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Gaza war rages into fourth month

Two journalists killed in Zionist strike • Al Jazeera slams targeted killings

Amir receives PM-designate, PM, ministers

KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Sunday at Seif Palace HH the Prime Minister-designate Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah. HH the Amir also received Prime Minister HH Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah. HH the Amir then received First Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Sabah. HH the Amir also hosted Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Fahad Al-Sabah. — KUNA



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

GAZA: The Gaza war raged on into a fourth month on Sunday as the Zionist army pounded the Palestinian territory with strikes. Zionist bombardments had killed at least 113 people in the past 24 hours, said the health ministry in the besieged territory run by Hamas, with two journalists among the victims when their car was struck in Rafah.

The journalists killed, who were working for Al Jazeera, were identified as Mustafa Thuria, a video stringer who also worked for AFP and other media, and Hamza Wael Dahdouh, the son of the Qatari network's Gaza bureau chief who was recently wounded in a strike after his wife and two other children were killed in Zionist bombardment in the initial weeks of the war.

"Hamza was everything for me ... while we are full of humanity they (the Zionist entity) are full of murder and hatred."

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GAZA: The widow of Hamza Wael Dahdouh, a journalist with the Al Jazeera television network, and his father, Al Jazeera's bureau chief in Gaza, Wael Al-Dahdouh (left) mourn over his body during his funeral after he was killed in a Zionist air strike in Rafah on Jan 7, 2024. — AFP

NEWS IN BRIEF

MBS congratulates new PM

KUWAIT: Saudi Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammad bin Salman spoke with Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah to congratulate him on being appointed as Prime Minister of Kuwait. In a phone conversation on Saturday, the Saudi Crown Prince expressed best wishes for Sheikh Dr Mohammad, who thanked him for his brotherly feelings. — KUNA



Sheikh Dr Mohammad

Zionists kill 8 Palestinians in West Bank

JENIN: An air strike and gunfire in the West Bank killed eight Palestinians on Sunday, officials said, as violence surges in the occupied territory. Seven Palestinians were killed in a Zionist air strike in the area of Jenin refugee camp, a militant stronghold in the northern West Bank, according to the Palestinian health ministry. Zionist police said an officer was killed when her "vehicle... was hit by an explosive device" during a raid on the camp, adding that three other officers were wounded.

In a separate incident, a Palestinian

man was killed by Zionist army fire in Abwein village north of Ramallah, said the health ministry. Elsewhere in the Ramallah area, a Zionist was shot dead, according to the army, which said forces were searching for the assailant. The man was "killed adjacent to the British police junction" north of Ramallah, it said in a statement.

Violence in the West Bank has surged to levels unseen in nearly two decades since Oct 7. Zionist forces carry out regular raids in the occupied territory including Jenin and its adjacent refugee camp, often triggering gun battles between Palestinian militants and Zionist forces. The official Palestinian news agency Wafa reported early Sunday a major deployment of Zionist forces in Jenin. It said a "(Zionist) drone strike" killed six

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JENIN: Mourners carry the flag-draped bodies of Palestinians killed in a Zionist raid in the occupied West Bank during their funeral on Jan 7, 2024. — AFP

Helpers' fees to include ticket

KUWAIT: The Public Authority of Manpower has contacted the ministry of commerce and industry to change the fees collected by domestic helper recruitment offices and include the worker's airfare in the overall charge. The new step helps "protect citizens from falling victim to scams" and to have more control in resolving disputes between them and recruitment offices, PAM said.

Palestinians rebury bodies

GAZA: Bereaved Palestinians on Saturday reburied bodies exhumed from a cemetery in Gaza City, where the Zionist army has been leading a ground offensive. Footage from the cemetery in Al-Tuffah neighborhood showed bodies wrapped in bags and laid out on mounds of soil. Other bodies were strewn around smashed up graves, as a dozen men clad in masks worked with shovels to rebury them. Hamas on Saturday accused the Zionist military of "destroying 1,100 graves" at the cemetery and "stealing 150 bodies of recently buried martyrs". A local man accused the Zionist army of "running over bodies" with a "bulldozer". — AFP

Blinken faces calls for Gaza ceasefire, aid

AMMAN/DOHA: Jordan's king urged the top United States diplomat on Sunday to push for a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and an end to the humanitarian crisis brought by three months of war, the royal palace said. King Abdullah II made the remarks to Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who is on a Middle East tour aiming to ensure the Zionist-Hamas war does not spread.

Blinken was also visiting Qatar and the United Arab Emirates on Sunday.

A source with knowledge of the visit said that "negotiations between the Qataris with (the Zionist entity) and Hamas regarding the release of hostages in Gaza are ongoing, although recent events have naturally impacted the atmosphere surrounding the talks".

King Abdullah warned Blinken against "the catastrophic repercussions of continuation of the aggression against Gaza, underlining the necessity of ending the tragic humanitarian crisis" there, a statement from the royal palace said. The king reiterated "the important role of the United States in bringing pressure for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, protection of civilians, and guaranteeing

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LUSAIL: Qatar's Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani meets US Secretary of State Antony Blinken at Lusail Palace on Jan 7, 2024. — AFP

Mideast player Iran weakened by internal woes

PARIS: Iran stands accused by the West of playing a key role in unrest plaguing the Middle East, but twin bombings claimed by Islamic State militants are a keen reminder of its own internal weaknesses, analysts say. Wednesday's double suicide bombing left about 90 dead during a ceremony near the tomb of General Qasem Soleimani, on the fourth anniversary of the death of the revered former commander from powerful Iran's Revolutionary Guards.

Soleimani, killed in Jan 2020 by a US strike just after his arrival in Baghdad, had headed the Guards' foreign operations arm, the Quds Force, overseeing Iranian military operations across the Middle East. Iran, sworn enemy of the Zionist entity, has established an "axis of Iranian resistance" in the region, relying on Lebanon's militant Hezbollah group, militias in Iraq and Syria, and Houthi rebels in Yemen.

"Iran does not need to mobilize a single Iranian soldier. Its proxies do the work," said Hasni Abidi, director of the Center for Studies and Research on the Arab and Mediterranean World in Geneva. But while Iran has become "an important regional power with an enormous ability to do harm, it is in-

ternally fragile", he added. Tehran has denied any role in the Oct 7 attacks when Iran-backed Hamas militants stormed across the Gaza border with the Zionist entity. The Islamic Republic has also rejected any notion that it has helped foment Houthi attacks against ships in a key Red Sea strait in the months since the outbreak of the Zionist-Hamas war, which have badly disrupted international trade.

Wednesday's attack claimed by the IS militants is a potent reminder that the Zionist entity is not Tehran's only adversary, and it faces other, strong internal threats. "The fact that the Islamic Republic remains vulnerable to terrorism and cannot protect its own citizens from a massive attack reveals

serious security weaknesses," said Sannam Vakili, a director with the Chatham House think tank. "The political and security establishment will certainly be seen to be culpable."

IS claimed its first attack in Iran in 2017, targeting the parliament building in Tehran and the mausoleum of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Republic. Some 17 people were killed and dozens wounded. But Iran is also confronted by several separatist movements. In the impoverished province of Sistan-Baluchistan on the border with Pakistan, unrest has involved drug-smuggling gangs, rebels from the Baluchi minority, and extremists.

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Kuwaiti architects featured on AD100 Middle East list

Al-Nassar, Al-Saddah, Al-Awadhi, AGI Architects among top designers, architects

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Meshary Al-Nassar, Jassim Al-Saddah, Khaled Al-Awadhi and AGI Architects were selected among the AD100 Middle East list for the top designers and architects in the Middle East. Launched in March 2015, Architectural Digest Middle East is a bi-monthly magazine and part of the Condé Nast portfolio, and is considered the most trusted voice on design, culture and luxury lifestyle in the region, spotlighting exceptional design by Middle Eastern and international talents.

Meshary Al-Nassar

Meshary Al-Nassar, a multi-talented Kuwaiti creative, designs buildings, interiors, landscapes and products. His timeless aesthetic, awash with understated neutral hues and refined materials, is inspired by his local environment and traditional design elements, as well as midcentury Scandinavian style and the serene sculptures of Brancusi. As well as renovating a Spanish colonial villa in Jumeirah, he's also currently researching Middle Eastern construction techniques, with the aim of "redefining standards of social housing" in the region.

Jassim Al-Saddah

In 2010, Kuwaiti architect Jassim Al-Saddah founded his practice Babnimim – a play on Arabic words that together mean a small, intricate door – and since then, he and partner Tareq Hashim have dedicated themselves to delivering refined spaces, no matter the scale. Having just finished work on the futuristic Mamluki Lancet Mosque in Kuwait, the duo is in the midst of finalizing the Arch Mosque in Bahrain, their most high-profile public project yet.

Khaled Al-Awadhi

One of Kuwait's most exciting talents, Khaled Al-Awadhi creates refined yet simple interiors with his studio Fortytwelve. There's a translucent beauty to his Ode Eatery in Althuraya Mall, Kuwait, with its fluted glass paneling, micro-cement finishes and wood veneers. Doha's Earth coffee bar exudes calm with its palette of silver travertine, stainless steel and oak. "Design can easily be undermined as shallow, but we create spaces that help small businesses grow and put cities on the map," he said.



Combination of photos shows (Left to right) Khaled Al-Awadhi, Meshary Al-Nassar and Jassim Al-Saddah.



ICSK students take a group photo with Kuwait Times staff in the printing press.

ICSK students visit Kuwait Times and Kuwait News

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: Humanities students from Indian Community School, Kuwait embarked on a journey into the realm of journalism, where they were provided with an authentic taste of it and met Kuwait Times staff. The experience served as a powerful testament to the potential and diversity that journalism holds. Under the guidance of Jana Alnaqeeb, Public Relations and CSR manager at Kuwait Times and Kuwait News, the students were taken on an enthralling tour of the newspaper's various departments.

Each department's role in delivering content to Kuwait and the world was explained, accompanied by giving each student their copy of Kuwait Times' 63-year-old inaugural newspaper edition. The archive room, where Kuwait Times preserves its invaluable historical documents spanning six decades, was one of the remarkable experiences for the students, as they flipped through the pages of history.

They were led to the warehouse, where they witnessed the vibrant artistic coworking space, making it another astonishing area for the students. They enjoyed discovering every small and big detail that leaves a memorable impression on Kuwait Times' visitors. Their journey of exploration finally culminated in the studio, where Dhoha Al-Issa, video reporter and content creator, filmed a fun game with students who volunteered to be on camera for sharing on Kuwait Times' social media platforms.



Jana Alnaqeeb welcoming ICSK students on their arrival in Kuwait Times reception.



Students being introduced to the editorial department.



ICSK students being introduced to Kuwait Times' studio.



Indian Community School students exploring the archives.



Wathiq explaining to ICSK students how the printing press machines function.



ICSK students with their copies of Kuwait Times' first edition.



Kuwait's Amir HH Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah

Amir receives cable of congratulations

Algeria President

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received a cable from Algeria's President, Abdelmadjid Tebboune, on Sunday, congratulating His Highness the Amir on assuming pwer. President Tebboune expressed his sincere congratulations, wishing His Highness the Amir success and good health, prosperity, and progress for Kuwait. His Highness the Amir sent a reply cable to the president, expressing his appreciation for the heartfelt sentiments and wishing him good health.

Soloman Islands PM

His Highness the Amir received a letter on Sunday from the Prime Minister of the Solomon Islands, Manasseh Sogavare, congratulating him on assuming power. In the letter, the prime minister wished His Highness good health and more development and prosperity for Kuwait.

Belgium King

Kuwait Amir HH Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received a cable of congratulations from Belgium's King Philippe, expressing his congratulations to His Highness. He wished His Highness good health and further success.

Tunisia President

President of Tunisia Kais Saied sent a cable to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Sunday, congratulating him on assuming the top office. The President wished His Highness the Amir good health.

Senegal President

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah also received a cable from the President of Senegal, Macky Sall, congratulating him on assuming the top office. He wished His Highness the Amir good luck in leading Kuwait into a more promising future.

Ukraine President

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received a congratulatory message from Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Sunday. The Ukrainian President wished His Highness the Amir success and good health.

Singapore President

His highness the Amir received a cable of congratulations from President of Singapore Tharman Shanmugaratnam on his assumption of power. In the cable, the Singaporean president wished His Highness the Amir good health and for Kuwait's progress and prosperity.

Albania President

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Sunday a cable of congratulations from the President of the Republic of Albania, Bajram Begaj, for assuming the top office. The President wished His Highness the Amir success and good health. —KUNA

Iranian ambassador: Terrorism has no religious, national boundaries

Embassy opens condolence register, condemns attack in Martyrs Cemetery



Deputy Assistant Minister for Asian Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Khaled Al-Yassin



Ambassadors and officials at the Iranian Embassy.



Ambassador of Germany to Kuwait Hans-Christian Freiherr von Reibnitz

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: The Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran strongly condemned the terrorist attack in the Martyrs Cemetery in the city of Kerman in the southeast of Iran that killed and injured dozens of innocent citizens. A book of condolences was opened on Sunday, where a number of ambassadors, representatives of public benefit associations, community members and individuals expressed their condolences for the tragic martyrdom of nearly 100 Iranians.

Iranian Ambassador to Kuwait Mohammad Totonji emphatically underscored that terrorism has no religious or national boundaries and is an act universally rejected and condemned by people across the globe. His assertion reinforces the notion that combating terrorism requires collective efforts, devoid of divisive perspectives, as the international community unites against this common threat.

"Our region is targeted because of its sensitive location and great wealth, and that the only solution is to unify positions and unite. Such despicable crimes are planned from outside our region to make it permanently unstable. We hope security will prevail and peace will be established throughout the region that has suffered greatly from the scourge of terrorism," Totonji added.

Deputy Assistant Minister for Asian Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Khaled Al-Yassin, expressed profound sorrow on the terrorist explosions in Kerman. He conveyed Kuwait's strong denunciation and condemnation of these acts, extending heartfelt wishes for continued security and stability in Iran. Yassin also conveyed Kuwait's hope for a swift recovery for the injured and expressed prayers for mercy on the souls of the martyrs who lost their lives in the tragic incident.

Meanwhile, EU Ambassador to Kuwait Anne



Turkish Ambassador to Kuwait Tuba Nur Sonmez

Koistinen said: "The EU condemns in the strongest terms the bombing in the city of Kerman in Iran. The EU expresses its solidarity with the Iranian people. This act of terror has exacted a shocking toll of civilian deaths and injuries. Our thoughts now are with the victims and their families. Perpetrators must be held accountable." Ambassador of Germany to Kuwait Hans-Christian Freiherr von Reibnitz said he came to offer his deepest condolences to the Iranian ambassador for the terrorist attack in Kerman, wishing the Iranian people to live in peace and security.

The Vatican's Ambassador to Kuwait, Archbishop Eugene Nugent, conveyed heartfelt condolences to the Iranian ambassador for the lives lost in the terrorist act. He expressed the Vatican's deep sympathy, stating: "We pray for the victims and their families, and we wish the wounded speedy recovery."

In addressing a question regarding his assessment of international efforts against terrorism, Nugent acknowledged ongoing initiatives, but emphasized the necessity for more collective action. Stressing the



Vatican Ambassador Archbishop Eugene Nugent

importance for a united front, he called for intensified global cooperation in the fight against terrorism. The Vatican ambassador highlighted the imperative application of international law as a potent tool in eradicating this menace, emphasizing the need for effective measures to eliminate the scourge of terrorism.

For her part, Turkish Ambassador to Kuwait Tuba Nur Sonmez said: "We condemn the killing of about 100 innocent people in Kerman province, wishing speedy recovery for those injured as a result of this terrorist act. Our region is important and targeted by terrorist groups". She hoped all Islamic countries of the world should cooperate to confront terrorism.

Indonesian Ambassador Lena Maryana expressed her sincere condolences to the Iranian people and the families of the victims of this criminal terrorist act, affirming the Indonesian government and people condemn terrorism in all its forms, explaining that targeting innocent people is an unacceptable, criminal and internationally prohibited act.



Iranian Ambassador Mohammad Totonji (center), Ambassador of Germany to Kuwait Hans-Christian Freiherr von Reibnitz (left) and Vatican Ambassador Archbishop Eugene Nugent (right) take a photo.



Ambassador of Iraq Al-Manhal Al-Safi chat with Iranian Ambassador Mohammad Totonji.



KUWAIT: Education Minister and Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research Dr Adel Al-Mane visits Grade 12 students and the examination committee.



KUWAIT: Group of 12th graders take a photo. — KUNA photos

43,000 students start midterm exams

KUWAIT: The final midterm exams for the 2023–24 semester started on Sunday for some 43,000 high school students in the 12th grade for both sciences and arts disciplines. Some 27,540 sciences, 15,005 arts, and 824 religious studies students were eager

to start and perform their best to succeed in their studies and cultivate a bright future for Kuwait.

Meanwhile, Education Minister and Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research Dr Adel Al-Mane has stressed his keenness to make the academic year easy and convenient for students. Al-Mane visited Grade 12 students and the examination committee to check and monitor the academic activities of the students. The minister vowed to continue to improve the quality of education and

fight any negative phenomena.

He appreciated the leading and significant role of school administrations, members of the scientific and literary control, participants and all employees during the examination period. Al-Mane called on the students to exert effort and work hard so as to achieve their goals and ambitions. The minister was accompanied during the tour by the undersecretary of the Ministry of Education, the head of exams, Anwar Al-Hamdan and other high-ranking officials. —KUNA



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Gold price stabilizes at 2,045 per ounce

KUWAIT: Gold price stabilized at the end of last week's trading to \$2,045 per ounce after achieving a high of \$2,060 per ounce amid geopolitical and technical factors on the yellow metal, said Dar Al-Sabaek. In the report released on Sunday by the company, the prices of gold futures contracts for delivery next February stabilized at \$2,049 per ounce, ending a series of gains that lasted three weeks as traders reset their bets on the first cut in the US interest rate.

The metal markets are anticipating a decrease or stabilization of the US interest rate in the first quarter of this year, mainly in conjunction with the emergence of economic data indicating an increase in employment in the US market, as 216,000 jobs were added recently, bringing the unemployment rate to stabilize at 3.7 percent, the report added.

