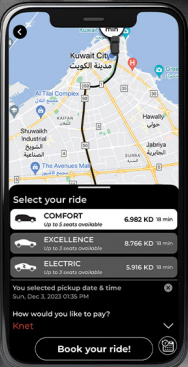



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5

US re-designates Yemen's Houthis as 'terrorist' entity



5

King Charles, Kate postpone appearances over health woes



11

After fleeing war, Sudanese artists recreate scene in Cairo



16

Djokovic survives test but Jabeur, Wozniacki derailed at Aussie Open




Amir calls on new Cabinet to adopt 'open door' policy

New technocrat govt formed • Amir bestows His Highness title on PM



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah poses for a group photo with HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah and Cabinet members after they were sworn in at Bayan Palace on Jan 17, 2024. — KUNA

US envoy lauds humanitarian role of KRCS globally



KUWAIT: US Ambassador to Kuwait Karen Sasahara (left) and Kuwait Red Crescent Society Chairman Dr Hilal Al-Sayer (second left) are seen during the US envoy's visit to KRCS on Jan 17, 2024. — KUNA

KUWAIT: US Ambassador to Kuwait Karen Hideko Sasahara lauded on Wednesday the strong humanitarian role played by the Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) throughout the world. Speaking to KUNA after meeting KRCS Chairman Dr Hilal Al-Sayer, Sasahara also commended the charitable efforts of the society, supported by the leadership, government and people of Kuwait.

She indicated she was informed during her visit to KRCS headquarters about the humanitarian program executed currently in the region and the world, reiterating on this occasion the swift action carried out by the society in helping others to overcome catastrophes and hardships.

Continued on Page 6

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: An Amiri decree was issued on Wednesday announcing the new Cabinet line-up which included 11 new faces and retained only three members of the outgoing government, appointing a non-ruling family foreign minister for the first time in Kuwait's history. HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah swore in the 14-member Cabinet headed by new Prime Minister HH Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, who served as foreign minister for a decade until 2011.

Almost all the ministers are technocrats with half of them holding doctorate degrees in their field and others are long-serving government bureaucrats. And for the first time in Kuwait's 60-year-old parliamentary democracy, Abdullah Al-Yahya, a non-ruling family member, was appointed as foreign minister. He is a former ambassador. This post has always been given to senior members of the Al-Sabah family. A few years ago, Anas Al-Saleh, also a non-ruling family member, was appointed as interior minister for the first time ever.

Pak recalls envoy after Iran strike kills 2 children

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan recalled its ambassador from Iran Wednesday and blocked Tehran's envoy from returning to Islamabad after an Iranian air strike killed two children in the west of the country a day earlier. Iranian news agency Mehrnews said the "missile and drone" attack targeted the Jaish al-Adl group's headquarters in Pakistan, calling it "another

Zionists step up Gaza raids, kill 10 in West Bank

GAZA: The Zionist entity stepped up strikes Wednesday on war-torn Gaza's south, where medicines were expected to be delivered for hostages in exchange for humanitarian aid under a newly brokered deal. But nearly 24 hours after the deal was announced, a top Hamas official set new conditions for providing the drugs, insisting

decisive step taken by Iran in response to the aggression against the security of our country".

The raid came late on Tuesday after Tehran also launched attacks in Iraq and Syria against what it called "anti-Iranian terrorist groups". Pakistan denounced the strike, near the nations' shared border. "Last night's unprovoked and blatant breach of Pakistan's sovereignty by Iran is a violation of international law and the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations," spokeswoman Mumtaz Zahra Baloch said in a statement on Wednesday.

The foreign ministry recalled its ambassador from Tehran and said Iran's envoy — currently on a visit home— would not be allowed to return to Islamabad.

After the swearing-in ceremony, HH the Amir called on the new Cabinet to adopt an "open door" policy with people, strengthen the fight against corruption and adopt accountability against all those who commit mistakes. HH the Amir also called on the Cabinet to comply with the constitution, apply the law, safeguard the country's security and adopt justice and equality. He also called

for adopting the banner of reforms and development, based on action, monitoring and accountability. HH Sheikh Mishal urged the government to cooperate with the National Assembly.

HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad said a new economic course will be adopted and will be based on fighting corruption, safeguarding national gains, restructuring government agencies and reforming education and health services. He said the country is entering a new era, and vowed that he and his team will work hard to serve national interests.

HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal also signed an order Wednesday bestowing the title "His Highness" upon Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad. The order reads that the prime minister shall inform the National Assembly about this decree, which would

Continued on Page 6

abad. Tehran's top diplomat insisted his country's armed forces had targeted "Iranian terrorist group" Jaish al-Adl in Pakistan. "None of the nationals of the friendly and brotherly country of Pakistan were targeted by Iranian missiles and drones," Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

Formed in 2012, Jaish al-Adl is blacklisted by Iran as a terrorist group and has carried out several attacks on Iranian soil in recent years. The Iranian foreign ministry said Amir-Abdollahian spoke with his Pakistani counterpart Jalil Abbas Jilani on Wednesday, stressing that "Pakistan's sovereignty and territorial integrity are of great concern".

