaments that are being played and to forget all of this political non-golf talk, which has consumed a lot of the energy over the last couple years."

For now, the only places for PGA and LIV stars to compete are majors. But Cantlay hopes the PGA Tour's new set of signature events, with larger purses and smaller fields, will help until the dealmaking concludes.

"I hope with having more of the best players play the same weeks, they know exactly which weeks are important to us players and they get to see a lot more tournaments where the best players on tour are competing against each other down the stretch on Sunday," Cantlay said.

Other players at The Sentry in Kapalua want PGA-LIV unity for the sake of fans, players and sponsors as they focus on golf and trust the board to hammer out a solution. "I'm a small piece of a big puzzle," reigning Olympic champion Xander Schauffele said. "I think everyone wants to see that puzzle sort of whole without missing pieces. The product is probably better if all together than sort of split up."

Exactly how LIV players who defected from the PGA would be welcomed back was something Schauffele could not solve. "I'm sure there's some smart people out there that have some ideas on how to do it correctly. I'm not one of them," he said.

"You just need someone that's really smart that's going to create a fair pathway back for everyone to play again." Two-time major winner Collin Morikawa just wants the LIV-PGA fight to end. "At this point, I think just deals need to be made and we all need to get back to playing golf," he said. — AFP

Sports

Sharp-shooting Al-Attiyah takes aim at 6th Dakar title

This year's route includes a first ever 48-hour stage in the Empty Quarter

AL-ULA: The Dakar Rally roars into life on Friday in Saudi Arabia with Qatari Nasser Al-Attiyah seeking a sixth title and third in a row in the mythic motor-sport marathon. A 425-strong colourful caravanserai made up of cars, bikes, quads and trucks sets out from Al-Ula on a treacherous 4,900-mile odyssey around the Gulf kingdom with a January 19 finish in Yanbu on the Red Sea.

This year's route includes a first ever 48-hour stage in the Empty Quarter, a vast sea of sand with dunes as far as the eye can see. Al-Attiyah, 53, is adept at multi-tasking - juggling the sand dunes of Saudi with his other passion, skeet shooting.

He took bronze at the 2012 London Olympics, and in September added two medals at the Asian Games to add to the shooting golds he collected in 2002 and 2010. He now puts his preparations for his seventh Olympics in Paris in July to one side to try to become only the third driver to win three successive Dakars.

"The last Dakar was difficult for everyone. It's incredible that I was able to hold on to my title," he told the event's official website. Al-Attiyah first mastered the Dakar in 2011 in a Volkswagen, winning the 2015 edition in a Mini before success for Toyota in 2019, 2022 and last year.

He has since left the Japanese constructor to drive his Nasser Racing Team-sponsored and British-based Prodrive Hunter. "I'm so happy to have won five times. I'm now delighted to be part of a new team and to take on a new challenge for the next Dakar.

"It gives me new motivation in my quest for victory on the Dakar. I've won the Dakar five times with three different teams. We will make rally history if we win the 2024 Dakar with the Prodrive Hunter." One of his arch rivals, nine-time world rally champion Sebastian Loeb, is also behind the wheel of a ProDrive for his BRX Team.

'Third star'

Loeb has finished second to his new teammate in the past two runnings with no fewer than seven stage wins last time. Al-Attiyah said he had "a lot of respect" for Loeb. After knocking at the Dakar door in 2022 and 2023 Loeb approaches his eighth edition full of optimism.

"What I remember from the last Dakar is that this second place is motivating for the future because we were competitive," said the 49-year-old Frenchman. "We now have to put everything together to win. Of course, it's not easy to beat Nasser Al-Attiyah and (co-driver)

Mathieu Baumel. They hardly make any mistakes. To do that, they'd have to have a few little problems." Stephane Peterhansel, who holds the all-time record of 14 Dakar wins, and former rally champion and three-time winner Carlos Sainz, father of Ferrari's Formula One driver who bears the same name, are driving Audi's hybrid-electric car.