The eurozone also recorded an inflation rate of 2.9 percent in December, while the dollar index stabilized at 103.1 points. It also explained that there are possibilities of decreasing the US interest rate by 25 points during March, noting that the current week will witness the emergence of new inflation data, followed by US foreign trade data and producer prices.

Analysts do not only check technical data, but rather the rapid geopolitical developments in the Middle East and the possibility of expanding military tension in the region with the rise in maritime shipping costs, which may increase economic fluctuations, thus investors turn to the yellow metal instead of investing in high-risk markets, it noted. Regarding the local market, the price of a gram of 24 karat was KD 20.4, the price of 22 karat was KD 18.72, and silver closed at KD 274 per kilogram. The ounce is one of the units' measurements of mass, which is equal to 28.349 grams, while a troy ounce of gold equals 31.103 grams.

US Dollar stable

Meanwhile, the US dollar exchange rate against the Kuwaiti dinar was stable at KD 0.307 on Sunday, while the euro went up 0.16 percent to KD 0.336 in comparison to last Thursday, said the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK). The CBK revealed in its online daily bulletin that the exchange rates of the Pound Sterling went up 0.36 percent to reach KD 0.390, and the Swiss Franc went down 0.16 percent to reach KD 0.361, while the Japanese Yen stood at KD 0.002. — KUNA

Photo of the day



KUWAIT: A view of Shaheed Park on a clear winter day. — Photo by Shakir Reshamwala

NBK raises media awareness on sustainability, climate change

Bank committed to having a positive impact on the environment



KUWAIT: The National Bank of Kuwait organized a workshop on strategies to promote awareness about sustainability and climate change concerns.

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) took a pioneering step by organizing a workshop, the first of its kind in Kuwait, inviting diverse media outlets and newspapers. The focus was on showcasing ESG initiatives, along with discussions on strategies to promote awareness about sustainability and climate change concerns. Dr Ehab Shalaby, Chairman and CEO of DCarbon Global, a renowned expert in the field, delivered a lecture during the workshop conducted at NBK's headquarters.

Journalists from diverse media platforms participated in the workshop, which delved into wide-ranging subjects such as the significance of environmental and social investment and financing to the hurdles in governance and reporting concerning environmental and social issues. Additionally, it delved into the journalists' role in advocating awareness about sustainability issues and climate change. The presentations within the workshop encompassed various themes, including comprehending ESG principles and their influence on companies and investors, pinpointing significant environmental, social, and governance trends and challenges within the Kuwaiti market and neighboring regions. Additionally, emphasis was placed on the significance of crafting reports on initiatives, measuring their impact, and effectively engaging all stakeholders regarding ESG issues.

At the workshop, attending journalists were offered a unique chance to delve deeply into comprehensive discussions about ESG issues and their profound effects on the corporate landscape. They explored the risks and opportunities associated with investing in sustainability-related facets, engaging in thorough and expansive conversations on these crucial topics. Shalaby emphasized the media's pivotal role in shedding light on the risks posed by climate change and its extensive influence on the business landscape across various sectors. He underscored the significance of this narrative at local, regional, and global scales, highlighting its widespread importance across various spheres.

He emphasized the evolution of "Sustainable Journalism" into a pivotal element in raising awareness and directing focus towards addressing the multifaceted challenges that societies encounter on the economic, environmental, and social fronts. He also highlighted the interconnectedness between decisions, operations, and activities in shaping the capacities of the present and future generations in these realms.

He elaborated on the pivotal role of banking and financial institutions in this domain, citing their integral connection to the companies and entities they finance as the primary drivers within this sphere. Shalaby further highlighted that progress toward sustainability and the shift towards renewable energy should encompass the entire system. This comprehensive approach involves active participation from financial and banking institutions, pertinent government bodies, and all entities within both the public and private sectors.

He continued by pointing out that recent manifestations of climate change, like floods and forest fires, have adversely impacted certain companies and organizations involved in projects related to these areas. This has intensified the focus on the risks associated with climate change and the evaluation conducted by financial institutions before financing such

projects. Ensuring the highest standards of ESG becomes imperative in this context.

Shalaby highlighted that certain countries in the region have made significant advancements and notable strides towards achieving specific sustainable development goals. However, he underscored the necessity for other countries to address pressing environmental concerns, water management, and pollution issues urgently to avoid lagging behind on the global stage.

Meanwhile, Amir Hama, Head of Investor Relations & Communications at National Bank of Kuwait said: "The media stands as a crucial partner in the endeavor to raise awareness regarding the significance of sustainability. It serves as a pivotal pathway for shaping the future of upcoming generations."

Hanna emphasized that NBK's initiative stems from a core belief in the importance of transparency and informed discussions that unite relevant organizations. Such collaborative efforts are deemed essential to instigate positive change and actively contribute to supporting Kuwait's sustainable development agenda. He further added that comprehending and disclosing ESG concerns stands as a crucial step. This understanding equips media professionals with the requisite knowledge and tools needed to accurately report on these issues and illuminate their profound impact on both companies and society as a whole.

He emphasized that NBK has diligently undertaken significant measures in recent years to embed ESG standards at the core of its business framework, operational procedures, and organizational culture. Hanna detailed that in the preceding year, the Group restructured its ESG strategy, transitioning from a six-pillar approach to a more integrated model comprising four interconnected pillars: Governance for Resilience, Responsible Banking, Capitalizing on our Capabilities, and Investing in our Communities.

He emphasized that NBK is an industry leader in sustainability, having made significant strides in ESG issues. The bank initiated a comprehensive framework for sustainable financing to fortify and elevate its efforts in this domain. This commitment has now become a foundational pillar woven into all aspects of its business models, operational protocols, and organizational culture, thereby facilitating the transition towards a more sustainable and low-carbon economy. This alignment also resonates with Kuwait's economic plans.

Hanna highlighted that NBK stands among the leading institutions capitalizing on the widespread shift towards sustainable financing. The bank has proactively introduced services and products aligned with the green transformation journey. These include offerings like green mortgage loans, consumer loans to finance electric vehicles, financing for low-emission housing, and various sustainability-related financing options.

NBK has laid out clear plans and targets aimed at curbing carbon emissions within specific timeframes. Notably, the bank pledged to decrease total operational emissions by 25 percent by 2025 and aspiring to reach net zero operationally by 2035. These efforts are integral components of the bank's comprehensive strategy geared towards attaining carbon neutrality by 2060.



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Bangladesh's Hasina heads to victory

North Korea conducts more drills near South's border

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WAJIMA: Police officers check a collapsed building in the city of Wajima, Ishikawa prefecture, on Jan 5, 2024, after a major 7.5 magnitude earthquake struck the Noto region on New Year's Day. — AFP

Elderly woman miraculously survives quake

Japan continues search for 195 missing people with snow complicating relief efforts

SUZU, Japan: A woman in her 90s trapped for five days under rubble caused by a huge earthquake in central Japan was rescued against the odds, but snow and storms were further complicating relief efforts on Sunday. At least 128 people have died since the 7.5 magnitude tremor on New Year's Day and its aftershocks — a toll sure to rise, with 195 others reported missing, according to local authorities.

The shockwaves toppled buildings, sparked a major fire and triggered tsunami waves over a meter high on the Sea of Japan side of the main island of Honshu. The hope of finding survivors usually fades three days after a destructive quake. But an elderly woman spent five days under the wreckage of a collapsed house in the city of Suzu on the hard-hit Noto Peninsula before being saved on Saturday.

She was taken to hospital and was able to hold a conversation, according to public broadcaster NHK. "Hang in there!" rescuers were heard calling to the woman in police footage from the rainy scene published by local media. "You're gonna be OK!" they shouted. "Stay positive!"

A Tokyo police spokesman confirmed to AFP that

the rescue had been carried out by officers from Tokyo and Fukuoka, but he could not give further details. Not all were so lucky. In the town of Anamizu, a 52-year-old man who lost his 21-year-old son and his parents-in-law waited to hear news of his wife, his other three children and more family members. "I want them to be alive. It's unthinkable that I could be left alone," he told NHK.

Sleet and snow

On Sunday, rain, sleet and snow made the recovery efforts of thousands of police, troops and other rescuers even more challenging. The cold weather is also likely to worsen conditions for more than 28,800 people in 404 government shelters.

Continuous rain has increased the risk of fresh landslides, while heavy snow through Monday could cause more buildings to collapse under its weight, the regional government warned. At least 2,000 people in many communities on the remote peninsula have been cut off by damaged roads, with some of an estimated 1,000 landslides also blocking aid vehicles.

That means relief materials have been slow to reach areas suffering water and power outages. Around 20,700 households in the wider Ishikawa region remained without electricity on Sunday. More than 66,100 households were without water.

"The first priority has been to rescue people under the rubble, and to reach isolated communities," Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said in an interview with NHK on Sunday. The military has sent small groups of troops to each of the isolated communities on foot, he said.

The government has also "deployed various police and fire department helicopters" to reach them, Kishida added. "In parallel with these efforts, we need to improve the conditions in shelters, and the health of those suffering in the disaster," because they may have to stay in place for extended periods, he warned.

In Anamizu, rescuers in heavy-duty orange or blue waterproof suits were seen carrying the body of a landslide victim covered in a blue tarp under a toppled pylon. And among the widespread destruction in the city of Wajima, the traditional red gate of

one shrine remained standing, but the view through it was a now-familiar mess of splintered wood and toppled beams. But in a coastal village called Akasaki, visited by AFP, no houses had collapsed — thanks to their unusual design.

To withstand the rough environment at the tip of a headland, the houses have few glass windows, and the exterior walls are made from sturdy wooden slats layered horizontally. "I felt so encouraged, because the village was still there standing," said Masaki Sato, who maintains one of the homes remotely.

Japan experiences hundreds of earthquakes every year, though most cause no damage with strict building codes in place for more than four decades. But many structures are older, especially in rapidly ageing communities in rural areas like Noto.

The country is haunted by the monster quake of 2011 that triggered a tsunami, left around 18,500 people dead or missing and caused a nuclear catastrophe at the Fukushima plant. Japan's last earthquake disaster to cause more than 100 deaths was in 2016 in the southern city of Kumamoto, where 276 people died. — AFP



COX'S BAZAR, Bangladesh: Rohingya refugees look through the debris of their houses charred by a devastating fire at the Ukhiya camp, Cox's Bazaar in the early hours of Jan 7, 2024. — AFP

Rohingya refugees homeless after Bangladesh fire

COX'S BAZAR: Thousands of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh have been left without shelter after a suspected arson attack ripped through their camp burning nearly 800 homes, an official said Sunday.

Bangladesh is home to around a million Rohingya, many of whom fled a 2017 military crackdown on the mainly Muslim minority in neighboring Myanmar that is now subject to a UN genocide probe. The United Nations refugee agency said "nearly 7,000 Rohingya refugees" had been left homeless, but that there were no casualties.

The blaze tore through the tightly packed complex of bamboo and tarpaulin shelters in the early hours of Sunday morning at a camp in the country's southeast, refugee commissioner Mizanur Rahman said. "At least 711 shelters were fully burnt and 63 were par-

tially damaged," said Rahman, who put the number of homeless at 4,000. "We have ordered a probe into the fire", he added. "We suspect it is an act of arson". The UN said 120 facilities, including learning centers, mosques and healthcare centers, had also been "destroyed or damaged by the inferno".

Some refugees had to tear down their homes to create corridors to stop the fire from spreading further. "Refugees displaced by the fire are temporarily taking shelter within the camp's community centers," the UN refugee agency said in a statement. Fires in the dozens of Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh are common, especially during the dry season from November to April. But many of the camps are also riven by violence between rival Rohingya groups.

Police said security in the camps has worsened, with more than 60 refugees killed in turf wars and drug-related clashes last year, the highest number on record. In March 2023, a fire in Kutupalong camp — one of the world's largest refugee settlements — destroyed 2,000 shelters. Two years earlier, at least 15 Rohingya were killed and another 50,000 refugees were made homeless after a blaze in the same camp. — AFP

Erdogan bets on urban planner to win back Istanbul

ISTANBUL: President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Sunday entrusted a former environment minister to run for mayor of Istanbul and avenge the worst political defeat of the Turkish leader's two-decade rule. Murat Kurum will represent Erdogan's Islamic conservative Justice and Development Party (AKP) in March 31 municipal elections in which control of Turkey's main cities will be up for grabs.

The secular opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) seized back control of Istanbul for the first time since Erdogan ruled the city as mayor in the 1990s in watershed 2019 polls. That vote also saw the opposition win back the capital Ankara and keep power in the Aegean port city of Izmir.

The opposition's control of Turkey's three main cities shattered Erdogan's image of political invincibility and underscored the levels of resentment rising against his dominant rule. The president's rivals campaigned against perceived corruption and a sweeping political crackdown that followed a failed 2016 coup attempt.

Erdogan bounced back last year to win a tough re-election that came in the throes of an economic crisis in which the annual inflation rate topped 85 percent. He has since set his sights on winning back Istanbul — the city where he grew up playing street football and where he launched his political career as a self-proclaimed champion of Turkey's pious Muslims and the poor.

"We say no stopping until March 31, keep going," Erdogan told cheering supporters during a party congress in Istanbul. "We stand before our nation with candidates who run for solutions rather than excuses, who act with humility rather than arrogance," he said.

Kurum graduated from Konya's Selcuk University with a degree in civil engineering and served as Erdogan's environment and urbanization minister from 2018 until last year. Turkish media reported that the 47-year-old Ankara native came out on top of an internal party poll Erdogan oversaw last month.

Kurum also worked in Turkey's housing develop-



ISTANBUL: Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan reacts after announcing Murat Kurum (left) as his ruling Justice and Development Party candidate in Istanbul's upcoming mayoral election in March. — AFP

ment administration and became a member of parliament representing one of Istanbul's districts last year. His wife Sengul has held a senior position at Turkey's powerful RTUK media regulator since 2021.

Kurum's background as an urban planner fits with Erdogan's claims that Istanbul has become run down and dysfunctional under opposition control. Istanbul mayor Ekrem Imamoglu edged out Erdogan's ally in a 2019 election that gained international headlines for being controversially annulled.

Imamoglu won a re-run vote by a massive margin that turned him into an instant hero for the opposition and a formidable foe for Erdogan. The 52-year-old is widely seen as the opposition's best bet at winning back the presidency from Erdogan's AKP in 2028.

He was effectively barred from running for president last year because of a politically-charged defamation conviction that his supporters viewed as Erdogan's vendetta for losing in 2019. But he challenged the ruling and has said repeatedly that he would like to run for president one day. A defeat for Imamoglu in March could sink his political ambitions and leave the opposition with no clear presidential candidate to run in 2028.

Kurum appeared to take a potshot at Imamoglu's national aspirations in a social media message posted after his candidacy was confirmed. "We are here to manage Istanbul in a systematic and planned manner and to give the city the special attention it deserves," Kurum said. — AFP

International

North Korea conducts more drills near South's border

Tensions escalate as Pyongyang claims 'they did not fire a single shell'

SEOUL: North Korea conducted live-fire drills on its western coast, Seoul's military said Sunday, the third consecutive day of military exercises near its contested maritime border with the South. Seoul's military said that North Korea had "conducted artillery fire with over 90 rounds north of Yeonpyeong Island from 1600 to 1710 (0400 to 0510 GMT) today".

They accused the North of "repeated artillery fire" within a buffer zone created in 2018 under a now-defunct tension-reducing deal, saying the bombardment posed "a threat to the peace on the Korean Peninsula." North Korea's military said it had carried out "maritime live-fire training" with 88 rounds of artillery but said the drills were "directionally unrelated" to the maritime border.

The exercises "did not pose any intentional threat" to South Korea and were part of the North's "normal training system of our military," it said in a statement carried by the official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA). No North Korean artillery shells fell south of the Northern Limit Line, the de facto maritime border in the Yellow Sea, and no casualties were reported, according to the Yonhap news agency.

Residents on the South Korean border island of Yeonpyeong were warned to stay inside Sunday, local officials told AFP. Due to the drills and any possible South Korean countermeasures, "North Korean gunfire is currently being heard," said a text message sent to all residents Sunday afternoon.

"Troops on Yeonpyeong Island are currently responding, but residents are advised to be careful of outdoor activities," said the message, details of which were confirmed to AFP by local officials. On both Friday and Saturday,

North Korea fired artillery rounds in the same area — near Yeonpyeong and Baengnyeong, two sparsely populated islands situated just south of the Northern Limit Line.

On Friday, residents of the two islands were ordered to evacuate to shelters and ferries were suspended during one of the most serious military escalations on the peninsula since Pyongyang fired shells at one of the islands in 2010. On both days, Seoul said North Korea's shells landed in the buffer zone created under the 2018 deal, which fell apart in November after the North launched a spy satellite.

'Deceptive operation'

North Korea said Friday that its live-fire drills that day had not even had "an indirect effect" on the border islands. On Sunday, Kim Jong Un's powerful sister denied Seoul's claims that Pyongyang had fired dozens of artillery rounds near their border on Saturday, saying North Korea had instead conducted a "deceptive operation".

"Our military did not fire a single shell into the water area," Kim Yo Jong said in a statement carried by KCNA. Kim claimed instead that her country's military had detonated explosives simulating the sound of gunfire 60 times and "watched the reaction" of the South Korean forces. "The result was clear as we expected," she said. "They misjudged the blasting sound as the sound of gunfire and conjectured it as a provocation. And they even made a false and impudent statement that the shells dropped in the sea buffer zone."

The two Koreas remain technically at war because their 1950-53 conflict ended in an armistice, not a treaty, and most of the border between them is heavily fortified, with their contested maritime



SEOUL: People watch a television screen showing a news broadcast with file footage of North Korea's artillery firing, at a railway station in Seoul on Jan 6, 2024. — AFP

border never officially delineated. Cho Han-bum, senior research fellow at the Korea Institute for National Unification, told AFP that North Korea had "transitioned into a phase of military confrontation". "North Korea will not engage in clear provocations like its previous shelling of Yeonpyeong Island but it will continue to escalate military tensions," while trying to blame the South for the situation.

Relations between the two Koreas are at one of their lowest points in decades after Kim Jong Un last year enshrined his country's status as a nuclear power into the constitution and test-fired several advanced ICBMs. At Pyongyang's year-end policy meetings, Kim threatened a nuclear attack on the South and called for a build-up of his country's military arsenal ahead

of armed conflict that he warned could "break out any time".