Continued on Page 6



GAZA: The father of Masa Shoman carries the body of his daughter who was killed in Zionist bombardment during her funeral in Rafah on Jan 17, 2024. — AFP

Local

Amir: Govt has many important files to attend, honor citizens' aspirations

Govt needs to address challenges, meet goals: PM Sheikh Mohammad



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah delivers the speech.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah administers the oath of office to His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah. — KUNA photos

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah said Wednesday the new government should, among other matters, focus on many files like appointment of executive officials, equality in appointments, diversifying income, protecting public funds and boosting Kuwait's foreign policy. His Highness the Amir also instructed the ministers to abide by the constitution, apply the law on all, boost national security, fight corruption and nepotism as well as promote justice and equality in all ministries and institutions.

"There are many files that require attention and planning," he said. The most important files, he added, were "appointment of top officials with expertise and proficiency, taking care of youth and women, considering equality of appointment opportunities, economy, investment and diversifying income and financial sustainability, boosting private sector role, protecting public funds, accelerating execution of vital and development projects, digital transformation to achieve transparency and eradicate nepotism, and boost foreign policy and State of Kuwait's role and positions towards brotherly and friendly countries, and their common causes."

His Highness the Amir said: "you have to do your utmost best, place interest of the nation above anything else, abide by the constitution, apply the law on all and without exception, promote national security, provide security for citizens and residents, fight corruption and nepotism and boost justice and equality in all State ministries and institutions." He told the new ministries to set their priorities and unite their efforts within an action plan with specific objectives and timetable, and to seek assistance of experts to "reach the right decisions which will have desired objectives."

His Highness the Amir urged the ministers to follow "the open door" policy, communicate with the public and be in the field, activate your media tools, address obstacles facing citizens to meet their needs in accordance with the law and regulations. This, he added, would ultimately improve public services offered by state authorities like education, health and housing.

His Highness the Amir said the government's achievements would result in confidence of the people which will "contribute to overcoming obstacles and facing challenges, the foundation stone to achieve the objectives." He said the government should strengthen cooperation with the legislative authority, which aimed at developing the nation and meeting citizens' aspirations while considering social justice. "The two authorities, legislative and executive, should abide by the constitution which governs relationship between them," he said.

Challenges

In his address to His Highness the Amir, His Highness the Prime Minister Dr Sheikh Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah affirmed that the task given by the Kuwaiti leadership was of utter importance, vowing to honor the trust given to him during this crucial period in the history of Kuwait.

There are challenges and goals that should be addressed by the current government with all due diligence, increasing efforts to achieve the dreams and aspiration of the people of Kuwait, His Highness Dr Sheikh Mohammad said.



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah.



Minister of Public Works and Minister of State for Municipality Affairs Dr Noura Mohammed Khaled Al-Meshaan.

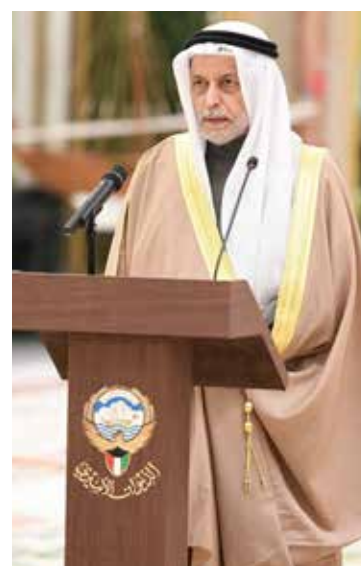
He reiterated the fact that the government knew the huge national responsibility that lies ahead, saying that under the guidance of His Highness the Amir, the government would do its utmost to honor the goals of the new era, focusing on reforms, opening the economy, and improving the atmosphere of work at national institutions.

He went on to say that the government would combat corruption, protect national achievements, and reinforce the identity of the country's new economy via restructuring and reform of government institutes at all levels. His Highness the Prime Minister stressed that efforts would be made to expedite the wheels of development and progress, eliminating all aspects that would hinder such vision.

He affirmed that the government would work with the National Assembly, knowing the fact that Members of Parliament were partners in development and protection of national aspiration in accordance with the constitution. His Highness the Prime Minister expressed gratitude to His Highness the Amir for his trust and affirmed that the cabinet would be working relentlessly to serve Kuwait and its people. — KUNA



Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Acting Minister of Interior Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah.



Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Oil Dr Emad Mohammad Abdulaziz Al-Atiqi.



Minister of Information and Culture Abdulrahman Baddah Abdul Rahman Al-Mutairi.



Minister of Health Dr Ahmad Abdel-Wahab Ahmed Al-Awadhi.



Sheikh Feras Saud Al-Malik Al-Sabah, Minister of Social Affairs, Family and Childhood Affairs and Acting Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs.



Dr Anwar Ali Abdullah Al-Mudhaf, Minister of Finance and Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Investment.



Dr Salem Falah Mubarak Al-Hajraf, Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy and Minister of State for Housing Affairs.



Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs, Minister of State for Youth Affairs, and Minister of State for Communications Affairs Dawood Suleiman Abdul Rasoul Maarafi.