In the bike section defending champion Kevin Benavides, who beat Toby Price by a thrilling 43 seconds last year, is back to defend his title after recovering from a broken femur and wrist. The Argentinian KTM rider, a winner with Honda in 2021, said: "I have nothing to prove. But the motivation is the same.

"I continue to ride because I love it. I think I have a chance to achieve more. I'm ultra-competitive. I'm going to give my best. I'm going with the hope of winning a third star." The 46th running of the event may be called the Dakar, but the last time the Senegalese capital actually hosted the finish was way back in 2007 - the security situation in Mauritania forced the 2008 cancellation.

It moved then to South America until finding a new home in Saudi Arabia since 2020. The Saudis are spending billions to turn the conservative Arab monarchy often criticised for its human rights record



AL-ULA: Prodrive's Qatari driver Nasser Al-Attiyah walks past his car during a check-up in the bivouac ahead of the Dakar rally 2024 in Al-Ula, Saudi Arabia, on January 3, 2024. — AFP

into a major sporting force as it tries to diversify its economy away from oil.

Aside from the Dakar the Saudis have invested spectacularly in luring some of the world's top footballers into the Saudi Pro-League. The kingdom also stages a

Formula One Grand Prix in Jeddah, high profile boxing fights, the world's richest horse race, and last season rocked the world of golf with the launch of the LIV Tour. The kingdom is also the sole bidder for the 2034 World Cup. — AFP



Zain's fan zone at Sabah Al Salem Stadium.



Company engaged with fans of all ages.

Zain brings derby excitement closer to local fans

KUWAIT: In an exciting day for local football fans, and with over 25,000 spectators attending Sabah Al Salem Stadium, Zain celebrated the thrills of the Kuwait Premier League (Dawri Zain) derby between Arabi SC and Qadisiya SC in the 13th round's opening match. The company set up a dedicated fan zone to engage with fans of all ages during the most-anti-

pated clash in the league.

This step was part of the plan Zain outlined to engage with football enthusiasts through its official sponsorship of the Kuwait Football Association's competitions for the 2022-2026 seasons. This partnership includes the biggest two contests: The Kuwait Premier League (Dawri Zain) and the Zain First Division League, and also includes extended support to HH the Amir's Cup, HH the Crown Prince's Cup, and the KFA Cup (Zain Cup). For the exhilarating derby match between Arabi SC and Qadisiya SC, Zain dedicated a special fan zone at Sabah Al Salem Stadium, with activities and fun programs starting two hours before the kick-off whistle. Scores of fans from both clubs joined the fan zone's activities, where Zain presented sports-

themed games and distributed gifts and prizes.

Continuing its pledge to support athletes and promote excellence in the league, Zain has dedicated 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. The company remains a strong supporter of local athletes and believes that such encouragement to athletes and engagement with fans contribute to elevating the league's quality.

Zain firmly believes that the private sector has a vital and active role in developing the local sports and youth sectors, and the company makes this belief a reality by sponsoring and supporting some of the nation's biggest sports competitions, including this partnership with Kuwait's top football contest.

Lee, Mbappe goals give PSG French Champions trophy

PARIS: Lee Kang-in and Kylian Mbappe scored first-half goals as Paris Saint-Germain won the first silverware of the French season on Wednesday, beating Toulouse 2-0 to claim the Champions Trophy. Lee, playing his final game before heading off to the Asian Cup in Qatar with South Korea, put PSG ahead in the third minute, leaving Toulouse with an uphill battle at the Parc des Princes.

Mbappe then added a superb second goal just before half-time, as Paris claimed the Champions Trophy for the 10th time in the last 11 seasons. "We were exceptional in the first half. It was our best 45 minutes of my time here," said PSG coach Luis Enrique after claiming his first silverware as a coach since leaving Barcelona in 2017.

France's version of a Super Cup is habitually the curtain-raiser to the season and has usually been staged abroad over the last 15 years, including in Tel Aviv at the beginning of the last campaign. This season's edition was initially due to be played in Thailand in August before being postponed and held in PSG's own stadium rather than on neutral ground.

Home advantage gave Luis Enrique's team, the reigning Ligue 1 champions, the edge as they

opened the scoring from one of their first attacks, Lee firing in from Ousmane Dembele's cushioned first-time ball into the middle.