"In the grand scheme of things, they are trying to create tension by pressuring South Korea and eventually gain an upper hand in the process of negotiating with the US while making their presence felt," said Park Won-gon, professor at Ewha University. — AFP

India, China eye strategic areas bordering Bhutan

NEW DELHI: Squeezed between giant arch-rivals India and China, the landlocked mountain kingdom of Bhutan was long isolated by icy Himalayan peaks. But as Bhutan readies to elect a new parliament in Thimphu on Jan 9, China and India are watching the contest with keen interest as they eye strategic contested border zones, analysts warn.

A "cooperation agreement" inked between Bhutan and China in October after talks over their disputed northern frontier sparked concern in India, which has long regarded Bhutan as a buffer state firmly under its orbit. Bhutan is "one of the last barriers" in China's bid to exert influence in South Asia, said Harsh V. Pant, an international relations professor at King's College London told AFP.

India is determined not to let China extend its influence further across what New Delhi sees as its natural sphere of influence, wary after a swathe of muscular

trade deals and loans by Beijing, including with Bangladesh, Nepal, the Maldives and Sri Lanka. Thimphu and Beijing do not have formal diplomatic relations. India, however, effectively oversaw Bhutan's foreign policy until 2007.

The relationship was "in exchange for free-trade and security arrangements", Britain's Chatham House think tank wrote in a December report. The report included satellite photographs it said showed an "unsanctioned program of settlement construction" by China in Bhutan's northern frontier region, which could "become permanent Chinese territory" pending the outcome of a border deal. China's foreign ministry told AFP in a statement of its "determination to strive for an early resolution of the boundary issue and the establishment of diplomatic relations".

'Far-reaching implications'

"Beijing will anticipate that a deal consolidating its gains in northern Bhutan may lead to formal diplomatic relations and the opportunity to draw Thimphu into its orbit", Chatham House said. "Any such deal would have far-reaching implications for India."

If China succeeds in that, Beijing "can push a view that India is now marginal in its immediate neighborhood", Pant ad-

ded. New Delhi has been wary of Beijing's growing military assertiveness and their 3,500-kilometre (2,175-mile) shared frontier has been a perennial source of tension.

In 2017, there was a 72-day military standoff after Chinese forces moved into the disputed Doklam plateau, on the China-India-Bhutan border. The plateau pushes south towards India's critical Siliguri Corridor, dubbed the "Chicken's Neck".

The perilously narrow strip of land lies between Nepal and Bangladesh, and connects India's northeastern states with the rest of the country. China and India fought a month-long war in the region in 1962. "New Delhi would be concerned that, in the event of a deal demarcating Bhutan's northern border, attention may turn to territory in Bhutan's west which China disputes, including the Doklam plateau," Chatham House added.

For Bhutan, dwarfed by China, striking a deal makes sense, said Pant. "If they don't resolve their border now, tomorrow they will be in an even more unfavourable position," he said.

Suhasini Haider, diplomatic editor of The Hindu newspaper, said India was worried that a Bhutan-China border deal "seems imminent". She said that Bhutan's "fast-tracking" of boundary talks with



PUNAKHA, Bhutan: This file photo taken on Dec 6, 2019 shows tourists walking across a suspension bridge over the Puna Tsang Chhu River in Punakha province in Bhutan. — AFP

China after the 2017 Doklam standoff was a decision that "India has viewed with quiet concern".

Analysts say foreign policy plays little role in the domestic concerns of voters in Bhutan — about the size of Switzerland with around 800,000 people — who are more worried about high unemployment

and young people migrating abroad seeking jobs. However, India is the biggest source of investment and infrastructure in Bhutan — Thimphu's ngultrum currency is pegged to New Delhi's rupee — and boosting bilateral relations is key. "Any government coming to power will seek to shore up ties," Haider said. — AFP

Gaza war rages into fourth...

Continued from Page 1

Dahdoudh said on Al Jazeera television. "I hope that the blood of my son Hamza is the last blood to flow of journalists as well as people in the Gaza Strip." Dahdoudh was seen in tears as he hugged his son's body at a hospital surrounded by other journalists and relatives.

Thuria, in his 30s, had worked with Agence France-Presse since 2019 and had also worked with other media networks, including AP, Reuters, Al Jazeera and CNN, according to his AFP colleagues. The two men had been gone to film a strike on a house in Rafah earlier Sunday, and their car was hit while they were on their way back. Al Jazeera on Sunday condemned the killing and targeting of Palestinian journalists in Gaza. "Al Jazeera Media Network strongly condemns the (Zionist) occupation forces' targeting of Palestinian journalists' car," the company said in a statement, accusing the Zionist entity of "violating the principles of freedom of the press".

By Dec 31, at least 77 journalists and media work-

ers had been killed since the Oct 7 start of the war between the Zionist entity and Hamas, according to the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists. Of those killed, 70 were Palestinians and three Lebanese. The Hamas government media office said in a statement that "we condemn this heinous crime committed by the (Zionist) occupation army in a bid to intimidate and prevent media coverage". "We are all shocked" by the news of the journalists' deaths, said Christophe Deloire, the secretary general of the media advocacy group Reporters Without Borders on X, formerly Twitter.

Air strikes also claimed civilian lives in the southern cities of Khan Yunis and in Rafah where many displaced people have sought refuge, AFP correspondents reported. The Zionist entity is carrying out a relentless bombardment and ground invasion that have killed at least 22,835 people in Gaza, most of them women and children.

"These three months have been like a quarter of a century," said one Gaza resident, Nabil Fathi, 51. "I wake up thinking this is a passing nightmare, but it is a reality. Our home and my son's home have been destroyed and we have 20 people martyred in our family. I don't know where we will go even if I survive." Civilians in Gaza have borne the brunt of the conflict that has reduced swathes of the coastal territory to rubble and triggered a deepening humanitarian crisis. — AFP

idents inspecting patches of blood and splintered glass on a pavement. Mourners gathered later on Sunday for the funeral of the four brothers.

The Zionist army says its frequent raids target "terrorists", but the Palestinian health ministry says many civilians are among the dead. Since the Zionist-Hamas war began on Oct 7, Zionist forces and settler attacks have killed at least 329 Palestinians in the West Bank, according to the health ministry. During 2023, the ministry counted more than 520 Palestinian deaths in across the West Bank in violence related to the conflict. The Zionist entity has occupied the West Bank since 1967. About three million Palestinians live in the territory along with 490,000 Zionists, who live in settlements deemed illegal under international law. — AFP

Blinken faces calls for Gaza...

Continued from Page 1

delivery" of medical and humanitarian aid. Washington has twice exercised its veto at the United Nations Security Council over ceasefire calls, drawing outrage in the Arab world, and Blinken has bypassed Congress to rush weapons to the Zionist entity. He and other US officials have, however, become increasingly vocal about the need for the Zionist entity to protect civilians in Gaza, where 22,835 people have been killed since Oct 7.

Blinken, who is seeking to get more aid into besieged Gaza, visited the World Food Program's regional coordination warehouse near the Jordanian capital. Inside the warehouse, stocked with pallets of canned food aid, the senior UN official in Jordan, Sheri Ritsema-Anderson, described the situation in Gaza as unlike anything she had seen during 15 years in the Middle East. It is "catastrophic," she told reporters.

Blinken said "it is imperative that we maximize assistance to people in need", by getting the aid in and distributing it effectively. "We'll be working on that as well in the days to come," he said at the warehouse. King Abdullah, whose country signed a peace treat-

ty with the Zionist entity in 1994, also reaffirmed the need for a two-state solution to the Zionist-Palestinian question and underlined Jordan's "total rejection" of any forced displacement of Palestinians from Gaza and the occupied West Bank.

Washington also insists on a two-state solution, something rejected by Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, some of whose cabinet members have called for Palestinian inhabitants of Gaza to leave. Regional tensions have soared since Tuesday when a strike in a Beirut stronghold of the Iran-backed Hezbollah movement, a Hamas ally, killed Hamas' deputy leader Saleh Al-Aruri. A US Defense Department official has told AFP that the Zionist entity carried out the strike.

Blinken arrived in Jordan from Turkey and Greece, where he said there is "real concern" over the Zionist-Lebanon border, which even before the Aruri strike had seen regular exchanges of fire largely between Lebanon's Iran-backed Hezbollah movement, and Zionist forces. "We want to do everything possible to make sure that we don't see escalation there" and to avoid an "endless cycle of violence", Blinken said.

The European Union's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell carried a similar message on a visit to Beirut Saturday. "It is imperative to avoid regional escalation in the Middle East. It is absolutely necessary to avoid Lebanon being dragged into a regional conflict," Borrell said. — AFP

Zionists kill 8 Palestinians...

Continued from Page 1

people including four brothers. A seventh person later died from wounds. Suleiman Moussa, a resident of Jenin, said the "air strike" followed sounds of gunfire. "We came here and saw people thrown to the ground, some with heads cut off, some body parts. It was an unbelievable scene and we didn't know what to do," Moussa told AFP. "Later people called the ambulance which came and took six martyrs and another person in a critical situation." AFP footage from the site of the strike near the camp showed res-

Mideast player Iran weakened...

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In southwestern Khuzestan province, home to a large Arab minority, residents have long complained of marginalization, and some groups have also carried out several attacks in recent years. Iran has also announced in the past the arrests of alleged agents working for foreign countries, including the Zionist entity. And it has accused the Zionist entity of sabotaging its nuclear sites and assassinating Iranian scientists. Tehran's "inability to protect critical nuclear and military officials and facilities against covert operations" shows its "security forces have failed at (their) primary task", said Ali Vaez, director of the Iran Project and senior

adviser at the International Crisis Group think tank.

Iran also faced months of street protests which erupted in Sept 2022 after the death of Kurdish Iranian woman Mahsa Amini. She died in police custody three days after being arrested by the notorious morality police, who accused her of violating the country's strict dress code. Outrage at her death led to unprecedented scenes of women burning their headscarves, and defiantly appearing in public with their hair uncovered. "Focused on harassing women without hijab or cracking down on civil society, Iranian security forces clearly have failed at getting their priorities right," said Vaez.

Discontent has also grown amid economic hardship caused by years of international sanctions led by the United States, targeting key sectors such as oil. According to an October report from the International Monetary Fund, inflation stood at a projected 47 percent for 2023. — AFP

International

Bangladesh's Hasina heads to victory

Reports of intimidation, incentives to lure voters in low-turnout election without opposition



DHAKA: A man votes in Bangladesh's general election in Dhaka on Jan 7, 2024. — AFP photos



Election officials count ballot papers at a polling booth on Jan 7, 2024.

DHAKA: Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina looked certain Sunday to win a fifth term in office following a boycott led by an opposition party she branded a "terrorist organization", as partial results pointed to an overwhelming victory.

Hasina has presided over breakneck economic growth in a country once beset by grinding poverty, but her government has been accused of rampant human rights abuses and a ruthless opposition crackdown.

Her party faced almost no effective rivals in the seats it contested, but it avoided fielding candidates in a few constituencies, an apparent effort to avoid the legislature being branded a one-party institution.

The opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), whose ranks have been decimated by mass arrests, called a general strike and, along with dozens of others, refused to participate in a "sham election".

But Hasina, 76, called for citizens to show faith in the democratic process. "The BNP is a terrorist organization," she told reporters after casting her vote.

"I am trying my best to ensure that democracy should continue in this country," she added.

Bangladeshi media reported that with results in more than a third of the 300 seats announced, Hasina's ruling Awami League and her allies had won at least 85 percent.

Somoy TV, the country's largest private news broadcaster, said of the 114 seats declared, Hasina's ruling Awami League had won 93 and its ally Jatiya Party had won four, while the other 17 seats had been taken by independent or other allied lawmakers.

Counting continues, but among the victors was Shakib Al Hasan, the Bangladesh cricket team captain, who won his seat to become a ruling party lawmaker.

'Disgrace'

Results are expected as early as Monday morning, with television channels broadcasting early counts from several polling stations putting ruling party candidates ahead. Chief Election Commissioner Habibur Awal told reporters the turnout, based on preliminary figures, was around 40 percent.

First-time voter Amit Bose, 21, said he had cast his ballot for his "favorite candidate", urging others to follow his example. But many said they had not voted because the outcome was assured. "When one party is participating and another is not, why would I go to vote?" said Mohammad Saidur, 31, who pulls a rickshaw.

BNP head Tarique Rahman, speaking from Britain where he lives in exile, told AFP he feared "fake votes" would be used to boost voter turnout. "What unfolded was not an election, but rather a disgrace to the democratic aspirations of Bangladesh," he wrote on social media, alleging he had seen "disturbing pictures and videos" backing his claims.

There were widespread reports of carrot-and-stick inducements to encourage turnout aimed at bolstering the poll's legitimacy. Some voters said earlier they had been threatened with the confiscation of government benefit cards needed to access welfare payments if they refused to cast ballots for the ruling Awami League.

Fear of 'further crackdown'

The BNP and other parties staged

months of protests last year, demanding Hasina step down ahead of the vote. Officers in the port city of Chittagong broke up an opposition protest Sunday, firing shotguns and tear gas canisters, but election officials said voting was largely peaceful, with nearly 800,000 police officers and soldiers deployed countrywide. Meenakshi Ganguly, from Human Rights Watch, said Sunday that the government had failed to reassure opposition supporters that the polls would be fair, warning that "many fear a further crackdown".

Politics in the world's eighth-most populous country was long dominated by the rivalry between Hasina, the daughter of the country's founding leader, and two-time premier Khaleda Zia, wife of a former military ruler. Hasina has been the decisive victor since returning to power in a 2009 landslide, with two subsequent polls accompanied by widespread irregularities and accusations of rigging. Zia, 78, was convicted of graft in 2018 and is now in ailing health at a hospital in Dhaka, with her son Tarique Rahman helming the BNP in her stead from London.

'Dangerous combination'

Hasina has accused the BNP of arson and sabotage during last year's protest campaign, which was mostly peaceful but saw several people killed in police confrontations. The government's security forces have been dogged by allegations of extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances — charges it rejects.

The United States, the biggest export market for the South Asian nation of 170 million, has imposed sanctions on an elite police unit and its top commanders. Economic headwinds have left many dissatisfied with Hasina's government, after sharp spikes in food costs and months of chronic blackouts in 2022. Wage stagnation in the garment sector, which accounts for around 85 percent of the country's \$55 billion in annual exports, sparked industrial unrest late last year that saw some factories torched and hundreds more shuttered.

Pierre Prakash of the International Crisis Group said before the vote that Hasina's government was clearly "less popular than it was a few years ago, yet Bangladeshis have little real outlet at the ballot box." "That is a potentially dangerous combination." — AFP

Trumped by Trump: Republican favorite denies rivals limelight

WASHINGTON: With Donald Trump's multiple court battles dominating the US Republican presidential primary, the bombastic front-runner isn't so much raining on his rivals' hopes of equal coverage as drowning them out completely. A percolating scandal that would have finished off most candidates long ago, the ex-president's growing legal threats have been a shot in the arm as he has cleaved to the old PR adage that no publicity is bad publicity.

Trump, 77, is practically all Americans can talk about in the countdown to the January 15 Iowa caucuses, leaving his rivals for the leadership of the Grand Old Party (GOP) struggling to make headlines and gain precious TV time. "Having the leading candidate facing multiple indictments and possible disqualification makes the GOP competition incredibly unstable and unpredictable," said Julian Zelizer, a public affairs professor at Princeton University. "There is no playbook to follow."

According to political aggregator RealClearPolitics, Trump is polling at 62.7 percent, while his two closest rivals, Nikki Haley and Ron DeSantis, are in a margin-of-error tussle at 11 percent and 10.9 percent respectively. A handful of other candidates, from entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy to former New Jersey governor Chris Christie, are barely competitive.

Wall-to-wall coverage

The hapless trailing candidates have followed the

usual Iowa script, getting press photographers to snap them perched on straw bales, corn dog in hand, debating the issues of the day with potential supporters. But a substantial proportion of their primary campaign activity has been eclipsed by evening news bulletins reporting on the latest developments in Trump's criminal cases and civil court battles.

And the wall-to-wall coverage has been accompanied by a bump in Trump's already stellar polling that has propelled him further into the lead in multiple states. So how do you get the public to notice the smaller attractions in the animal house when there's an 800-pound gorilla in the corner? It is a question that has vexed Trump's rivals since the beginning of the campaign. "I would say that if I could have one thing change, I wish Trump hadn't been indicted on any of this stuff ... it distorted the primary," DeSantis said in a recent interview.

The 45-year-old Florida governor, seen by many as the heir to the post-Trump Republican Party before a number of stumbles on the campaign trail, complained that Trump's legal woes had "sucked out a lot of the oxygen." Trump's Republican opponents could have capitalized on the controversy around his prosecutions, hammering him over the many serious charges he faces. But that would risk a peril greater than the frustration of being ignored — angering Trump's ultra-loyal support base. As a result, the also-rans have been at pains to pull their punches in their rare criticisms of the front-runner, diminishing the potential for damage to his campaign.

Not being talked about

Their restraint has at times appeared farcical, particularly in the first Republican debate in Milwaukee in August. Asked to indicate if they agreed that a



TUSCALOOSA: This combination of pictures created on Jan 4, 2024 shows (left) Florida Governor Ron DeSantis and (right) former Governor from South Carolina and UN ambassador Nikki Haley during the fourth Republican presidential primary debate on Dec 6, 2023. — AFP

victorious Trump should be entrusted with the keys to the White House even if convicted of felonies, all but two raised their hands.

Meanwhile, the presumptive nominee has spent much of the campaign leaning into his legal troubles rather than trying to brush them under the carpet. At rallies, on social media and at fundraisers, he brings up his four criminal indictments more frequently than his plans to "Make America Great Again."

"Trump has cast a long shadow over the GOP contest so far, and that shadow has blocked in-depth discussion of policy positions," Brown University political scientist Wendy Schiller told AFP. "And the candidates have been unwilling to take Trump head on, which has prevented them from making space to talk about themselves and how they would differ from Trump." — AFP

Somalia signs law 'nullifying' Ethiopia, Somaliland pact

NAIROBI: Somalia's president has signed a law "nullifying" a contentious agreement between Ethiopia and Somaliland in a largely symbolic gesture of his government's displeasure over the deal to grant port access. President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud said the law voided the "illegal" pact giving landlocked Ethiopia long-sought access to the Red Sea through Somaliland, a separatist northwestern region over which Somalia exercises little real authority.

