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3 Everyday challenges encountered by food delivery drivers in Kuwait



5 Kuwait-born UK-Palestinian surgeon fights for 'justice'



12 'Oppenheimer' tops Golden Globes on bittersweet night for 'Barbie'



16 Beckenbauer, stylish Kaiser who ruled German football, dies at 78



MPs urge govt to join S Africa's genocide case against Zionists

Parliamentary probe finds €349m squandered in Caracal deal

NEWS IN BRIEF

MoI launches smart services center

KUWAIT: The ministry of interior announced on Monday that the first experimental smart center for citizens' service would open round the clock from Tuesday. The center has been established at the headquarters of the General Administration of Kuwaiti Citizenship and Travel Documentation in Shuwaikh. The center provides the ministry's electronic services on Sahel application and the MoI website, including passports, driving permits and civil IDs. — KUNA

KPA handed KD 22m in damages

KUWAIT: Kuwait Ports Authority has been given more than KD 22 million in compensation by a number of firms found to have committed legal infractions, it said on Monday, citing a court decision on the matter. — KUNA (See Page 2)

KFF warns of carbon monoxide risks

KUWAIT: Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) on Monday urged citizens and residents to be cautious when using coal, gas or kerosene to heat homes, camps and farms, explaining the release of carbon monoxide causes suffocation, poisoning, injury or death. — KUNA (See Page 3)

Tents allowed in home gardens

KUWAIT: Minister of State for Municipality Affairs Fahad Al-Shula approved a Municipal Council decision to allow citizens to set up tents in their home gardens, as part of amendments to agriculture regulations in the private housing law.

Fees set for recruiting helpers

KUWAIT: Minister of Commerce and Industry Mohammad Al-Aiban issued a decision setting the maximum charges for recruitment of domestic helpers, which should include the airfare, as per the directives of Interior Minister Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Sabah. The fee was set at KD 750 for labor recruited from Asia and KD 575 for labor recruited from Africa.

Release of 11 killers quashed

NEW DELHI: India's top court ruled Monday that 11 murderers convicted of a gang rape that drew global outrage, but who were released early, must return to jail. Bilkis Bano and two of her children were the only survivors among a group of Muslims attacked by a Hindu mob in the western state of Gujarat in 2002. "Their plea for protection of their liberty is rejected," the Supreme Court said. News of the verdict was greeted with fireworks in Gujarat's Randhikpur, Bilkis' home village. — AFP (See Page 5)

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The National Assembly's foreign relations committee on Monday called on the government to join South Africa in its case at the International Court of Justice against Zionist genocide in its war on Gaza. South Africa filed the case on Dec 29, calling on the UN court in the Hague to order a halt in the Zionist entity's bombardment against Palestinian civilians and also accused the Zionist entity of committing genocide in Gaza in violation of the 1948 Genocide Convention.

More than 23,000 Palestinian civilians, a majority of them children and women, have been killed and close to 60,000 others have been injured, some 70 percent of them children and women, as a result of barbaric Zionist bombardment of the densely populated territory of Gaza, where 2.3 million Palestinians, mostly refugees since 1948, live.

Blinken meets MBZ, MBS on regional tour

AL-ULA, Saudi Arabia: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken met Monday with Saudi Arabia's crown prince before heading to the Zionist entity as part of efforts to stop the Gaza war spiraling into a regional conflict. Blinken was expected to discuss Red Sea attacks by the Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen, Saudi Arabia's southern neighbor, during his talks with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

Their private meeting in Al-Ula, a historic oasis in western Saudi, is the latest leg of a rapid tour of the region as concerns over the Zionist-Hamas war continue to mount. The talks were also

probing alleged wrongdoing in two major defense deals to purchase Caracal military helicopters and Eurofighters, MP Adel Al-Damkhi, said on Monday the panel ended its probe in the Caracals deal and found that some €349 million was squandered. He said that the probe found that ministers, undersecretaries, senior army commanders and officials were responsible for many actions and works that resulted in squandering public funds.

Damkhi added the probe also established that the French manufacturer had breached its commitments in the contract and that some officials covered up for the French company. He said the investigation panel called on the defense ministry to use some €400 million held from the contract to cover the ministry losses.

The committee recalled that one of the recommendations called on the Kuwaiti government to press for a trial of Zionist leaders as war criminals. It said it will invite the foreign minister for a meeting to coordinate efforts to face Zionist crimes against the Palestinian people.

Meanwhile, head of a parliamentary committee



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken meets Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in Al-Ula (left) and UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan at Al-Shati Palace in Abu Dhabi (right) on Jan 8, 2024. — AFP photos



set to touch on a potential normalization of ties with the Zionist entity after initial discussions were put on hold by the Zionist-Hamas war, a senior official said. Saudi Arabia, home of Islam's two holiest sites, did not join the handful of Arab countries — including its neighbor the United Arab Emirates — in signing the US-brokered Abraham Accords recognizing the Zionist entity in 2020.

Blinken "emphasized the importance of preventing further spread of the conflict", during talks in Abu Dhabi earlier with United Arab Emirates President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, a US summary of the meeting said. "This is a conflict that could easily metastasize, causing even more insecurity and even more

Continued on Page 6

Zionists kill top Hezbollah commander

BEIRUT: The Zionist entity on Monday killed a top Hezbollah commander in a strike on south Lebanon, the Iran-backed group and a security official said, as regional tensions soar amid the Gaza war. Hezbollah in a statement announced the killing of a "commander" for the first time in three months of cross-border clashes with the Zionist forces.

It said Wissam Hassan Tawil had died "on the

road to Jerusalem" — the phrase used by the movement for fighters killed by the Zionist entity. A security source told AFP that Tawil "had a leading role in managing Hezbollah's operations in the south", near the Zionist entity's border. The official, requesting anonymity for security reasons, said that the commander, who held several other top positions in the group, "was killed in a (Zionist) strike targeting his car in the south".

The Zionist military said it struck Hezbollah "military sites" in Lebanon on Monday, but did not immediately comment on Tawil's death. Hezbollah released photographs of Tawil alongside leaders of the movement as well as top Iranian general Qasem Soleimani, who headed the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' Continued on Page 6



An undated handout photo released on Jan 8, 2024 shows Hezbollah military commander Wissam Hassan Tawil, known as Jawad, at an undisclosed location.

Snag imperils private US lunar lander mission

WASHINGTON: An historic private mission to land on the Moon was facing potential failure Monday due to technical problems, in a blow to America's hopes of placing its first robot on the lunar surface in five decades. Fixed to the top of United Launch Alliance's new Vulcan rocket, Astrobotic's Peregrine Lunar Lander blasted off overnight from Florida's Cape Canaveral Space Force Station, then successfully separated from its launch vehicle around an hour later.

But teams at ground control found they were unable to point the unmanned spacecraft correctly at

the sun, necessary for its top-mounted solar panel to achieve maximum power generation for Peregrine's systems. In its latest update, Astrobotic tweeted: "The team believes that the likely cause of the unstable sun-pointing is a propulsion anomaly that, if proven true, threatens the ability of the spacecraft to soft land on the Moon."

The company added Peregrine is currently in an expected communication blackout, and it would provide further updates once contact is re-established. Peregrine is supposed to reach the Moon, then maintain an orbit for several weeks before touching down on a mid-latitude region of the Moon called Sinus Viscositatis, or Bay of Stickiness, on Feb 23.

Until now, a soft landing on Earth's nearest celestial neighbor has only been accomplished by a handful of national space agencies: the Soviet Union was first, in 1966, followed by the United States, which is still the only country to put people on the Moon. China

has successfully landed three times over the past decade, while India was the most recent to achieve the feat on its second attempt, last year. Now, the United States is turning to the commercial sector to stimulate a broader lunar economy and ship its own hardware at a fraction of the cost, under the Commercial Lunar Payload Services (CLPS) program — but a failure for Astrobotic could lead to criticism of the new strategy.

NASA paid Astrobotic more than \$100 million for the task, while another contracted company, Houston-based Intuitive Machines, is looking to launch in February and land near the Moon's south pole. NASA says they will help pave the way for its Artemis program to return astronauts to the Moon later this decade, in preparation for future missions to Mars. Controlled touchdown on the Moon is a challenging undertaking, with roughly half of all attempts failing.

Continued on Page 6



Court rulings grant Kuwait Port Authority 22m in compensations

Three violating companies at heart of public fund infringement cases to be blacklisted

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Ports Authority (KPA) announced the issuance of rulings obliging companies to compensate the authority amounts exceeding KD 22 million (about USD 71.5 million) and placing the violating companies on the blacklist from registration and work in Shuaikh Port and Shuaiba Port.

The KPA said the rulings came after a serious follow-up from the corporation to crack down on all forms of infringement on public funds and prevent any illegal practices by any violating company, with emphasis on ensuring an attractive environment for investment and improving maritime logistics services in Kuwait.

The authority stressed the importance of taking the necessary legal measures to ensure that the state's wealth is not abused and that violators are punished through sound lawsuits. It also highlighted the importance of providing the Fatwa and Legislation Department with all the evidence and documents necessary to file these lawsuits.

KPA expressed pride in the Kuwaiti judiciary's announcement of a ruling obliging a company to pay KD 20 million (about \$65 million) in compensation to the authority. The matter has been finally judicially decided on by the Court of Cassation and cannot be

litigated again between the two parties.

The unnamed company had exploited an area of 270,000 square meters in the tenth storage area of Doha Port since its license expired in July 2014. According to the ruling, the company will be compensating the authority for incurred losses.

KPA said the court's final ruling obligated two companies to pay an amount of KD 2.7 million (about USD 8.7 million) to the corporation. The matter has also been finally judicially decided on by the Court of Cassation and cannot be litigated again between the two parties. The penalty is for the value of their registration fees as a container handling contractor at Shuaiba Port from July 2002 until December 2015.

The final judgment issued by the Court of Cassation upholding the authority's decision not to register these companies as a general cargo handling contractor at Shuaikh Port and as a container handling contractor at Shuaiba Port for the years 2017 and 2018.

The KPA stressed that it will immediately work with the General Department of Implementation at the Ministry of Justice to collect the amounts adjudicated in its favor and enhance the revenues of the state's general treasury. — KUNA



KUWAIT: A container lift handles containers at Shuaikh Port in this illustrative file photo.



Authorities encourage exclusive use of K-Net in labor offices

KUWAIT: The Public Authority for Manpower and the Ministry of Commerce have urged people on Monday to use K-Net cards when dealing with labor recruitment offices exclusively.

On Sunday, the Minister of Commerce and Industry gave orders to set the maximum fare for recruitment of #domestic helpers, which includes the flight ticket as per directions of First Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Sabah. The fee was set at KD 750 for labor recruited from Asia and KD 575 for labor recruited from Africa, according to the new decision.

In a joint statement, the manpower authority and the ministry of commerce encouraged individuals to report any offices not adhering to announced prices or refusing to accept K-Net transactions. Complaints can be filed promptly by contacting the Public Authority for Manpower hotline (96966595) and the Ministry of Commerce hotline (135). Non-compliance with Ministerial Resolution No. (2) of 2024, issued on January 7, 2024, will be subject to investigation.

Both entities are establishing a collaborative committee between the Ministry of Interior, Manpower and the Ministry of Commerce to oversee inspections of labor recruitment offices. Strict legal measures will be taken against any offices violating ministerial decisions, the Domestic Workers Law and its executive regulations.

According to local media, the new directive aims at protecting citizens from exploitation and fraudulent practices related to travel ticket expenses in cases where workers refuse to complete the period of their contract with the employer for whatever reason.

The decision to pursue this amendment was spurred by complaints lodged by citizens against domestic worker recruitment agencies. These complaints detailed issues related to the recovery of charges imposed by these agencies.

There was a total of 780,000 domestic workers in Kuwait as of the end of March 2023, according to official numbers. Of that, 423,000 were female workers and 357,000 were male. Workers from four countries — India, the Philippines, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka — make up about 94.6 percent of total domestic workers in the country. — Agencies

4 KPA employees sentenced to prison for money laundering

KUWAIT: The Court of Cassation upheld the imprisonment of four men for four years in addition to fining them KD 4.5 million after finding them guilty of money laundering. The court has also acquitted a man of the same charge and overturned his four-year prison sentence.

The Public Prosecution had charged the defendants with committing the crime of money laundering amounting to the amount fined. Their operations came through transfers when they were working for the Kuwait Ports Authority.

In related news the Criminal Court ruled to refrain from pronouncing the verdict in a case accusing former MP Abdulrahman Al-Anjari of disseminating false news and threatening state security through his account on the "X" platform.

Anjari had plead not guilty in an appearance before court last month and the defendant's lawyer stressed the accusation against his client was baseless, requesting his acquittal. Anjari was released without bail while under investigation in April 2023.

NBK gets largest 2023 social media interactions

KUWAIT: At the end of 2023, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) continued to dominate banking social media landscape in Kuwait, in terms of the number of followers as well as interactions and engagement across different platforms. In addition, the bank's social media pages played an instrumental role in enriching customer experience through the proactive response, and customers' impressive interaction with its engaging content.

NBK has the highest number of followers among all banks in Kuwait, with over 2.2 million followers across all platforms by the end of 2023. In 2023, the bank received 3.2 million interactions and increased the number of its followers by 160,000 on all platforms including Instagram, X, Facebook, TikTok and YouTube.

In addition, staying up to date with trends on TikTok was an important goal in 2023, as the bank succeeded in achieving more than 332,000 views on this platform, demonstrating impressive engagement from a large audience.

Commenting on these accomplishments, Abdul-Mohsen Al-Rushaid, AGM, Head of Digital Communications at National Bank of Kuwait said, "We are proud of our achievements in digital communication in 2023, which reflect our commitment to setting standards for meaningful and effective communication with our customers, employees, and other stakeholders. This stems from our belief in the powerful role of effective communication in strengthening relationships and stimulating innovation."

"During 2023, NBK's Communications team worked hard to develop and implement effective communication strategies that had a positive impact on our business, noting that the engaging content and proactive responses took our platforms to new levels of excellence and leadership," he added. "We continue to benefit from social media, which recorded a growth in the follower base by 10 percent during 2023, as a vital means of communication and engagement, while focusing on real-time inter-



Abdul-Mohsen Al-Rushaid

action with customers, in addition to highlighting the different aspects of our social contributions," he emphasized.

"Last year witnessed the launch of campaigns aimed at attracting potential customers, in addition to our pivotal role in supporting the regulatory authorities' campaigns and keen endeavors to educate customers, most notably the Central Bank of Kuwait's "Let's Be Aware" campaign, which aims to promote financial inclusion and disseminate educational materials and awareness content," he noted.

NBK is constantly updating its social media content, ranging from educational and media awareness campaigns, in addition to engaging content and challenge competitions that give followers the opportunity to enter draws on valuable prizes and exceptional rewards.

It is worth mentioning that NBK's presence spans various social media platforms including Facebook, X, Snapchat, Instagram, LinkedIn and YouTube, underscoring its keenness to keep pace with all developments in order to satisfy customers' needs and expectations, in addition to its constant endeavors to optimize communication with followers on these platforms.

Internal Communications

Recognizing the importance of internal communications, NBK has revolutionized its internal com-



munication strategy. Using innovative channels and personalized content, we have fostered a cohesive environment where every employee feels connected, informed and empowered.

The introduction of interactive platforms, real-time updates, and comprehensive information dissemination resulted in developing a comprehensive strategy for internal communications that act as a hub for news and announcements delivered to all employees across different locations.

Improving website user experience

NBK's commitment to providing an enhanced user experience has been embodied through continuous improvements to the website, by focusing on transparency, accessibility, customer centricity, as well as attractive design.

During 2023, NBK focused on improving website user experience through a new, more attractive and interactive journey that helped achieve unprecedented increase in the number of website users. The new design of some website pages includes more visually attractive elements when browsing the website content via mobile, which represents 89 percent of website visits.

During the year, the number of visits exceeded 8 million visits, 73 percent of which were interactive visits, where users browsed more than one page during the same session, which boosted the number of webpages views to 12 million views.

Supporting sustainability agenda

NBK's Digital Communications also contributes to supporting the bank's sustainability agenda by sharing content on its activities related to the four sustainability pillars, covering ESG areas.

Kuwait-based API affirms support for Lebanese workforce

BEIRUT: The Arab Planning Institute (API) General Director Dr Bader Al-Shami affirmed on Monday interest in refining Lebanese work force's abilities and preparing them to take initiatives for a successful future. This came in a statement to Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) after a delegation from the Kuwait headquartered institute met with Prime Minister of the Lebanese caretaker government, Najib Mikati, where they discussed economic growth and future of the Lebanese economy.

Shami said facts revealed in Lebanon's latest budget highlight a number of "achievements" compared to previous years, which were positive and could further be built upon to make positive results in the future. He pointed out that start of the economic wheel contributes to moving the situation in Lebanon in a positive way, stressing the importance of political stability.

Furthermore, Shami elaborated on the role of the API in supporting political and economic institutions in Arab countries through a number of programs and initiatives, especially small and medium enterprises. The API's role for which it was established and the contributions of Arab countries to it is "to develop the human and technical capabilities of individuals" and enable them to contribute to creating a promising future for their countries, Al-Shami stated.

Shami mentioned that the institute's delegation will visit the Basil Fuleihan Financial and Economic Institute in Lebanon and hold a meeting with the president of the institute, Lamia AlMoubayed Bissat. Bissat is the representative of the Minister of Finance on the Board of Trustees of the AP. She directly supervises the institute and coordinates through the Basil Fuleihan Institute for implementing training programs in Lebanon. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Health ministry officials survey a room in a hospital under construction in this file photo. — KUNA

MoH to fill nurse shortages through contracting

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Health is in the process of announcing new job opportunities for Kuwaitis and expatriates. The ministry is looking to hire hundreds of nurses through local or external contracts, with the aim of working in new hospitals and medical centers that have been opened and others that are preparing for opening during the next short period.

Official sources pointed out that the goal is to appoint over 2,000 nurses, explaining: "local contracts are not enough, so external contracts will be resorted to, as nursing teams from India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Vietnam and the Philippines will be contracted as well whenever this is agreed."

They stressed that the ministry is keen to support

national nursing cadres in the country, by approving and disbursing rewarding financial incentives to attract Kuwaiti nurses. "The Ministry of Health has 22,021 nurses working in its hospitals and centers, including 1,004 citizens, constituting 4.6 percent, and 21,017 expatriates representing 95.4 percent," they added.

The sources pointed out that the health ministry has established an electronic database to automatically link the administration, health zones and central departments, to prepare annual and five-year development plans, regarding nursing work and other areas.

The sources reported that the new recruitment plan for nurses has been completed, including determining the needed controls, the required numbers of nurses and the conditions that must be met by applicants to be hired. They pointed out that the local contract is currently open to Kuwaitis and children of Kuwaiti women and stateless residents (bedoons). The sources said that it is expected that the health ministry has taken into account the costs related to hiring new employees in its new budget, which will be implemented early April.

Delivery workers grapple with risks, mistreatment

'Some customers are nice while some are very disrespectful'



By Passant Hisham

KUWAIT: Dealing with dangerous road risks, mistreatment by customers, stress of meeting unachievable delivery targets and unfair compensation from employers, food delivery drivers grapple with hurdles in their daily life in Kuwait. Near a restaurant area in Salmiya, Kuwait Times spoke to two delivery drivers who had parked their motorbikes there for hours, waiting for someone to make an order.