It was a third goal of the season for Lee, who is likely to have a big role to play as South Korea aim to

win the Asian Cup for the first time since 1960. Toulouse, taking part after winning last season's French Cup, almost equalised late in the first half when a Thijs Dallinga shot was tipped onto the post by PSG goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma. — AFP



PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain players celebrate with the trophy after winning the French Champions' Trophy (Trophée des Champions) football match between Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) and Toulouse FC at the Parc des Princes stadium in Paris. — AFP

Girona snatch thrilling 4-3 win over Atletico

GIRONA: Shock Spanish title challengers Girona snatched a remarkable 4-3 victory over Atletico Madrid to keep pace with Real Madrid at the top of La Liga on Wednesday. After Madrid edged Real Mallorca 1-0, Ivan Martin's stoppage time strike ensured the Catalan minnows matched Carlo Ancelotti's side on 48 points from 19 matches.

Alvaro Morata hit a hat-trick for Atletico at Girona's tiny Montilivi stadium, but it was not enough as Martin found the top corner at the death to keep Girona firmly in the hunt for the title. Atletico Madrid, third, trail Los Blancos and Girona by 10 points, as do champions Barcelona, fourth, who visit Las Palmas on Thursday.

Valery Fernandez, Savinho and Daley Blind netted for the hosts in a wild first half, with Morata twice scoring for Atletico. The Spain international completed his treble early in the second period to pull Atletico level but Martin's last gasp heroics snatched Girona victory from a compelling clash.

Girona, in only their fourth season in the top flight in their history, could have taken the lead inside the first minute. Artem Dovbyk fired wide at the near post when well placed, but his team did not have to wait much longer.

Valery curled home in the second minute beyond Jan Oblak with a fine strike from the edge of the area. Morata pulled Atletico level after being teed up by Antoine Griezmann, and although his effort was ruled out for offside, VAR proved otherwise.

Girona were quickly back ahead with Savinho netting after 26 minutes, turning home after Oblak parried Martin's effort. Michel Sanchez's side pressed high and Atletico were extremely fragile when bringing the ball out from the back.

Blind turned home the third after Aleix Garcia's cross was cleverly flicked on to the back post by Dovbyk's outstretched boot. Morata was heavily involved for Atletico and after netting from Rodrigo de Paul's pass, struck again—this time he was offside.

The forward slashed another effort over before completing his hat-trick after the break with the aid of a slight deflection, after being sent through again by De Paul. Oblak was sharp to deny Dovbyk as Girona hunted for a winner, with the game still relentlessly flowing from end-to-end.

Eventually Martin found it, scrapping for an inch of space inside the area and cleverly prodding a finish into the top corner, with Oblak only able to watch as Girona's dream grew bigger still. — AFP

Classifieds

Clinics & Hospitals

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707	Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Rawda	22517733	Qadisiya	22515088
Adaliya	22517144	Dasmah	22532265
Khalidiya	24848075	Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Kaifan	24849807	Shaab	22518752
Shamiya	24848913	Qibla	22459381
Shuwaikh	24814507	Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Abdullah Salem	22549134	Mirqab	22456536
Nuzha	22526804	Sharq	22465401
		Salmiya	25746401

Change of Name

I, KANIKAIRAJ PAUL ROBERT, holder of Indian passport no. L6662628 having permanent address R No. 68 8 Azad Nagari Lalangam Rd, Colaba, Mumbai, Maharashtra, pin code: 400005, India residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as given name MOHAMMAD YUSUF and surname SHAIKH. (#4584) 5-1-2024

I, TASNEEM, holder of Passport No. R7728875 do hereby change my name to TASNEEM (as Given name) LOKHANDWALA (as Surname) 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 Ameerah 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 Ameerah and surname: Syed (#4582) 3-1-2024

Rudiger scrapes Real Madrid tight win over Mallorca

Vinicius Junior returns from injury as Los Blancos struggle



MADRID: Real Madrid's Spanish forward #21 Brahim Diaz challenges Real Mallorca's Serbian goalkeeper #01 Predrag Rajkovic during the Spanish league football match between Real Madrid CF and RCD Mallorca at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium in Madrid. — AFP

MADRID: Antonio Rudiger snatched Real Madrid a 1-0 win over Real Mallorca to take them provisionally three points clear at the top of La Liga on Wednesday. The defender headed home from a corner with 12 minutes remaining to settle a tight clash in which Mallorca twice hit the woodwork.