The passage of the bill on Saturday evening "is an illustration of our commitment to safeguard our unity, sovereignty & territorial integrity as per international law", the president wrote on X, formerly Twitter. The central government in Mogadishu has vowed to strenuously oppose by any legal means the port agreement between regional power Ethiopia and Somaliland, whose 1991 claim of independence from Somalia is not

recognized internationally.

Somalia called the surprise pact signed on Monday an act of "aggression" and a violation of its sovereignty, and appealed for international support. It staunchly opposes Somaliland's claim to independence but in reality has little say over the affairs of the de facto state, which has its own government, security forces and currency and a long coastline on one of the world's busiest shipping routes.

Somaliland's leadership has said Ethiopia would "formally recognize the Republic of Somaliland" under the deal, but this has not been confirmed by the government in Addis Ababa. The agreement has raised tensions in the Horn of Africa and the African Union, United States, European Union and the Arab League have called for calm and for Somalia's sovereignty to be respected. The memorandum of understanding gives Ethiopia access to commer-



MOGADISHU: Students wave a Somali flag during a demonstration in support of Somalia's government following the port deal signed between Ethiopia and Somaliland on Jan 3, 2024. — AFP

cial maritime services and a military base, with Somaliland leasing it 20 kilometers (12 miles) of coastline for 50 years.

Ethiopia, the second most populous country in Africa and one of the biggest landlocked nations in the world, was cut off from the coast

after Eritrea seceded and declared independence in 1993 following a three-decade war. Addis Ababa had maintained access to a port in Eritrea until the two countries went to war in 1998-2000, and since then Ethiopia funnels most of its trade through Djibouti. — AFP

How Iowa's unusual caucus tradition launches US election

WASHINGTON: The 2024 US presidential election officially kicks off later this month, when voters in the rural farm state of Iowa head to school gymnasiums and public libraries to deliberate over who should become their party's nominee for the White House.

This Midwestern state of three million people is proud of the unusual "caucus" system it employs to determine how many delegates will represent the respective candidates at the parties' national nominating conventions in the summer.

So, what is a caucus?

At a caucus, participants physically show their candidate preference by gathering with other like-minded voters in a designated spot in the room — a sharp contrast to the confidentiality of filling out a paper ballot in a private voting booth.

Primary caucus voting, in which attendees are registered party members, happens in stages. For the Democrats, candidates usually need the backing of at least 15 percent of voters present to qualify for a second round.

Supporters of candidates who fall short of that threshold then have three choices during a second round that immediately follows. They can move to another part of the room to support another finalist candidate; they can try to persuade fellow voters to help them push their own candidate over the 15 percent hurdle; or they cannot vote.

The procedure is similar for the Republicans, though there is no minimum vote threshold candidates must win to be allocated delegates. Advocates of the quirky custom praise it as democracy in action, as citizens physically move around the room, sharing their views and collaborating to choose their leaders.

Iowa's special status

In the vast majority of US states, the Republican and Democratic Parties hold primary elections to determine which candidates will win those states' delegates. But during the 2024 cycle, seven states will host caucuses for at least one of the two major parties throughout the winter and spring.

Political watchers turn a keen eye toward Iowa, as results in the state — which since the 1970s has scheduled voting to come first on the nation's political calendar — often influence outcomes in the primary elections and caucuses that follow. That means the size and effectiveness of candidates' early operations in Iowa are important to their long-term success, despite the relatively few delegates up for grabs there.

The community involvement required at a caucus is not universally beloved: some voters are turned off by the idea of a long Monday evening debating — or arguing — with crowds of strangers. And others struggle with the logistical challenges presented by Midwestern January weather, work obligations or lack of childcare. — AFP

Business

MONDAY, JANUARY 8, 2024

US regulator orders inspections on some Boeing MAX 9 planes

Decision causes flight cancellations • Many airlines ground MAX 9 jets

WASHINGTON: The US air safety regulator said on Saturday that it had grounded some versions of Boeing's 737 MAX 9 jets pending inspections, causing dozens of flight cancellations a day after a panel blew out of one of the planes over the western US state of Oregon.

The Federal Aviation Administration "is requiring immediate inspections of certain Boeing 737 MAX 9 planes before they can return to flight", the agency said on X. It added that around 171 aircraft worldwide would be affected, with each inspection taking four to eight hours.

Alaska and United Airlines fly the largest number of MAX 9 planes, while Turkish Airlines has a smaller fleet. As of Sunday, all three airlines had grounded their jets for inspection.

Boeing has so far delivered about 218 of the 737 MAX planes worldwide, the company told AFP. US-based Alaska Airlines grounded all 65 of its Boeing 737 MAX 9 planes on Friday after a flight carrying 171 passengers and six crew was forced to make an emergency landing. The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) said a sealed-over door panel had opened and come off mid-flight.

Alaska Flight 1282 had departed from Portland International Airport and was still gaining altitude when the cabin crew reported a "pressurization issue", according to the FAA. The plane quickly returned to Portland and there were no major injuries. Images posted on social media showed a side panel of the plane blown out, with emergency oxygen masks hanging from the ceiling.

"Following tonight's event on Flight 1282, we have decided to take the precautionary step of temporarily grounding our fleet of 65 Boeing 737-9 aircraft," Alaska Airlines CEO Ben Minicucci said on Friday. "Each aircraft will be returned to service only after completion of full maintenance and safety inspections," he said. Passenger Kyle Rinker told CNN the problem occurred soon after takeoff. "It was really abrupt. Just got to altitude, and the window/wall just popped off," he told the broadcaster.

The NTSB said no-one was sitting in the two places nearest the panel, but the Oregonian newspaper quoted passengers as saying a young boy seated in the row had his shirt ripped off by the sudden decompression, injuring him slightly.

Aviation specialist John Ostrower, of the Air Current website, said the affected panel was a so-called



SEATTLE, Washington: An Alaska Airlines Boeing 737 MAX 9 plane sits at a gate at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport on January 6, 2024 in Seattle, Washington. — AFP

mid-aft door that Boeing "deactivates" for some carriers before delivering the planes. According to Aviation Week magazine, airlines that do not choose MAX models offering the maximum seating configurations can have the door sealed up, which makes it look like a typical window.

The NTSB dispatched a team to Portland to examine the Alaska Airlines craft. The board's chair, Jennifer Homendy, said it was "very, very fortunate" that the incident had not ended in tragedy.

"We have the safest aviation system in the world. It is incredibly safe," she said. "But we have to maintain that standard." Homendy revealed that the door had fallen off over the Portland suburb of Cedar Hills, and urged residents to come forward if they found it.

Alaska Airlines said on Saturday that more than a fourth of its Max 9 fleet had been inspected since the

incident, and nothing noteworthy found. The plane, which had been heading to Ontario, California, was certified airworthy in October and was newly delivered to Alaska Airlines, according to the FAA registry website. "Safety is our top priority and we deeply regret the impact this event has had on our customers and their passengers," Boeing said in a statement.

"A Boeing technical team is supporting the NTSB's investigation into last night's event," it added.

United, which has the world's largest fleet of 737 MAX 9s, said it grounded 46 of the planes and 33 had now been inspected. This was expected to cause 60 flight cancellations on Saturday. Aeromexico said it was grounding all of its 737 MAX 9 planes while inspections were carried out, and Turkish Airlines announced on Sunday that it would also suspend flights of five MAX 9 planes for checks.

Panamanian carrier Copa Airlines said it was grounding 21 of its 737 MAX 9s, while Icelandair said none of its 737 MAX 9s featured the plane configuration specified in the FAA grounding order. Boeing has struggled in recent years with technical and quality control issues related to its 737 MAX models.

In December, the US aviation giant told airlines that MAX aircraft should be inspected to check for loose hardware on plane rudder control systems after an international operator discovered a bolt with a missing nut while performing routine maintenance. Boeing's 737 MAX planes were grounded worldwide following two MAX 8 crashes in 2018 and 2019 that killed 346 people in total. The FAA approved the planes' return to service only after the company made changes to its flight control system. — AFP

Bhutan to vote as economic strife hits 'national happiness'

THIMPU, Bhutan: The picturesque Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan holds general elections on Tuesday with serious economic challenges calling into question its longstanding policy of prioritizing "Gross National Happiness" over growth. Both parties contesting the vote are committed to a constitutionally enshrined philosophy of a government that measures its success by the "happiness and well-being of the people".

Some voters are expected to trek for days to cast their ballots in the landlocked and sparsely populated country, similar in size to Switzerland. Foremost in the minds of many are the struggles facing the kingdom's younger generation, with chronic youth unemployment and a brain drain of migration abroad.

"We don't need more new roads or bridges," farmer Kinley Wangchuk, 46, told AFP. "What we really need is more jobs for young people." Bhutan's youth unemployment rate stands at 29 percent, according to the World Bank, while economic growth has sputtered along at an average of 1.7 percent over the past five years. Young citizens have left in record numbers searching for better financial and educational opportunities abroad since the last elections, with Australia the top destination.

Around 15,000 Bhutanese were issued visas there in the 12 months to last July, according to a local news report—more than the preceding six years combined, and almost two percent of the kingdom's population. The issue is front and centre for both parties con-



TRONGSA, Bhutan: In this picture taken on December 31, 2023, a man reads an election board ahead of the upcoming parliamentary elections in Trongsa. — AFP

testing the poll. Career civil servant Pema Chewang of the Bhutan Tendrel Party (BTP), said the country was losing the "cream of the nation".

"If this trend continues, we might be confronted with a situation of empty villages and a deserted nation," the 56-year-old added. His opponent, former prime minister and People's Democratic Party (PDP) chief Tshering Tobgay, 58, sounded the alarm over Bhutan's "unprecedented economic challenges and mass exodus". His party's manifesto quoted government statistics showing that one in every eight people were "struggling to meet their basic needs for food" and other necessities.

for justice that was aired on British television this week. London's Metropolitan Police said late Friday that officers are "investigating potential fraud offences arising out of these prosecutions".

The probe also includes money recovered from sub-postmasters as a result of civil actions, the force added in a statement. The Met had already been investigating potential crimes of perjury and perverting the course of justice relating to investigations and prosecutions carried out by the Post Office.

Two people have been interviewed under caution but nobody has been arrested since the investigation opened in January 2020. The scandal has been described at an ongoing public inquiry as "the worst miscarriage of justice in recent British legal history".

The Horizon IT system had been developed by the Japanese technology giant Fujitsu.

The Post Office began installing the software in

the late '90s, but flaws in its programming showed up deficits in branch accounts. Postal service executives, refusing to acknowledge problems with the software, forced workers to repay the shortfalls.

Some were imprisoned or left out of pocket, while others failed to find other jobs and lost their homes. In December 2019, a High Court judge concluded that the system contained a number of "bugs, errors and defects". Eighty-six postmasters have so far seen their convictions overturned and £21 million (\$26 million) has been paid in compensation.

The UK government announced in September that every postmaster convicted would receive a payout of hundreds of thousands of pounds. The four-part television series, "Mr Bates vs the Post Office," shown on ITV, has led to 50 potential new victims contacting lawyers, British media has reported. — AFP

UK plans Europe's first high-tech uranium fuel plant

LONDON: Britain intends to become the first European country to produce an advanced uranium fuel that is currently commercially available only from Russia, the government announced Sunday. The UK government said it would invest £300 million (\$382 million) building a high-assay low-enriched uranium (HALEU) program that would help "displace" Moscow from global energy markets.

"We stood up to (Vladimir) Putin on oil and gas and financial markets. We won't let him hold us to ransom on nuclear fuel," energy secretary Claire Coutinho said in a statement. "This will be critical for energy security at home and abroad and builds on Britain's historic competitive advantages," she added. HALEU fuel is needed to power many of the next generation of advanced nuclear reactors, including so-called small modular versions that the UK intends to use.

The fuel has a uranium-235 content of between five and twenty percent, above the five percent level that powers most nuclear plants currently in operation. HALEU production has recently begun in the United States, but only a Russian facility manufactures the uranium on a commercial scale, according to the International Atomic Energy Agency. The British investment is part of plans to deliver up to 24 gigawatts of electricity from nuclear power by 2050, a quarter of the United Kingdom's electricity needs. The first plant will be in northwest England and is scheduled to be operational by the 2030s, the government said. — AFP

UK police launch fraud inquiry over post office IT scandal

LONDON: UK police have announced they are investigating possible fraud offences committed during Britain's post office scandal, described as one of the worst miscarriages of justice in British legal history. More than 700 people running small local post offices received criminal convictions between 1999 and 2005 after faulty accounting software made it appear that money had gone missing from their branches. The prosecutions for theft and false accounting have received new attention following a television drama about one branch manager's fight



OXFORD: Britain's Prime Minister Rishi Sunak talks to a worker from the Environment Agency on January 7, 2024. — AFP

NBK MONEY MARKETS REPORT

US labor market remains resilient, continues to exceed expectations

Geopolitical tensions could have consequences for European economy

KUWAIT: The Institute of Director's (IoD) confidence index showed that the gap between economy-optimists and economy-pessimists has fallen to -28 in December from -21 in November. The figure indicates that company directors are getting back to their pessimistic stance on the economy, as they start to hesitate to take investment decisions. "Although aspects of the business environment have improved in the last couple of months, particularly with regard to inflation, this is not yet exerting a meaningful impact on business decision-making," IoD policy director Roger Barker emphasized that for significant economic growth to happen in 2024, "business is in dire need of a boost."

Adding more signs that the resilient US jobs market is steadily cooling, openings fell in November to their lowest level since March 2021. There were 8.79 million job openings in November, down from October's upwardly revised 8.85 million and roughly in line with expectations of 8.77 million openings. Openings fell by 62,000, though the rate of vacancies as a measure of employment was unchanged at 5.3 percent. Economic activity is beginning to show signs of cooling as interest rates remain at a 22-year high. The ratio of job openings to available workers fell to 1.4 to 1, still elevated but down sharply from the 2 to 1 level seen throughout 2022.

ISM manufacturing PMI

The latest reports showed that the US manufacturing sector is still in contraction. The ISM manufacturing report for December registered a reading of 47.4

US must keep engaging with China, says ex-World Bank chief

TOKYO : With a resolution to the US-China confrontation nowhere in sight, the US must continue to engage with China on critical issues such as the international economy and climate change, said former World Bank Group President Robert Zoellick.

"On the one hand, we need security deterrence so as to prevent any aggression. On the other hand, we need to continue to work with China on issues, whether they be climate change, pandemics, the

(anything below 50 indicates a contraction), up 0.7 points from November and slightly stronger than the 47.2 estimate. Meanwhile, employment rose to 48.1, a strong 2.3-point monthly increase.

The latest to come out of the Federal Reserve is that we might have certainly seen the end of the interest rate hike cycle and have entered the phase of anticipating rate cuts. Fed officials have affirmed that progress has been made in the battle to bring down inflation. "In discussing the policy outlook, participants viewed the policy rate as likely at or near its peak for this tightening cycle, though they noted that the actual policy path will depend on how the economy evolves," the minutes said. The ever so cautious Federal Reserve reiterated "the importance of maintaining a careful and data-dependent approach to making monetary policy decisions."

In December, more workers were hired than expected, with the latest Non-Farm Employment change showing that a hefty 216K workers were hired versus the expected 168K figure. The bulk of jobs added in recent months have largely been in a small number of sectors, mainly leisure and hospitality. The latest report indicates that markets expectations for the Federal Reserve to start cutting rates in March are somewhat premature. On an annual basis, 2.7 million jobs were added in 2023, as opposed to the 4.8 million jobs added in 2022, proving that the tightness of the labor market is in fact cooling down following the Fed's vigorous rate hike cycle. Additionally, the unemployment rate was unchanged at 3.7 percent. Similar to the previous month, average hourly earnings rose

international economy. And finding that balance, I think, is the challenge of our era," Zoellick said in an interview with Nikkei Asia in Tokyo. Zoellick served in the administration of George W. Bush as US trade representative and as deputy secretary of state before becoming president of the World Bank in 2007. He is seen as a proponent of the decades-long US policy of engagement with China, which, it was hoped, would see China democratize as it integrated into the global economy. That policy has been questioned as China has grown to become the world's second-largest economy, challenging the US position as the world's top economic and military superpower. Both Democrats and Republicans in the US have leaned toward a hard line against China in recent years.

Rates - 7th January, 2024

Currencies	Previous Week Levels				This Week's Expected Range		3-Month Forward
	Open	Low	High	Close	Minimum	Maximum	
EUR	1.1042	1.0875	1.1046	1.0941	1.0890	1.1040	1.0990
GBP	1.2729	1.2607	1.2770	1.2716	1.2610	1.2805	1.2722
JPY	140.82	140.80	145.98	144.65	143.40	147.30	142.60
CHF	0.8415	0.8399	0.8576	0.8498	0.8350	0.8600	1.1880

0.4 percent in December. The US Dollar index closed the week at 102.412.

Eurozone Inflation

The latest CPI reading to come out of the Eurozone was in line with the European Central Bank's expectations, at 2.9 percent. This backs the ECB's case to keep interest rates higher for longer, despite markets' expectations of swift rate cuts. The ECB believes that inflation had reached a low point of 2.4 percent in November and will now roam around the 2.5 percent -- 3 percent range before falling to its 2 percent target in 2025. Global political tensions are playing a major role in impacting prices and that could have longer-term consequences for the European economy. Nevertheless, markets are still expecting the ECB to cut interest rates six times this year, while policymakers argue that

The picture is complicated, however, according to Zoellick. "[I]n reality, if you look at the Chinese cooperation in areas like nonproliferation policy, economics, some environmental issues, engagement didn't fail. The challenge is there's always more work to do." The Biden administration has come to recognize the need to face China, Zoellick said. "You can't ignore China. You can't contain it. You can't make it go away." At the same time, he does not expect the administration to be conciliatory because "Biden doesn't want to be perceived as soft on China," as he is expected to run for reelection this year. Zoellick reflected on a speech he gave in 2005 in which he urged China to become a "responsible stakeholder" in the international system. By that time, China was an important player in

this will not be the case.