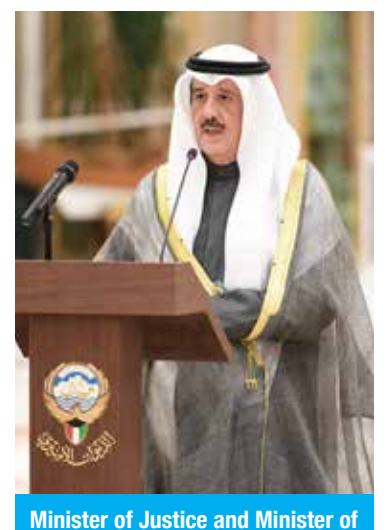
Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research Dr Adel Mohammad Abdullah Al-Adwani.



Minister of Commerce and Industry Abdullah Hamad Abdullah Al-Jouan.



Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Ali Abdullah Al-Yahya.



Minister of Justice and Minister of Endowments and Islamic Affairs Faisal Saeed Nafel Al-Ghareeb.

Local

Community participation crucial to manage waste, protect ecosystem

Forum on development and sustainable projects addresses sustainable development issues



A group photo of participants.



Booth of the Ministry of Interior on the sidelines of the forum.



Kuwait Ports Authority booth.

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: With the aim of encouraging governmental and private sectors to safeguard the environment, promote sustainable development and move toward using green hydrogen, the Second Gulf Forum for Development and Sustainable Projects Management was held on Wednesday.

Undersecretary of the Ministry of Electricity and Water Maha Al-Asousi affirmed the tremendous technological progress in all fields has led to an increase in waste rates and an increase in the problem of environmental pollution, which most countries in the world suffer from, especially Arab countries.

"One of the most prominent dangers of this phenomenon is that it causes the spread of diseases and disruption in the ecosystem, and the subsequent climate change and spread of desertification and global warming, which calls for the need to work on developing the waste management system, raising the level of awareness, highlighting the latest methods in waste management, energy production and recyclable materials, supporting the idea of community participation to preserve the environment and encouraging investment in the field of renewable energy and clean water," she said.

Asousi indicated that Kuwait is keen to achieve sustainable development and address waste management, highlighting the focus extends to recycling waste, minimizing its quantities and promoting reuse, all while spearheading initiatives to generate energy and establish green smart cities. The pursuit of these objectives aligns seamlessly with the overarching strategy of Kuwait, reflecting a collective vision for a new Kuwait.

"The forum serves as a platform to discuss and advance these critical aspects, emphasizing the importance of quality work outcomes and the implementation of a comprehensive risk and safety management system, thus reinforcing Kuwait's dedication to a sustainable and environmentally conscious future," Asousi noted.

She stated the forum also aims to find the best solutions and technologies aimed at the impacts resulting from population growth and urban and economic development witnessed by Kuwait and the Gulf countries, as the recycling process contributes to safeguarding the environment, reducing levels of pollution, preserving resources and energy and reducing consumption, as well as raising the quality of work, reducing risks and maintaining occupational safety.

"Our hope is firmly rooted in the belief that this

forum, along with the accompanying events, will yield the desired benefits. The lectures, delivered by a diverse group of scholars and both local and international experts, are anticipated to be a source of valuable insights and knowledge. With optimism, we look forward to the positive impact these discussions and presentations will have, fostering a wealth of understanding and contributing to the collective wisdom of those engaged in this forum," Asousi said.

Over the two-day event, local, regional and international experts and speakers will discuss sustainable development. More than 20 speakers will participate, in addition to seven diverse discussion panels, during which new technology in waste management and treatment and modern laws in waste management and recycling in the country will be discussed.



Maha Al-Asousi

KIPIC, KPC provide low-sulfur fuel oil for power stations

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Integrated Petroleum Industries Company (KIPIC) announced its success, in cooperation with the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation, in providing a constant, stable and safe supply of low-sulfur fuel oil. Low-sulfur fuel oil is available in all stations of the ministry of Electricity and Water which contributes to strengthening the ministry's efforts in the comprehensive transition to clean energy sources.

The official spokesman for KIPIC Abdullah Al-Ajmi said in a press statement on Wednesday that this achievement is the result of joint efforts between the company the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation and the Ministry of Electricity and Water. Al-Ajmi stressed that the complete switch to low-sulfur fuel oil effectively

contributes to preserving the environment, reducing environmental impact, and improving air quality in Kuwait.

He stated that the use of low-sulfur fuel is a major strategy for reducing sulfur emissions into atmosphere and addressing concerns related to air pollution. This will support global efforts to combat climate change. He pointed out that this transformation confirms Kuwait's commitment to adopting sustainable and environmentally friendly practices in its energy sector, pointing out that the cooperation between KIPIC and the KPC supports the strategy of the ministry of Electricity and Water towards producing more environmentally-friendly energy and achieving national self-sufficiency. — KUNA



Abdullah Al-Ajmi



The Kuwait Integrated Petroleum Industries Company facility. — KUNA

Municipality removes 330 tons of farm waste in Wafra

KUWAIT: Kuwait Municipality removed about 330 tons of agricultural waste using cleaning equipment and mechanisms in Ahmadi governorate during a wide cleaning campaign in Wafra Agriculture area. The Municipality also took action against the violators. Acting director of the Ahmadi Municipality branch and the director of the Public Hygiene and Road Works Department at the municipality branch, Nawaf Al-Mutairi, said after the campaign on Wednesday that 10 neglected cars and eight trucks were also lifted and nine road occupancy citations were also issued during the campaign.