Vinicius Junior made his return from injury as Los Blancos struggled to find a way through against their stubborn visitors at the Santiago Bernabeu. Eventually Rudiger converted from Luka Modric's corner to seal victory ahead of second-place Girona's clash with Atletico Madrid, third, later Wednesday.

"I scored last season (against Mallorca) and this year again, I'm very happy because it was an important goal and an important three points for us," said Rudiger. Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti was happy his team took advantage of a set piece to secure victory, just as they did against Alaves in their last game of 2023. "We lacked some freshness and accuracy in the final third, but we won because of a well-taken set piece," Ancelotti told reporters.

"There are games like today's in which dead balls can give you an advantage—we played against a

team that defended well." Madrid have now gone 18 matches without defeat across all competitions. Ancelotti, who renewed his contract last week until 2026, selected midfielder Aurelien Tchouameni alongside Rudiger at the heart of defence.

With David Alaba and Eder Militao injured and Nacho Fernandez suspended, the Italian was forced to innovate, but he was able to bring winger Vinicius back into the side for the first time since November 11. The Brazilian had been sidelined with a hamstring injury and was not at his effervescent best, although Mallorca's persistent Pablo Maffeo also had a say in the matter.

Even battle

La Liga's top goalscorer Jude Bellingham had Madrid's first chance, with Predrag Rajkovic fielding his header from Luka Modric's dangerous cross well. Vinicius dragged wide of goal after the Croatian playmaker set him up well, and then was thwarted by the flying Rajkovic.

The 23-year-old produced a cheeky nutmeg to bypass the scrambling Samu Costa and unleashed

from the edge of the box but the Serbian goalkeeper tipped his effort away. However it was Mallorca who came closest to scoring in the first half, with Antonio Sanchez heading against the underside of the crossbar, with the ball bouncing down on to—but not over—the line.

The visitors, 14th, hit the woodwork again when Costa pinged a low drive from distance against Andriy Lunin's far post early in the second half. Sanchez volleyed wildly over under pressure from Fran Garcia as Javier Aguirre's side wasted another good opportunity, badly missing injured hitman Vedat Muriqi.

Ancelotti withdrew Vinicius in the 60th minute for Brahim Diaz, who has impressed over the past two months in the forward's absence. Diaz hit the post with a close-range diving header after Rajkovic produced a sensational save from Rodrygo's effort, with Madrid fans stunned the ball did not end up in the gaping net. Eventually Rudiger broke the deadlock with a flicked header from Modric's inswinging corner after 78 minutes to secure Madrid the three points. Champions Barcelona, fourth, visit Las Palmas on Thursday. — AFP

Nadal rolls into Brisbane q-finals on comeback

BRISBANE: Rafael Nadal said every day was an adventure as his comeback from injury gathered pace with an aggressive 6-1, 6-2 drubbing of Australian Jason Kubler at the Brisbane International on Thursday.

Played in hot and humid conditions on Pat Rafter Arena, the Spanish great took 1hr 23min to see off Kubler, who battled hard but didn't have the weapons to trouble the 22-time Grand Slam champion. Nadal, 37, has not played on tour since suffering an injury at the 2023 Australian Open a year ago, resulting in two surgeries on his hip.

"Every day is an adventure," he said of his comeback. "I take every day like an opportunity, and tomorrow is another one." Nadal said leading into the tournament that he had no expectations for the Australian summer. But the form he showed against former US Open champion Dominic Thiem in the first round and now Kubler suggests he could be a real threat at the first Grand Slam of the year at Melbourne Park.

He raced to a 5-0 lead in the first set before Kubler got on the board, then broke the Australian's opening game of the second to stamp his authority on the match. "I started the match playing very well, with very good determination," Nadal said. "I tried to be aggressive from the baseline and I think it worked very well."