China Caixin manufacturing PMI

In China, the Caixin General Manufacturing PMI unexpectedly climbed to 50.8 in the latest publication released in December, exceeding expectations of a drop to 50.4. The data shows an increase in output at the fastest pace in 7 months, as well as an increase in new orders which rose to its highest level since February. Meanwhile, new export orders fell at the softest pace in seven months, and purchasing activity stagnated. The USD/CNY currency pair ended the week at 7.1395.

Kuwait

Kuwaiti dinar USD/KWD closed last week at 0.30735.

multilateral bodies such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, and the United Nations Security Council. "The point of my speech was to say that we needed to go beyond integration. I mean, China assuming the responsibilities of the international system."

He said that until Xi took office, there were some important efforts by China on issues such as the global financial crisis and sanctions against Iran and North Korea. "But I think that when Xi Jinping took office, you started to see a move away from some of those policies," he said. Zoellick, who became acquainted with Xi when he was vice president, added that he always had more of a focus on the Communist Party and strengthening the party rather than China's economy in his early days. — Agencies

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Global equity markets are off to a shaky start in early 2024: UBS

Fed easing to support quality bonds and equities alike in 2024

GENEVA: Equity markets are off to a shaky start in early 2024, said UBS Global Wealth Management. "At the end of US equity trading on Thursday, 10-year US Treasury yields had risen 20 basis points since December to return to 4 percent, while the S&P 500 had declined 2 percent over the same time period," UBS said in a note. Investors also dialed back the probability of an early rate cut by the Federal Reserve to a market-implied probability of 66 percent that the Fed will ease policy at its March policy meeting, down from 86 percent at the end of last week.

This appeared to contribute to a third straight daily decline in the S&P 500, the first time since 2015 that the index has kicked off the year with back-to-back falls. This was part of a broader risk-off move. High yield credit spreads also widened, typically a sign of rising risk aversion, UBS continued.

But UBS believes that the latest moves are largely a reflection of how far markets rallied in the final two months of 2023. The latest Fed minutes, while indicating some caution over the pace of cuts, continued to back the view that easing is on the way this year. The overall tone of the minutes released on Wednesday was less dovish than Fed Chair Jerome Powell's remarks at the press conference following the December meeting, at which he pointed out that policymakers had started to discuss lowering rates. Among the more hawkish elements in the minutes, it was revealed that many policymakers felt that the swift fall in government bond yields, leading to an easing of financial conditions, could make it more difficult for the Federal Open Market

Committee to reach its inflation goal. However, such comments were balanced by the observation by a number of participants that "downside risks to the economy" would arise if rates were kept restrictive for too long, UBS said.

With rate cuts likely still ahead, Mark Haefele, chief investment officer at UBS Global Wealth Management, continues to see upside in fixed income. "Quality bonds look set to gain further as economic growth moderates and rates fall, and their advance would likely be even more pronounced in the event of a hard landing. That said, markets continue to imply a faster pace of Fed easing than we anticipate, raising the risk of disappointment. Therefore, investors should be able to look for more attractive entry points given the potential for periodic rises in yields over the coming months," Haefele said.

The prospect for rate cuts should also support stocks, though against a backdrop of more moderate growth. UBS continues to favor quality stocks — those issued by companies with strong balance sheets, high returns on invested capital, and a track record of delivering earnings. As indicated last November, UBS expects Fed easing to support quality bonds and equities alike in 2024.

UBS' views were echoed by RBC Wealth Management on Friday, who also suggested caution on equities in 2024. RBC WM maintains market weight positioning in equities overall, which attempts to balance the risks of a US recession against the possibility that one may again be averted. The firm recommends tilting portfolios towards higher-quality segments of the equity market, including those companies with resilient balance sheets, sustain-



NEW YORK: Traders work on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE). — AFP

able dividends, and reliable cash flow generation.

They are not alone in their views. According to Andrea Seminara, CEO and CIO of Redhedge, investors need to exercise prudence and discernment in their investment decisions. "The emphasis should

transition from broad market movements to specific risks and individual asset exposures. The importance of investing in high-quality assets is underscored, as they are considered to hold value, unlike their lower-quality counterparts," Seminara said.

مبروك للرابحين في حساب كنز
Congratulations to the winners of the Kanz Account
January Monthly Draw
سحب شهري بنابر
2,000 ك.د.

• ABDULLAH FALEH ALDAIHANI	• MOHAMMAD MAHDI ASHKANANI	• محمد محدي الشكنايني	• عبدالله فالح الدايحاني
• ABDULLATEEF HUSSAIN TWAINEH	• MOHAMMAD NAJEEB ALHAMDAN	• محمد نجيب الحمدان	• عبد اللطيف حسين توبيه
• ABDULWAHAB AL BEN ALI	• SHAIKH MUBARAK FAISAL ALSABAH	• الشيخ مبارك فيصل الصباح	• عبد الوهاب ال بن علي
• ALI NASER ALSAFFAR	• REHAB SULTAN EISSA	• رهاب سلطان عيسى	• علي ناصر الصفار
• FATEMAH JAAFAR MAARAFAI	• SAHAR AKREMAH SALEH	• سحر عكرمة صالح	• فاطمة جعفر معرفي
• GAUTAM RAVIKUMAR	• SAKEENAH ALI HUSSAIN	• سكهيه علي حسين	• جاوهار رافيكومار
• JUZAR MOHAMMED BANKODAWALA	• SALEH RADHI MELBES	• صالح راضي ملبس	• جوزار محمد بانكودوالا
• KHALED AHMED ALHUSSAIN	• SHEHAB AHMED ALSAQAI	• شهاب احمد السقاقي	• خالد احمد الحسين
• MOHAMMAD JASIM ALQALLAF	• SHEROOQ ALI DASHTI	• شرووق علي دشتي	• محمد جاسم الفلاق
• MOHAMMAD JASSIM REDHA	• WALEED SALEH ALALI	• وليد صالح العلي	• محمد جاسم رضا

Burgan Bank announces winners of Kanz account monthly draw

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank announced the names of the Kanz account monthly draw winners, who will each take home a KD 2,000 cash-prize. All Kanz customers who maintain a minimum balance of KD 200 for at least one week before the draw date are included in the draw and their chances of winning increase with higher deposits.

The 20 lucky winners are:

- Abdullah Faleh Al-Daihani
- Abdullateef Hussain Twainah
- Abdulwahab Al-Ben Ali
- Ali Naser Al-Saffar
- Fatemah Jaafar Maarafi
- Gautam Ravikumar
- Juzar Mohammed Bankodawala

- Khaled Ahmed Al-Hussain
- Mohammad Jasim Mohammad
- Mohammad Jassim Redha
- Mohammad Mahdi Habeeb
- Mohammad Najeeb Al-Hamdan
- Shaikh Mubarak Faisal Al-Sabah
- Rehab Sultan Eissa
- Sahar Akremah Saleh
- Sakeenah Ali Hussain
- Saleh Radhi Melbes
- Shehab Ahmed Al-Saqai
- Sherooq Ali Dashti
- Waleed Saleh Al-Ali

In addition to the monthly draw of Kanz account, Burgan Bank also offers a semi-annual KD 500,000 prize and a mega annual prize of KD 1,500,000. Kanz Account is accessible to any individual and can be opened in Kuwaiti dinar or in major currencies (USD, EURO, GBP) with a minimum KD 200 requirement for account opening. More information on opening a Kanz account, the draws or any of the Bank's products and services, is available at any of Burgan Bank branches, through the Call Center and Burgan Bank website.

Gulf Bank announces 10 winners of Al-Danah monthly draw

KUWAIT: As part of its ongoing commitment to reward its customers, Gulf Bank has announced the 10 monthly winners of the Al-Danah account draw for Dec 2023. The lucky winners who will be taking home a prize of KD 1,000 each, are:

- Ahmed Ali Zaid Al-Besais
- Hussain Ibrahim Mohammad Ahmad
- Elyanah Najeb Ramadhan Kalkattawi
- Nadin Humaidan Abdulhafeth Al-Natshoh
- Maria G MD Mokhaizeem
- Zaid Ibrahim Metni Mohammad
- Mohammed Abdulla Ali Al-Wazzan
- Abdulaziz Mohammad Ali Hasan Sadeq
- Tareq Mohammed Hassan Al-Baghlhi
- Asmaa Mohammed Mansour Mohammed

The deadline for depositing and participating in the Al-Danah Millionaire's annual grand draw concluded on Nov 30, 2023. The draw is scheduled for Feb 1, 2024, with representatives from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, and

Ernst & Young in attendance.

This upcoming draw marks a significant milestone, as it is the first draw following the increase of the annual grand prize for the Al-Danah Millionaire draw from KD 1.5 to KD 2 million. This change reflects the bank's commitment to rewarding customers and encouraging a savings culture in the community.

Renowned as one of the top savings accounts in Kuwait, the Al-Danah account offers numerous benefits, including periodic draws with substantial prizes. Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account offers monthly opportunities to win KD 1,000 to ten lucky winners, in addition to two quarterly draws with KD 100,000 prizes each, a semi-annual draw prize of KD 1 million and a grand draw prize of KD 2 million.

Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account is the only account in Kuwait, that rewards customers for their loyalty by providing loyalty chances, and transfers your chances of winning from the previous year to



the next year, as part of a program that rewards customers for their loyalty to Gulf Bank.

In order to increase one's chances of winning, customers must maintain a minimum of KD 200 in their accounts, or deposit continuously to increase their chances of winning. Al-Danah account holders are eligible to win Gulf Bank's upcoming monthly, quarterly, and annual Al-Danah draws.

Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti bank of the Future. The Bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role

in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience. Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining robust developments in sustainability at environmental, social and governance levels through diverse sustainability initiatives, strategically selected to benefit the Bank both internally and externally. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with various parties to achieve it.

Huawei launches GoPaint Worldwide Creating Activity

KUWAIT: Huawei officially kicked off the Huawei GoPaint Worldwide Creating Activity. From Jan 5, 2024 to Feb 29, 2024, participants can showcase their digital art skills in an online activity that embodies Huawei's commitment to sparking creativity. Huawei GoPaint Worldwide Creating Activity is a platform for creatives or anyone who loves to create to express themselves, inspire all nature of creativity, and empower more people in artistic creation.

With Huawei tablets, designed to deliver delightful creating features, the activity aims to stimulate global consumers to express the 'Creation of Beauty' concept.

The Huawei GoPaint Worldwide Creating Activity extends an invitation to those passionate about artistic creation, continually inspiring and energizing the creative spirit within. Huawei not only provides a creative platform for artists and enthusiasts to express themselves but also elevates the creative experience with the latest Huawei MatePad Pro 13.2". This device features a flexible OLED screen, an ultra-thin design at just 5.5mm, and a lightweight frame weighing only 580g. Its immersive screen boasts an impressive 94 percent screen-to-body ratio. Paired with the Huawei M-Pencil (3rd generation), which offers 10,000+ pressure sensing levels, it enables mastery over a variety of artistic styles. Specifically designed for creative minds, the Huawei MatePad Pro 13.2" ensures that your artistic vision is captured with unmatched precision and ease. If you resonate with the idea that to create is a universal calling, we invite you to pick up your digital brush and GoPaint!

Huawei GoPaint will reward winners with creation fund, which include:

- Best Creative Award (1 winner): \$5000
- Best Visual Award (1 winner): \$5000
- Best Storytelling Award (1 winner): \$5000
- Most Popular Award (2 winners): \$5000
- Honorable Mention (15 winners): \$2000

How to participate

To participate in the Huawei GoPaint Worldwide Creating Activity, simply submit your work in either of the following ways, before the submission deadline, Feb 29, 2024 at 24:00 Beijing Time (GMT +8):

Method 1: Open My Huawei app on your phone or



tablet and register within the app. Then submit your work on the GoPaint page in the app.

Method 2: Post your work on Instagram/Facebook with #HUAWEIGoPaint, and mention the @huaweimobilekw official account.

A creative journey

Huawei GoPaint Worldwide Creating Activity consists of three conceptual categories, which include:

- Culture
Culture is the calling of each creator, the essence of our soul, the place where life experience meets inspiration, and possibilities are endless.
- City
We spend much of our lives in concrete jungles of our own making. If the world is a blank canvas, its cities are the lines, dots and brushstrokes that give it color.
- Character
We are nothing without the people around us. The everyday acts of kindness, bravery, love, and resilience we witness are the sustenance that gives our lives meaning and purpose.

Submission requirements

Artworks should be submitted in either JPG or PNG files, with a resolution of at least 300 dpi, and a file size of no more than 20 MB. Each uploaded work must be accompanied by a text description of between 30 and 80 words.

Participants are encouraged to carefully review each category before submitting their work to the most suitable one. Participants can only use Huawei tablets to create their artworks — any model is acceptable. We look forward to your participation and witnessing your wonderful creations in the Huawei GoPaint Worldwide Creating Activity. Earn the exciting opportunity to showcase your artwork globally and in app placements, as well as share the narrative of your creation in video 22interviews.

Indian economy faces risk of lower consumption growth

MUMBAI: The Indian economy is facing the challenge of lower consumption growth as high inflation is impacting people in the lower income bracket, India Ratings and Research Chief Economist Devendra Kumar Pant said on Sunday.

According to Press Trust of India, Pant said although the country's economy is now resilient enough to deal with the dual shocks of below-normal monsoon and high global oil prices, the challenge is to bring down inflation so that people can have more disposable income in their hands.

"One percentage point reduction in inflation will lead to 64 basis points increase in GDP or 1.12 percentage points increase in PFCE (Private final consumption expenditure) growth... If inflation can be brought down by 1 percentage point, it would be a win-win," Pant said in an interview to PTI. PFCE denotes money spent by individuals on goods and services for personal consumption.

As per the estimates of Ind-Ra, which is a subsidiary of global rating agency

Fitch Ratings, PFCE would grow 5.2 percent year on year in current fiscal, as against 7.5 percent in last fiscal. "Until private corporate investment starts and government withdraws some of the investment they are doing, the economy will not have a stable growth path," Pant said. The Indian economy grew 7.2 percent in 2022-23 fiscal and as per government estimates, the growth in the current fiscal would be 7.3 percent. Pant said there are two kinds of India in terms of income bracket—one is people from upper income and the other those in the lower income bracket. The wages of people at the bottom end of pyramid are not growing at the same pace as the people in organized sector or people in upper end. — Agencies

"We have done a study and found that people at the bottom 50 percent bracket face a higher inflation compared to people in the top 50 percent of population. Prices of the good and services consumed mainly by the people in the bottom of the pyramid is growing faster than what is consumed by upper end of the pyramid," he said. Retail or consumer price index-based inflation rose to a 3-month high of 5.55 percent in November, mainly due to rise in food prices. — Agencies

MONDAY, JANUARY 8, 2024

Niger struggling to keep its traditional music alive

A succession of high and low sounds from the Nigerian musician's drum is a kind of telegram but few today understand its message. Each beat is a syllable in the Hausa language. "You see, he heard his name!" said Oumarou Adamou, alias Maidouma, one of Niger's most celebrated traditional musicians, delighted when his assistant responded to the call. He's a master of the douma, a typical percussion instrument which he plays with sticks and by rotating his bare foot on its goatskin membrane.

But with rap and electronic music now more likely to enthrall Niger's youth, being able to decipher the drumbeats is a dying art. On stages around the world, Maidouma, dressed in his sky-blue boubou, is an ambassador for his country's musical heritage. At home, he's also the guardian of a prized array of percussion, string and wind instruments housed at the state-owned Centre of Musical Training and Promotion (CFPM) in the capital Niamey.

The collection is all the more cherished for having been saved from a fire at the national museum in 2011. "Our traditional musical instruments are in danger of disappearing," Adamou said. "The young people of today all want to play modern instruments like the guitar and drums."

'All gone'

The advanced age of players of traditional instruments, such as the molo, a type of lute, or the kalangou, an elongated drum, raises fears the know-how will die out with them. "How many artists practise here? That's over, they've all gone," said Yacouba Moumouni, alias Denke Denke, who plays the traditional Fulani flute and is a singer. A lack of money hinders conservation efforts in one of the world's poorest countries.

Some 70 percent of Niger's population is aged under 25. Diplomatic tensions between its military rulers

and several Western partners since the July 26 coup also bode ill for its cultural life, which long benefited from foreign funding. But the problem runs deeper. The doyens of traditional music agree that young musicians are "impatient" and prefer to compose on a computer rather than undergo a drawn-out apprenticeship that pays very little.

The growing popularity of a strict interpretation of Islam in a predominantly Muslim country can also thwart a musical vocation. A caste system, too, that reserved instrument playing to so-called griots, a class of travelling musicians who tend to be looked down on today, is also a hindrance. "We don't view griots here like in Mali or Senegal. In Niger, when you are griot, you are a bit overlooked by society," said Moumouni, whose son is currently the only apprentice.

'Bearer of ancestral values'

Unlike in neighboring Mali or Nigeria, Niger's traditional music has not opened up to other world music and modernized, artist and teacher Mahaman Sani Mati said. Since 2018, he has organized workshops for underprivileged youngsters to learn to



Oumarou Adamou, alias "Maidouma", a traditional Nigerian percussionist artist, player and manufacturer of membranophone instruments, makes music in his workshop located within the Professional Music Training Center (CFPM) in Niamey, on Oct 25, 2023. — AFP photos

play and — crucially, also to make — traditional instruments. Tentatively strumming a gourimi, Aichata Adamou is among about 10 students in a classroom at the CFPM. "If I manage to sell even just one gourimi, this workshop will be of benefit to us," the young woman said.

Previous students have gone into musical careers, while others have found work in companies that produce instruments, according to Mati. But beyond that, it's about teaching them to "open their eyes, so they understand what they can gain, what the benefit is of being a bearer of these ancestral values", he added. Rapper Oumarou Abourahamane, who is among the students, seemed won over. "We copy people from abroad, but we have our own instruments. Why not work on those?" he said. — AFP



Mahaman Sani Mati plays a traditional gourimi.

VAR aims to bring clarity to rowdy wrestling in Senegal

Wrestling is enormously popular in Senegal — and the decisions that award victory or crushing defeat to the grapplers are now overseen by the same technology that is dividing opinion in football across the world. At a fight in December at the National Arena in Pikine, just outside the capital Dakar, 15,000 fans roared on the bare-chested wrestlers to the beat of drums and encouragements booming out of loudspeakers.