John (not his real name), a 30-year-old delivery driver from Ghana, shared a common issue faced by almost every motorbike delivery driver. He complained about having to work for long, tedious hours, moving hurriedly from one place to another in a desperate attempt to achieve the required monthly delivery target of 420 orders. "The target is too high. I have been standing here for almost 30 minutes and haven't got an order. If I get no orders here, I'll keep moving until I find another location to just get one order — it's very difficult for us," he said.

Since his company pays its drivers on a commission basis, not hitting the target results in a reduction of his already minimal salary every month. "I work two shifts, almost 14 hours a day, and my salary is only KD 150 for this much stress; and I never even get the full salary," he noted.

Not to mention the road risks he must overcome while navigating crowded and chaotic streets on two wheels, with motorists mostly disregarding his existence. With the lack of a cabin, roof, airbags and seatbelts, one can barely overcome road challenges, such as dealing with reckless drivers or managing slippery roads due to rain. "We're never safe on the road — one little mistake can make us fall. We only ride with one thing in mind, praying for God's protection," John said.

What makes matters worse is that some companies don't provide their employees with health insurance, which prevents them from getting the medical health support they need. David (also not his



Lina Adlouni

real name), a 25-year-old delivery driver from Sierra Leone, said: "If we suffer an accident, the company doesn't care. If we are sick, we are the ones who take ourselves to the hospital. The company is treating us really bad."

The driver referred to two of his colleagues who are currently staying at home with broken legs due to accidents they had on the road months ago. The company refused to hold itself accountable for the accidents and refuses to pay them their salaries until they get back to work. Dealing with customers is another issue for them. While some customers are very nice to delivery drivers, some are very disrespectful and treat them as non-humans. David noted how some customers make them wait excessively long times before showing up to receive the order, hindering them from achieving their minimum targets.

Sometimes they even accuse them for no reason. "Last week, when I was delivering an order to a guy, I called him and stood there for quite a long time knocking on the door. He then came out shouting

at me and knocked me on the head. I just gave him the food and walked off, without taking any money," he said.

Having to stick to the contract that they signed for the company, delivery drivers get no choice but to stay under these unfair conditions until their contracts end, which John confirmed. "If I get the opportunity, I'll change my job, but the laws don't allow me to do this until I serve them for three years," he said. Lawyer Lina Adlouni said such practices by delivery companies are illegal and against labor rights, as they don't align with the labor laws of Kuwait. The payroll laws don't acknowledge payment of salaries based on a specific target every month. Employers are obliged to pay the full salary to an employee as long as they complete their required working period, at least once a month, once a week or once every two weeks.

She emphasized that an employer is not allowed to reduce an employee's salary under any circumstances. According to her, this means that any employer who doesn't abide with laws should be subjected to legal accountability. She highlighted that in such cases, filing a complaint at the labor relations department of the Public Authority of Manpower against violating employers is the first and most important step to guarantee an employee's full rights. But the undeniable problem is that workers lack awareness about their legal rights. Even if they are aware, they don't agitate for them out of the fear of losing their jobs and their only source of income.

John said he hopes things get better. "I love it here in Kuwait. I just want to make some money, get married and live a fruitful life. But how can I do something good for myself or my family when the company is treating me like this. They are using us and we have no say," he added. David echoed his words: "We need someone to fight for us, for our rights and our salaries, because whenever we ask for these, they tell us to either leave work or go back to our countries."



Municipality removes abandoned vehicles

KUWAIT: Kuwait Municipality carried out a search operation on Sunday, penalizing land transgressors and removing discarded vehicles. Faisal Al-Otaibi, the cleaning director in Hawalli Governorate, told KUNA during the inspection tour that the municipality was examining the work of the public cleaning companies and vendors and monitoring stray harmful animals. He indicated that a number of penalties were issued against land transgressors, and 11 neglected vehicles were removed. — KUNA



Faisal Al-Otaibi

Fire Force calls for safety when using coal, gas, kerosene

KUWAIT: Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) on Monday urged citizens and residents to be cautious when using coal, gas or kerosene to heat homes, camps and farms explaining that the emission of release of carbon monoxide causes suffocation, poisoning, injury or death. "Every year we deal with cases of injuries or deaths caused by the use of charcoal, wood, or gas as a result of not following the safety guidelines, especially after igniting and placing them in closed places. These types of accidents are more likely to happen during

sleep," said the Director of the Public Relations and Media Department at KFF, General Mohammad Al-Gharib, in a press statement.

Al-Gharib called on citizens to educate workers in camps, farms, and parks about the dangers of using coal, gas, and kerosene heaters in enclosed spaces and to replace them with other approved heating devices, with the need to follow the necessary safety guidelines.

He stressed the importance of taking the necessary precautions when lighting coal and making sure to have a fire extinguisher and ventilation in the area to avoid suffocation by toxic gases. He also mentioned the danger of using gas for heating and advised that the extensions and connections must be checked to ensure that there are no leaks and that the gas source must be shut off using the main switch and disconnected from the cylinder before going to sleep. — KUNA

Temperatures to drop after Jan 22

KUWAIT: Chances of rain this winter are expected to be lower than average, said Meteorologist Issa Ramadan. He added that Kuwait and the Middle East region were affected in the first part of winter this year by an abnormally warm winter, as high and low temperatures were above average. Ramadan expected this winter to remain relatively warm, until Jan 22, as temperatures are expected to drop after that. The weather is expected to become gradually warmer in February.

Ramadan said that the region was affected by warm air masses from the south of the Arabian Peninsula and the Arabian Sea and stationary air fronts. He pointed out that the cause of this phenomenon is climate change as well as the impact of the El Nino phenomenon, which has affected the movement of air masses and atmospheric systems in general.

In my view

Harnessing the Sun



Jaber Mohammed Al-Sabah

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Energy, the cornerstone of civilization, powers nations and fuels their economic engines. Nowhere is this more evident than in the Middle East, a region bestowed with an abundance of oil, gasoline and natural gas. These resources, exported to global giants such as the United States, China, the United Kingdom and Japan, have transformed the geopolitical landscape. This story of energy and influence began with George Bernard Reynolds' discovery of oil in modern-day Iran in 1908.

In Kuwait, the narrative took a decisive turn in 1938 with the Kuwait Oil Company's discovery in the Burgan field. By 1946, under the reign of HH Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the tenth Amir of Kuwait, the nation proudly commenced its first crude oil export, marking a new era in the region's history. Kuwait is now seen as one of the leading countries in oil production, with Kuwait's oil reserves accounting for 8 percent of global oil reserves.

However, Kuwait's oil and gas reserves are finite, meaning there will ultimately come a day when the country's production levels reach naught. The finiteness of our domestic resources is a forewarning not only to diversify Kuwait's economy for the benefit of future generations but also to export and sell today's oil and gasoline and harness a renewable, consistent, and if sufficiently developed, superior energy source.

As Kuwaiti people, we are eagerly awaiting the policies on oil and energy the current Amir, HH Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, will make following the passing of the late Amir of Kuwait, HH Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. With his inauguration speech about his duty to eliminate corruption in Kuwait along with the appointment of Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah as Prime Minister, a visionary, modernizer and ambitious political and economic leader, we can expect their Highnesses to be the main driving forces of Kuwait's efforts for economic success, especially with their high expectations for the country and their avidity for Kuwait to return as the hub of Arabian trade and the epitome of a thriving Arabian economy, like our sister countries of Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar.

However, this eagerness and determination by their highnesses does not come without challenges. One challenge is the current subsidizing of electricity in Kuwait to households, which carries an enormous burden on the economy, where the cost of electricity generation exceeds the price households and industries pay. Since the electricity generation cost is astronomically higher than what is paid for, it leads to an opportunity cost for the government, as there is no possibility for an increase in the price of electricity due to a suppressed subsidy and parliamentary regulations.

The main challenge and predicament in Kuwaiti energy consumption, however, is the opportunity cost set in the power generation itself. Kuwait's primary power source is oil and natural gas, which could be exported. This opportunity cost is one of the leading causes of Kuwait's decreasing GDP.

Furthermore, the ever-so-clear decrease in oil prices is a forewarning to the Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy (MEW), that, in order to maximize economic efficiency in Kuwait, the correct consumption of oil for energy regulated by the MEW and the Ministry of Oil, in proportion to its distribution, is necessary. In the Kuwaiti Assembly's analysis of ministries' expenditure in the financial term 2022-2023 and its estimated expenditure for the financial term 2023-2024, the MEW was a standout as opposed to Kuwait's 32 other ministries. The MEW has spent about KD 3.24 billion in the 2022-2023 financial term and has an estimated expenditure of about KD 4.1 billion for the 2023-2024 financial term, leaving the ministry with an expenditure increase of about KD 860 million and about a 27 percent increase between the two financial terms.

The MEW's expenditure increase can be seen as a means to decrease oil dependence for energy generation in Kuwait's power plants, specifically the Shagaya Renewable Energy Park (SREP). SREP has seen significant developments in its renewable energy generation sectors, mainly made up of photovoltaics (the conversion of light into electricity) and wind turbines, with its estimated capacity being 3.5 GW by 2040, an estimated 3.0 GW of which being generated from photovoltaics.

This estimation of SREP's capacity by 2040 would save Kuwait about 8.8 million barrels of oil, "equivalent in the year 2040," as the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research states. This will alleviate Kuwait's opportunity costs set by the subsidies imposed on electricity and the use of oil for energy, as these 8.8 million barrels could then be exported, which would be the start of economic strengthening in Kuwait.

According to the Energy Information Administration, "by 2040, the global benchmark Brent crude oil spot price averages \$73 per barrel in the low oil price case, \$136 per barrel in the reference case, and \$230 per barrel in the high oil price case." Kuwait's oil produced within its domestic borders is usually about 10 percent more expensive than Brent crude oil.

This means Kuwait would save at least \$640 million (KD 200 million) in the low oil price case, \$1.2 billion (KD 370 million) in the reference case, or \$2 billion (KD 615 million) in the high oil price case. The annual saving of oil and resources when SREP is fully commissioned in 2040 will eventually relieve Kuwait of its decline in economic growth, where its fluctuating GDP and lack of developments on infrastructure relative to other GCC countries could be improved.

This would be done by exporting the oil saved by SREP in addition to using the funds from the exportation of the saved oil to improve any lacking areas in Kuwait. Harnessing the sun could provide a brighter future for Kuwait, its economy, and most importantly, its people. Moreover, with the MEW's many power plants developing renewable energy sources similar to SREP, we can expect today's economic costs and losses to be mended by the decisions made by the MEW and Kuwait's oil and petroleum companies tomorrow.

Furthermore, we can picture a more prosperous, developed Kuwait and, most notably, the revitalization of a geopolitically mighty Arabian Peninsula, where the implementation of photovoltaics partnered with oil spearheaded by Kuwait would lead the world.

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Online forms to help keep track of KU students' health

KUWAIT: Kuwait University (KU) launched on Monday an online form displaying health status of students, allowing for medical follow up and boosting of primary health services.

In a press release, KU Acting Secretary General Dr Fayez Al-Dhafiri affirmed that the launching of the new service would ensure the improvement of health services on campus, and boost response to cases of emergency.

The initiative comes as part of the university's efforts to improve health procedures and ensure students have the appropriate environment to help them achieve their academic goals. KU executive for utilities Mohammad Al-Suleiman, as well as acting head of security and safety Yousef Al-Khamees both said that the new service would enable students to focus on their studies and seek help when feeling unwell.

The form contains students' basic information, health condition and history, which would enable experts to respond to any health emergency, they added. They called on students to apply for the document to ensure their wellbeing and streamline services for students.



Dr Fayez Al-Dhafiri

Health minister shuts down 4 private clinics

KUWAIT: The Minister of Health, Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi, issued a decision to close four private clinics for committing violations, including subcontracting, and committing health violations, in addition to employing workers who do not hold licenses to practice medical professions.

It is worth mentioning that the minister recently temporarily suspended granting and issuance of licenses for private pharmacies, until the completion of the study to evaluate their status.

Moreover, he issued a decision to establish a central electronic system under the supervision of the ministry, through which prescribing medicines and preparations dispensed from private sector pharmacies will be regulated.

The decision is the first of its kind in 2024. The minister had cracked down on dozens of clinics in 2023, the last of which was a dermatology and beauty clinic shut down in December. A doctor at the clinic was also suspended. The decision had come based on the recommendations of a team investigating a report of a child going under the knife at the clinic. The inspection team has also found a number of violations in accordance with Law No 70 of 2020 regarding the regulation of the medical profession.

Photo of the day



KUWAIT: Skyscrapers stand tall behind Al-Seif Palace and its well-known clock tower in Kuwait City. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

GCC chief, EU official discuss ties, developments in Gaza

Borrell, Budaiwi address GCC-EU security dialogue to be held in Riyadh on Jan 24

RIYADH: Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Jasem Al-Budaiwi and High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell discussed developments in Gaza late Sunday.

This came during a meeting between both officials at the headquarters of the GCC Secretariat General in Riyadh, the Secretariat said in a statement. Both sides also discussed ways to enhance international and regional efforts aimed at ending the crisis in Gaza and putting an end to this humanitarian disaster, it said.

The Zionist entity's relentless ground and air military campaign in Gaza has killed more than 22,000 people, mostly women and children, according to the territory's health ministry. The entity claims the bombardment is aimed at destroying Hamas after the Palestinian resistance group attacked southern Zionist communities and military bases on Oct 7. Around 1,140 people, mostly civilians, died in the attack and subsequent Zionist military operation aimed at re-gaining control of communities targeted by Hamas.

Last Thursday, Budaiwi voiced vehement rejection and condemnation of the Zionist occupation ministers'



RIYADH: Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Jasem Al-Budaiwi (right) and High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell are seen during their meeting late Sunday. — KUNA

remarks on the forced displacement of Gazans. In a press statement, Budaiwi indicated that these remarks reflect the Zionist occupation's false and hostile intentions towards the Middle East peace process, calling it a threat to the stability of the region and a dangerous escalation causing mounting tensions.

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

The meeting on Sunday also addressed GCC and EU senior officials' regional security dialogue, which is scheduled to be held on Jan 24 at the headquarters

of the Secretariat-General in Riyadh. The structured dialogue aims at coordinating efforts on regional and global issues, including nuclear, missile and drone proliferation, maritime security, cybersecurity, counterterrorism, terrorism financing, recruitment and ideology, human trafficking, drug trafficking, irregular migration and organized crime. The parties will also work together on energy security, security of global food supplies and disaster preparedness and emergency response. The GCC-EU Joint Council agreed to hold the regular and structured GCC-EU regional security dialogues last October.

Budaiwi and Borrell also discussed ways to strengthen and develop cooperation between the GCC and the EU in various fields and stressed the importance of collective action to address the current challenges. — Agencies



Municipality suspends construction work in Fahad Al-Ahmad

KUWAIT: The Engineering Audit and Follow-up Department in the Ahmadi municipality issued a warning and stopped construction work in the Fahad Al-Ahmad area due to violations. The municipality reported that during the tours of the Engineering Audit and Follow-up Department at the Ahmadi Governorate Municipality branch, the department monitored a building under construction in the Fahad Al-Ahmad area. The inspection team found construction and concrete columns in violation of building codes. Accordingly, the team issued a warning by which construction work would be suspended until the building permits are presented to the pertinent authorities and construction plans have been verified. The department called on residential building owners to abide by the

laws and regulations set by the municipality to avoid penalties. Municipality inspection teams last week issued seven warnings in the "Mahboula" and "West Abdullah Mubarak" areas during their fifth and sixth campaigns in the areas respectively.

The field campaigns aimed at ensuring compliance to building codes have resulted in identifying four buildings failing to abide by the laws in Mahboula and three in West Abdullah Mubarak.

The Farwaniya inspection team, which surveyed West Abdullah Mubarak, said the audit department has completed 90 percent of building permits in the area. It added that the power has been connected to 85 percent of buildings. The department said tours will continue periodically. Most of the violations in newly-built areas such as West Abdullah Mubarak, the department said, included the blocking of pathways next to transformers, and erecting unregulated communications towers, noting that the administration's statistics showed the presence of 37 communications towers in the West Abdullah Mubarak, 29 of which found in violation of regulations.



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Still standing: Unique houses survive quake in Japan village

Russia evacuates hundreds from border city amid Ukraine strikes

Page 6

Page 7



GAZA: A smoke plume erupts over Khan Yunis from Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip during Zionist bombardment on January 8, 2024. — AFP photos

UK-Palestinian surgeon fights for 'justice' after Gaza return

Gaza's health system completely overwhelmed

LONDON: A British-Palestinian doctor who worked in Gaza hospitals during the Zionist-Hamas conflict hopes that testimony he has given to UK police will lead to prosecutions for war crimes. Ghassan Abu Sitta, a plastic surgeon specializing in conflict injuries, spent 43 days volunteering in the besieged Palestinian territory, mostly at the Al-Ahli and Shifa hospitals in the north. The 54-year-old has already testified to the Met, the UK's biggest police force, about the injuries he saw and the kinds of weapons used, as part of evidence being gathered for an International Criminal Court probe into alleged war crimes committed by both sides.

He is due to travel to The Hague this week to meet ICC investigators. Abu Sitta said the intensity of the war was the greatest of the numerous conflicts he has worked in, including others in Gaza, Iraq, Syria, Yemen and south Lebanon. "It's the difference between a flood and a tsunami - the whole scale is completely different," he told AFP during an interview in London on Sunday. "Just the sheer number of the wounded, the size of the calamity, the number of children killed, the intensity of the bombing, the fact that within days of the war starting Gaza's health system was completely overwhelmed."

The war in Gaza was triggered by an unprecedented attack on October 7, which resulted in the deaths of around 1,140 people, most of them civilians, according to an AFP tally based on official figures. In response, Zionist entity is carrying out a relentless bombardment and ground invasion that have killed at least 22,835 people, most of them women and children, according to the Hamas-run Gaza health ministry.

Abu Sitta - born in Kuwait and who has lived in Britain since the late 1980s - arrived in Gaza from Egypt on October 9 as part of a Doctors Without Borders medical team. "From the very beginning our capacity was less than the number of wounded we were having to treat. Increasingly we were having to make very difficult decisions about who to treat," he recalled. Abu Sitta remembers one 40-year-old man coming into hospital with shrapnel in his head. He needed a CT scan, and to see a neurosurgeon, but they did not have one.

"We told his children and they stayed around his trolley that night until he passed away in the morning," he said. The hospitals also quickly ran out of anaesthetic and analgesic drugs, meaning the surgeon had to perform "really painful cleaning procedures



LONDON: British-Palestinian plastic surgeon specializing in conflict injuries Ghassan Abu Sitta, poses for pictures in Victoria Park, east London, on January 7, 2024.

of wounds" without relief. "It was a choice between doing that or watching them succumb to the wound infections and dying from sepsis," he added.

'Voice on the outside'

Abu Sitta is adamant that he treated burn wounds caused by white phosphorus. Its use as a chemical

weapon is prohibited under international law, but it is allowed for illuminating battlefields and as a smoke-screen. "It has a very distinctive injury," he said. "The phosphorus continues to burn until the very deepest part of the body, until you reach bone."