Al-Mutairi added that the aim of the intensive field inspection campaigns is to monitor negative manifestations and take all legal measures against violators.

"The supervisory team of the Ahmadi Municipality pays great attention to raising the level of cleanliness in the areas under its responsibility, as well as removing everything that distorts the aesthetic view and works to occupy the road in all areas through field tours to preserve the civilized appearance of the governorate," he pointed.

He indicated that field campaigns will continue and the distribution of awareness posters by the supervisory team of the department of Public Hygiene and Road Works throughout the month of January, stressing "there is no complacency in taking all legal measures against violators of the public hygiene and road occupancy regulations."

He explained that the campaign launched by the public relations department in the Municipality aims to spread community awareness by distributing posters in foreign languages targeting Indian, Filipino and English-speaking communities to educate them about the



The Municipality clears waste in Wafra area.

dates of removing garbage and sealing waste bags and placing them inside containers.

"Today's campaign included all areas of the Ahmadi Municipality, including monitoring and supervising follow-up on public cleanliness, the implemen-



tation of cleaning contractors and public cleaning companies, monitoring street vendors, and working to implement laws and regulations and decisions issued on public hygiene and road works within the governorate," he stated.—KUNA

In my view

Entrepreneurial landscape of Kuwait



Ahmad Hesham Alsarhan

Local@kuwaittimes.com

The entrepreneurial spirit of the Kuwaiti population is undeniable, and the country has a wealth of individuals who are eager to venture into the world of startups. However, an examination of the current small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) landscape reveals a prevalent focus on short-term gains and trendy cash grabs, often at the expense of building and enduring sustainable legacies.

In recent years, Kuwait has witnessed an increase in startup activity, driven by a young, passionate, dynamic and risk-taking population, with two-thirds of Kuwaitis being under the age of 35. This demographic is savvy in the digital space and eager to experiment with entrepreneurial ventures, contributing to the fast-paced and trend-centric nature of the SME business environment in Kuwait.

Businesses in this environment need to keep up with the wave of trends or else they will be caught in the current and pulled under. The rapid rise and fall of businesses in response to this flow of trends is a reason that emphasizes the need for a more strategic and forward-thinking approach.

While the pursuit of profit is natural to the foundation of any business, Kuwait finds itself at a position of crucial transformation, one that does not shift away from the importance of profitability but brings another priority into the picture. The strategic vision outlined in "New Kuwait" aims to position the country as an attractive hub for innovation and foreign investment, with a focus on diversifying the economy and increasing the productivity of non-oil economic sectors.

Achieving this vision necessitates a fundamental shift in the mindset of entrepreneurs, moving away from trendy cash grabs and towards the creation of businesses that contribute meaningfully to the nation's long-term economic development. Reflecting on the smaller business landscape here in Kuwait, it becomes apparent that the prevalent "follow and support" culture on social media often fades away as quickly as the trends it follows does.

There is a need for continuity, a sustained effort that goes beyond the initial hype. This is what a lot of businesses lack. Trendy cash grabs might yield short-term success, but they often struggle to establish a lasting impact or contribute to sustained economic growth. The path forward requires a collective commitment to building legacies that prioritize not only maximizing profits, but also positively influencing societal and economic advancement. This is highly attractive to foreign investment.

Fortunately, Kuwait is witnessing a growing wave of support for its entrepreneurs. Startup incubators and funds provided by both private and public organizations are actively supporting Kuwaiti-led SMEs. Still, more must be done. Notable success stories of Kuwaiti men and women leading startups receiving international recognition are paving the way for further growth and recognition.

Critical to this change is the education of Kuwait's youth on the significance of forward and critical thinking in the business environment. Emphasizing the importance of contributing lasting value to society and the economy will help shift the mindset towards a new age of entrepreneurial ventures. One that prioritizes the building of legacies over short-term gains.

As we advocate for this transformative shift, let us foster a culture that encourages and supports entrepreneurs who strive to create businesses that leave a lasting imprint. I am optimistic about the future of Kuwait, where entrepreneurship becomes synonymous with building legacies and contributing to positive growth for generations to come.