Sitor Ndour though was not watching the ring — his eyes were firmly fixed on a TV monitor placed in a small blue tent a few metres from the fight. Ndour is the VAR — or Video Assistant Referee — judge. Wrestling fans in the west African country have long called for VAR to be introduced into their sport and in 2023 that wish became reality. Three cameras record the action from different angles, which Ndour can view on two screens.

Although the technology is far from that found at football matches in Europe, if a decision is disputed, the VAR official can call over the main umpire and show him the recordings. Maissa Ndiaye, the vice-president of the Senegalese wrestling association (CNG), said the advent of VAR was a source of relief for the referees in a sport which in Senegal has prize money of several tens of millions of CFA francs, equivalent to tens of thousands of dollars.

Ndour, who is the president of the referees' committee, explained: "Sometimes we had a disputed verdict, which caused confusion and (as a result) people broke chairs and destroyed public property because they weren't happy with the result that had been given. "In this kind of situation if we can review the footage and declare a winner, but also if the public can see the images, that makes our task easier and it allows the spectators to go home with more peace of mind."

Reluctant acceptance of VAR

In the high-profile fight in December, VAR was called into action several times. In one of the preliminary bouts, which was broadcast live on TV, two



A wrestler frees a bird ahead of a wrestling match.

heavily muscled fighters, stripped to the waist, were both looking for ways past their opponents and the crucial edge that would give them victory. One of the fighters pulled off a move that led both of them to land on the filled sacks that mark out the ring — and both claimed victory.

VAR was called in, with the chief judge making the same screen gesture with his hands that football referees use. The judge walked over to the VAR screen and, having seen the recording, returned to the ring and lifted the arm of one of the wrestlers to indicate he was the winner. His beaten opponent loudly contested the decision and pushed his way towards the VAR tent before he was restrained by security, who eventually escorted



Wrestlers get ready for a match at the National Arena in Pikine, Senegal, on Dec 24, 2023. — AFP photos



Wrestlers fight during a match at the National Arena.



The VAR is seen ahead of a wrestling match.

him away. Ndour said such scenes were common because while some wrestlers have accepted the introduction of VAR, others have yet to fully grasp how the system works and often demand to see the video footage themselves. — AFP

Lifestyle

Amsterdam 'fashion library' takes aim at clothes waste

Kram Cakir hands over a multi-colored blue and white blouse and selects a similar item, this time in hot pink. Welcome to Amsterdam's "fashion library". Billed as one of the world's only physical centers for renting used and new clothing, the "big shared wardrobe" in the Dutch capital is a response to clothes waste and fashion industry pollution. Hundreds of brightly colored trousers, coats and overalls are sorted by brand or style, each with a tag indicating a sale price or how much it costs to rent the item per day.

The daily rental price varies from around 50 euro cents (\$0.55) to a couple of euros, depending on the customer's loyalty — how often he or she rents clothes and how many are borrowed. For Cakir, a 37-year-old NGO campaign manager, the concept is "just really good". "So many clothes are bought and then never used," she told AFP. "This is an excellent way to wear new clothes without depleting the planet," added Cakir.

Globally, the equivalent of a truckload of clothes is burnt or buried in landfills every second, according to the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, a charity focused on eliminating waste and pollution. The textile industry is also a major polluter, causing between two and eight percent of global carbon emissions, according to the United Nations in 2022. In the era of fast fashion, the average person buys 60 percent more clothing than 15 years ago, while each item is kept for only half as long, the UN says.

Fashion is responsible for one quarter of the pollution of the world's waters and a third of microplastic discharges into the oceans — toxic substances for fish and humans. All this prompted Elisa Jansen to open "LENA, the fashion library" in a trendy area in central Amsterdam, with her two sisters and a friend. "Why did we open in 2014? Because the fashion industry is one of the most polluting industries in the world," she told AFP.

'Try before you buy'

The library also has an online section, plus drop-off and collection points in other Dutch cities. "Always new clothes. Good for the planet. Experiment with your style. Try before you buy," reads a poster hanging above



LENA's counter and washing machines, summing up its philosophy. Jansen's career began in vintage shops so she said she has "always worked in recycling clothes". But the vintage business did not allow her to acquire new items and she found it too homogenous a style. "That's when I got the idea of sharing clothes in a massive shared wardrobe," she said.

Customers sign up for a €10 fee, allowing them to borrow or buy clothes from the collection. There are more than 6,000 members but not everyone is a regular borrower, admits Jansen. Her top priority is the quality of her garments, always preferring longer-lasting brands. "You won't find any fast fashion

here," she said, referring to a trend where garments are bought cheaply then discarded after only a few wears. LENA was "really one of the first of its kind" when it opened nine years ago, said Jansen.

Similar initiatives have been launched in places such as Australia, Britain, Canada, France, Scandinavia and Switzerland, although Jansen said the Scandinavian outlets appeared to have closed since. It took some time to find a profitable business model, she admits. But her location in a trendy area now mostly attracts women aged between 25 and 45 "who want to make sustainable choices but who also want pretty clothes".

India Donisi, a 35-year-old blogger, is the target audience. "It's really very convenient," she said as she tried on what she called an "extravagant" fuchsia pink blazer. Donisi regularly rents clothes from the library to wear for media events but she lives around the corner and admits she wouldn't cross town to borrow an outfit. Jansen hopes her initiative will inspire others. "I really believe this is the future. Our consumption cannot continue as it is," she said. "I hope other clothing brands will even do it themselves ... so you always have the option to borrow if you don't want to buy." — AFP

Demolition of 'Marie Curie' site on hold

France's culture minister has said that the demolition of a site linked to pioneering radioactivity researcher Marie Curie would be put on hold. The Curie Institute will "suspend demolition of the Pavillon des Sources to take the time to look at... any possible alternative," Culture Minister Rima Abdul Malak wrote on X, formerly Twitter. Critics of the demolition say two-time Nobel winner Marie Curie worked in a laboratory in the building, while its proponents dispute this.

A cancer-fighting foundation, the Curie Institute wants to build a 2,000-square-meter five-storey research center at the site in Paris' touristy Latin Quarter. It would be "the first center for cancer-related chemical biology in Europe" and "an indispensable scientific project", Curie Institute chief Thierry Philip told AFP. He added that he had had a "calm exchange on the complex debate" with minister Abdul Malak "on a question of memory that stokes so much emotion today".

If no "alternative solution" can be found, "we will

have to calmly make a decision between memory and living science," Philip said. Figures including television presenter Stephane Bern and conservative former minister Rachida Dati launched the debate around the Pavillon des Sources into the public eye. It would be a "serious mistake" to destroy the building, Bern wrote on X this week, given its status as French "heritage".

Philip said that the Pavillon des Sources was not a laboratory used by Curie, but rather served to store radioactive waste and today stands empty. Her actual laboratory, the Curie pavilion, is not in danger of being demolished, he said. — AFP



This photograph taken on Jan 5, 2024 shows the entrance of the Radium Institute, the historical site of Polish-French physicist and chemist Marie Curie's laboratory. — AFP

Cancel Depardieu?
French cinema split over film icon

The case of actor Gerard Depardieu, charged with rape and facing other accusations of sexual assault, has exposed a major split in French cinema, extending into politics and wider society. A petition to support the actor has been challenged by a wave of open letters denouncing years of reprehensible behavior, while the case has caused an apparent rift between French President Emmanuel Macron and his culture minister.

An icon of French cinema for half a century after rocketing to fame in the mid 1970s, Depardieu was charged in 2020 with rape and has been targeted by two other complaints alleging sexual assault, as well as other accusations published in media. He denies any wrongdoing. With his career on hold, debate over whether the 75-year-old's back catalogue of some 200 titles should be shown at all intensified last month when a French television documentary entitled "Fall of the Ogre" showed him making a litany of sexual comments at women during a trip to North Korea in 2018.

saying he was entitled to "presumption of innocence".

'Old world'

Those signing the letter — entitled "Don't Erase Gerard Depardieu" — included former French first lady and singer Carla Bruni, British actor Charlotte Rampling and Depardieu's former partner, actor Carole Bouquet. Another celebrity signing the text was director Bertrand Blier who made the 1974 movie "Les Valseuses" ("Going Places"), which was one of Depardieu's first hits and



French actor Gerard Depardieu poses during a photocall for the second season of the French TV show "Marseille" broadcasted and co-produced by US streaming video giant Netflix, on Feb 18, 2018 in Marseille, southern France. — AFP photos

which has long been controversial over the vulgar attitudes expressed towards women.

But in a sign of the discomfort caused by the open letter, a counter-petition signed by 8,000 people including singers Angele and Louane and rapper Medine swiftly appeared, contending that the text supporting Depardieu "spat in the face" of his accusers. "It's a sinister and perfect illustration of an old world that refuses to let things change," the counter petition said.

Another critical petition, entitled "Address to the old world", was published on Sunday on the Mediapart website with some 70 signatures from cinema personalities including Anouk Grinberg, Blier's former partner. "No one wants to erase the artist. But the talent of Gerard Depardieu does not permit the indignity of his behavior," it said. "Defending art also means saying that being an artist should not exempt us from all responsibility," added a third petition published in the Liberation daily signed by luminaries including theatre director Thomas Jolly, who is to mastermind the 2024 Olympics opening ceremony, and actor Swann Arlaud who starred in "Anatomy of a Fall".

'Not perfect'

The controversy has also been reflected in politics, with Culture Minister Rima Abdul-Malak in December saying Depardieu's behavior "shames France" and a pro-



This image grab taken from video footage on Dec 26, 2023 shows French actor and columnist for French conservative magazine Causeur Yanniss Ezzadi reading French newspaper Le Figaro during an interview in Paris.

cedure would be started that could see him stripped of France's top award the Legion of Honor. But Macron days later contradicted his minister, complaining that Depardieu, an "immense actor" was the target of a "manhunt" and dismissing the minister's suggestion he could be stripped of the award.

Meanwhile, scrutiny has in the last days intensified on the original petition supporting Depardieu, with some of its signatories now distancing themselves from the text. Disquiet grew after it emerged that the initiator of the text was little known actor Yanniss Ezzadi — who writes for the ultraconservative magazine Causeur, and is close to Gerard Depardieu's daughter Julie Depardieu.

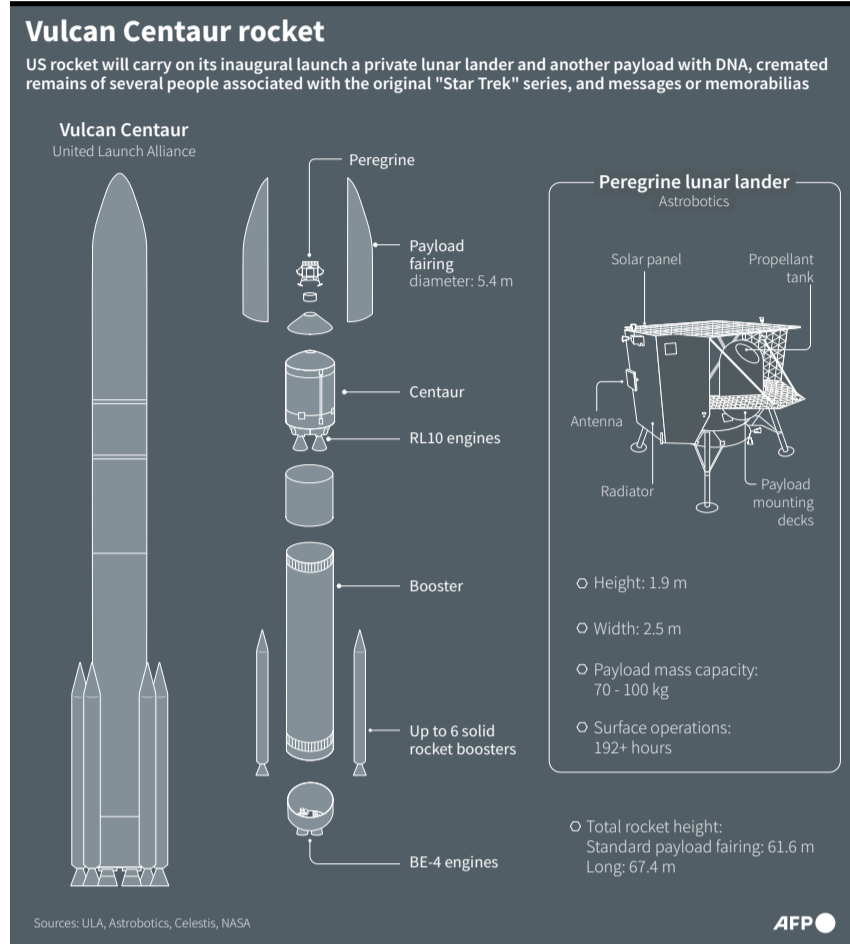
"I signed it," Carole Bouquet said on Instagram. "However, I do not support the ideas and values associated with the journalist behind this platform. Giving him visibility through Gerard makes me, as you can imagine, deeply uncomfortable." The former head of Paris' pres-

tigious Cinematheque francaise, Serge Toubiana, who also signed the petition, told AFP he had not been aware who was behind the text, which he acknowledged was "not perfect". It gives the impression "that because he (Depardieu) is an immense actor, that could put him above the law", he noted.

Actor and director Jacques Weber expressed regret for signing the document, saying he had put his name "in haste... as a reflex of friendship without inquiring." "Despite the love or admiration that his friends, his family and the cinema family have for him, we must not prevent the truth from emerging," he wrote. Ezzadi himself strongly defended the petition in comments to AFP, saying "we don't want to cancel him, and we don't want to do without him" and denouncing a "climate of terror". — AFP

Lifestyle

Navajo object to depositing human remains on Moon



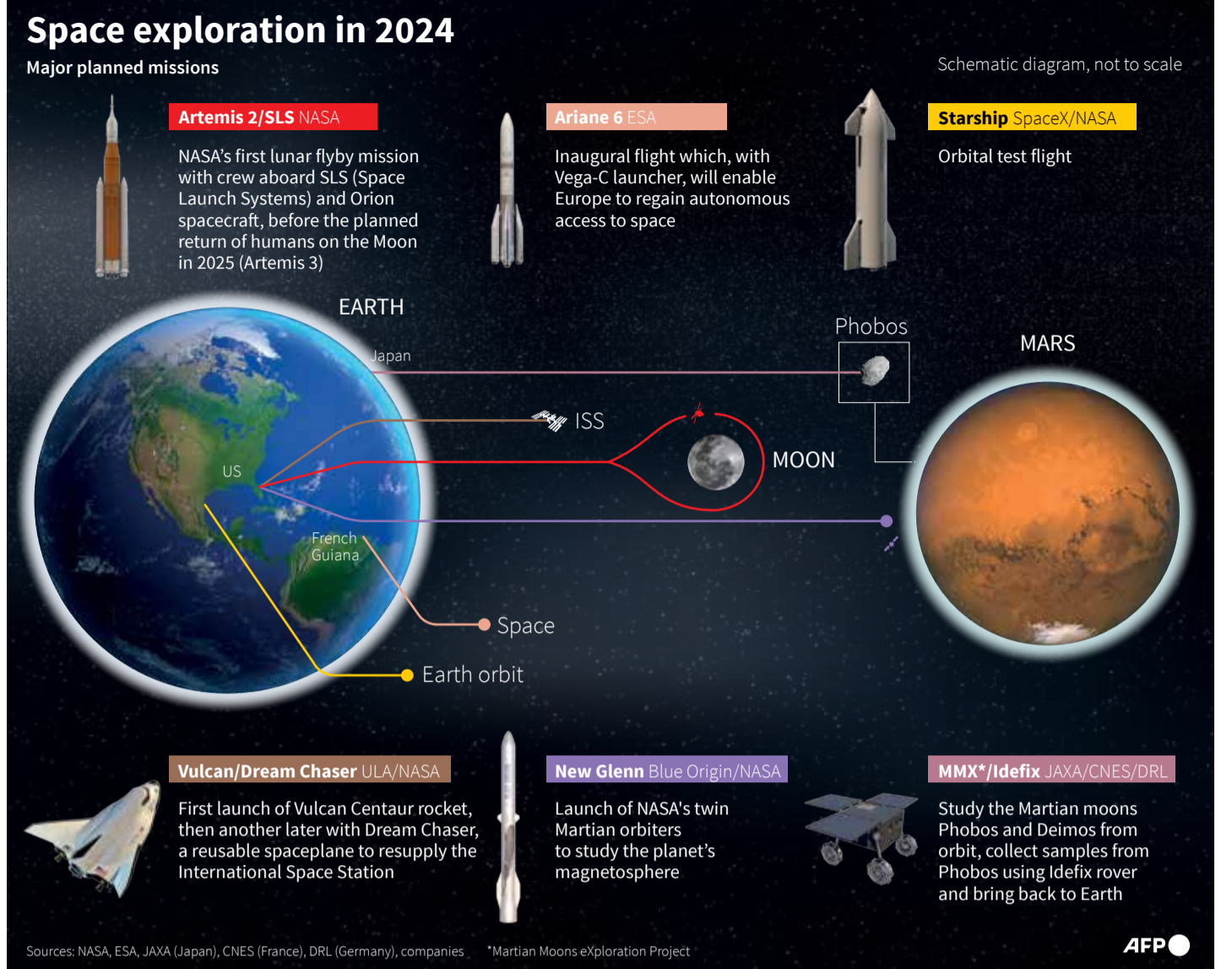
The United States will soon launch its first spacecraft to attempt a soft lunar landing since the Apollo era, in a historic collaboration with the private sector — but not everyone is celebrating. The Navajo Nation, America's largest Indigenous tribe, has raised concerns over the presence of human cremated remains on the lander vehicle, calling the mission a "desecration" of the Moon which holds a sacred place in their culture.

On Jan 8, Pittsburgh-based Astrobotics' Peregrine lander is set to hitch a ride on a giant United Launch Alliance Vulcan Centaur rocket making its maiden voyage under a NASA commercial partnership aimed at saving the US space agency money. Peregrine's sci-

entific instruments will probe for lunar surface radiation, helping NASA better prepare for crewed missions going there later this decade under the Artemis program.