Abu Sitta said he left Gaza after becoming "redundant" because a lack of medical supplies meant he could no longer perform surgery. He has spent much of his time back in Britain briefing politicians and humanitarian organizations on the urgent need for aid. "I've been trying to help my patients who I left behind as much as I can by almost being their voice on the outside." The Met says it is obliged to gather evidence for an ICC probe into alleged war crimes committed by both sides.

Abu Sitta says he told officers about what he witnessed, including the use of white phosphorus and attacks on civilians. He also described surviving the October 17 attack on the Al-Ahli hospital, which Hamas blames on Zionists, but Western countries say was caused by a misfired Palestinian rocket. "Eventually justice will catch up with these individuals, if not in five years, 10 years, when they're 80 years old, whenever the balance of power in the world allows for justice for Palestinians," Abu Sitta said. — AFP

Pope urges global ban on surrogacy

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis called Monday for a global ban on surrogacy, saying the practice of a woman carrying another person's child was "deplorable". In his New Year's address to diplomats at the Vatican, the 87-year-old pontiff said it was a "grave violation of the dignity of the woman and the child". In a speech dominated by calls for an end to conflicts around the world, the head of the worldwide Catholic Church said: "The path to peace calls for respect for life."

This began "with the life of the unborn child in the mother's womb, which cannot be suppressed or turned into an object of trafficking", he said. "In this regard, I deem deplorable the practice of so-called surrogate motherhood, which represents a grave violation of the dignity of the woman and the child, based on the exploitation of situations of the mother's material needs."

"A child is always a gift and never the basis of a commercial contract. Consequently, I express my hope for an effort by the international community to prohibit this practice universally." In June 2022, the pope condemned surrogacy as an "inhuman" practice. "Al-

truistic" surrogacy, whereby a woman gives birth to a baby on behalf of another woman or couple but no money changes hands, excluding for expenses, is legal in countries including Belgium, the Netherlands, the UK, Canada, Brazil and Colombia. Commercial surrogacy is permitted in some US states.

In another development, Pope Francis on Monday condemned "war crimes" perpetrated against civilians in conflicts such as in Gaza and Ukraine, and said those killed should not be considered "collateral damage". "The distinction between military and civil objectives is no longer respected," the 87-year-old pontiff said in his New Year's address to diplomats at the Vatican.

"There is no conflict that does not end up in some way indiscriminately striking the civilian population. The events in Ukraine and Gaza are clear proof of this," he added. "We must not forget that grave violations of international humanitarian law are war crimes", he continued, in a speech dominated by calls for an end to conflicts around the world.

Francis said people "need to realize more clearly that civilian victims are not 'collateral damage' but men and woman, with names and surnames, who lose their lives." "Were we to be able to look each of them in the eye, call them by name, and learn something of their personal history, we would see war for what it is - nothing other than an immense tragedy," he said. — AFP

Release of 11 in gang rape case quashed in India

NEW DELHI: India's top court ruled Monday that 11 murderers convicted of a gang rape that drew global outrage, but who were released early, must return to jail. Bilkees Bano and two of her children were the only survivors among a group of Muslims attacked by a Hindu mob in the western state of Gujarat in 2002 during one of post-independence India's worst religious riots. Bilkees, now in her 40s, was pregnant at the time and seven of the 14 people murdered were relatives, including her three-year-old daughter.

The attack took place when Hindu nationalist Narendra Modi, now India's prime minister, was the premier of Gujarat. Modi was accused of turning a blind eye to the riots but was cleared of any wrongdoing in 2012, two years before his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won national power. The 11 convicts were freed in August 2022 following a recommendation by a state government panel but must now return to jail within two weeks, the Supreme Court in New Delhi ruled.

"Their plea for protection of their liberty is rejected," the Supreme Court said. Allowing them to remain free would "not be in consonance of the rule of law", it added. News of the verdict was greeted with fire-



MUMBAI: Women shout slogans during a protest against the release of men convicted of gang-raping Bilkees Bano during the 2002 communal riots in Gujarat. — AFP

works in Gujarat's Randhikpur, Bilkees's home village. "We have been fighting for so long," said one of the witnesses in the original trial, who asked not to be identified due to the sensitivity of the case. "The Supreme Court decision is what we wanted. I thank them."

In 2022, the men were accorded a heroes' welcome when they were released and a viral video showed relatives and supporters welcoming them with sweets and garlands. The convicts' release triggered angry reactions across the country, especially since it coin-

cided with India's Independence Day celebrations, when Modi spoke about women's safety and security. Soon afterwards, Bilkees said she was "bereft of words". At the time, she said in a statement released by her lawyer that she "trusted the system" and was "learning slowly to live with her trauma". "The release of these convicts has taken from me my peace and shaken my faith in justice," she said then. "My sorrow and my wavering faith is not for myself alone but for every woman who is struggling for justice in courts." — AFP

International

Russia evacuates hundreds from border city amid Ukraine strikes

Biggest evacuation from a major Russian city

KYIV: Russia said Monday it had moved some 300 people from the border city of Belgorod due to Ukrainian shelling, the biggest evacuation from a major Russian city since the conflict began. The unprecedented announcement follows waves of deadly strikes by Kyiv's forces on Belgorod, which lies less than 20 miles from the Ukrainian border. Some 300 residents who decided to leave are now being housed in temporary accommodation in the towns of Stary Oskol, Gubkin and the Korochansky district, further from the border, regional governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said.

"Over the past 24 hours we received 1,300 requests to send Belgorod children to school camps away from the city in other regions," he added. The Kremlin has tried to maintain a semblance of normalcy on the home front, but recent strikes on Belgorod have brought the Ukraine conflict closer to home for Russians. On December 30, Ukrainian shelling of the city killed 25 people, prompting schools to shut for an extended period. Moscow vowed to intensify strikes on Ukraine in response to the attack, the deadliest in Russia since the start of the war in February 2022.

At least four people were killed and dozens injured in a fresh wave of Russian strikes across Ukraine on Monday, regional officials said. Kyiv warned last week it only had enough ammunition to withstand a few more powerful attacks, and has asked for more Western help. "The enemy launched dozens of missiles at peaceful cities and villages of Ukraine," Ukraine's deputy head of the presidency Oleksiy Kuleba said. A total of 59 projectiles were fired at Ukraine, including drones and missiles, the air force said, adding that Moscow had targeted civilian infrastructure. Russian missiles hit a shopping centre and high-rise buildings in President Volodymyr Zelensky's hometown of Kryvyi Rih, killing one

person, Kuleba said. "In Kryvyi Rih, there are many break-ages in power grids, there are power outages, and electric transport does not work," he said. Two people were killed in a missile attack in the western region of Khmelnytsky, far from the frontlines in the east, Ukrainian police said. In the eastern region of Kharkiv, an elderly woman pulled from the rubble of her house in the city of Zmiiv also died, regional governor Oleg Syngubov said. Russia said it had only struck "military" targets in its latest defense ministry briefing.

'They're trying to destroy us'

The attacks come a day after Japanese Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa paid a surprise visit to Kyiv Sunday, where she said Tokyo was "determined" to keep supporting Ukraine. Kamikawa, the first high-level foreign official to visit Kyiv this year, announced new deliveries of defense equipment and discussed Tokyo's plans to host a February conference to promote Ukraine's economic reconstruction. "Japan is determined to support Ukraine so that peace can return to Ukraine," Kamikawa told a press conference with her Ukrainian counterpart Dmytro Kuleba held in a bomb shelter as an air raid siren rang out. "I once again strongly condemn Russia's missile and drone attacks, particularly on New Year's Day," said Kamikawa.

She said Tokyo would "allocate" \$37 million to provide Ukraine with a drone detection system. It will also supply five generators to help Ukraine "survive" another winter. Kuleba said Kyiv was thankful for Japan's decision last year to provide Ukraine with F-16 jets, but said the country also needed air defense systems. "Every day, Ukrainian cities are destroyed by Russian missiles and drones. They cannot capture us, so they are trying to destroy us," he said. —AFP



BELGOROD: This handout photograph published on the official Telegram account of Belgorod region governor Vyacheslav Gladkov shows a destroyed car following a missile strike in Belgorod. — AFP

'Suicidal' Breivik sues Norwegian state over isolation

OSLO: Anders Behring Breivik, the right-wing extremist who killed 77 people in 2011 and is now "suicidal" according to his lawyer, appeared in court Monday in his lawsuit against Norway over his prison conditions. As he entered the gymnasium of the Ringerike prison where the five-day trial was being held, Breivik was clad in a dark suit with his head shaved. He refrained from making provocative gestures as he has done on previous occasions.

The now 44-year-old has been held apart from other inmates in various high-security facilities for over 11 years. He argues that his extended isolation is a violation of Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which prohibits "inhumane" and "degrading" treatment. On July 22, 2011, Breivik set off a van bomb near government offices in Oslo, killing eight people, before gunning down 69 others, mostly teens, at a Labour Party youth wing summer camp on the island of Utoya. He was sentenced in 2012 to 21 years in prison, which can be extended as long as he is considered a threat.

On Prozac

Since then, he has been held "in isolation, and the more time that passes the greater the violation of the Convention", his lawyer Oystein Storrvik told AFP in October. In the lawsuit documents, Storrvik said that the "long period of isolation and absence of mean-

ingful interaction has caused Breivik (psychological) suffering, including the fact that he is now suicidal". "He is dependent on the anti-depressant Prozac to be able to get through his days in prison," Storrvik said.

According to him, Breivik's only personal contact is with two other inmates whom he sees for one hour every two weeks under strict surveillance, as well as his interaction with prison staff. Citing another article of the Convention on Human Rights that guarantees the right to correspondence, Breivik has also asked for an easing of the restrictions on his letter-writing with people outside prison.

Breivik has already sued the Norwegian state on both grounds, with an Oslo district court stunning the world in 2016 when it ruled his isolation was a breach of his rights. On appeal, Norway's higher courts found in the state's favor, and the European Court of Human Rights in 2018 dismissed his case as "inadmissible".

Pet budgies

The Ringerike prison is located on the shores of the lake that surrounds the island of Utoya. Breivik has access to several rooms on two floors that include a kitchen, a TV room with a game console, and an exercise room, according to Norwegian news agency NTB. Prison officials have also complied with his request for a pet by providing him with three budgies, NTB said. Norway prides itself on a humane prison system aimed more at rehabilitation than punishment. The state has said that Breivik's isolation is relative and justified due to the danger he presents, and that his prison conditions are needed to protect society, other inmates and wardens, as well as himself given risks from other inmates.

Breivik enjoys "a wide range of activities" such

narrow Palestinian territory to rubble, and prompted international concern over dire humanitarian conditions. The United Nations on Monday said it was "very concerned by the high death toll of media workers", a day after Qatar-based Al Jazeera network said a Zionist strike had killed two of its journalists, including the son of Gaza bureau chief Wael Dahdoh. The UN rights office called for the deaths to be "thoroughly and independently investigated".

Most of Gaza's population has been displaced, according to the United Nations, leaving people in overcrowded shelters or tents in the winter chill. Many have fled to Rafah in Gaza's far south, where a strike on Monday ripped open a car killing two of Dahdoh's nephews. He was recently wounded himself in a strike, and lost his wife and two other children in the Zionist bombardment in the initial weeks of the war.

Brothers Ahmed Al-Dahdoh, 30, and Muhammad Al-Dahdoh, 26, were travelling in a car when it was hit in the Gaza Strip's southern city of Rafah, the ministry said, adding a third man accompanying them was also killed. Muhammad worked as an accountant at a school and Ahmed was an electronics engineer, a relative said. "They say Rafah is safe, but we don't see it is safe in Rafah. No place is safe," said Mohammad Hejazy, overlooking the blood-soaked road.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas was in Cairo on Monday to meet with President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi of Egypt, a mediator in the conflict. Washington, the Zionist entity's main ally and arms supplier, has grown increasingly concerned over the war's civilian death toll. The World Health Organization (WHO) has warned of the risk of famine and disease, with only minimal aid entering the besieged territory. Zionist rights group B'Tselem on Monday said "everyone in Gaza is going hungry" as "direct results of (the Zionist entity's) declared policy". — AFP

ist-Hamas war broke out on Oct 7. The killing of Hamas's deputy leader in Beirut last week, in a missile strike widely attributed to the Zionist entity, has raised fears of a wider conflagration. Saleh Al-Aruri was the most high-profile Hamas figure to die during the three-month war, in the first attack on Beirut since the fighting began.

On Friday, Nasrallah warned the Zionist entity his fighters would respond swiftly to Aruri's killing. The group claimed an attack on a Zionist air control base the next day. On Saturday, European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell met in Beirut with Mohammed Raad, head of Hezbollah's parliamentary bloc, as part of a push to avoid Lebanon being dragged into the Zionist-Hamas conflict. In November, Raad's son was killed in a Zionist strike in south Lebanon along with five other Hezbollah members, the group had said. The cross-border violence has killed more than 180 people in Lebanon, including over 135 Hezbollah fighters, but also more than 20 civilians including three journalists, according to an AFP tally. — AFP



TYRSTRAND, Norway: Anders Behring Breivik (2nd left) sits at a makeshift courtroom at Ringerike prison during his trial over his prison conditions, on January 8, 2024 in Tyrstrand, Norway. — AFP

as cooking, games, walks and basketball, and "there is no indication that he is suffering from physical or mental problems due to his prison conditions," the state's lawyer Andreas Hjelldal said. "Breivik has so far shown little interest in rehabilitation work," he added. "It is therefore difficult to imagine which significant improvements in his prison conditions are possible and justified in the short term."

Breivik has in the past used his public appearances as platforms to air his political ideology and provocations, including Hitler salutes and tirades, which have been painful for survivors and relatives of the victims. "Many are fed up and try to keep this all at

a distance," Lisbeth Kristine Royneland, the head of a support group for families of the victims and who lost her 18-year-old daughter on Utoya, told AFP.

"Naturally people feel this is a burden because it brings back memories," said another group member Merete Stammeshagen, who also lost her 18-year-old daughter on the island. "We never get complete, lasting peace." The Oslo court has barred Breivik's testimony, due on Tuesday, from being broadcast in the media. "There would be a real danger that Breivik's testimony would divert attention away from the question at hand and put the focus on his ideological message," judge Birgitte Kolrud said. — AFP

Blinken meets MBZ, MBS on...

Continued from Page 1

suffering," Blinken said on Sunday in Qatar, the pre-vious leg of his whistlestop tour.

Vowing solidarity with the Palestinians, Yemen's Houthis have launched more than 100 drone and missile attacks on targets in the Zionist entity and the Red Sea, disrupting traffic in the key shipping route. The United States and 11 allies last week warned of unspecified consequences if the attacks continue. But the situation is tense for Riyadh as it coincides with attempts to settle a long-running war between the Houthis and a Saudi-led international coalition.

A Palestinian militant group fighting alongside Hamas in the besieged Gaza Strip reported fierce ground combat in southern Gaza, while the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory said it had recorded 249 deaths in the previous 24 hours. Sirens sounded Monday in the Zionist entity to warn of a salvo of rockets fired from the Gaza Strip.

The Zionist entity's relentless bombardment of Gaza and a ground invasion have killed at least 23,084 people, mostly women and children. The Al-Quds Brigades, the armed wing of militant group Islamic Jihad, reported "fierce clashes" on Monday, involving machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades, with Zionist troops in the southern city of Khan Yunis. Live AFP TV images showed black smoke over central and southern areas, and the sound of explosions.

Islamic Jihad later released a video it claimed showed a Zionist captive alive in its custody. The fighting, now in its fourth month, has reduced swathes of the

Zionists kill top Hezbollah...

Continued from Page 1

foreign operations until he was killed in a US strike in 2020. Other photos showed him beside Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah and the group's former top commander Imad Mughniyeh, killed in a 2008 car bombing in Syria blamed on the Zionist entity. Tawil also appeared alongside Hezbollah's former military commander in Syria, Mustafa Badreddine, who died in 2016 and had been indicted by an international court for the killing of Lebanon's former premier Rafic Hariri.

Tawil was the highest-ranking Hezbollah member to be killed since near-daily exchanges of fire with the Zionist forces across the border began after the Zion-

Teacher finds part of Boeing panel in yard

WASHINGTON: A teacher in Oregon has found part of an Alaska Airlines airplane panel that blew out mid-flight in his backyard, officials said, as shares in the beleaguered manufacturer Boeing began falling in pre-market trading Monday after the near-disaster. Dozens of flights have been canceled around the world as airline and safety bodies ground some versions of Boeing's 737 MAX 9 jet pending inspections after the emergency, which miraculously saw no major injuries.

On Friday, Alaska Flight 1282 departed from Portland International Airport and was gaining altitude when the cabin crew reported a "pressurization issue", according to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), with the plane quickly returning to Portland. Video images of the incident, which showed a gaping hole in the side of the plane, air rushing through the cabin, oxygen masks dangling and travelers observing city lights below them through the opening, were seen around the world.

"I am excited to announce we have found the door plug," National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) chair Jennifer Homendy said at a press briefing. A door plug is a cover panel used to fill an unneeded emergency exit in planes with smaller seat configurations. "He took a picture," she said, referring to the schoolteacher who she named only as "Bob".

"I can just see the outside of the door plug from the pictures, the white portions. We can't see anything else but



PORTLAND: This handout picture provided on Jan 8, 2024 shows the damage onboard Alaska Airlines Boeing 737-9 MAX. — AFP

we're going to go pick that up and make sure that we begin analyzing it." She said it was "very, very fortunate" that the incident had not ended in tragedy.

Meanwhile, a man in Portland, Oregon found a smartphone that fell 16,000 feet from the Alaska Airlines flight. The man, who was on the lookout for the door plug after the NTSB had asked the public for help locating it, found something else instead. "I found a phone sitting on the side of the road that had apparently fallen 16,000 feet," Sean Bates said in a post on social media. "It was in airplane mode with a travel confirmation and baggage claim for Alaska 1282," Bates said. "So, I had to go call the NTSB." A few items, reportedly including AirPods and a boy's shirt, made more dramatic landings after shooting out of the suddenly depressurized cabin. It is not yet clear what went wrong on the flight, but shares in Boeing from falling in pre-market trading on Monday. — AFP

Snag imperils private US lunar...

Continued from Page 1

In the absence of an atmosphere that would allow the use of parachutes, a spacecraft must navigate treacherous terrain using only its thrusters to slow descent. Private missions by the Zionist entity and Japan, as well as a recent attempt by the Russian space agency, have all ended in failure — though the Japanese Space Agency is targeting mid-January for the touchdown of its SLIM lander launched last September.

This weekend's blast-off was the first launch for ULA's Vulcan rocket, maintaining the company's 100 percent success rate in more than 150 launch-

es. Vulcan is planned to have reusable first stage booster engines, which the company, a joint venture between Lockheed Martin and Boeing, expects will save costs. On board Peregrine is a suite of scientific instruments that will probe radiation and surface composition, helping to pave the way for the return of astronauts.

But it also contains more colorful cargo, including a shoebox-sized rover built by Carnegie Mellon University, a physical Bitcoin and cremated remains and DNA, including those of Star Trek creator Gene Roddenberry, legendary sci-fi author and scientist Arthur C Clarke and a dog. The Navajo Nation, America's largest Indigenous tribe, has objected to sending human remains, calling it a desecration of a sacred space. Though they were granted a last-ditch meeting with White House and NASA officials, their objections failed to remove the cargo. — AFP

International

Bangladesh's PM celebrates 'absolute' victory after polls without opposition

Hasina dismisses opposition's criticism

DHAKA: Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Monday dismissed the opposition's criticism of the country's general election as "illegitimate" as she celebrated securing her fifth term in power. 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 crackdown on dissent. "The election was free and fair," she told reporters in her first comments since the vote on Sunday, where her party took three-quarters of seats in parliament after polls boycotted by the opposition, with turnout at a meagre 41.8 percent.