Local

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Commerce ministry to Kuwaitize Tamween branches

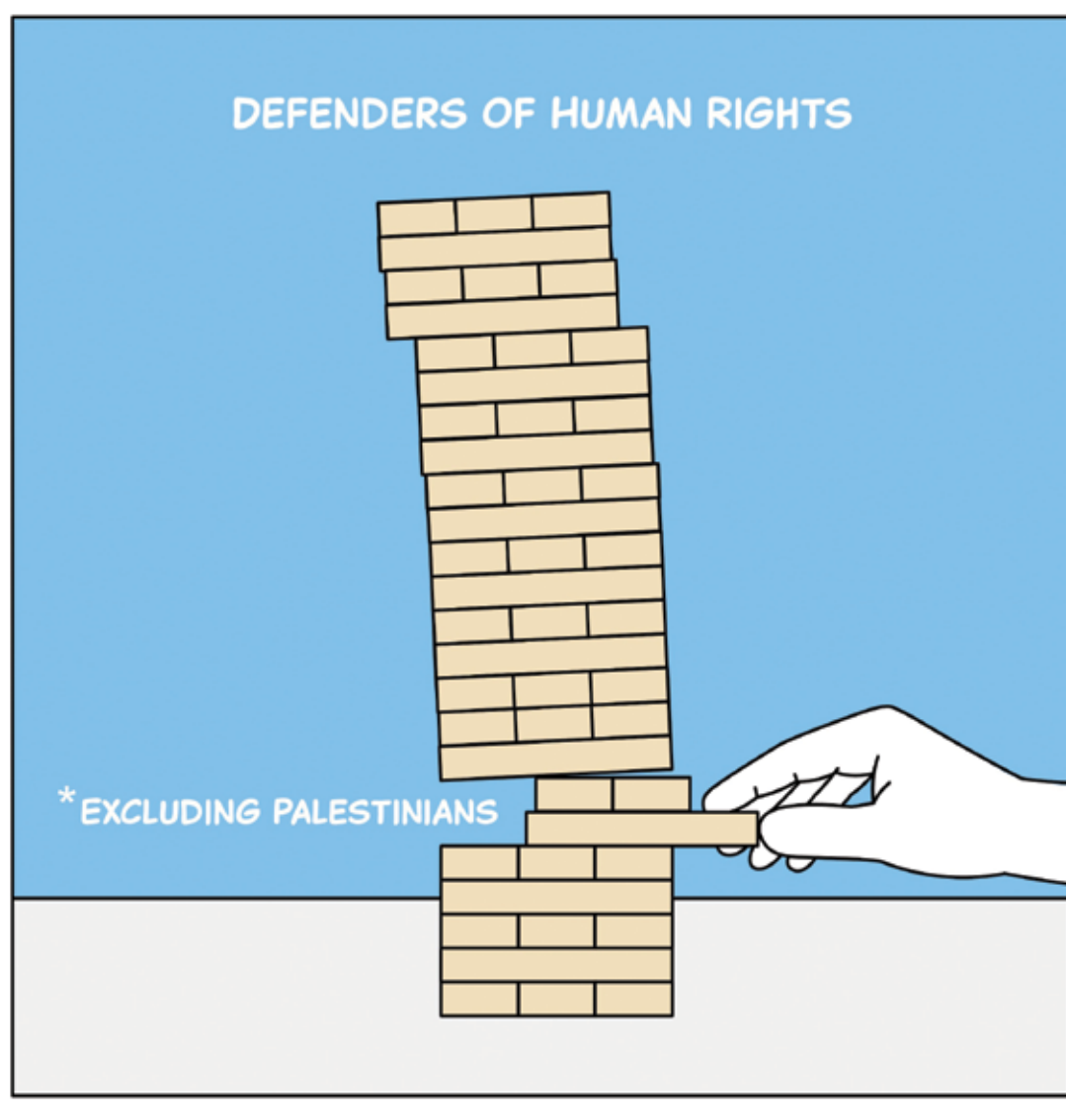
KUWAIT: The ministry of commerce has affirmed its commitment to Kuwaitize Tamween branches, stating that the Kuwaitization process is progressing successfully. Employment is permitted if the ratio of salaries to sales allows for it and is approved directly, regardless of the staffing needs. This initiative aims to safeguard supplies from wastage, combat smuggling abroad and prevent the sale of supplies on the black market by expatriates. The ministry warns that such practices lead to the squandering of public funds and neglect the rights of those entitled to state-subsidized supplies.

The ministry has announced plans to offer jobs to Kuwaitis in supply centers to reduce the reliance on expatriate workers. If the number of Kuwaiti employees is insufficient, consideration will be given to the children of Kuwaiti women, stateless individuals with valid security cards and citizens of GCC countries.

The Union of Cooperatives has highlighted the reluctance among Kuwaiti youth to work in supply centers, citing reasons such as the lack of financial incentives. It urged the adoption of financial benefits to encourage Kuwaitis to take up employment in Tamween centers. According to sources from the ministry of social affairs, many citizens decline positions in supply branches due to the stringent job requirements, including signing an agreement. Any shortages in supplies are the responsibility of the branch personnel.

Addressing accusations of negligence by cooperative societies leading to thefts of food supplies, sources clarify that theft is uncommon. Supplies are provided by the ministry of commerce based on the number of ration cards allocated to each branch. Regarding concerns about food supplies being sold on the black market or smuggled to other countries, sources suggest that some individuals donate their entire ration to a single expatriate worker, while others provide charity to certain individuals in front of Tamween centers.