"I think it was a very positive match for me. Two victories after a long time being outside the professional tour is something that makes me feel good." He said his body was holding up well after the two matches. "The positive thing is that the first two matches haven't been super long," Nadal said.

"Of course, I had some feelings after the first match. I mean, I have been a year without playing with the tension of a real match, so I felt a little bit some muscles tired here and there. "In general terms, I felt good." The only real blemish for the Spaniard was a warning for a time violation for taking too long to return to court after a bathroom break at the end of the first set.

He later explained the humidity was so high that he had to do a complete change of clothes and was four seconds longer than he should have been. Nadal will next play Australian Jordan Thompson in the quarter-finals and remains on course for a blockbuster semi-final against second-seeded Bulgarian Grigor Dimitrov, who demolished Germany's Daniel Altmaier 6-1, 6-2. — AFP

Pelicans upset Wolves, Heat scorch Lakers

LOS ANGELES: Zion Williamson and C.J. McCollum combined for 51 points as the New Orleans Pelicans upset the Western Conference-leading Minnesota Timberwolves 117-106 in the NBA on Wednesday. Pelicans power forward Williamson led the scoring with 27 points while McCollum added 24 as New Orleans ground out an impressive victory on the road.

McCollum's tally included four three-pointers while Brandon Ingram (19 points) and Herbert Jones (16) also chipped in with valuable contributions. Jones' 16 points included four three-pointers from five attempts. Anthony Edwards led the Minnesota scoring with 35 points. Minnesota's defeat came just two days after their New Year's Day reverse to the New York Knicks and marked the first time this season the Wolves (24-9) have suffered consecutive losses.

The Pelicans' fourth straight win meanwhile leaves them in fifth place in the Western Conference as they bid to return to the playoffs this year after missing out in 2022-2023. "They're a really good team, they're the best team defensively, and sound offensively, so to come in here and get a win against a talented, well-coached team like Minnesota is huge for us," Pelicans coach Willie Green said. "It was a good wire-to-win for us."

Elsewhere, the Los Angeles Lakers slid to a third straight loss, falling 110-96 to the Miami Heat. LeBron James had a rare off-night, finishing with just 12 points after shooting six-of-18 from the field, leaving Anthony Davis to lead the Lakers with 29 points. Miami however were always in front after taking the lead early in the first quarter, with a balanced offensive performance seeing eight Heat players make double figures.

The Lakers were left ruing an inability to convert from three-point range, with the team making just



LOS ANGELES: Max Christie #10 and Jarred Vanderbilt #2 of the Los Angeles Lakers defend a rebound during a 110-96 Miami Heat win at Crypto.com Arena in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

four of 30 attempts from beyond the arc. In Indianapolis, the Indiana Pacers won the latest instalment of their simmering rivalry with the Milwaukee Bucks 142-130 to complete back-to-back victories over the 2021 NBA champions.

'Winning is fun'

Point guard Tyrese Haliburton led the scoring for the Pacers with 31 points on a night when seven Indiana players posted double-digit tallies for the home side, who trailed by two at half-time before taking control of the contest with a 47-point third quarter.

"Winning is fun, and we're having fun doing it right now — we've got to continue competing at a high level," Haliburton said. "If we keep getting good shots, good things will happen." Haliburton said defensive improvements had been the key to

the Pacers' game-changing third quarter display, which left Indiana leading by 16 points heading into the fourth quarter.

"We just had to lock in defensively — we've been scoring pretty well against those guys all year, so we had to figure out a way to get some stops, and we were able to do that in the second half," he said. Recent encounters between the two sides have seen tempers boil over, and there was a flashpoint in the fourth quarter when Benedict Mathurin drew a foul from Milwaukee's Giannis Antetokounmpo that triggered a scuffle between several players from both sides.

Antetokounmpo led Milwaukee's scorers with 26 points while Damian Lillard added 23 and Chris Middleton 19. Bucks coach Adrian Griffin lamed his team's turnover count — 13 in all — for letting the game slip away. — AFP