"If any party does not participate in the election, it does not mean there is no democracy," she said, adding that "those who want to criticize can criticize". The opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), which has seen its ranks diminished by mass arrests, called a general strike and, along with dozens of others, refused to participate. Senior BNP leader Moyeen Khan called it a "fake election" and said the government was "illegitimate", he told reporters in Dhaka on Monday.

Election Commission secretary Moniruzzaman Talukder said Hasina's party had won

223 seats in Sunday's polls, but the support of other lawmakers means her actual control over the 300-seat parliament is even higher, analysts said. "It was a farce election, like a local neighborhood or a market association election," said Mohammad Shahin, 42, who pulls a rickshaw.

Hasina, 76, called for citizens to show faith in the democratic process and branded the BNP "a terrorist organization" after she voted on Sunday. "This is a one-party parliament," Ali Riaz of Illinois State University told AFP, adding that "only the allies of the Awami League had the opportunity to participate". Bangladesh was the first in key South Asian elections this year where embattled opposition parties face a tough battle, including in Pakistan, where jailed former prime minister Imran Khan has been rejected as a candidate, and in neighboring India.

The Jatiya Party, which won 11 seats, is a long-time ally of Hasina's Awami League, as are many of the 61 independent candidates, said Mubashar Hasan, a political scientist at the University of Oslo. "This election has legitimized one-party rule in the country with no credible and effective opposition in the parliament," Hasan told AFP. "Almost all the independent candidates who won the parliamentary seats

are also part of the Awami League."

Among the victors was Bangladesh cricket team captain Shakib Al Hasan, who won a seat for the ruling party. Hasina's party faced almost no effective rivals in the seats it contested, but it avoided fielding candidates in a few constituencies, in an apparent effort to avoid the legislature being branded a one-party institution. Opposition activists staged a protest Monday in Dhaka, wearing black gags over their mouths to condemn the election.

BNP head Tarique Rahman, speaking from Britain where he lives in exile, called the result "a disgrace to the democratic aspirations of Bangladesh", in a social media post, alleging he had seen "disturbing pictures and videos" backing his claims. Meenakshi Ganguly, from Human Rights Watch, said the government had failed to reassure opposition supporters that the polls were fair, warning that "many fear a further crackdown".

Envoys from China, Russia and neighboring India were among the first to congratulate Hasina, visiting her at home on Monday and praising her "absolute victory", her office said in a statement. Beijing's ambassador Yao Wen praised a "long-established friendship" with Dhaka in a statement, underlining the deepening ties during Hasina's 15-year-long rule.

Politics in the country of 170 million people



DHAKA: Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina accepts greetings from the assembled media and election observers during a press conference, a day after she won the 12th parliamentary elections, in Dhaka on January 8, 2024. — AFP

has long been 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. BNP head Rahman is her son. — AFP

Still standing: Unique houses survive quake in Japan's village

AKASAKI, Japan: The New Year's Day earthquake demolished wooden buildings all across Japan's Noto Peninsula but thanks to decades-old smart architecture, one small fishing village stood strong. A few roof tiles came loose but not one of around 100 structures in windswept Akasaki, on the stick of land's western coast, collapsed in the magnitude 7.5 quake whose epicenter was just a few kilometers away.

Masaki Sato drove all night from his home 300 kilometers away in Tokyo after the quake to check on the 85-year-old house that he has owned since 2017 and runs as a summer B&B. "The house stands on a very narrow lot of land, and the building has many small rooms, with many columns" that make it stronger, the 43-year-old told AFP.

To withstand the harsh rain, snow and ocean winds buffeting off the Sea of Japan, Sato's house and most others in Akasaki have few glass windows. Their exterior walls are made from sturdy wooden slats, layered horizontally. The structure is supported by thick beams criss-crossing the ceiling. The earthquake and its many aftershocks killed at least 161 people, and 103 others are still missing, authorities said on Monday.

But there were no casualties in the tight-knit village. Even tsunami waves triggered by the earthquake didn't reach the houses, which are built on land slightly uphill from concrete tetrapods that protect them from the sea. At Sato's place, ceramic dishes smashed, appliances toppled and a recently added wooden sliding door broke, leaving debris strewn across the floor. But that was it. "I felt so encouraged, because the village was still there standing," Sato said. "I think it's thanks to the design of the houses," he added, sitting at the dusty but still solid kitchen counter in his guest house.

'Windshield'

The same lucky outcome was seen around the village, where "the design of the houses is more or less the same," said resident Seiya Shinagawa, a retired fisherman. "Traditionally there's a shed on the coast as a windshield, with a narrow main house behind it," the 78-year-old said. This setup is a remnant of the days when each fisherman would launch their boats out of their shed directly to the sea, Shinagawa said. From around the 1920s, the community's fishermen opted for



AKASAKI: Photo shows houses in Akasaki village, Ishikawa prefecture after a major 7.5 magnitude earthquake struck the Noto region on New Year's Day. — AFP

more lucrative deep-sea fishing far away from home, sometimes hauling in small fortunes for their catch. But when a fire broke out and destroyed a significant part of the village in the late 1930s, people rebuilt the houses in a unified and stronger design.

Demographic threat

Now despite its resilient character, the village faces a problem that is widespread in Japan: a severely ageing population. Most people in Akasaki are over 65, with many living alone, including 74-year-old resident Akiyo Wakasa. "My neighbor and their next-door neighbor also live alone," she said. According to Wakasa, part of the problem is that "fixing houses costs money".

"I'm not sure how many people here actually think it would be worth fixing the house and continuing to live here when they have nobody to hand it down to," she explained. For Sato, an IT firm employee who runs a real-estate renovation business on the side, seeing Akasaki entering a slow decline is unbearable. The area is not recognized by the government as a cultural asset, but it's a place where people lead a simple, old-fashioned lifestyle, he said.

And when there's no one to live in a house, it's torn down—eroding the village's charm, according to Sato. "Akasaki, which has preserved a unique and uniform housing design... is losing its scenic appearance." To save Akasaki's special look, Sato has purchased five of the houses and sheds himself, and wants eventually to open some cafes and restaurants there. "The village is too precious to lose," he said. — AFP



KAOSHIUNG: People on motor scooters wait for passing a campaign motorcade tour of Taiwan Vice President and presidential candidate of the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Lai Ching-te in Kaohsiung on January 8, 2024, ahead of the presidential election. — AFP

and resilience," he said. After initially saying they were weather balloons, Taipei's defense ministry on Saturday called them "an attempt to use cognitive warfare to affect the morale of our people". It also said they posed a "serious threat" to aviation routes. When asked about the balloons, China's defense ministry dismissed allegations of interference and accused Taiwan of trying to "manipulate the election".

Balloons from China became a politically fraught topic last February, when the United States shot down what it called a spy balloon. Beijing has said it was a civilian airship blown off-course. More than 20 balloons have crossed the sensitive median line separating China from Taiwan since December, with at least seven of them passing directly over the island.

Sighted during the daytime and evenings, they move at altitudes ranging from 12,000 to 36,000 feet, according to Taipei's defense ministry. With commercial flights usually cruising between 24,000 and 40,000 feet (7.3 to 12 kilometers), the balloons around Taiwan "do pose a threat and potentially cause disruption to air traffic", said independent aviation expert Gerry Soejatman. — AFP

China balloons inflate Taiwan election fears

TAIPEI: As an election in democratic Taiwan looms, Chinese balloons have appeared around the island at various times of day in what its military says is a new form of "grey zone" harassment. China already flexes its military prowess against self-ruled Taiwan daily, sending fighter jets, reconnaissance drones and naval ships around the island. But since December, Taiwan's defense ministry has said that mysterious balloons have crossed the narrow Taiwan Strait separating the island from China in a kind of "grey zone" harassment. "Grey zone" tactics are aggressive actions deployed by a state that stop short of open warfare. Experts say that is what China has been doing with its show of military force around the island.

Days before a presidential election, some balloons have flown directly above Taiwan, with at least one detected around a military airbase. "Beijing is signaling that it can violate Taiwanese airspace at will and challenge its sovereignty," said Raymond Kuo, Taiwan Policy Initiative director at RAND Corporation. Self-ruled Taiwan is claimed by China as part of its territory, with Beijing's leadership vowing to bring the island under its control.

The January 13 election pits frontrunner Lai Ching-te - whose ruling Democratic Progressive Party says Taiwan is a sovereign nation - against two others who have pledged warmer relationships with Beijing. The timing of the balloons' appearance is "political", said Kuo. "The CCP (Chinese Communist Party) is attempting to demoralize the Taiwanese public in the run-up to next week's presidential and legislative elections," he told AFP. But its military purpose is "in line with broader China's grey zone coercion strategy towards Taiwan".

"Beijing is adding yet another operational challenge to Taiwan's defense forces, which could erode readiness

GCC survey reveals need for innovation to address harm reduction strategies

DUBAI: A new survey conducted across the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), the Kingdom of Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Kuwait has revealed how industries, particularly the tobacco industry, must take bigger steps towards product innovation to reduce harm. The survey, conducted independently by leading Dubai-based market research company 4SiGHT, was commissioned by Philip Morris Management Services (Middle East) Limited. (PMMS) to understand how the general public viewed the subject of harm reduction and their perspective on companies that are undertaking similar initiatives.

Drawing on the opinion of more than 2,500 respondents across the four GCC countries, the survey revealed that a majority of Kuwait participants (62 percent) strongly believe product innovation is key to harm reduction. Similarly, 45 percent of participants equally in the UAE and KSA also believe the same. Meanwhile, among participants in Bahrain and Kuwait, an impressive 86 percent and 89 percent respectively identified tobacco as one of the key industries that should undergo transformation to address harm. Following tobacco, a majority of respondents across all four markets also pointed out fast food, pharma, automotive and chemical industries as key industries that must innovate and implement transformational practices to create less-harmful alternatives.

To initially measure the foundational understanding of harm reduction across all markets, the survey explored the general public's comprehension, familiarity with harm reduction practices, and whether they were implemented on a habitual or awareness-led basis. The majority of the population across all markets claimed to be familiar with the concept, especially Kuwait participants (47 percent) fairing higher than 13 percent of participants in Bahrain, 15 percent in the UAE, and 17 percent in Saudi Arabia. When asked about harm reduction in practice, respondents cited using seatbelts, hybrid and electric vehicles, bike helmets and vaccinations as more salient harm reduction practices.

The survey also revealed that in all four markets, harm reduction practices were more habitual than awareness driven. While many were aware that their practices would prevent harm, the majority also unknowingly engaged in these practices without realizing they fell under the definition of "harm reduction" concepts. Common harm reduction practices, both known and unknown, across the GCC included using sun protection, refrigerating food, vaccinations, and wearing seat belts.

Based on the survey findings that highlighted how industries, predominantly tobacco, must embrace harm reduction practices, the general overall population believed burnt chemicals, nicotine, tar, and carbon monoxide to be the key elements that need to be addressed by the tobacco industry. A significant 67 percent of Kuwait participants were convinced that harm reduction is extremely important for adult smokers, while 51 percent of UAE respondents strongly feel that adult cigarette smokers should switch to less-harmful alternatives.

Tarkan Demirbas, Area Vice-President Middle East, Philip Morris Management Services (Middle East) Limited, commented: "These survey findings underscore the urgent call to action for leading organizations especially those operating in highly regulated sectors like tobacco to innovate and develop better alternatives that replace products bringing harm to public health. As consumers become increasingly conscious of what they consume, businesses must practice accountability by embracing product innovation and consequently, company-wide transformation."

At Philip Morris International (PMI), we've taken up this approach with unwavering determination, placing consumer well-being at the very heart of our operations. Our commitment is about creating a far-reaching, positive impact on society as a whole. This commitment centers on harm reduction as the cornerstone of our journey towards

a smoke-free future."

The results of the 4SiGHT survey align with PMI's strategic transformation journey toward creating a smoke-free future. Awareness of heated tobacco products are relatively high across all four markets, especially in Kuwait, leading with 48 percent. While not risk-free, when scientifically developed and made to appropriate quality and safety standards, heated tobacco products can be better alternatives to cigarettes. PMI is already bringing this solution in the form of its heated tobacco product, and other smoke free products available in 82 markets as of September, 2023.

Being informed and educated continues to be critical when discussing harm reduction and smoking. 61 percent of the population in Kuwait firmly believe adult smokers should be given accurate, scientifically backed information to make informed choices on new-age options, followed by 43 percent in Saudi Arabia, 37 percent in the UAE, and 36 percent in Bahrain.

PMI's transition to a smoke-free future is based on the premise of informing adult smokers on how harm reduction can benefit public health by minimizing morbidity from smoking-related diseases and extending longevity. The best choice for any smoker is to completely quit tobacco and nicotine products. However, many don't. For those adults who would otherwise continue to smoke, there are better alternatives. PMI is transforming for good to deliver smoke-free products to adults who would otherwise continue to smoke cigarettes.

4SiGHT survey methodology

4SiGHT conducted this online survey on behalf of PMI between in August 2023. It comprised of online CAWI (Computer-assisted web interviewing) interviews with general adult population and a structured questionnaire. The survey was fielded among 2,821 legal-aged adult respondents, drawn from the general population, and aged 18 or older in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait.

Smoke-free future

Philip Morris International (PMI) is a leading international tobacco company working to deliver a smoke-free future and evolving its portfolio for the long term to include products outside of the tobacco and nicotine sector. The company's current product portfolio primarily consists of cigarettes and smoke-free products. Since 2008, PMI has invested more than \$10.5 billion to develop, scientifically substantiate and commercialize innovative smoke-free products for adults who would otherwise continue to smoke, with the goal of completely ending the sale of cigarettes.

This includes the building of world-class scientific assessment capabilities, notably in the areas of pre-clinical systems toxicology, clinical and behavioral research, as well as post-market studies. In November 2022, PMI acquired Swedish Match - a leader in oral nicotine delivery - creating a global smoke-free champion led by the companies' IQOS and ZYN brands. The US Food and Drug Administration has authorized versions of PMI's IQOS Platform 1 devices and consumables and Swedish Match's General snus as Modified Risk Tobacco Products.

As of September 30, 2023, PMI's smoke-free products were available for sale in 82 markets, and PMI estimates that approximately 19.7 million adults around the world had already switched to IQOS and stopped smoking. Smoke-free products accounted for approximately 36.2 percent of PMI's total third-quarter 2023 net revenues. With a strong foundation and significant expertise in life sciences, PMI announced in February 2021 its ambition to expand into wellness and healthcare areas and, through its VecturaPharma business, aims to enhance life through the delivery of seamless health experiences.



Tarkan Demirbas

Business

TUESDAY, JANUARY 9, 2024

Turkish Airlines grounds Boeing 737 MAX 9 jets

Boeing hit by new headwinds in recent mid-flight scare



BUENOS AIRES: An Aerolineas Argentinas Boeing 737 MAX 8 lands at Jorge Newbery International Airport in Buenos Aires. — AFP photos



MEXICO CITY: A Turkish airlines Boeing 787 Dream Liner plane waits at the gate at the Benito Juarez International Airport in Mexico City.

ISTANBUL: Turkish Airlines said that it would ground five Boeing 737 MAX 9 jets in its fleet for inspections after a panel blew out of one of the planes in midair in the US, forcing an emergency landing. The Alaska Airlines scare over Oregon on Friday prompted the US Federal Aviation Administration to order immediate inspections of around 171 of the jets operated worldwide.

A sealed-over door panel had opened and come off mid-flight, prompting the cabin to suddenly lose pressure. "In light of the incident with the Boeing 737 MAX 9 operated by Alaska Airlines, five Boeing 737 MAX 9 in the Turkish Airlines fleet have been recalled for checks as a security precaution," the airline said in a statement.

They will be grounded "where they are to land", it added. Alaska and United Airlines, which has the world's largest fleet of 737 MAX 9s, have also grounded their planes for checks, leading to dozens of flight cancellations. Aeromexico and Panamanian carrier Copa Airlines also said they had grounded the planes affected by the FAA order, while Icelandair said none of its 737 MAX 9s had the plane configuration specified in the FAA grounding order.

New headwinds

A mid-air emergency in which a piece of fuselage came off a Boeing 737 MAX 9 jetliner as it flew over the US west coast dealt a new blow to the oft-beleaguered manufacturer. However, the consequences for Boeing are expected to be limited. The Federal Aviation Administration has ordered the grounding of 171 planes of that model so they can be inspected.

That order came after a scary incident Friday in which a 737 MAX 9 operated by Alaska Airlines and carrying 177 people had to make an emergency landing because a sealed-over door panel ripped off during a flight from Portland, Oregon to Ontario in southern California. Spectacular video images of the incident, which showed a gaping hole in the side

of the plane, air rushing through the cabin, oxygen masks dangling and travelers observing city lights below them through the opening, were seen around the world. No one was seriously injured, however.

An investigation by the National Transportation Safety Board has just begun and it is not yet clear what went wrong on that flight, in which a mid-cabin door plug - a cover panel used to fill an unneeded emergency exit in planes with smaller seat configurations - came off during flight. But it is the latest in a series of setbacks in recent years for Boeing. The worst were two crashes of 737 MAX planes, in October 2018 and March 2019, that caused the deaths of 346 people in total.

These accidents linked to software in a flight stabilizing system called the MCAS triggered the grounding of all 737 MAX planes for nearly two years. But Boeing had other woes, too, as it suspended delivery, several times over the course of two years, of its long-haul 787 because of manufacturing and inspection flaws. More recently it was the 737 MAX that again drew bad press. Last autumn defects were found in the plane's rear bulkhead, which is a kind of partition. And in December a risk of bolts coming loose in the navigating system was found.

'One-off anomaly'

The latest mishap could stem from the manufacturing of the door plug that came loose or bolts that were supposed to secure it, or from a quality control issue, said Scott Hamilton of the specialized aviation news outlet Leeham News. "If it's indeed a quality assurance issue, whether it's in Spirit or at Boeing, I would say it's more than likely a narrow, quality assurance issue," he said, referring to Spirit Aerosystems, Boeing's main subcontractor.

"I think this is more of a one-off anomaly than I would a systemic issue," he said. "For me it is a very isolated problem," added Michel Merluzeau, an aeronautics specialist with consulting firm AIR. "I do not

at all think it is a design problem." He said evidence for this is the fact that the FAA ordered inspections that take just four to eight hours. "We should be back to normal in about a week," said Merluzeau. He said this latest incident stems from supply chain and production problems that are currently affecting the commercial aviation sector, and also cited the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

For instance in the spring of 2020, as the pandemic raged and the US economy largely went into lockdown, Boeing stopped making planes for nearly a month. As air travel fell off dramatically, Boeing laid off around 30,000 workers. Boeing started hiring en masse again in 2022 but many experienced workers did not return to the company. "You now have new people that have been hired, that have to go through what's called a learning curve," said Hamilton.