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Kuwait: Illegal MoU between Ethiopia, Somaliland a violation of UN charter

Deputy FM addresses extraordinary session of Arab League Council



Deputy Foreign Minister during the meeting of the Arab League Council at the ministerial level in its extraordinary session to support Somalia.

KUWAIT: Deputy Foreign Minister Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah said that Kuwait is following with great concern the tension occurring between Somalia and Ethiopia resulting from the signing of the illegal memorandum of understanding between Ethiopia and the Somaliland region as it is a blatant violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Somalia.

This came in a speech delivered by Sheikh Jarrah Al-Sabah remotely on, Wednesday, at the meeting of the Arab League Council at the ministerial level in its extraordinary session to support Somalia in confronting the attack on its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Sheikh Jarrah Al-Sabah added that the State of Kuwait expresses its full solidarity and support for the Somali cabinet's decision rejecting the illegal memorandum of understanding.

The State of Kuwait also expresses its rejection and condemnation of any agreements and understandings that violate the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Arab countries.

The State of Kuwait calls on all parties to exercise self-restraint, comply with international law, adhere to good neighborliness, respect international covenants and conventions, noninterference in internal affairs, and promote the resolution of all disputes and disputes by peaceful means "Peace, mercy and blessings of God."

Somalia had submitted a request to the Arab League to hold an emergency meeting of the Arab League Council at the level of Arab foreign ministers to discuss the repercussions of concluding an illegal memorandum of understanding signed between Ethiopia and Somaliland and recently. — KUNA

‘Women in Ismail Abdullah Theater’: A literary insight

By Dr Nermin Al-Houti

KUWAIT: On the occasion of the Cairo International Book Fair, running from Jan 24 to Feb 6, Edaat Publication and Distribution House is showcasing "Women in Ismail Abdullah Theater" at its stand in Hall 1 A19. Authored by Dr Nermin Al-Houti, a member of the teaching faculty at the Higher Institute of Dramatic Arts, the book has gained significant traction with extensive sales of copies.

Spanning approximately 325 pages across three chapters, the first chapter presents a historical panorama by Dr Houti, exploring the evolution of women on stage. Beginning with the nuanced relationship between women in theater and support theater, the journey spans Greek and ancient Roman times, through the Middle Ages, and encompasses global and Arab theaters, concluding with a focus on women's portrayal in UAE theater.

The second chapter, titled "Ismail Abdullah Theater", encompasses various sub-titles. It opens with an introduction to playwright Ismail Abdullah, detailing his biography and artistic journey. The analysis delves into Abdullah's theatrical creations, examining elements such as the play's title, character names, text, dramatic structure and thematic units.



Dr Nermin Al-Houti



The chapter also explores Abdullah's distinctive writing characteristics, including scenic representation, viewer engagement, motivation, dramatization and his incorporation of heritage elements like beliefs, proverbs, anecdotes, songs and poetry.

The third and final chapter, "Women's Image in Ismail Abdullah Theater", offers a comprehensive conclusion. Dr Houti examines how women's issues are addressed, exploring the dimensions of female characters and the patterns within the play's text structure.

Additionally, Dr Houti has received an invitation from Abdulaziz Saud Al-Babtain Cultural Establishment to attend the third Forum for Just Peace Culture in Cairo. The event, scheduled from January 28 to 30 and held under the patronage of Egyptian President Abdul Fattah Al-Sisi, is in collaboration with the Higher Council of Culture. Themed "Just Peace for Development," the forum highlights the late Abdulaziz Saud Al-Babtain's commitment to cultural endeavors and charitable initiatives, a legacy continued by his sons. This cultural project reflects the late Babtain's dedication to ideas, principles and human values throughout his life.

campaign Omar Al-Thuwaini told KUNA that the relief aid was organized by KSR with the participation of 28 other governmental and charitable organizations.

He pointed out that the planeload contains seven tons of medical equipment, 13 tons of nutritional supplies, in addition to 20 tons of blankets and childcare materials. He noted that this Kuwaiti relief bridge comes in line with the commands of the political leadership of Kuwait, in cooperation with the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Defense, Social Affairs and more than 24 other Kuwaiti charitable organizations. — KUNA

Kuwait dispatches 41st planeload of aid for Gaza

KUWAIT: The 41st plane within the Kuwait Relief Air Bridge took off on Wednesday heading to the Egyptian city of Al-Arish, carrying 40 tons of urgent relief aid for the people in the Gaza Strip. Deputy Director of Kuwait Society for Relief (KSR) and supervisor of (Fazaa for Palestine)



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Money weighs heavy on would-be Chinese parents

Trump attends court for rape defamation trial in New York



RAFAH: Displaced Palestinians warm by the fire at a makeshift camp west of Rafah near the Egyptian border on Jan 14, 2024. — AFP

Gazans burning plastic to survive

‘The children are sick from the smell and the cold. They don’t stop coughing’

RAFAH: In a makeshift tent of cloth and plastic, Is-mail Nabhan huddled by a fire with his children and grandchildren as his family, displaced by the war in Gaza, struggled to stay warm. “Two days ago there were strong winds, we tried all night to fasten the nylon. We’re living in a desert and the sea is in front of us — the cold has multiplied,” said the 60-year-old, who has fled his home in central Gaza.