But the boxy robot's manifest also includes payloads from two companies — Elysium Space and Celestis — that will contain cremated remains and DNA to stay on the Moon, inside the lander, forever. While Elysium hasn't offered details, Celestis has 69 individual "participants" including late Star Trek creator Gene Roddenberry, sci-fi author Arthur C. Clarke, and a dog named Indica-Noodle Fabiano. Customers paid prices starting at \$12,995, according to the company's website.

In a Dec 21 letter addressed to of-



icials at NASA and the Department of Transportation, Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren expressed what he called "our deep concern and profound disappointment regarding a matter of utmost importance," and called for NASA to delay the launch. "The Moon holds a sacred position in many Indigenous cultures, including ours," Nygren wrote. "The act of depositing human remains and other materials, which could be perceived as discards in any other location, on the Moon is tantamount to desecration of this sacred space."

NASA promises meeting

Nygren added the situation was reminiscent of the Lunar Prospector mission launched in 1998 by NASA, which intentionally crashed a probe into the Moon's surface. On board were the remains of renowned geologist Eugene Shoemaker. Then, too, the Navajo voiced objections. NASA apologized and committed to consult with Native Americans in future, according to a contemporary report in The Spokesman-Review of Spokane, Washington.

NASA's deputy associate administrator for exploration Joel Kearns said Thursday an intergovernmental team had arranged a



The United Launch Alliance (ULA) Vulcan Centaur rocket is transported to Space Launch Complex 41 at the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Florida, on Jan 5, 2024. — AFP

meeting with the Navajo Nation, but added the agency had no control over its private partner's payloads. "We take concerns expressed from the Navajo Nation very, very seriously, and we think we're going to be continuing on this conversation," Kearns told reporters.

Celestis was less conciliatory. "We respect all cultures' right to engage in religious practices, but no single culture or religion should exercise a veto on space missions based on religious tenets," the company said. Denying that the mission "desecrates the Moon", it stressed the material would remain aboard the lander rather than being deposited on the surface. Kearns said NASA's growing private partnerships could lead to "changes to how we view this" or to establishing industry standards. It won't be the first human DNA left on the barren celestial body — that distinction belongs to the almost 100 bags of feces and urine left behind by American astronauts during the 1969-1972 Apollo lunar landings. — AFP

Africa's large birds of prey facing 'extinction crisis'



Ruppell's vulture

The flamboyantly plumed Secretary-bird and the serpent-catching Snake Eagle are among dozens of Africa's large birds of prey facing a human-driven "extinction crisis" researchers said. Previous research has shown that rapid human and agricultural expansion has had a particularly dire impact on vultures in Africa, due to habitat change and poisoning. But the new study by researchers at the University of St Andrews and The Peregrine Fund found that other large birds of prey — or raptors — that do not depend on scavenging and are less vulnerable to poisoning had also suffered similarly severe depletions.

Scientists said these large birds of prey in decline face a "double jeopardy" — increasingly dependent on protected areas, they also have a more restricted habitat. Unless Africa's conservation network is extended and other human threats are eased, "large raptor species are unlikely to persist over much of the continent's unprotected land by the latter half of this century", said lead author Philip Shaw, honorary research fellow at the University of St Andrews.

The study, published in Nature Ecology

and Evolution, measured changes in population abundance for 42 raptor species in Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali, northern Cameroon, Kenya and Botswana during two periods, 1969 to 1995 and 2000 to 2020. Of the birds studied, 37 species had witnessed declines, with 29 plummeting by at least 30 percent over three generational periods. The authors concluded that as a group, Africa's diurnal raptors — those active during the day like eagles — "are facing an extinction crisis, with more than two-thirds of the species exam-

ined potentially qualifying as globally threatened".

Human impact
Larger birds are particularly at risk because they need a wider habitat and breed more slowly than smaller birds,

rendering their populations less resilient. Human threats include shooting, trapping, poisoning, electrocutions or collisions with energy infrastructure, with birds killed for food or belief-based reasons. The animals they prey on are also targeted.

Species declines were most pronounced in West and Central Africa, where protected areas are particularly underfunded. High regional levels of poverty and corruption have been linked to adverse conservation outcomes for numerous charismatic mammal species, according to the study. To protect the birds, the researchers point to two solutions.

The first is to expand protected areas in Africa in line with one the goals set at the Convention of Biological Diversity (COP 15) in 2022 — to effectively conserve and manage at least 30 percent of the world's surface by 2030. Currently, protected areas account for

just 14 percent of Africa's land and inland waters, Shaw said. The second is to manage existing protected areas more effectively, Shaw added.

Researchers stress that effective conservation of large birds of prey is in human societies' best interests. Vultures, for example, by scavenging carcasses can limit the transmission of zoonotic diseases to human populations, Shaw said. The loss of big predators also has a profound effect on ecosystems. Without them, prey populations can become unregulated and damage crops. "In Africa, losing the largest and most uniquely adapted avian predators will most likely have the biggest impact on ecosystem function," Shaw said. — AFP



Bateleur



Secretarybird

Sports

Confident Rybakina, resurgent Dimitrov win in Brisbane

Dimitrov claims his first title since 2017 with a win over Rune

BRISBANE: Elena Rybakina will head to the Australian Open full of confidence after demolishing Aryna Sabalenka in the Brisbane International final Sunday, while Grigor Dimitrov upset Holger Rune to win his first title since 2017.

Rybakina, who will now become world number three, won the first eight games in a row on her way to a 6-0, 6-3 win in just 73 minutes over the Australian Open champion in a repeat of the 2023 Melbourne Park final.

It was her sixth WTA title and comes a week before the first Grand Slam of the year. "For sure it gives me confidence," she said about her Australian Open prospects. "But this week is just the beginning for all the players. I feel like maybe not everyone is in the best form yet."

"I'm playing well now, so hopefully, as I said, I continue." The 2022 Wimbledon winner was in irresistible form all week, spending only three hours and 40 minutes on court in her four matches. The final was expected to be a different challenge—the two players had met seven times previously with all but two of those matches going to three tough sets, including last year's Australian Open final.

But Rybakina soon put those expectations to bed with a blistering start, racing through the first set in 24 minutes, only dropping three points on serve. She outshone the Belarusian in all aspects, serving beautifully and hitting her groundstrokes with power and depth.

Rybakina admitted she was surprised at her form after being sick in the lead-up and unable to

practise before the tournament because of rain. "Also the first few days here it was really tough with the jet lag and everything," she said.

"I'm just pleased with the way I started the tournament because I was not feeling the greatest physically after the illness and everything." World number two Sabalenka also had an impressive run to the final, but she appeared out of sorts and made a host of unforced errors.

She finally got on the board when she surprisingly broke Rybakina's serve at 0-2 in the second set, but dropped her next serve and there was no way back.

'Great tennis'

Sabalenka saw the humorous side during the presentations, laughingly blaming her own team for the loss. "Congratulations to my team," she said. "6-0, 6-3. That's all your fault guys. "Of course we should have finished this week differently but I think we showed some great tennis," she added.

"Hopefully we'll do better at the Australian Open." Bulgaria's Dimitrov claimed his first title since 2017 with a 7-6 (7/5), 6-4 win over Rune, the world number eight from Denmark. Dimitrov was once touted as the player most likely to break the stranglehold Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal, Novak Djokovic and Andy Murray had at the top of the men's game.

But after winning four titles in 2017, including Brisbane, he never reached the heights expected of him and Sunday was a welcome return to the winner's circle. In a tight contest between two evenly



BRISBANE: Grigor Dimitrov of Bulgaria (C) celebrates with the trophy after the men's singles final against Holger Rune of Denmark at the Brisbane International tennis tournament in Brisbane. — AFP

matched players, Dimitrov took the few chances he had to win a tight tiebreak then break Rune at 3-3 in the second set.

He held on to clinch a high quality final, winning the match with a backhand volley. Dimitrov said he had been forced to change his game over the past

year to match the younger players such as Rune. "I've had to find a way to get to those powerful guys differently," he said.

"I'm playing a little bit differently to how I used to play before so basically I'm trying to find my way around the court against a different generation." — AFP



HONG KONG: Russia's Andrey Rublev (L) receives the trophy from Hong Kong Chief Executive John Lee (R) after winning the match against Finland's Emil Ruusuvuori in the men's final singles match at the Hong Kong Tennis Open in Hong Kong on January 7, 2024. — AFP

Rublev romps to Hong Kong title

HONG KONG: World number five Andrey Rublev prepared for next week's Australian Open in perfect style as he swept past Finland's Emil Ruusuvuori 6-4, 6-4 to win the Hong Kong Open on Sunday. The 26-year-old Rublev has reached nine Grand Slam quarter-finals without ever progressing further.

But he must be rated among the favourites for the first major of the year at Melbourne Park after romping to his 15th ATP tour crown in just 77 minutes. "The title is something special," said Rublev. "So I couldn't have had a better week."

"Now with a really happy feeling I go to Melbourne. I will enjoy one week of practice there and then we will start the Australian Open." The last time Rublev lost to a player outside the top 50 was to the 69th-ranked Ruusuvuori, in a 3-hour, 16-minute marathon, at the Cincinnati Masters last August.

But that never looked like it might be repeated at Victoria Park. Both players quickly settled into the final, with some furious hitting off both wings from Ruusuvuori at the baseline being met with more powerful counter-punching from Rublev.

At 3-3, Rublev upped the ante further and, on his fourth break point, nudged ahead with a rasping backhand winner. Ruusuvuori saved a set point at 4-5 and then created his first and only break point in the match, but it proved in vain as Rublev took the opener in 44 minutes.

The Russian dominated the second set more than the scoreline suggests, barely giving up a point on his own serve while constantly pressuring his 24-year-old opponent. Rublev broke to love for a 5-4 lead before sealing the championship on his first match point when Ruusuvuori netted.

"Of course this gives me more confidence ahead of the Australian Open," he said. "Now I have one week to prepare, so we're going to work on my fitness as we have some time but basically keep doing the same."

Rublev became the first men's Hong Kong Open winner for more than two decades on the tournament's return to the city. The Russian added his name to an illustrious list of former winners that includes all-time greats Rod Laver and Pete Sampras.

Ruusuvuori was playing in only his second ATP Tour final after Pune in 2022 and paid tribute to Rublev at the trophy presentation. "You're one of the hardest working and toughest competitors, but still one of the nicest guys on tour," said Ruusuvuori.

"I don't think anyone deserves it more than you. Congrats to you and your team. "We'll keep fighting. I got you once before, but this was your time. I think we're going to have many more fights in the future." — AFP

Ali Al-Kharafi wins third round of Equestrian League

KUWAIT: Kuwait Riding Club Rider Ali Al-Kharafi had a very important win and is now leading the league alone in the showjumping event. Al-Kharafi maintained his grip on the top place as he was the champion of the two previous rounds.

Al-Kharafi won the Grand Prize heat at the height of 140cm in 33.72 in the differentiation heat without a fault, he was followed by rider Yara Al-Hunaidi, Abdullah Al-Awadhi and Abdullah Al-Roudhan. Chairman of Kuwait Equestrian Federation Masoud Hayat, External and Internal Relations Manager of Zain Kuwait Hamad Al-Musaibeh and Administrative Manager of Kuwait Equestrian Federation Sulyan Buqammaz handed the winners their awards. Ali Al-Kharafi also won the heats at 135 and 130 cm, while Nadia Al-Mutawa won first place at 125 cm.



Hayat, Musaibeh and Buqammaz awarding the winners.

Sports federation, Coop union cooperate in sports initiative

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Sports Federation and the Union of Cooperative Societies discussed cooperation frameworks between them and mutual coordination to find a mechanism to urge the community to practice sports.

During the meeting held on Sunday at the headquarters of the Union of Cooperative Societies, the two parties indicated that the responsibility lies on everyone to advance society and maintain its physical health as one of the foundations for

creating a healthy society free of diseases associated with obesity and others.

In this regard, the President of the Kuwait Sports for All Federation, Mahmoud Abul, said in a press statement that the Federation is working to strengthen cooperation with all government and private institutions in the framework of supporting the sports movement in society and encouraging all its groups to practice sports.

Abul expressed his wishes for success in achieving the great goals of the federation by spreading health awareness and concerted efforts of the public and private sectors to achieve the federation's goals to confront modern diseases and other diseases associated with

obesity through exercise and access to a healthy society.

"We have many events that will be held in the future through the working committees of the Federation, the first of which (sports villages) will start on January 11," he said calling on everyone to actively participate in these villages dedicated to all groups and segments of society. He stated that the Union opens its doors to the accession of all volunteers, amateurs and owners of initiatives and ideas that promote and contribute to achieving the desired goals in the Union.

In a similar statement, the President of the Union of Cooperative Societies, Musab Al-Mulla, expressed his hap-

piness to cooperate with the Kuwait Sports Federation in enriching the community with sporting events held by the federation.

Al-Mulla added that the Union of Cooperative Societies will work to extend a hand of cooperation to guide associations to urge shareholders to participate widely in sports events.

He pointed out that the meeting discussed the mechanism for enhancing ways of cooperation in the future in the activities of the federation and that cooperation is not limited to (sports villages) only, with the aim of creating a healthy society physically and psychologically through these recreational activities.

Vlhova leads slalom after first run as Shiffrin slides out

KRANJSKA: Slovakian skier Petra Vlhova took advantage of a big mistake by Mikaela Shiffrin to set the fastest time in the first run of the World Cup slalom at Kranjska Gora in Slovenia on Sunday. Five-time big globe winner Shiffrin straddled a gate in the second sector and failed to finish, ruling her out of the second run.

It is the first time since the Beijing Winter Olympics in February 2022 that Shiffrin has gone out in her favourite event. It marked the end of a poor weekend in Slovenia for the American, who has a record 93 World Cup victories under her belt, 56 of those coming in the slalom. On Saturday, she could only finish ninth in the giant slalom, her worst result in the discipline since November 2022. Vlhova, who started the day in second place in the overall standings 307 points behind Shiffrin, clocked 51.30 seconds in the opening run. The German Lena Duerr was second and the Croat Leona Popovic third, both of them 0.26sec behind.

Meanwhile, Norwegians Alexander Steen Olsen and Atle Lie McGrath took command of the slalom in Adelboden, Switzerland, with the two fastest times in a first run marked by the exit of Olympic champion Clement Noël.

With fog enveloping the top of the course, Steen Olsen, 22, was the fifteenth down the mountain and completed the run in 56.79 seconds, just 0.05sec ahead of his 23-year-old compatriot McGrath. Italy's Tommaso Sala was third quickest, finishing 0.23sec behind the leader.

The track is a happy hunting ground for the young Norwegians with victory last year for Lucas Braathen, who retired earlier this season after a dispute with the national federation, ahead of McGrath.



KRANJSKA GORA: Slovakia's Petra Vlhova competes during the first run of the Slalom event of the Women's FIS Alpine Skiing World Cup in Kranjska Gora, Slovenia on January 7, 2024. — AFP

Discipline leader Marco Schwarz is absent after a serious knee injury ended his season in December but the narrow gaps at the top promise a thrilling second round. Linus Strasser, Manuel Feller, Samuel Kolega and Henrik Kristoffersen all remain in the hunt for the podium, with the top 12 separated by

less than one second.

Olympic champion Noël, who was second in the last slalom at Madonna di Campiglio and lies fourth in the discipline standings, crashed at the top of the course after a good first intermediate time. The second run is scheduled for 1230 GMT. — AFP

Sports

Chelsea and Villa win, Isak stars as Newcastle beat Sunderland in FA Cup

Newcastle's fans were taken to the stadium on buses in a huge police convoy

LONDON: Newcastle ended their 13-year wait to beat bitter rivals Sunderland as Alexander Isak's double inspired a 3-0 win in the FA Cup third round on Saturday. Chelsea joined Newcastle in the last 32 with a 4-0 rout of second tier Preston while Aston Villa snatched a late 1-0 win at Middlesbrough.

In the first Tyne and Wear derby since 2016, Newcastle put Sunderland to the sword thanks to Dan Ballard's first-half own goal and Isak's brace after the break at the Stadium of Light. Newcastle had lost six of their previous seven clashes with Sunderland, but their composed display neutered the fired-up Black Cats and delivered a first derby success since a 1-0 victory in 2011.

After four successive defeats in all competitions, Newcastle coach Eddie Howe hoped the derby would be a "season-changing" moment to salve the wounds from their Champions League exit and poor Premier League form. Whether vanquishing second-tier opponents will prove transformative remains to be seen, but for now local pride was all that mattered to the 6,000 Newcastle fans who waved their black and white scarves in delight at the final whistle.

"We handled the occasion well, were brave with the ball and were very composed. We didn't let the crowd take over," Howe said. "Today will have done us the world of good. It keeps us in an important competition and that brings hope."

While the northeast rivalry might lack the glamour of the Manchester and north London derbies, there is no questioning the rivalry between clubs separated by just 14 miles. Encapsulating the enmity was a bizarre incident this week when Sunderland were forced to apologise to furious fans after a stadium bar was redecorated with Newcastle colours in the

corporate hospitality section of the visitors' support.

Newcastle's fans were taken to the stadium on buses in a huge police convoy, then given their tickets to the match, in a bid to avoid the violent scenes that have marred previous encounters. Amid the sound and fury in the stands, Newcastle kept their nerve and snatched the lead in the 35th minute as Ballard diverted Joelinton's cross into his own net.

Sunderland gifted Newcastle their second goal less than 60 seconds after the interval when Almiron robbed the dawdling Pierre Ekwah inside his own area and teed up Isak to fire home from 10 yards. Ballard's 90th minute foul on Anthony Gordon conceded a penalty that Isak converted to cap the exclamation point on Newcastle's victory.

Chelsea goal spree

At Stamford Bridge, inconsistent Chelsea dismissed Preston with three goals in 11 second half minutes. Blues boss Mauricio Pochettino has urged his players to use the FA Cup as a route into Europe given their dismal form in the Premier League.

Heading that message, Armando Broja headed home to break Preston's resistance in the 58th minute. Thiago Silva nodded in the second from a corner and Raheem Sterling grabbed the third with a fine free-kick.

Enzo Fernandez tapped in to complete the rout in the 85th minute. "We started so sloppy. I told the players at half-time we needed to increase the energy and match that of Preston. The second half was a completely different game," Pochettino said.