Merluzeau said "experience is something that is very important in this industry." Unlike Boeing, its big competitor Airbus only shut down for a few days in 2020 and avoided mass layoffs, said Hamilton. Merluzeau said he did not see this latest incident having long term commercial impact on Boeing. "Boeing must handle the situation and as soon as possible provide guarantees to customers on the manufacturing of its planes so that people do not worry," he said. Hamilton said "the Max 9 is, for the most part a US airplane," with two thirds of the fleet operated by Alaska Airlines (65) and United (79).

"And their relationship with Boeing is pretty deep and pretty good," said Hamilton, who thinks the blown door problem on Friday will mainly affect Boeing's dealings with US regulators. Boeing recently requested a safety exemption in the 737 MAX 7's certification process. The exemption would cover the engine anti-ice system, on which a defect has been identified. Hamilton said that if the probe of this mishap ends up pointing the finger at Boeing "it's going to impact the FAA decision whether to grant an exemption." — AFP

China says foreign consulting agency head spied for UK

BEIJING: China's spy agency said Monday the head of a foreign consultancy had been found to be spying for Britain's MI6 intelligence service. The Ministry of State Security said in a WeChat post that Britain's Secret Intelligence Service - also known as MI6 - used a foreign national with the surname Huang to establish an "intelligence cooperation relationship".

Huang, who headed a foreign consulting agency, "entered China several times under instructions to use their public profile as a cover to collect China-related intelligence for Britain... and seek other personnel whom MI6 could turn", the MSS said. Huang allegedly passed 17 pieces of intelligence, including confidential state secrets, to MI6 before he was identified, according to the MSS.

The ministry also claimed he had received "professional intelligence training" in Britain and had used "specialist spying equipment" to send communications. The MSS said an investigation had "promptly discovered criminal evidence that Huang was engaged in espionage activities, and took criminal coercive measures in accordance with the law".

The statement did not provide further details of Huang's identity or employer, or describe their current condition or whereabouts. Britain's embassy in Beijing directed an AFP request to comment to the Foreign Office in London, which did not immediately respond. China's foreign ministry declined to provide further comment when asked about the case at a regular press briefing.

Trading allegations

China and Britain have traded barbs in recent months over allegations of perceived espionage and its resulting impact on national security. Britain's government has warned that Chinese spies are increasingly targeting officials, allegations that Beijing has denied. A researcher at the British parliament was arrested last year under the Official Secrets Act and subsequently denied spying for Beijing. China, which has a broad definition of state secrets, has publicized several other alleged spying cases in recent months.

In May, authorities sentenced 78-year-old American citizen John Shing-wan Leung to life in prison for espionage, though Beijing has not provided substantial details of his case. And in October, the MSS published the story of another alleged spy, surnamed Hou, who was accused of sending several secret and classified documents to the US. China last year also conducted raids on a string of big-name consulting, research and due diligence firms.

Last May, China said it had raided the offices of US consultancy firm Capvison in order to safeguard its "national security and development interests". Beijing also questioned staff at the Shanghai branch of another American consultancy, Bain, in April. And authorities detained workers and shuttered a Beijing office belonging to US-based due diligence firm Mintz Group in March. The US government and its chambers of commerce warned that the raids damage investor confidence and the operations of foreign businesses in China. — AFP

Head of Evergrande electric vehicle unit detained

BEIJING: The head of heavily indebted Chinese property developer Evergrande's electric vehicle unit has been detained, the firm said Monday, the second executive from the company to come under investigation in recent months. Once China's biggest real estate developer, Evergrande has reported more than \$300 billion in liabilities and its troubles have become a symbol of the nation's years-long property crisis. The firm's electric vehicle arm NEV said Monday that Liu Yongzhao - listed on its website as its president - had "been detained in accordance with the law on suspicion of illegal crimes".

It did not give further details on why exactly Liu had been held. Chinese law allows for individuals to be detained for extended periods while they are under investigation. Those placed under investigation are usually convicted. Liu's detention follows Evergrande's announcement in September that chairman Xu Jiayin was "subject to mandatory measures" from Chinese authorities over "crimes". Liu, born in 1981, has also served as chairman of the board of an Evergrande-owned football team based in the southern city of Guangzhou.

Cash flow woes

At the time of its establishment in 2019, Evergrande NEV said it aimed to become the world's leading manufacturer of electric cars in just "three to five years". But the EV unit's cash flow and growth outlook were hit hard by its parent company's in-



NANJING: This aerial photo taken shows the Evergrande logo on residential buildings in Nanjing, in China's eastern Jiangsu province. — AFP

creasingly dire financial situation. Evergrande NEV indicated in March 2023 that it was fighting to secure liquidity in order to stay afloat.

On Monday, just before it announced Liu's detention, shares in the EV firm were halted briefly on the Hong Kong Stock Exchange "at the request of the company", the company said. Less than an hour after restarting trading at 1:00 pm (0500 GMT), the EV firm's share price was down 13 percent. The announcements come after the failure of a deal that would have sold a stake in Evergrande NEV to NWTN, a Dubai-based firm specializing in

clean-energy vehicles. Following a long delay, the firm began production of its first EV model - the Hengchi 5 - in 2022.

Evergrande NEV shares were suspended for 15 months between April 2022 and July 2023, owing to the firm's failure to publish financial results. It is currently valued at around \$570 million, having lost almost half its value in five years. As the real estate giant's woes deepened, a Hong Kong court last month gave it until late January to put together a restructuring plan, extending a deadline that could lead to its liquidation. — AFP

Business

Angry farmers stage tractor blockades across Germany

Berlin plans to cut tax breaks for agriculture

BERLIN: Furious farmers opposed to Berlin's plans to cut tax breaks for agriculture used tractors to block roads across Germany on Monday, kicking off a series of crippling strikes sinking the country deeper into a winter of discontent. In Berlin, dozens of tractors and lorries stationed in the city centre blasted their horns to signal their anger at the start of a planned week of action. Rail workers will likewise launch a three-day strike on Wednesday, with unions seeking a pay rise to compensate for months of painfully high inflation.

Workers in sectors across Germany, from metallurgy and transport to education, have turned to industrial action in recent weeks. Wage negotiations have taken a bitter turn as Europe's biggest economy struggles with weak growth. "We are exercising our basic right to inform society and the political class that Germany needs a competitive agricultural sector," German Farmers Association President Joachim Rukwid told Stern magazine.

"That's the only way to ensure the supply of high-quality, homegrown food." Farmers began gathering on Sunday evening at the Brandenburg Gate landmark in the heart of the government quarter in Berlin. The sector has been up in arms over government plans to withdraw certain tax breaks for agriculture this year. "We simply don't get enough money for what we produce, while we work 365 days a year," said Jenny Zerbin, 34, told AFP in Berlin.

Tractor blockade

"We want to support farmers," said Zerbin, who set off from her home in the region of Brandenburg on Sunday to take part in the protest with her son.

Farm vehicles blocked the centers of cities including Berlin, Hamburg, Cologne and Bremen, with up to 2,000 tractors registered for each protest. Outside cities, demonstrators targeted motorway access ramps, snarling traffic in a coordinated nationwide show of discontent.

Police reported blockades and major disruptions due to slow-moving tractor convoys from the early morning hours across Germany. Authorities in the rural northern state of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania said all of its autobahn ramps were impeded. The protest also caused disruptions at Germany's borders with France, Poland and the Czech Republic, causing traffic to back up at crossing points, according to local media and German police.

Thousands of protestors had already descended on Berlin to protest against the planned subsidy cuts in December, blocking roads and dumping manure on the street. The protests prompted the government to partially walk back the reductions on Thursday. A discount on vehicle tax for agriculture would remain in place, while a diesel subsidy would be phased out over several years instead of being abolished immediately, the government said.

'Pure anger'

The agriculture sector however said the move did not go far enough and urged Berlin to completely reverse the plans, which were announced after a shock court ruling forced the government to find savings in the budget for 2024. "We simply can't continue to do business like this. Agriculture is going to the wall," said Sebastian Schuman, 34, who works in the sector.



BERLIN: A placard reading 'Don't bite the hand that feeds you' is attached on a tractor parked at the "Strasse des 17 Juni" boulevard, towards the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin. — AFP

Schuman told AFP at the protest in Berlin that he felt "pure anger" when the cuts were announced after households had been hammered by months of high inflation. "You have to think about what the consequences are. Food prices are going up. Everything is becoming more expensive," he said. Late on

Thursday, around 30 agitated protestors targeting the reforms trapped Economy Minister Robert Habeck and other passengers on a ferry, preventing them from disembarking. The demonstration was widely condemned by government figures for its implicit threat of violence. — AFP

London underground strike suspended at the last minute

LONDON: A strike that threatened to grind London's underground network to a virtual halt for several days was called off at the last minute on Sunday following "positive discussions" in pay talks, the main rail union said. Some 10,000 members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT) had been due to walkout in protest at a below-inflation pay offer. "Following further positive discussions today, the negotiations on a pay deal for our London Underground members can now take place on an improved basis," said Mick Lynch, the RMT general secretary.

He said the scheduled strike action had been "suspended with immediate effect". "We look forward to getting into urgent negotiations with TfL (Transport for London) in order to develop a suitable agreement and resolution to the dispute," he added. London's underground workers had previously been offered a 5 percent pay rise, Transport for London, which runs the capital's "Tube" network, had previously said "little or no" services would run from Sunday evening until Friday morning, warning users to complete their journeys by 1730 GMT on Sunday.



UXBRIDGE: People walk along the High Street past the Underground station in Uxbridge, west London. — AFP

The industrial action has been mirrored across the public and private sectors in Britain, as workers demand pay rises in response to high inflation of the past two years. Health sector employees, teachers,

lawyers and dock workers have all staged strikes. Junior doctors are due to end their longest consecutive strike in the seven-decade history of Britain's National Health Service (NHS) on Tuesday. — AFP

Stock markets drop as early US rate cut chances recede

LONDON: Stock markets retreated Monday, extending a weak start to the year, after a forecast-busting US jobs report further dampened hopes of an early cut to interest rates in the world's biggest economy. US and European oil futures slid nearly three percent after top producer Saudi Arabia cut the price of its crude, analysts said, weighing also on shares of energy majors.

The keenly awaited non-farm payrolls data Friday showed the US economy remained resilient despite interest rates sitting at a two-decade high and inflation still well above the Federal Reserve's target. However, the figures dealt another blow to expectations the central bank would start to cut borrowing costs in the next few months. "Friday's US jobs report brought fresh concerns over the likelihood of the Fed to cut rates in March as markets have been widely anticipating, with a hot payrolls figure coming alongside a higher wage growth reading," noted Joshua Mahony, chief market analyst at Scope Markets.

Attention now turns to the release this week of US consumer price figures. Equities ended 2023 with a surge as traders bet on a string of rate reductions this year thanks to falling inflation and a softening of the labor market. But the release of minutes last week from the Fed's December meeting showed decision-makers were happy to keep rates elevated for some time to make sure they have prices under control. Policymakers have signaled 75 basis points of cuts this year, but markets have



LONDON: Customers buy plants on stalls at Columbia Road Flower Market, in east London on January 7, 2024. — AFP

priced in as much as 150 points, leaving investors open to disappointment.

"The first week of 2024 brought contradictory data signals," Barclays economists wrote in a client note. "Solid US jobs growth, cautious Fed minutes and a still robust US economy raise doubts about markets' aggressive Fed rate-cut expectations," it added. A sharp slowdown in the US services sector provided some solace for investors, as it suggested the economy was slowing, giving the Fed wiggle room.

Wall Street ended slightly higher Friday but the positive finish failed to cross over into Monday's

trading. A sell-off in tech giants hammered Hong Kong, while Shanghai was also deep in retreat. Tokyo was closed for a holiday. London and Paris fell, while Frankfurt edged higher, nearing the half-way stage in European deals. In US pre-market trading, shares in Boeing slumped more than eight percent after a mid-air emergency Friday in which a piece of fuselage came off a 737 MAX 9 jetliner as it flew over the US west coast. Shell lost two percent in London, hit also by a mixed trading update ahead of the British energy group's annual earnings due next month. — AFP

France to build 'beyond' planned six nuke plants

PARIS: France is set to build eight new nuclear plants on top of six already announced, the energy minister has said, arguing more reactors are needed to hit carbon reduction targets. A draft law set to be presented soon recognizes that "we will need nuclear power beyond the six first European Pressurized Reactors" (EPRs) announced by President Emman-

uel Macron in early 2022, Agnes Pannier-Runacher told Sunday's edition of weekly newspaper Tribune Dimanche. The bill will include a further eight plants that had until now been discussed as an "option" by the government, Pannier-Runacher said.

By contrast, the text would not include any targets for renewable energy generation by 2030, remaining "technologically neutral", she added. France is on the lower end of greenhouse gas emissions in the 27-nation European Union, at around 4.7 tons per capita in 2020, according to data from Climate Watch. This is in part thanks to its fleet of 57 nuclear reactors built from the 1970s - some of which required long and costly repairs in recent years. "The historic nuclear fleet will not last forever," Pannier-Runacher told Tribune Dimanche.

France aims to reduce fossil fuels' share of energy use from more than 60 percent now to 40 percent in 2035, which would require "further construction equivalent to 13 gigawatts" of energy from 2026, Pannier-Runacher said. That matches "the power of eight EPR reactors, without setting in stone any particular technology", the minister added. Pannier-Runacher suggested that construction of even more than 14 nuclear reactors could be raised in talks with lawmakers once the energy bill reaches parliament.

State energy firm EDF's next-generation EPR has had a rocky start. Three are online, one in Finland and two in China, after suffering massive construction delays and cost overruns that have also beset projects in Britain and France. — AFP

German exports rebound in Nov

FRANKFURT: German exports rose more than expected in November, official data showed Monday, but analysts said it was too soon to signal a recovery as Europe's largest economy continues to face a series of headwinds. Exports totaled 131.2 billion euros (\$143 billion) in November, a 3.7-percent jump on the previous month, federal statistics agency Destatis said, ending several months of decline. Analysts surveyed by FactSet had forecast an increase of just 0.7 percent.

The stronger-than-expected rebound was driven by a 5.4 percent rise in exports to fellow European Union countries, while those to the United States were down by 1.4 percent. Overall imports were down 1.9 percent, widening the country's trade surplus to 20.4 billion euros. While the export agency brought "some relief", ING bank economist Carsten Brzeski cautioned against reading too much into the data. On the year, exports were down five percent, he pointed out.

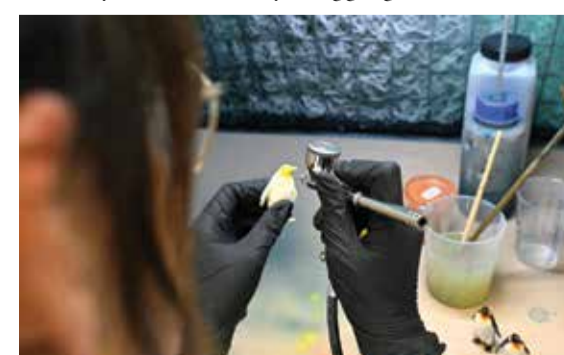
"Supply chain frictions, a more fragmented global economy and China moving from a dynamic export destination to competitor are all factors weighing on the German export sector," he said. High energy costs in the wake of Russia's war in Ukraine and higher interest rates have also taken their toll on the powerhouse economy, hitting the crucial industrial sector particularly hard.

Separate data released by Destatis on Monday showed that factory orders rose by a modest 0.3 percent in November, less than analysts had expected. The "very weak increase in industrial orders shows that the economy is still far from a substantial recovery," said Brzeski. The German economy is widely expected to have ended 2023 in recession, with the government predicting a 0.4 percent contraction. The German central bank last month slashed its growth forecast for 2024 to 0.4 percent, from an earlier prediction of 1.2 percent.

Train drivers' strike

Meanwhile, German train drivers will start a nationwide three-day strike on Wednesday after wage talks broke down, the GDL union said Sunday. The union, which called several strikes in 2023, said the Deutsche Bahn public train company had failed to come up with a "negotiable" offer to head off industrial action. Drivers will walk off the job from 2 am (0100 GMT) Wednesday while for freight the stoppage will begin from 1700 GMT on Tuesday, the union said.

Drivers will return to work from 1700 GMT on Friday after what will be the longest stoppage the union has called to date. November and December also saw drivers walk off the job. "This strike is not only absolutely unnecessary, but we also believe it is not legally authorized," said Deutsche Bahn director of human resources Martin Seiler. Seiler announced an injunction to try to prevent a stoppage which the operator says will seriously disrupt operations. Disruptions to freight transport come at a high cost to a German economy which is already struggling. — AFP



SCHWABISCH: An employee of German toy manufacturer Schleich colors a toy penguin with an airbrush in the painting section of the company's development center in Schwabach, southwestern Germany. — AFP

Malaysia's Capital A to sell budget carrier to AirAsia X

New entity would handle short-, medium- and long-haul flights

SELANGOR: Malaysia conglomerate Capital A said Monday it plans to sell its budget airline AirAsia to its medium-haul affiliate AirAsia X in a bid to streamline operations. Under the terms of the non-binding agreement, AirAsia Malaysia and AirAsia subsidiaries in Cambodia, Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines would be merged with AirAsia X, it said. The new entity would handle short-, medium- and long-haul flights, Capital A chief executive Tony Fernandes told reporters, enabling the conglomerate to focus on its non-aviation businesses.

"We are going to merge the two airlines and double passenger traffic to 200 million (per year) from about 80 to 90 million currently," Fernandes said. AirAsia has a fleet of 166 A320 and A321 planes while AirAsia X has 17 A330s in operation. The merged airline would start flying new routes to India, Africa, Kazakhstan, and North and South America in 2025,

said Fernandes, who also announced he would retire from his position at Capital A in 2028.

"I have been doing it for 22 years. It is the right time to retire," he said. "Leadership is about knowing when to step aside." Shukor Yusof, an analyst with Singapore-based Endau Analytics, told AFP the merger was "natural", but could be a sign of a downturn in the region's aviation sector.

Fernandes, a flamboyant former music industry executive, launched AirAsia as a low-cost airline flying to secondary cities in Southeast Asia, shaking up the region's aviation sector and inspiring a slew of competitors. AirAsia X was launched in 2007 with lofty ambitions to operate long-haul flights, including to Europe. But it suspended flights to London and Paris in 2012 because of rising costs, focusing on core markets like Australia, Japan and China. — AFP



SELANGOR: AirAsia airplanes are pictured on the tarmac at Kuala Lumpur International Airport in Sepang on January 8, 2024. — AFP

Gulf Bank continues to support Diraya Campaign in 2024

KUWAIT: Mohammad Al-Hebeshi, Gulf Bank's Corporate Communications Officer, highlighted the bank's pivotal role in supporting the Let's Be Aware (Diraya) campaign throughout 2023. The campaign, overseen by the Central Bank of Kuwait in collaboration with the Kuwait Banking Association, aims to enhance financial literacy, raise awareness about the banking sector, and optimize customer utilization of a range of banking services.



Mohammad Al-Hebeshi

Emphasizing the bank's dedication, Al-Hebeshi declared ongoing support for the campaign in 2024. Gulf Bank aims to enhance its success by distributing awareness materials across various channels, such as social media, press, radio, and television, to reach a wide audience. Al-Hebeshi emphasized the bank's proactive involvement in the campaign's central themes, including educating customers about their rights in bank transactions, securing their data and accounts, and ensuring the safe usage of bank cards.