Thousands of tents have been erected by some of the 1.9 million people the United Nations estimates have been internally displaced in the Gaza Strip since the war erupted on Oct 7. The Zionist entity’s relentless ground and air military campaign in Gaza has killed nearly 24,000 people, mostly women and children, according to the territory’s health ministry.

The entity claims the bombardment is aimed at destroying Hamas after the Palestinian resistance group attacked southern Zionist communities and military bases on Oct 7. Around 1,140 people, mostly civilians, died in the attack and subsequent Zionist military operation aimed at regaining control of communities targeted by Hamas.

Nabhan and his family have pitched their tent at a precarious spot in a southwestern corner of Rafah, overlooking the Egyptian border and a few hundred meters (yards) from the Mediterranean Sea. There are 28 people crammed into the flimsy shelter and, despite the risk from the flames and fumes, they keep a fire going inside as their only means of staying warm.

Even the fuel they use is improvised and harmful, but the family have little choice. “The smoke we inhale from burning plastic burns our lungs,” said Nabhan’s wife, Raidah Awad, as their grandson coughed. Awad asked her son to get firewood but lamented that it would take four days to dry out after recent heavy winter rain. “The children are sick from the smell and the cold. They don’t stop coughing and having colds, their clothes aren’t thick enough to warm them up,” said the 50-year-old Awad. One blanket is shared between three people, she added. “The situation’s tragic.”

‘Die from the cold’
The health ministry in the Hamas-run territory

says at least 24,100 Gazans have been killed in the war. Haneen Adwan, who was forced to flee from central Nuseirat refugee camp due to heavy Zionist bombardment, said she and her family were struggling in the winter weather. “At night, I feel like we’re going to die from the cold,” said the 31-year-old, who has six children.

Adwan piled three thin mattresses on top of one another as a barrier from the cold ground. Firewood, she said, was unaffordable, so like Nabhan and his family, she had turned to burning waste. “We light the fire with plastic, (and) choke on the fumes,” she said.

Adwan’s 14-year-old son’s hands have been blackened by the constant search to scavenge enough plastic to keep the family warm. The teenager explained how he worked the sewer at the border, digging up plastic buried in the sand and cutting it up with a knife. “My brothers are dying from the cold at night. We have to light something or we’ll freeze,” he said.

The UN humanitarian agency said on Monday

that the makeshift shelters in which many Gazans now live “are inadequate to withstand current weather conditions,” while many sites had been flooded by heavy rain.

Fear of bombs

Nearby, Khaled Faraj Allah was baking bread in the corner of his tent and passing pieces to his son. His six children, one of whom has special needs, shared three mattresses. “After two in the morning, it’s not possible for anyone to sleep because of the extreme cold,” said Faraj Allah, who fled his home east of Gaza City.

“Even if you lay out a thousand blankets, the ground is cold and the earth transfers the damp and cold,” added the 36-year-old. Faraj Allah said his child with special needs lacked regular medication and had stopped laughing or interacting with the family. “If there’s heavy rain, people will die from the cold, and if the (Zionists) storm this area what can I do? I’ll flee over there for my kids,” he said, pointing to the Egyptian border. — AFP

US re-designates Yemen’s Houthis as ‘terrorist’ entity

WASHINGTON: The United States announced Wednesday that it will put Yemen’s Iran-backed Houthi rebels back on a list of “terrorist” entities due to their repeated attacks on international shipping in the Red Sea. The Houthis have already faced multiple rounds of air strikes in response to their targeting of merchant vessels, but have continued to carry out attacks they say are in support of Palestinians in Gaza.

They have also declared US and British interests to be “legitimate targets.”

“The Department of State today is announcing the designation of Ansarallah, commonly referred to as the Houthis, as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist group, effective 30 days from today,” Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement. “The Houthi is must be held accountable for their actions, but it should not be at the expense of Yemeni civilians,” he said. “During the 30-day implementation delay, the US government will conduct robust outreach to stakeholders, aid providers, and partners who are crucial to facilitating humanitarian assistance and the commercial import of critical commodities in Yemen,” Blinken added.

US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said the designation “is an important tool to impede terrorist funding to the Houthis, further restrict their access to financial markets, and hold them accountable for their actions.” “If the Houthis cease their attacks in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, the United States will immediately reevaluate this designation,” Sullivan said in a statement.

Pressure strategy

The designation is part of Washington’s strategy to put pressure on the Houthis, which has also included military action against them. On Tuesday, the US military said it destroyed four anti-ship missiles in Yemen that posed an imminent threat to military and civilian vessels.

The United States and Britain targeted nearly 30 sites in Yemen with more than 150 munitions last week, while American forces later attacked a Houthi

radar site in what was described as “a follow-on action” related to the previous strikes.

But Houthi attacks have continued, with the US Central Command saying Tuesday that the Houthis launched an anti-ship ballistic missile into international shipping lanes, and that a Maltese-flagged bulk carrier reported that it was hit but remained seaworthy. In 2021, US President Joe Biden’s administration removed his predecessor Donald Trump’s last-minute designation of the Houthis as both a foreign terrorist organization and a specially designated global terrorist group.