Aston Villa, just two points behind table-topping Liverpool, needed an 88th minute strike from Matty Cash to see off Championship side Middlesbrough at the Riverside Stadium. Non-league Maidstone



LONDON: Chelsea's Argentinian midfielder #08 Enzo Fernandez heads the ball but misses to score during the English FA Cup third round football match between Chelsea and Preston North End at Stamford Bridge in London. — AFP

United, the lowest ranked team left in the competition, clinched a surprise 1-0 win against Stevenage to reach the fourth round for the first time.

There is a 69-place gap between George Elkobi's Kent-based club and third-tier Stevenage. But in their first third round appearance since 1988, the National League South minnows made history as Sam Come netted a penalty in first half stop-

page-time before fans flooded the pitch in celebration at the final whistle.

Bournemouth came from two goals down at half-time to win 3-2 at second tier QPR. Inspired by Joao Pedro's double, Brighton won 4-2 at Championship outfit Stoke despite falling behind early on. Sheffield United, bottom of the Premier League, cruised to a 4-0 victory at fourth tier Gillingham. — AFP

Khalid Al-Harban League to continue until Feb 7, 2024

KUWAIT: Abdullah Khalid Al-Saleh said that the sixth Kuwait Amateurs Football League is being held at Surra playgrounds under the patronage of Khalid Yousuf Al-Harban, aiming at increasing awareness about cancer diseases and reduce their risks, as well early detection which results in higher recovery rates.

He said the league that was launched Thursday under the patronage and presence of Khalid Al-Harban who brought the place a frenzy with his call "Goaaaal", following his opening speech.

The league will continue until Thursday, February 7, 2024 with 14 teams participating with a total of more than 520 players.

Director of Haido Academy Abdullah Khalid Al-Saleh said "C.A.N" is honored to launch this sports activity through which youth learn how to occupy their free time with sports correctly, and to benefit from the positive effect on their way of life.

He said C.A.N campaign was keen on linking between sports and chronic diseases risk factors headed with cancer, as sports form the corner stone in keeping youth away from risk factors that reduce immunity and getting diseases.

He said smoking is among the most notable risk factors, as sports help quitting smoking, which negatively affect the ability of the human immune system making it difficult to fight diseases. Al-Saleh thanked Public Authority for Sport, as there were more efforts to bring out the league as it is now.



Al-Harban, Dr Hussa Al-Shaheen and Abdullah Al-Saleh.

Real Madrid ease past Arandina to reach Copa del Rey last 16

BARCELONA: Reigning champions Real Madrid secured their place in the Copa del Rey last 16 with a 3-1 win at fourth-tier Arandina on Saturday. Atletico Madrid progressed with a 3-1 win at third-tier Lugo after Memphis Depay struck twice, while Real Betis were knocked out in a 1-0 defeat by Alaves.

Surprise La Liga title challengers Girona beat second division side Elche 2-0. Minnows Arandina fought gamely in the first half but Joselu put Madrid ahead with a penalty early in the second, with Brahim Diaz and Rodrygo Goes expanding Madrid's lead.

Madrid defender Nacho Fernandez put through his own net in stoppage time to give Arandina a consolation goal which delighted supporters at their packed 6,000 capacity El Montecillo stadium. "We know how hard these games are, with this pitch, but there are no excuses, we are Real Madrid, we have to win at any stadium," Joselu told television channel La 1.

"It was a bit harder than normal, but we are happy with the win and getting into the next round." Arandina battled well to frustrate Madrid in a surprisingly even first half in the province of Castile and Leon, north of the Spanish capital.

Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti started Eduardo Camavinga, returning after a knee ligament injury which saw him miss nearly two months. Otherwise the Italian largely deployed a combination of reserve and youth players, handing Turkish playmaker Arda Guler his first appearance since joining Madrid this summer from Fenerbahce.

Guler came closer than anyone to scoring in the first half, striking the post with a rasping free-kick and playing with freedom to roam. "We have to be patient with him, and his quality was on show in the first half," Ancelotti told reporters. "He has to improve his physique and intensity, he has personality and character."

Madrid took the lead from the spot early in the second half after the excellent Diaz was tripped by Zazu as he ran into the area, with Joselu dispatching a firm, low penalty. Diaz added the second moments later after the ball broke loose to him and he fired it home across Arandina goalkeeper Adrian Alvarez.

Joselu missed a good chance to extend Madrid's lead further before substitute Rodrygo stroked in the third in stoppage time from Diaz's cross. Arandina got the goal their performance deserved at the death when Nacho deflected Raly Cabral's cross into his own net.

Earlier Depay scored twice for Atletico to send them through after Lugo had taken the visitors in level at the break. Atletico took the lead in the second minute when Angel Correa tapped home Javi Galan's cross at the back post. — AFP

Nadal pulls out of Australian Open with muscle tear

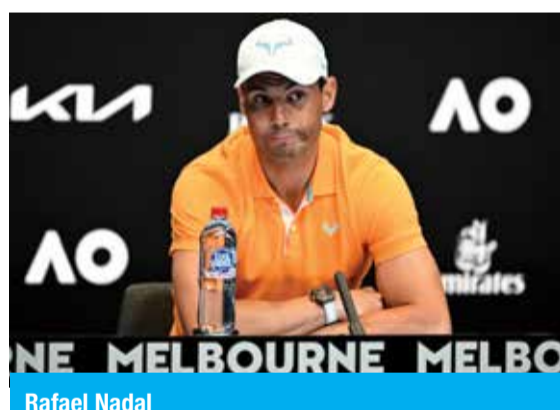
MELBOURNE: Spanish superstar Rafael Nadal on Sunday pulled out of the Australian Open with a "micro tear on a muscle" barely a week after making his comeback from a year-long injury absence, but said he remained positive.

The 37-year-old had been out of the game since injuring his hip at the 2023 Australian Open, undergoing surgery before making his return at the Brisbane International. He won his opening two matches in straight sets and looked in good touch, but needed a medical timeout towards the end of his quarter-final loss to Australia's Jordan Thompson after feeling pain in his upper left thigh.

"During my last match in Brisbane I had a small problem on a muscle that as you know made me worried," he said on X, formerly known as Twitter. "Once I got to Melbourne I have had the chance to make an MRI and I have micro tear on a muscle, not in the same part where I had the injury and that's good news. "Right now I am not ready to compete at the maximum level of five-set matches. I'm flying back to Spain to see my doctor, get some treatment and rest."

His absence from the Australian Open could mean he has played at Melbourne Park for the last time, having said there was a "high percentage" that 2024 would be his farewell to the tour. He said in Brisbane that his health would be the deciding factor in any decision about continuing to play after this season.

"We will miss you in Melbourne, Rafa," the Australian Open said on its official X feed. "Sending all our love and best wishes for a speedy recovery. See you on the court soon." Long-time rival and world number one Novak Djokovic also has an injury cloud hanging over him ahead of the opening Grand Slam of the season.



Rafael Nadal

The Serbian needed treatment on a troublesome right wrist during the United Cup last week, but said: "I think I have enough time to get myself in the right shape for the Australian Open."

Injuries have been a recurring theme of Nadal's record-breaking career, a painful by-product of his all-action, brutal-hitting style that has led to struggles with serious knee, wrist and foot problems. The 22-time Grand Slam champion stressed in Brisbane that he did not come into the tournament expecting to win, and hinted that the Australian Open might come too soon.

"I have worked very hard during the year for this comeback and as I always mentioned my goal is to be at my best level in three months," he said. "Without the sad news for me for not being able to play in front of the amazing Melbourne crowds, this is not very bad news and we all remain positive with the evolution for the season."

"I really wanted to play here in Australia and I have had the chance to play a few matches that made me very happy and positive. Thanks all for the support and see you soon." During his career, Nadal dominated the French Open, where he won 14 of his majors, his first arriving just days after his 19th birthday in 2005, his last in 2022 making him the event's oldest champion. — AFP

Brazil says goodbye to late football great Zagallo

RIO DE JANEIRO: Brazilians paid their last respects Sunday to football legend Mario Zagallo, after the four-time World Cup-winning player and coach died at age of 92, the final member of one of the country's greatest footballing generations.

Dressed in black, the yellow of the Brazilian national team or the colors of the clubs where Zagallo played and coached, scores of mourners filed past his coffin at the headquarters of the Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF) in Rio de Janeiro.

Also on display near the lace-draped coffin were football-mad Brazil's record five World Cup trophies. Zagallo, a diminutive left-wing known for his tactical brilliance, had a hand in winning four of them, more than anyone in football history.

The "Professor," as he was known, played alongside Pele in Brazil's 1958 and 1962 World Cup-winning teams. He then went on to coach the 1970 world champion side starring Pele—considered by many the greatest team in history—and serve as assistant coach when the "Selecao" repeated the feat in 1994.

"He made football history. It's a tremendous loss," said Eduardo Bandeira de Mello, former president of famed club Flamengo, where Zagallo was both a player and manager. "What he did with the national team in 1970 should be an inspiration to every coach," he told AFP.

Zagallo died Friday of multiple organ failure at a Rio hospital, after suffering a series of health problems in recent months. The public wake will be followed by a private mass, then a burial at the Sao Joao Batista cemetery, the final resting place of some of Brazil's most famous citizens. — AFP

Classifieds

Clinics & Hospitals

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khalidiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913

Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381

Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401
Sabah Hospital	24812000

Hospitals

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

Change of Name

I, KANIKAIRAJ PAUL ROBERT, holder of Indian passport no. L6662628 having permanent address R No. 68 8 Azad Nagari Lalanigam 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



SYDNEY: Team Germany celebrates with the trophy after defeating team Poland in the final of the United Cup tennis event at Ken Rosewall Arena in Sydney on January 8, 2024. — AFP

Zverev-led Germany beat Swiatek's Poland to win maiden United Cup

'I'm really proud of myself that I could win all of my singles'

SYDNEY: Alexander Zverev saved two match points in a gruelling three-set win over Hubert Hurkacz to help Germany upset top seeds Poland and clinch a maiden United Cup title in Sydney on Sunday. The world number seven kept the tie alive with his never-say-die 6-7 (3/7), 7-6 (8/6), 6-4 victory after top-ranked Iga Swiatek had swept past Angelique Kerber 6-3, 6-0.

Zverev returned to partner Laura Siegemund and seal the title with a 6-4, 5-7, 10-4 win over Swiatek and Hurkacz in the deciding mixed doubles. "It was a matter of millimetres today for you guys (Poland) to be the champions," Zverev said at the presentation ceremony.

"To my team, it's been amazing and so much fun. I couldn't be happier," Hurkacz and Zverev had not met since the 2021 ATP Finals, where the German was eventually crowned champion. Both 26

years old and big servers, there were only small margins between them in the singles clash, with Hurkacz rising to the challenge in the first set tiebreak.

It went the distance again in the second set after the Pole saved two set points from Zverev at 5-6. But this time, he lost his nerve in the tiebreak and blew two championship points as Zverev took it to a deciding set despite showing signs of fatigue.

With errors creeping in to Hurkacz's game, Zverev broke for a 4-3 lead in the third and, overcoming a bout of cramps, found a way to win. "I was exhausted," said Zverev, with Germany's semi-final not finishing until 2.18am on Sunday.

"In the middle of the second set I was already exhausted and in the third set I was hanging on a lot of the time and somehow got the break," he added. "Ob-

viously mentally and physically, it was extremely difficult because playing three days in a row singles and mixed is tough."

Really proud

Swiatek is in imperious touch heading into the Australian Open, dropping just one set throughout the mixed teams tournament to be on a 16-match win streak that began with her runs through Beijing and Cancun to end last season.

She was on another level to former world number one Kerber, who is on the comeback from an 18-month maternity layoff, winning the last nine games in a row. "I feel like I just really improved during the pre-season and I'm happy that I played such solid matches here," said the 22-year-old.

"I'm really proud of myself that I could win all of my singles. I felt like she

was really picking the right spots to play and she surprised me sometimes with her decision-making and choices," she added of Kerber.

"I knew she could play like that but I didn't have much time to get into the rhythm because sometimes she was really aiming these balls inside out. "With the ball change, I felt like my game could be more dynamic and I could push Angelique more after 4-3 (in the first set)." Kerber put early pressure on Swiatek, who saved two break points to hold for 3-2. But the match turned when the Pole overpowered Kerber's serve to break for 5-3 and it was a demolition job from then on as Swiatek ran riot.

She will head to the Australian Open with wins over Caroline Garcia, Beatriz Haddad Maia, Sara Sorribes Tormo and Zheng Qinwen, along with Kerber. — AFP

Napoli crumble at Torino, AC Milan defeat Empoli

MILAN: Napoli's nightmare season continued on Sunday after crashing to a 3-0 defeat at Torino, while AC Milan consolidated their place in Serie A's Champions League positions with a 3-0 win at Empoli. Livid Napoli fans launched flares onto the pitch at the Stadio Olimpico Grande Torino during a humiliating loss for the troubled champions, who have sunk down to ninth place.

Last season's historic Scudetto has now been forgotten as Napoli plunge deeper into crisis with each passing week, their third defeat in four matches in all competitions fully deserved after a shambolic display in Turin.

Without Nigeria striker Victor Osimhen, Walter Mazzerri's side failed to score for the fourth straight match and are completely unrecognisable from the team which cruised to title glory last term. Napoli are a full 20 points behind league leaders Inter Milan and are closer to the relegation zone than the top of the table.

Antonio Sanabria got the ball rolling two minutes before the break when he rolled home from close range, and things went from bad to worse in the 50th minute when debutant Pasquale Mazzocchi was sent off for a wild challenge on Valentino Lazaro.

Mazzocchi, who signed from Salernitana on Friday, had only been on the field since the start of the second half and two minutes later Nikola Vlasic doubled Torino's lead with a brilliant low strike from outside the area.

Napoli were all over the place and they should have been three down just after the hour mark when Sanabria hit the post and Duvan Zapata somehow didn't finish on the rebound. However Alessandro Buongiorno made sure of an emphatic victory in the 66th minute when he thumped a bullet header past Pierluigi Gollini.

A sumptuous early strike from Ruben Loftus-Cheek and Olivier Giroud's 31st minute penalty set third-placed Milan on the way to a win which was sealed by Chaka Traore with two minutes remaining. Missing a host of players to injury and the Africa Cup of Nations, Milan took advantage of their closest rivals for the top four dropping points. — AFP

De Bruyne back for City as holders power into FA fourth round

LONDON: Kevin De Bruyne made his long-awaited return for Manchester City as the FA Cup holders thrashed Huddersfield 5-0 in the third round on Sunday. Belgium midfielder De Bruyne had been sidelined since tearing his hamstring during City's Premier League opener against Burnley in August.

He finally got back in action as a 57th minute substitute in City's emphatic victory over the Championship strugglers at the Etihad Stadium. Chants of 'Oh Kevin De Bruyne' echoed around the stands when the 32-year-old replaced Julian Alvarez.

Pep Guardiola's side were leading by goals from Phil Foden and Alvarez when De Bruyne was introduced. De Bruyne's arrival kept the momentum going as City netted three more times through Ben Jackson's own goal, another Foden effort and a Jeremy Doku strike on his return from injury as a second half substitute.

Fittingly, Doku's goal was set up by a deft lofted pass from De Bruyne. City have stayed afloat without De Bruyne, but his world-class quality in midfield will be a key factor in their bid to retain the Premier League, Champions League and FA Cup. After winning five major trophies in 2023, City have their sights set on more silverware in the new year and their first step on the road back to Wembley could not have

been any easier. City famously thrashed Huddersfield 10-1 in 1987 in a match featuring three hat-tricks.

While this wasn't quite that brutal on Huddersfield, there was never any doubt City would progress despite the absence of Rodri, due his grandmother's death, and the injured Erling Haaland. Foden broke Huddersfield's resistance in the 33rd minute, squeezing his shot in at the near post after Alvarez's effort was blocked.

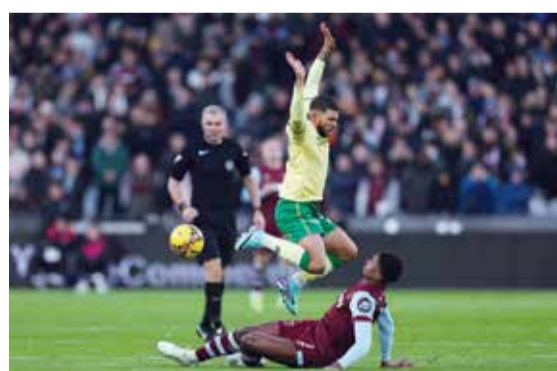
Alvarez nabbed in City's second goal four minutes later, the Argentine stretching to tap in Rico Lewis's pass from close-range. De Bruyne had been on for just seconds when City scored their third as Oscar Bobb's shot went in via a wicked deflection off Jackson. Foden struck again in the 65th minute with a clinical low strike from 20 yards. Belgium winger Doku capped the demolition in the 74th minute, meeting De Bruyne's sublime pass with a first-time finish.

Premier League trio held

Premier League strugglers Luton were held 0-0 by third tier Bolton at Kenilworth Road. In their first top-flight campaign since 1992, Luton's primary goal is survival and a draining replay was the last thing Hatters boss Rob Edwards needed.

Nottingham Forest were also given a scare by League One opponents as Nuno Espirito Santo's men recovered from two goals down to draw 2-2 with Blackpool. Blackpool beat Forest in the third round last year when the Seaside were in the Championship and almost repeated the trick at the City Ground.

Forest academy graduate Jordan Lawrence-Gabriel netted against his old club with a spectacular diving header in the 25th minute. Albie Morgan doubled Blackpool's lead in the 27th minute, coolly converting CJ Hamilton's



LONDON: Bristol City's Bermudian striker #21 Nahki Wells jumps over West Ham United's English defender #02 Ben Johnson as they fight for the ball during the English FA Cup third round football match between West Ham United and Bristol City at the London Stadium, in London on January 7, 2024. — AFP

cross at the far post. But Nicolas Dominguez finished off Gonzalo Montiel's cross in the 39th minute and Morgan Gibbs-White equalised from 18 yards in the 56th minute. West Ham were held to a 1-1 draw against second tier Bristol City at the London Stadium.

Jarrod Bowen ran onto Lucas Paqueta's lofted pass and slotted home in the fifth minute. But influential playmaker Paqueta was forced off with an injury midway through the first half in a major blow. And Tommy Conway sent 9,000 travelling City fans wild in the 61st minute when he fired the equaliser past Lukasz Fabianski. — AFP