He highlighted Gulf Bank's initiatives to acquaint customers with the customer protection guide issued by the Central Bank of Kuwait, fostering a balanced relationship between banks and customers, based on international best practices.

Fraud prevention

Addressing potential risks, Al-Hebeshi advised against the risk of falling victim to fraud through various means including remote applications, phone calls, text messages, and emails impersonating banking employees. He urged customers to exercise caution, refrain from engaging with unfamiliar messages or calls, and safeguard their account information to prevent inadvertent theft by international criminal organizations. Additionally, Al-Hebeshi warned against high-risk investments, particularly those in virtual currencies not regulated by the Central Bank of Kuwait, or any national or global institution. Customers were advised to avoid investments lacking regulatory oversight to protect their interests.

Secure investments

On the flip side, the bank is dedicated to acquainting customers with secure investment products offered to help manage their investments and boost returns. These options encompass various investment deposits, investment savings accounts, as well as short- and long-term investment plans. 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.

Chinese ex-oil firm executive arrested for alleged bribery

BEIJING: A former top executive at a Chinese state-owned oil and gas giant has been arrested for suspected bribery, state media reported on Monday, citing the country's top public prosecutor. Xu Wenrong, the former deputy general manager of China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) was arrested in northeastern China, state broadcaster CCTV said. "The case is currently under further processing," CCTV reported, without saying when Xu was arrested. The arrest came after the party's anti-graft agency announced on Saturday that Xu, who was already under investigation, had been kicked out of the ruling Communist Party for "accepting huge sums of money". CNPC, a vast energy group based in Beijing, ranked fifth on last year's Fortune Global 500 list of the world's biggest corporations by revenue. —AFP

VinFast plans first EV factory in India

HANOI: Vietnamese carmaker VinFast said it will build its first electric vehicle factory in India as part of a planned \$2 billion investment, as it looks to expand into the rapidly growing market. The facility will be in the southern state of Tamil Nadu, according to a VinFast statement released Saturday, which said there was an initial intended commitment of \$500 million for the first five years of the project. The communist state's first homegrown car manufacturer is hoping to compete with EV giants such as Tesla, and is trying to crack international markets. But VinFast's expansion overseas has faced a rocky start.

Of the 11,300 vehicles it sold in the first half of last year, 7,100 were bought by a company owned by the same parent company as VinFast. The firm listed on the Nasdaq in August, hitting headlines around the world as its valuation skyrocketed and then crashed. In the statement, the company said that the "VinFast Tamil Nadu project aims to evolve into a first-class electric vehicle production hub in the region, with an annual capacity of up to 150,000 units".

Construction of the plant is expected to begin this year, and create up to 3,500 local jobs. "This initiative forms a crucial part of VinFast's strategy to establish a strong presence in key markets and strengthen its supply chain for global expansion," the statement added. Tamil Nadu state chief minister MK Stalin welcomed the deal, calling it a



HANOI: A woman rides a motorbike carrying plastic toys on the outskirts of Hanoi. — AFP

"great leap in the industrial development" of the state, in a post on social media.

The announcement comes as VinFast named Pham Nhat Vuong, chairman of parent company Vingroup, as its new CEO on Saturday. Vuong will "directly oversee the operations of VinFast, including global production, sales, and market-

ing", the statement said. Vuong, Vietnam's richest man, replaces Le Thi Thu Thuy, who has held the post since 2021 and now becomes the chairwoman of the board of directors. His net worth is around \$4.6 billion, according to Forbes, and in April last year, he provided VinFast with a \$1 billion grant. — AFP

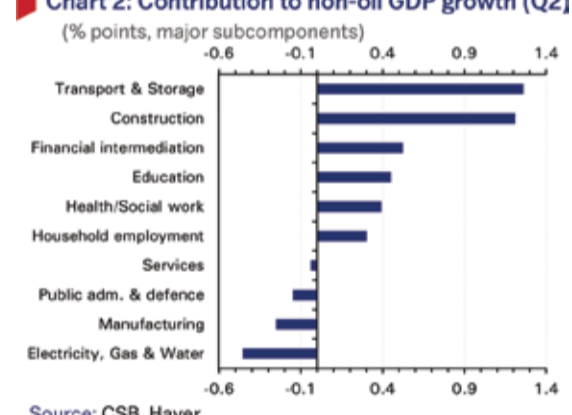
NBK Economic Report

Chart 1: Real GDP



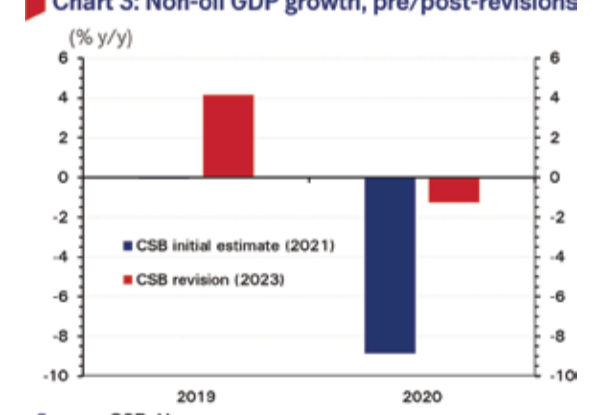
Source: Central Statistical Bureau (CSB), Haver

Chart 2: Contribution to non-oil GDP growth (Q2)



Source: CSB, Haver

Chart 3: Non-oil GDP growth, pre/post-revisions



Source: CSB, Haver

Kuwait: New figures show GDP contracted

KUWAIT: After a long hiatus, official figures on Kuwait's GDP have been published, with data up to Q2 2023. Real economic growth was negative in Q2 2023 at -1.3 percent y/y, with oil output weighed down by OPEC-mandated production cuts. Non-oil growth improved after several negative quarterly readings, but remained disappointingly soft given other, more upbeat high frequency data. The release also came with substantial revisions to the historical data, which raised non-oil output in both 2019 and 2020, resulting in a much smaller negative impact from the pandemic than previously estimated.

The contraction in Q2 23 GDP was due to a decline in oil sector output of -3.9 percent y/y. Oil GDP largely tracks Kuwait's crude oil production, which tends to move in line with the country's participation in OPEC+ production policy and which, since H2 2022, has been focused on restricting output to support prices amid uncertain global demand prospects. In Q2 23, Kuwait signed up to an additional 128 kb/d of voluntary cuts over and above curbs it agreed to in late 2022, lowering its crude production to 2.55 mb/d for the duration of 2023. Crude output is going to be reduced further to 2.41 mb/d through Q1 2024, following OPEC's November decision to take additional steps to balance the oil market.

Meanwhile, non-oil activity grew 1.5 percent y/y in Q2, a sharp improvement on the 0.9 percent y/y contraction recorded in Q1. Growth in Q2 was driven by strong gains in the transportation (+35 percent) and construction (+21 percent) sectors, with the latter reflecting the rebound seen in project awards witnessed in recent quarters. Combined, these two sectors added 2.5 percent points to year-on-year non-oil GDP growth in Q2. On the other side, growth in the utilities (-5 percent), communications (-1.6 percent) and manufacturing (-1.6 percent) segments was in negative territory.

The reported contraction in manufacturing output seems at odds with the expansion in the oil refining sector, which usually accounts for around half of all manufacturing output. Data published by the international Joint Organizations Data Initiative showed refining output surging 45 percent y/y and 32 percent y/y in Q1 and Q2, respec-

tively, boosted by the commissioning and launch of the 615 kb/d Al-Zour refinery at the end of 2022.

Overall, the picture painted by the recent data is less rosy than we had anticipated. Non-oil growth in H1 2023 stood at just 0.2 percent y/y, an improvement on the end of 2022 though still short of what was being signaled by solid growth in other indicators during the same period, such as bank card transactions (a proxy for consumer spending, which grew 10 percent y/y in cash terms) and imports (+9 percent). We acknowledge that these provisional GDP data are subject to change in future releases, and we also see scope for growth to have picked up in H2 23, continuing the improvement recorded in Q1.

Still, if unrevised, the latest numbers would make our full year 2023 non-oil growth estimate of 3.6 percent difficult to achieve. Conversely, however, the weak 2023 base would make meeting our 3.4 percent non-oil growth forecast for 2024 easier.

As mentioned above, there were also some substantial revisions to the historical time series, especially in 2019 and 2020. The level of real non-oil GDP was raised in 2019 by 4 percent and in 2020 by an eye-catching 13 percent. The latter was driven by huge upward revisions to output in the manufacturing, construction and telecommunications sectors, with previous data collection across the board disrupted by the pandemic, according to analytical notes from the Central Statistical Bureau that accompanied the data release.

The result of the changes is that non-oil growth in 2019 is marked up to 4.2 percent from the previous -0.1 percent and in 2020, even more strikingly, from -8.8 percent to just -1.2 percent. If left unrevised, Kuwait's non-oil GDP performance in 2020 would place it first among its GCC peers in terms of resilience in what was the year of largest economic disruption during the pandemic. Oil sector GDP, by contrast, was unchanged from previous estimates.

Post-pandemic

Looking at the new, post-2020 figures, the message regarding the recovery from the pandemic is mixed. Non-oil growth rebounded 4.4 percent in 2021, which was stronger than our initial estimate of 3.8 percent. But this was followed by a sharp slowdown in 2022 to just 0.3 percent, much weaker than our estimate of 4.3 percent (which captured some of the expected increase in refining output from Al-Zour).

Admittedly, slower growth was partly due to volatility in the "imputed bank service charges" component, which was likely pushed up as interest rates rose, and a recorded increase in subsidies. Without these, non-oil growth would have been a somewhat better 1.7 percent. Also, the better-than-expected non-oil performance in 2020 raised the baseline and thus lessened the 'catch up' growth that would have otherwise been expected subsequently. Indeed, at face value Kuwait's non-oil economy recovered from the pandemic remarkably quickly, topping pre-pandemic levels in 2021 rather than in 2022 as previously thought.

More broadly, the GDP figures provide an update on some structural features of the Kuwaiti economy. First, total GDP in nominal terms stood at KD56 billion in 2022, or \$183 billion. This means Kuwait has the 4th largest economy in the Gulf region (above Oman but below Qatar) and represents 8 percent of GCC GDP overall. Second, the year-on-year decline in total GDP in Q2 23 reflects the continued outsized role of the oil sector in the economy, which accounted for a large 52 percent of GDP in 2022 in real terms (excluding refining).

In nominal terms, the oil sector accounted for a larger 55 percent—the difference reflecting the evolution of the sectors since the 'base year' of 2010 used for the national accounts. (An updated base year with a new set of weights would likely change this share, affecting the sector's impact on overall growth. The direction of the shift would depend on the exact year chosen, but in general oil's share of GDP has trended lower in recent years, averaging 42 percent in the five years to 2021.) For comparison, the hydrocarbon sector's share of nominal GDP in 2022 stood at 44 percent in Qatar, 39 percent in Saudi Arabia and 30 percent in the UAE.

Third, between 2010 and 2022, total GDP grew at a compounded average rate of 1.8 percent per year in real terms, comprised of 2.5 percent per year for the non-oil sector and 1.3 percent per year for the oil sector. These structural features highlight the opportunity to press ahead with economic diversification to reduce the oil sector's share of GDP closer to the levels of Kuwait's GCC peers—something that can be achieved by boosting growth in the non-oil sector, which, at a trend rate of 2.5 percent in the past, is too low in our opinion. The government's ambitions to increase investment and expand the role of the private sector in the economy are critical in this regard.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 9, 2024



Australian actress Margot Robbie arrives for the 81st annual Golden Globe Awards at The Beverly Hilton hotel in Beverly Hills, California. — AFP photos



Billie Eilish



Hailee Steinfeld



America Ferrera

Stars glitter on Globes red carpet

Hollywood A-listers turned up in force Sunday on the red carpet at the Golden Globes, serving up killer looks to launch the showbiz awards season, after being out of sight for months during the industry's devastating strikes. Here are some of the best fashion moments at the gala, held at the Beverly Hilton hotel:

It's a Barbie world

"Barbie" star Margot Robbie, who channeled the iconic doll during the film's press tour, slayed



US actress Julianne Moore

again in vibrant pink—this time in a shimmering Armani gown and tulle wrap in the image of Superstar Barbie from 1977. Jennifer Lopez, who hosted a special screening of "Barbie" for Globes weekend, lit up the carpet in a rosy pink curve-hugging strapless gown with a full cape, its sleeves exploding in floral blossoms.

And presenter Hailee Steinfeld wowed in a soft pink Prada column gown with a train. But Robbie's co-stars and collaborators didn't all adopt the doll-inspired dress code. Director Greta Gerwig wore black silk and opera gloves, while America Ferrera, whose monologue is one of the film's defining moments, embraced the night's metallics trend in an embellished silver column gown.

Pop sensation Billie Eilish, who won the award for best original song along with her brother Finneas for their contribution to the "Barbie" soundtrack, embraced librarian chic, while fellow nominee Dua Lipa went for a sculptural black Schiaparelli gown.

Red carpet royalty

Jewel tones are always a red carpet winner, especially in the winter. Best female supporting actor winner Da'Vine Joy Randolph ("The Holdovers") stunned in a strapless burgundy Rodarte gown with a peplum and a scalloped sequined neckline. Helen Mirren, the narrator of "Barbie" and a nominee for her work in the "Yellowstone" prequel "1923," was all smiles in an amethyst floor-length gown and a matching coat with ruffled sleeves.

And several opted for take-no-prisoners red. Nominee Julianne Moore ("May December") went for understated glamour in a strapless red gown with a square neckline, while best TV comedy actress nominee Selena Gomez ("Only Murders in the Building") wore a halter gown with playful bodice cut-outs and black accents.

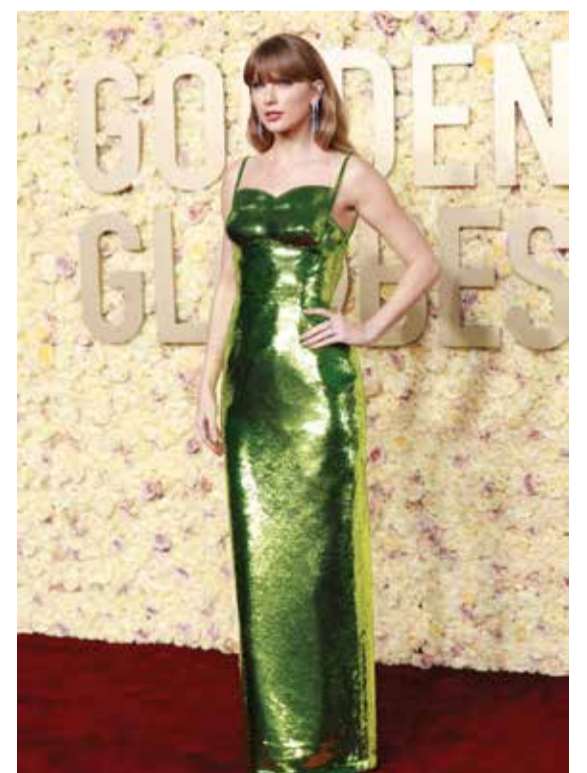
Irish actor Barry Keoghan, the star of "Saltburn," adopted the red trend in a Louis Vuitton jacket and trousers with contrasting tone-on-tone patterns. He also wore a brooch—a jewelry choice seen on other guests including nominee Colman Domingo ("Rustin") and musician/presenter Jon Batiste.



Dua Lipa



Selena Gomez



US singer-songwriter Taylor Swift



Colman Domingo



US-French actor Timothee Chalamet



Barry Keoghan



Helen Mirren



US actor Mark Ruffalo holds the award for Best Motion Picture - Musical or Comedy - "Poor Things". — AFP photos



Musicians Billie Eilish (right) and Finneas O'Connell pose with the award for Best Original Song - Motion Picture "What Was I Made For" from the movie "Barbie".



US actress Lily Gladstone poses with the award for Best Performance by a Female Actor in a Motion Picture - Drama for "Killers of the Flower Moon".

'Oppenheimer' tops Golden Globes on bittersweet night for 'Barbie'



Irish actor Cillian Murphy poses in the press room with the award for Best Performance by a Male Actor in a Motion Picture - Drama for "Oppenheimer".



US actor Paul Giamatti poses in the press room with the Best Performance by a Male Actor in a Motion Picture - Musical or Comedy award for "The Holdovers".

Oppenheimer," Christopher Nolan's drama about the inventor of the atomic bomb, topped the Golden Globes on Sunday—but its fellow summer smash hit "Barbie" missed out on best comedy film honors to "Poor Things." "Oppenheimer" took five prizes including best drama, best director for Nolan, best score, as well as acting trophies for Cillian Murphy and Robert Downey Jr.

Nolan told journalists backstage he was drawn to the "tragedy" of J. Robert Oppenheimer, a scientist who remained loyal to his country and never apologized for his actions, yet was "wracked by tremendous guilt." Emma Thomas, the film's producer and Nolan's wife, said his work about "one of the darkest developments in our history" was "unlike anything anyone else is doing."

Murphy, who plays the title character in the three-hour epic, hailed his "visionary director," while Downey Jr, portraying the protagonist's bitter rival, praised the movie as a "masterpiece." In winning best director, Nolan fended off Greta Gerwig, who helmed "Barbie"—the other half of the "Barbenheimer" phenomenon that grossed a combined \$2.4 billion last year at the box office.

Turning nostalgia for the beloved doll into a sharp satire about misogyny and female empowerment, "Barbie" was the leading film heading into the night with nine nominations, but ended the gala with just two prizes. It won the award for best song, for a tune written by Billie Eilish and her brother Finneas. And as the year's highest grossing movie, it claimed a newly created trophy for box office achievement.



(From left to right) English actor Matthew Macfayden poses with the award for Best Performance by a Male Actor in a Supporting Role on Television for "Succession", Australian actress Sarah Snook poses with the award for Best Performance by a Female Actor in a Television Series - Drama for "Succession" and US actor Kieran Culkin poses with the award for Best Performance by a Male Actor in a Television Series - Drama for "Succession".

"We would like to dedicate this to every single person on the planet who dressed up and went to the greatest place on Earth, the movie theaters," said Margot Robbie, the film's star and producer. "Thank you to all the Barbies and Kens in front of and behind the screen," added Gerwig.

But "Barbie" lost out on best comedy to "Poor Things"—a surreal, sexy bildungsroman which also earned Emma Stone best actress for her no-holds-barred turn as Bella Baxter. "Bella falls in love with life itself, rather than a person.

She accepts the good and the bad in equal measure, and that really made me look at life differently," said Stone.

'Changing your game'

After an annus horribilis in which the industry was crippled by strikes, A-listers turned out in force to celebrate Sunday. Stars who were unable to promote their movies during the month-long Screen Actors Guild (SAG-AFTRA) walkout made up for lost time on the Oscars campaign trail. Attendees also included big names from the world



(From left) Greek director Yorgos Lanthimos, US actress Emma Stone, US actor Willem Dafoe, US actor Mark Ruffalo and US actor Rami Youssef pose in the press room with the awards for Best Motion Picture - Musical or Comedy and Best Performance by a Female Actor in a Motion Picture - Drama for "Poor Things".



British director Christopher Nolan (left) and spouse British film producer Emma Thomas pose in the press room with the awards for Best Director - Motion Picture and Best Motion Picture - Drama for "Oppenheimer".



US actor Kieran Culkin poses with the award for Best Performance by a Male Actor in a Television Series - Drama for "Succession".



(From left) US actor Edwin Lee Gibson, US actress Abby Elliott, US actress Liza Colon-Zayas, US actor Jeremy Allen White, US actress Ayo Edebiri, US actor Ebon Moss-Bachrach, Canadian chef and actor Matty Matheson and US actor L-Boy, Winners of Best Television Series - Musical or Comedy "The Bear".



US actress Emma Stone poses with the award for Best Performance by a Female Actor in a Motion Picture - Musical or Comedy for "Poor Things".



French director Justine Triet poses with the awards for Best Screenplay - Motion Picture and Best Motion Picture — Non-English Language for "Anatomy of a Fall".



US actress Ali Wong poses with the award for Best Performance by a Female Actor in a Limited Series, Anthology Series or a Motion Picture Made for Television for "Beef" and US actor Steven Yeun poses with the award for Best Performance by a Male Actor in a Limited Series, Anthology Series or a Motion Picture Made for Television for "Beef".



US actor Robert Downey Jr poses in the press room with the award for Best Performance by a Male Actor in a Supporting Role in any Motion Picture for "Oppenheimer".

allegations of corruption and racism emerged in 2021, and the show was taken off air a year later. The controversial group of Los Angeles-based foreign journalists that created the Globes 80 years ago has since been disbanded, and a wider net of overseas critics was brought in to choose this year's winners. "Golden Globes journalists, thanks for changing your game," Downey Jr said in his acceptance speech.

'Historic'
The Globes provide a timely boost for the Oscars. Nominations voting for the Academy Awards begins Thursday, with the Oscars taking place this year on March 10. Indigenous actor Lily Gladstone won best actress in a drama for her role in Martin Scorsese's "Killers of the Flower Moon," delivering some of her emotional speech in the native language of the Blackfeet Nation. "This is an historic win, it doesn't belong to just me," she said. "This is for every little res kid."

Paul Giamatti and Da'Vine Joy Randolph bolstered their Oscars campaigns with wins for "The Holdovers," in which they starred as a curmudgeonly history teacher and cook of a 1970s prep school, respectively. Best screenplay and best non-English language film went to French courtroom drama "Anatomy of a Fall."

The film's director and co-writer Justine Triet told AFP it was "sort of unreal" to win two prizes, especially in the screenplay category, which included Scorsese, Nolan and Gerwig. Hayao Miyazaki's "The Boy and the Heron" won best animated film. The Globes also honored the best in television, just a week before the strike-delayed Emmys. "Succession" dominated, claiming best drama series, and acting wins for stars Kieran Culkin, Sarah Snook and Matthew Macfadyen. "The Bear" swept the comedy categories, while road-rage saga "Beef" did the same in limited series. Past Globes host Ricky Gervais, who did not attend, won best stand-up comedy performance, a new category. — AFP



Australian actress Elizabeth Debicki poses with the award for Best Performance by a Female Actor in a Supporting Role on Television for "The Crown".



US actress Ayo Edebiri poses with the award for Best Performance by a Female Actor in a Television Series - Musical or Comedy for "The Bear" with US actor Jeremy Allen White with the award for Best Performance by a Male Actor in a Television Series - Musical or Comedy for "The Bear".



US actress Da'Vine Joy Randolph poses with the award for Best Performance by a Female Actor in a Supporting Role in any Motion Picture for "The Holdovers".

Winners of the 81st Golden Globe Awards:

FILM

- **Best film, drama:** "Oppenheimer"
- **Best film, musical or comedy:** "Poor Things"
- **Best actor, drama:** Cillian Murphy, "Oppenheimer"
- **Best actress, drama:** Lily Gladstone, "Killers of the Flower Moon"
- **Best actor, musical or comedy:** Paul Giamatti, "The Holdovers"
- **Best female actor in a musical or comedy:** Emma Stone, "Poor Things"
- **Best male actor in a supporting role:** Robert Downey Jr, "Oppenheimer"
- **Best female actor in a supporting role:** Da'Vine Joy Randolph, "The Holdovers"
- **Best director:** Christopher Nolan, "Oppenheimer"
- **Best screenplay:** Justine Triet and Arthur Harari, "Anatomy of a Fall"
- **Best non-English language film:** "Anatomy of a Fall"
- **Best cinematic and box office achievement (new award):** "Barbie"
- **Best animated feature:** "The Boy and the Heron"
- **Best original score:** Ludwig Goransson, "Oppenheimer"
- **Best original song:** "What Was I Made For?" from "Barbie" -- music and lyrics by Billie Eilish and Finneas O'Connell

TELEVISION

- **Best drama series:** "Succession"
- **Best actor in a drama series:** Kieran Culkin, "Succession"
- **Best female actor in a drama series:** Sarah Snook, "Succession"
- **Best musical or comedy series:** "The Bear"
- **Best male actor in a musical or comedy:** Jeremy Allen White, "The Bear"
- **Best female actor in a musical or comedy:** Ayo Edebiri, "The Bear"
- **Best limited series or TV movie:** "Beef"
- **Best male actor in a limited series or TV movie:** Steven Yeun, "Beef"
- **Best female actor in a limited series or TV movie:** Ali Wong, "Beef"
- **Best female actor in a supporting role:** Elizabeth Debicki, "The Crown"
- **Best male actor in a supporting role:** Matthew Macfadyen, "Succession"
- **Best performance in stand-up comedy on television (new award):** Ricky Gervais, "Armageddon"

Sports

Krejcikova, Badosa crash out in Adelaide International first round

Marozsan beats weary Monfils to set up Shelton showdown

ADELAIDE: Former French Open champion Barbora Krejcikova and fifth seed Beatriz Haddad Maia were high-profile casualties on day one of the ATP-WTA Adelaide International on Monday, both crashing out to qualifiers.

Czech fourth seed Krejcikova was beaten by Russia's Anna Kalinskaya 7-5, 3-6, 7-5 while Brazil's Haddad Maia met the same fate at the hands of another Russian, Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova, losing 6-3, 6-4.

"It was a great match, she's a very good fighter," the 75th-ranked Kalinskaya said of Krejcikova, who was playing her first match of the season ahead of the Australian Open. "She made the match very complicated. I'm happy I won, I'm playing better tennis every day."

Kalinskaya, who needed nearly three hours to see off her opponent, now awaits the winner between American Claire Liu and Russian world number 15 Daria Kasatkina. The 59th-ranked Pavlyuchenkova, who lost to Krejcikova in the 2021 French Open final, advanced with 29 winners, breaking Haddad Maia three times.

"I tried to follow my game plan. She's a fighter and if you give her a chance to come back, she will," said Pavlyuchenkova. She will next play either big-serving Karolina Pliskova or 49th-ranked Katerina Siniakova. Former world number two Paula Badosa was also defeated on her comeback from injury, beaten 3-6, 6-2, 6-3 by American Bernarda Pera.

Spain's Badosa missed the second half of 2023 with a stress fracture of the back. Top seed Elena Rybakina, who beat reigning Australian Open champion Aryna Sabalenka to win the Brisbane International on Sunday, had a first-round bye.

Her round of 16 opponent will be Cristina Bucsa after the Spaniard defeated Italian Jasmine Paolini 6-3, 6-3. Rain played havoc at the WTA Hobart International, but top seed Elise Mertens safely went through, overcoming American Danielle Collins 6-2, 6-3.

Meanwhile, Fabian Marozsan held his nerve to beat veteran Gael Monfils in three sets on the opening day of the Auckland Classic on Monday and set up a clash with top seed Ben Shelton. Ahead of the Australian Open, the 61st-ranked Marozsan outlasted the 37-year-old Frenchman 6-4, 6-7 (6/8), 7-6 (7/4).

The 24-year-old Hungarian, who produced a stunning win over world number two Carlos Alcaraz last year in Rome, said: "I'm happy to beat Monfils, he's a great player. He was a top-10 player in the last 15 years so he has great experience." Monfils, spurred on by the crowd chanting his name, looked exhausted in the closing stages of the two-hour, 35-minute marathon as he leaned on either his racket or a sideline chair between points.

Marozsan will face world number 15 Shelton in round two. The American is coming off a first-round exit in Brisbane and will be keen to



BRISBANE: Russia's Anna Kalinskaya hits a return during the women's singles match. — AFP

get game time under his belt before heading to the first Grand Slam of the year starting on Sunday. In an upset, Botić van de Zandschulp

from the Netherlands defeated fifth seed Chris Eubanks, who struggled with a back injury, 7-6 (7/5), 6-2. — AFP

News in Brief

Hansen to miss Six Nations

LONDON: Ireland's Six Nations title defence suffered a blow on Monday when wing Mack Hansen was ruled out of the forthcoming tournament with a dislocated shoulder. Hansen is due to undergo surgery after sustaining the injury during Connacht's United Rugby Championship clash against Munster on New Year's Day. "Mack Hansen (shoulder) will undergo surgery today for a dislocated shoulder and is expected to be unavailable for three to four months," Connacht said in a statement. Hansen's injury is the latest setback for Ireland, coming just three days after veteran prop Dave Kilcoyne was sidelined for up to six months. Munster's Kilcoyne, 35, also suffered a shoulder injury that needed surgery. Six Nations champions Ireland kick off their campaign against France in Marseille on February 2. Hansen, 25, has developed into a key player for Ireland head coach Andy Farrell, scoring nine tries in 21 Tests since making his debut in February 2022. — AFP

Birmingham hire Mowbray

LONDON: Birmingham hired Tony Mowbray on Monday as their new manager to replace sacked Wayne Rooney. Former Sunderland and West Brom boss Mowbray agreed a two-and-a-half-year deal with the Championship strugglers. He is Birmingham's third manager this season after the dismissals of John Eustace and Rooney. "I am excited to be joining Birmingham at this time. I can't wait to get back on the training pitch and start working with this talented group of players," Mowbray said. "I know from personal experience how passionate Blues fans are, home and away, and I'm looking forward to having their full support for the team starting on Saturday at home to Swansea." Mowbray was sacked by Sunderland in December after 15 months in charge, despite guiding them to the play-offs last season. Former Manchester United and England star Rooney was axed by Birmingham after just 83 days in charge, having replaced Eustace in October. — AFP

Sunderland's dreams dashed

AL DUWADIMI: Two-time Dakar Rally motorcycle champion Sam Sunderland's dreams of a third crown evaporated on Monday as a mechanical problem ended his interest in this year's edition, organisers said. The 34-year-old, who was riding for the Spanish team GasGas, came to a juddering halt just 11 kilometres into the 400km special from Al-Duwadimi to Al-Salamiya. Sunderland, sixth overall after Sunday's second stage, gave up after waiting for more than three hours hoping a vehicle would bring him oil. Sunderland has a mixed record in the gruelling race, becoming the first Briton to win the title in 2017 and adding a second to his tally in 2022. However, he has also several retirements since his debut in 2012, notably both years after his two victories. The defence of his title last year ended on the first stage, a serious crash resulted in him fracturing a shoulder and concussion. Botswana's Ross Branch of the Hero team is the early overall leader in this year's motorbike category, ahead of Chile's Jose Ignacio Cornejo. — AFP

Falcons fire head coach

WASHINGTON: The Atlanta Falcons sacked head coach Arthur Smith after the NFL team's third straight losing season concluded with a 48-17 defeat to the New Orleans Saints on Sunday. Smith took charge in January of 2021 and they finished 7-10 in each of his three seasons, failing to make the playoffs in each. "Decisions like this are never easy and they never feel good," Falcons owner Arthur Blank said in a statement. "We have profound respect for coach Smith and appreciate all the hard work and dedication he has put into the Falcons over the last three years. He has been part of building a good culture in our football team, but the results on the field have not met our expectations." The team said the decision was made at a meeting between Blank and chief executive Rich McKay. — AFP



Abdullah Al-Hammadi (third right) with participants.

Shotgun referee courses commenced

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: As the Asian Shooting Championship, Kuwait 2024, approaches, the shotgun referee courses began on Sunday at Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Olympic Shooting Complex, with ISSF technical

Macron urges French to work out daily

PARIS: President Emmanuel Macron on Monday urged French people to start exercising daily as Paris prepares to host the Olympic and Paralympic Games this summer. Posting a video clip of himself on X, formerly Twitter, in a T-shirt, boxing gloves slung over his shoulder and with a punching bag in the background, the president urged his compatriots to work out 30 minutes a day, "and longer if you can".

Sports is beneficial "for health and for lots of other things, and it's also a way to make the Olympics part of our daily routine", Macron, 46, said. With 200 days remaining before the Games kick off on July 26, Macron said the government was promoting sports "as a great national cause" this year, including by boosting physical education instruction in schools.

The president said he hoped France would win "many medals" at the Games, and increasing numbers of amateurs would start working out. Macron

Sri Lanka dismiss Zimbabwe for 208

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka spinner Maheesh Theekshana returned figures of 4-31 to help bowl out Zimbabwe for 208 despite skipper Craig Ervine's 82 in the second one-day international on Monday. Zimbabwe elected to bat first in Colombo and looked good at 182-4, but were bowled out in 44.4 overs losing the last six wickets for just 26 runs.

The left-handed Ervine put on key partnerships including 67-run fifth-wicket stand with Ryan Burl, who made 31, but the batting fell apart after the captain's departure. Ervine was superbly caught by Sadeera Samarawickrama, who took a one handed catch diving to his right at extra cover off fast bowler Dushmantha Chameera.

Ervine survived a stumping chance as his opposite number Kusal Mendis couldn't collect the ball cleanly. He was on 29 at that point and went onto post his 20th half-century and the fifth as captain. Theekshana was ably supported by the bowlers as fellow spinner Jeffrey Vandersay, who made a remarkable comeback,

occasionally puts on boxing gloves in public and has been seen sparring with professional coaches or with his bodyguards.

Analysing his skills, specialist YouTube channel Boxe Attitude last year observed that "the president has a good job, fast and energetic", "good reflexes" and "doesn't give away the direction of a jab". Despite a "certain stiffness", he manifestly "trains regularly", Boxe Attitude said.

Officials in Macron's office said the government had already met the target it set in 2017 to have three million more people exercising regularly, and was now aiming for another three million by 2027. The Paris Summer Olympics run to August 11 and the Paralympic Games from August 28 to September 8. — AFP

inspection, yet the most important person in the range is the referee, and no one can change the result except him.

He said the Asian continent referees, particularly in the Gulf region are the elite, and they participated in many championships including international events and in the Olympics. He said we give the referees new regulations, and there are tests during the course, and to get the license the score must be 85 percent at least. The current course has 11 participants, 8 from Kuwait, 2 from UAE and one from Oman.

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COLOMBO: Zimbabwe's Ryan Burl is clean bowled by Sri Lanka's Dushmantha Chameera (not pictured) during the second one-day international (ODI) cricket match between Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe at the R. Premadasa Stadium in Colombo. — AFP

and Chameera took two wickets each. The first game between the teams on Saturday was washed out by rain and inclement weather could play spoilsport again. The final game is on Thursday. — AFP



Abdullah Al-Hammadi and Mohammad Al-Fahad.

Bangladesh cricket captain wins parliament seat

DHAKA: Bangladeshi cricket captain Shakib Al Hasan won a seat in the country's parliament Sunday after a landslide victory in a general election boycotted by the opposition, an official said. The 36-year all-rounder, who leads the country in all formats of the game, beats his rival by a margin of more than 150,000 votes in his constituency in the western town of Magura, the district's chief administrator Abu Naser Beg said.

"It was a landslide victory," he said. There is no immediate comment from the cricketer, a candidate of the ruling Awami League party of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who is herself widely expected to win a fifth term in power after the main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) boycotted the vote.

Shakib, speaking ahead of the election, conceded he was not facing any serious obstacle but told AFP the contest still made him anxious. "The competition and challenges are always there, be it a small team or big team," he said.

Shakib's campaign obliged him to take a temporary leave of absence from cricket. He has bristled at the suggestion he would not be able to balance his duties as a lawmaker and a cricket captain. "Did I retire?" he asked during campaigning. "If I haven't retired, then where does this question come from?"

Shakib is the only person to have been ranked the number-one all-rounder in all three formats simultaneously by the International Cricket Council. He was a teenager when he was recruited to the country's premier sports academy and just 19 at his international debut in 2006 as a batting all-rounder.

By the following year, he was already a star when he hit a fifty in a David-and-Goliath show against India in the World Cup—a victory still spoken of reverentially by Bangladeshi fans. He has also garnered a reputation for ill-discipline, with a rebellious streak that once saw him threaten a spectator with a bat, and that earned him a three-match ban after making a lewd gesture to a television crew. — AFP

Sports

'Sleeping giant' India awakening, says Stimac ahead of Asian Cup

Football has struggled to find its feet in cricket-obsessed nation

NEW DELHI: Igor Stimac says Indian football is "definitely out of its slumber" but the outspoken coach warned against big expectations at the Asian Cup starting on Friday in Qatar. Football has struggled to find its feet in the cricket-obsessed nation of 1.4 billion people, with former FIFA president Sepp Blatter once calling India "a sleeping giant" of the sport.

Former West Ham and Derby defender Stimac was appointed coach in May 2019 and India briefly broke into the top 100 of FIFA's world rankings for only the second time in nearly three decades. They are now 102nd, a spot below Kosovo, whose population is less than two million. "A giant is definitely out of its slumber now," declared Stimac, before cautioning: "But I reckon it will take us another four years to enter the top 10 in Asia."

Under the former Croatia international, India qualified for the Asian Cup with three wins from three against Hong Kong, Afghanistan and Cambodia, scoring eight times and conceding once. India's campaign starts on Saturday against 25th-ranked Australia and they have a mountain to climb in Qatar to get out of a group also containing Uzbekistan and Syria.

"We are far from being happy with the draw but it is what it is," the 56-year-old Stimac, part of the Croatia team that finished third at the 1998 World Cup, said in an email interview. "With a very short time for preparation it's difficult to expect great things, but my even greater concern are the injuries to some of our key players."

"Anyway, we are going to give our best and make it very difficult for our opponents." This will be India's fifth Asian Cup. They were runners-up in 1964 in a tournament that had only four teams, but apart from that they have never got out of the group phase. They have never reached the World Cup.

Fiery

Stimac's side lost 3-0 at home to reigning Asian champions Qatar in World Cup qualifying in November, underlining the task facing them in the coming weeks. They also suffered friendly defeats to Malaysia and Iraq, before beating Kuwait 1-0 away in World Cup qualifying.

Stimac blamed the Malaysia and Iraq losses on "terrible refereeing". "I hate talking about it but this area in Asian

football needs to improve a lot," says the Croat, who has a reputation for his straight talking.

Indian sports administrations are regularly embroiled in controversy and in 2022 Stimac threatened to quit unless there were "drastic" changes in the domestic game. "As a professional I have absolute freedom but I can work only with what I get from our decision-makers," he says. In September Stimac called a news report claiming he consulted an astrologer to pick his team "a disgrace" and again hinted his time as coach might be coming to an end.

Role model Chhetri

Stimac says more than 20 youngsters have been brought into the squad during his reign "and our supporters are finally enjoying some exciting football watching their national team". But it is an indication of the limitations of his squad that skipper Sunil Chhetri, at 39, remains India's biggest star. Chhetri has plundered 93 international goals, putting him among the likes of Cristiano Ronaldo (128) and Lionel Messi (106) on the all-time list.

Stimac says the forward can bow



HANGZHOU: (FILES) India's football coach Igor Stimac gestures during the men's round of 16 football match between India and Saudi Arabia in the 2022 Asian Games at Huanglong Sports Centre Stadium in Hangzhou in China's eastern Zhejiang province. — AFP

out at a time of his choosing. "We are not putting any pressure on him whatsoever," said Stimac. "That's up to him." "If he keeps enjoying his game with the same hunger and maintaining such bril-

liant fitness levels then we are there for him as long as it takes," he added. "He is a proper role model for many Indian kids dreaming about becoming football players." — AFP

De Bruyne 'nowhere near' his best after Man City return

LONDON: Kevin De Bruyne admits he is "nowhere near" his best yet after the Manchester City midfielder made his return from a five-month injury absence. De Bruyne came off the bench in the second half of City's 5-0 win against Huddersfield in the FA Cup third round on Sunday.

Playing for the first time since the opening day of the Premier League season against Burnley in August, the Belgium star was given the last 33 minutes and was quickly back in the old routine as he set up City's fifth goal for Jeremy Doku. De Bruyne had hamstring surgery after aggravating a problem that had affected him in the latter stages of last season's treble-winning campaign.

Although he is back to fitness, De Bruyne said he needs time to get up to full speed. "I worked hard and I'm happy to be back. I felt good so I'm pleased about that but I'm still nowhere near where I need to be," he said. "It's a good continuation of the process of the last few weeks. I feel

good, the movements were good, I felt comfortable in what I was doing and that was the only thing I was really looking for.

"To get that ovation after being away for five months gives you more of a boost. There will be moments I want to play every game but I know in the back of my mind I need to take care of myself. "It's good being January where we have fewer games. I don't expect to be playing too many games and Newcastle next week is a big game so I'll expect to be back on the bench."

De Bruyne was greeted like a returning hero by City fans at the Etihad Stadium on Sunday. In his absence, City have been short of their best for much of the campaign. With De Bruyne back in the fold, they will be expected to step up their bid for an unprecedented fourth successive Premier League title, as well as challenging to retain the Champions League and FA Cup.

While the injury was a blow for De Bruyne, he believes the revitalising rest may be a long-term boost given his



MANCHESTER: Manchester City's Portuguese defender #03 Ruben Dias (L) passes the captain's armband to Manchester City's Belgian midfielder #17 Kevin De Bruyne (R) during the English FA Cup third round football match between Manchester City and Huddersfield Town at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester. — AFP

heavy schedule for club and country in recent years. "To be honest I enjoyed it in a way. At the beginning it was a big blow but I knew I was going to be out for four or five months," he said.

"So after the first reaction I thought to myself I needed to work hard when

I'm working, but then I could enjoy the things that I've not been able to do with my family and friends. "Maybe it was good to refresh a little bit. It's not like I needed a break but I took it, to turn a disadvantage into an advantage." — AFP

Ivory Coast team to beat, says Belmadi

ABIDJAN: Africa Cup of Nations-winning coach Djamel Belmadi of Algeria says hosts Ivory Coast are the team to beat at the 2024 tournament, which kicks off on Saturday. Host nations have often struggled to turn home advantage into success with only 11 of the previous 33 AFCONs won by the home side.

But 2019 winning coach Belmadi believes the Ivorian Elephants can go all the way and win the flagship African football tournament a third time after triumphs in 1992 and 2015. "Hosts and two-time champions Ivory Coast are the team to beat at this tournament as they possess a very strong squad," he told reporters.

Belmadi brushed aside suggestions that Algeria are also strong challengers, saying "we are not among the favourites". The 47-year-old France-born coach guided the Desert Foxes to victory over Senegal in the 2019 final, but they were shock first round casualties when defending the title two years ago.

Here, AFP Sport covers the views of 10 of the 24 coaches who will be seeking glory in a tournament that reaches its climax on February 11 with the final in Abidjan.

Collin Benjamin (Namibia)

"My team are fit, aggressive and set out in every match to make things as difficult as possible for opponents. "Our first goal is obvious—to become the first team from Namibia to win a match at the Cup of Nations after nine failed attempts."

Djamel Belmadi (Algeria)

"(Apart from the Ivory Coast) Egypt, Morocco, Nigeria, Senegal and Tunisia are other strong contenders. As for Algeria, we are not among the favourites. "We are reminded of our elimination after the first round of the last edition, followed by our failure to qualify for the 2022 World Cup."

Sebastien Desabre (DR Congo)

"I am hoping we can at least reach the quarter-finals, which will be a major step forward after failing to qualify for the last tournament. "Morocco, who we face in the first round, gave African football a huge boost by reaching the 2022 World Cup semi-finals and must be favourites to lift the trophy."

Kaba Diawara (Guinea)

"Being drawn with Cameroon, the Gambia and defending champions Senegal means we are in the toughest first round group. "However, this is not a cause for despondency. Facing such formidable opponents will motivate us to exceed expectations. No one will look forward to facing us."

Jean-Louis Gasset (Ivory Coast)

"We will enjoy the support of the entire Ivory Coast nation, which is an incredible asset to have. "Facing Nigeria, who possesses a vast array of attacking talent, is a huge challenge in the first round and really excites us."

Chris Hughton (Ghana)

"I am aware of the disappointment of the last Cup of Nations tournament for Ghana, who were eliminated after the first round following a shock loss to the Comoros. "However, we are looking

forward, not back, and our first ambition in the Ivory Coast is to get past the first round."

Jose Peseiro (Nigeria)

"If you want to win the Cup of Nations the first thing to do is accept the group draw. All our opponents (Equatorial Guinea, Ivory Coast, Guinea-Bissau) are dangerous. "I believe we are a stronger team than Guinea-Bissau, but that did not stop them beating us in a qualifier in Nigeria."

Walid Regragui (Morocco)

"Since we created history by becoming the first African or Arab country to reach the World Cup semi-finals in Qatar two years ago, many African national teams have progressed. "I am thinking of nations like Algeria, Egypt, Ivory Coast and Nigeria. I consider them to be among the Cup of Nations favourites."

Tom Saintfiet (Gambia)

"Gambians have been wishing for a meeting with our neighbours and African champions Senegal for a long time and now the dream has come through. "We must also face Cameroon, the second most successful country in the Cup of Nations, and Guinea will be desperate for revenge after losing to us two years ago."

Rui Vitoria (Egypt)

"I am extremely conscious of the tremendous Cup of Nations record of Egypt, who have reached nine finals and won seven. "Both final losses came in the past seven years so there are millions of Egyptians who want nothing less than outright victory this time. For us, each match is a final." — AFP

Packers, Buccaneers into NFL playoffs

MIAMI: The Green Bay Packers, four-times Super Bowl winners, grabbed a place in the NFL playoffs on the final day of the regular season after a 17-9 victory over the Chicago Bears on Sunday. The Packers' win over their division rivals secured them the last available wildcard spot in the NFC while in the AFC, the Tampa Bay Buccaneers ground out victory over the Carolina Panthers to book their place in the postseason.

Packers quarterback Jordan Love, in his first full season as a starter after replacing superstar Aaron Rodgers, found Dontayvion Wicks with a 12-yard pass in the third quarter to put the Packers 14-6 up. The Bears could only manage a fourth quarter field goal in response and then Anders Carlson calmed any nerves at Lambeau Field with a 25-yard field goal to secure the win.

The Packers claimed the seventh seed and will travel to face the second-seeded Dallas Cowboys in wildcard weekend, a classic match-up of two of the league's historic franchises. Dallas took care of business, winning the NFC East with a 38-10 win over the Washington Commanders.

Cowboys quarterback Dak Prescott threw for 279 yards and four touchdowns as Dallas ended with a 12-5 record for the third straight season under head coach Mike McCarthy. The Los Angeles Rams, who beat the San Francisco 49ers 21-20, booked a meeting with the Lions in Detroit, a game which curiously pits both teams' quarterbacks against their former clubs.

The Rams took Matthew Stafford from the Lions in 2021 and sent Jared Goff to Detroit as part of the trade. The 49ers, who had already secured the top seed and a first-round bye in the NFC, rested starting quarterback Brock Purdy and the Rams also kept Stafford out of action.

Eagles stumble again

Stafford's back-up, Carson Wentz won the game with a 12-yard rush with 4:56 left in the fourth quarter. The Lions, already qualified for the playoffs, claimed the third seed with a 30-20 win over the Minnesota Vikings.

The other NFC wildcard game will see Tampa Bay host the Philadelphia Eagles after three field goals from Chase McLaughlin sealed a 9-0 win for Tampa Bay in Charlotte. The win ensured the 2021 Super Bowl champions advance to the postseason as NFC South division winners — their third straight crown. The Eagles lost 27-10 at the New York Giants, the fifth defeat in their last six games for last season's Super Bowl runners-up. As the Bucs celebrated, the Jacksonville Jaguars were eliminated after a 28-20 defeat to Tennessee in Nashville that completed a miserable late season collapse. — AFP

Classifieds

Clinics & Hospitals

Clinics

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

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

Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401
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-Fazi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9

Change of Name

I, JOSHI BABU KATIKA, Holder of Indian Passport No. M5451781 Having Permanent Address 4 18 Po Polamuru Penumantra, West Godavari, 534238, Andhra Pradesh, India Residing In Kuwait At Present, Hereby Declare That Henceforth My Name Will Be Read As Under: Given Name KISHOR KUMAR And Surname KATIKA.



LONDON: Liverpool's English midfielder #17 Curtis Jones (C) vies with Arsenal's English midfielder #41 Declan Rice (L) and Arsenal's English defender #04 Ben White (2R) during the English FA Cup third round football match between Arsenal and Liverpool at the Emirates Stadium in London. — AFP

'Super proud' Klopp hails Liverpool spirit after FA Cup win at Arsenal

Liverpool are two points ahead of second placed Aston Villa

LONDON: Jurgen Klopp saluted Liverpool's fighting spirit as they kept fired-up Arsenal at bay to seal a 2-0 win in the FA Cup third round on Sunday. Klopp's side had to survive a sustained Arsenal assault at the Emirates Stadium before two goals in the closing stages gave them a hard-fought success. Arsenal's Jakub Kiwior headed Trent Alexander-Arnold's free-kick into his own net in the 80th minute and Luis Diaz wrapped up the victory deep into stoppage-time. In the absence of the ill Virgil van Dijk, as well as Mohamed Salah and Wataru Endo on international duty, Liverpool showed they have the character required to win silverware this season.

"In the end we came through. I'm really happy we could win this game. Arsenal could have won it without a doubt. We finished it off and it spoke for the character

of the boys," Klopp said. "I'm super proud. It was a super difficult draw. Maybe the most difficult we could have got. "It wasn't an easy game to enjoy in the first half. We changed a bit at half-time. "We were really in the game in the second half. We scored the goals and fought for 95 minutes." With Premier League leaders Liverpool chasing four trophies and facing a League Cup semi-final first leg against Fulham in midweek, Klopp was relieved to avoid a draining FA Cup replay. Liverpool are two points ahead of second placed Aston Villa and five above fourth placed Arsenal as they chase a first title since 2020.

Revitalizing break

By avoiding an Arsenal rematch, Liverpool will have a revitalizing break after the Fulham game until January

21 when they go to Bournemouth in the Premier League. "We desperately wanted to avoid a draw. Now I don't have to make any decisions which is good," Klopp said.

"Wednesday is the next game and then a few days off. We have to make steps if you want to be where we are. We will have a winter break now."

Klopp saluted the influence of England defender Alexander-Arnold, who kept driving Liverpool forward in the second half. "What a game he played by the way in all the positions he played. You see his class on the ball," the German said.

Arsenal have now won just one of their last six games in all competitions, losing three in a row to leave their once-promising season in limbo. Mikel Arteta's side are out of the FA Cup and League Cup and are no longer in

pole position in the Premier League.

Arteta admitted they had only themselves to blame after squandering a host of chances to take the lead. "The performance was there and the amount of chances too. We just have to win the game, but we lost it and we are not capitalizing," he said.

"When you are better than the best team in Europe and you generate that amount of chances, I have not seen a team do it against them. "But it is not enough. The reality is, it is not enough." Arteta insisted he would not panic despite Arsenal's untimely slump.

"When my team plays with this confidence what can I do? I am still behind them 100 percent," he said.

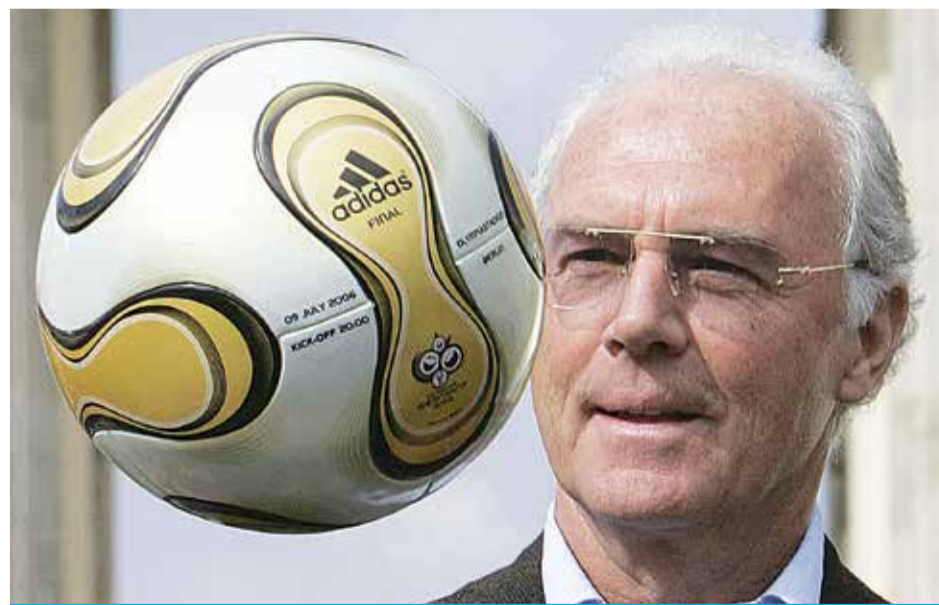
"It is what it is and we have to continue to play the same way and be more efficient." — AFP

German football legend Beckenbauer dies at 78

PARIS: Franz Beckenbauer, an iconic German player and later coach with a knack for leading his teams to greatness, has died at the age of 78. Beckenbauer, one of only three men to win the World Cup as player and as a coach, was known as the Kaiser, a title that fitted both his stylish and assured playing style and his natural leadership. "He was so elegant he wasn't really German," Karl-Heinz Rummenigge, a team-mate and later fellow administrator at Bayern Munich, said in a profile on the Bundesliga's official website. "He just oozed class and quality."

Beckenbauer helped establish Bayern as Germany's strongest club. At international level, he played a key role as Germany became a football powerhouse. Yet his final triumph, leading Germany's successful organisation of the 2006 World Cup, ultimately cast a shadow over his legacy, when he was implicated in possible corruption in securing the hosting rights. Beckenbauer was born in derelict Munich in 1945, four months after the end of the Second World War. "When I look at my life, I must have been born under a lucky star," he said looking back.

He was a childhood fan of Bayern's local rivals, but after an 1860 Munich player slapped him in a youth tournament, he made the fateful decision to switch loyalties. "It wasn't the hand of God but a slap from an 1860 player," he said later. While 1860 were selected as founder members of the Bundesliga in 1963, cash-strapped Bayern relied on youth to es-



Franz Beckenbauer

cape the regional leagues. Beckenbauer made a scoring debut at 18 as an outside left in June 1963 in the promotion play-offs as Bayern narrowly missed out. He became a regular a month into the next season, scoring 16 goals as they cruised to promotion.

'I won the World Cup'

By 1966 he was in the West German midfield as they lost the World Cup final 4-2 to hosts England. "I was told to mark what was then the best player: Bobby Charlton. Bobby told me later that (England manager) Alf Ramsey had told him to keep an eye on this young, good-looking German guy," he said. "England beat us because Bobby Charlton was just a little bit better than me." As teams switched

from a back three to a back four, Beckenbauer dropped into central defense but revolutionized the position. He developed the role of "libero", sauntering forward to support the attack. With a relaxed swing of either boot, he could shoot from range with power, accuracy and swerve.

Beckenbauer took his revenge on England in Mexico in 1970, scoring the first goal as West Germany came from 2-0 down to beat the holders 3-2 in the quarter-finals. In the semis against Italy, Beckenbauer dislocated his shoulder after West Germany had used their two permitted substitutes. He played in a sling as his team lost 4-3 in extra time in an all-time World Cup classic. — AFP

Lakers snap skid with win over Clippers

LOS ANGELES: The Los Angeles Lakers snapped their four-game NBA losing streak on Sunday, clawing out a 106-103 victory in a cross-town tussle with the LA Clippers—one of the hottest teams in the league. LeBron James scored 25 points, Anthony Davis added 22 and 10 rebounds and the Lakers got a big lift from their reserves, including 13 points from D'Angelo Russell.

The Lakers seized the first double-digit lead of the contest on Russell's three-pointer early in the fourth quarter. The Clippers, taking advantage of a spate of Lakers turnovers, pulled level on three free throws from Norman Powell with 2:19 remaining.

Taurean Prince drained a three-pointer to put the Lakers back up for good, Powell missing a potential game-tying three-pointer in the final second. Paul George and Ivica Zubac scored 22 points apiece for the Clippers, who were riding a five-game winning streak and came into the contest with the best record in the league since December 1.

"We still slipped in some detail things," James said. "If we could continue to get better with our details we could be a really good team. "Tonight was a good step in the right direction." Elsewhere, Kyrie Irving scored 35 points and Luka Doncic added 34 as the Dallas Mavericks thwarted a Minnesota rally to beat the Western Conference leading Timberwolves 115-108.

The Timberwolves, owners of the second-best record in the league, trailed

by nine going into the fourth quarter but took a 106-100 lead on an Anthony Edwards basket with 3:53 to play. Mavs coach Jason Kidd called being down by six "a great test of character and trust" and Dallas passed it with flying colors. The Mavs responded with a 13-0 scoring run. Irving drained a three-pointer to tie it at 106-106, then poked the ball away from Rudy Gobert for a steal and delivered another three-pointer from the corner and the Mavs held on for the win. "I was just letting him cook," Doncic said of Irving. "When he stays aggressive he's an amazing player." Other tight finishes included overtime victories for Portland and Orlando, and Cleveland's 117-115 victory over San Antonio.

There were blowout wins for the New Orleans Pelicans and the Toronto Raptors, who took full advantage of an off-night for Stephen Curry in a victory over the Golden State Warriors. RJ Barrett scored a season-high 37 points for the Raptors, who led wire-to-wire in a 133-118 victory over the Warriors in San Francisco.

Warriors' star Curry made just two of his 14 shots from the field, missing all nine of his three-point attempts on the way to nine points. Klay Thompson scored 25 points for Golden State, whose best news on the day was the appearance of Draymond Green at the pre-game walkthrough as he prepares to return from an NBA suspension that lasted 12 games.

New Orleans' CJ McCollum scored 30 points to lead seven Pelicans players in double figures in a 133-100 rout of the Kings in Sacramento. The Pelicans pushed their lead to as many as 50 points in the fourth quarter, both teams resting their starters for most or all of the final period. — AFP