The removal came in response to fears from aid groups that they would need to pull out of Yemen as they are obliged to deal with the rebels, who effectively are the government in vast areas including the capital Sanaa. — AFP

Britain’s Charles, Kate get treatment for health issues

LONDON: British head of state King Charles III has been treated for an enlarged prostate and will undergo a procedure in hospital next week, Buckingham Palace said on Wednesday. The rare announcement about the monarch’s health comes after Kensington Palace said his daughter-in-law Catherine, Princess of Wales, had undergone successful abdominal surgery.

Catherine, often known as Kate, is facing up to two weeks in hospital and several months’ recuperation after the operation, which palace officials said was non-cancerous, without specifying further. Charles, 75, became king on the death of his mother, Queen Elizabeth II, in September 2022 after spending most of his life as her heir.

He is head of state of 14 other countries outside the United Kingdom, including Australia, Canada and New Zealand, and is head of the 56-member Commonwealth, which comprises 2.4 billion people. He is also Supreme Governor of the Church of England, the mother church of the world-wide Anglican communion.

Charles has thrown himself into the role, despite reaching a phase of life when most men of his age have retired. His last public appearance was with other senior royals at a Christmas Day service at Sandringham. “In common with thousands of men each year, The King has sought treatment for



LONDON: King Charles III (left) talks with his daughter-in-law Catherine, Princess of Wales, in this file photo. — AFP

an enlarged prostate,” a palace statement read. “His Majesty’s condition is benign and he will attend hospital next week for a corrective procedure. The King’s public engagements will be postponed for a short period of recuperation.”

Benign prostate enlargement is common in men aged over 50 and is not normally considered a serious threat to health or an increased risk of developing prostate cancer. If the prostate gland is enlarged, it can put pressure on the bladder and urethra, affecting urination. Causes of prostate enlargement are unknown but are thought to be linked to hormonal changes with age, according to the UK’s state-run National Health Service.

Postponement
The announcement came some 90

minutes after the health bulletin about Catherine, who is married to Charles’s eldest son and heir, Prince William. Her office at Kensington Palace said she was admitted to a private clinic in central London on Tuesday.

“The surgery was successful and it is expected that she will remain in hospital for ten to fourteen days, before returning home to continue her recovery,” a statement read. “Based on the current medical advice, she is unlikely to return to public duties until after Easter (on March 31).”

The princess is one of the most popular — and photographed — members of the royal family. In the latest polling she was third most-popular living royal with a 63 percent public approval rating, behind William (68 percent) and King Charles III’s sister Princess Anne (67 percent). Queen Elizabeth II, who died in September 2022 aged 96, remains the most popular, with 75 percent, according to YouGov. The king’s rating was 51 percent.

Kensington Palace added: “The Princess of Wales appreciates the interest this statement will generate. “She hopes that the public will understand her desire to maintain as much normality for her children as possible; and her wish that her personal medical information remains private. Kensington Palace will, therefore, only provide updates on Her Royal Highness’ progress when there is significant new information to share. “The Princess of Wales wishes to apologize to all those concerned for the fact that she has to postpone her upcoming engagements. “She looks forward to reinstating as many as possible, as soon as possible.” — AFP

CONDOLENCES

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Extend our Heartfelt
condolences to

Mr. Joel Fernandez & Family
(Project Manager)
on the sad demise
of his Mother
who passed away in India
on 17th January 2024

May her soul Rest in Peace

International

Trump attends court for rape defamation trial in New York

Jean Carroll seeking more than \$10m in one of many trials swirling over Trump's head



NEW YORK: People hold signs outside the Manhattan federal court in New York for the second defamation trial against former US President and 2024 presidential candidate Donald Trump. — AFP photos

NEW YORK: Donald Trump went straight from his victory in the Republican Iowa caucuses to a New York courtroom Tuesday for the start of a defamation trial brought by writer E. Jean Carroll after an earlier jury found he had sexually assaulted her in the 1990s. In court, the former US president did not make any statements, and he and Carroll avoided looking at each other while jurors were being selected, according to reporters allowed inside the courtroom.

But Trump continued attacking Carroll on his Truth Social platform, reposting a clip from an interview she gave to CNN and writing, "Can you believe I have to defend myself against this woman's fake story?!" Addressing supporters at a rally in New Hampshire later in the day, Trump said he planned to attend daily court proceedings in the "phony" case in New York over the next several days, while continuing campaigning.

"Early in the morning I go to a Biden witch hunt," Trump said in the northeastern state, which will hold the nation's second presidential nomination contest next Tuesday. "And then I come here in the afternoon, and I stop, we make speeches and we get the votes."

The shocking defamation case, which would likely once have been enough to wreck any politician's career, has had no visible impact on Trump's bid to retake the White House — and if anything is boosting his standing with his party's right wing.

Carroll, 80, is seeking more than \$10 million in damages in the civil trial, alleging that Trump defamed her in 2019 when he was president and she had just come out with her allegation, saying she "is not my type." This is separate to a civil case last year where another New York jury found Trump liable for sexually assaulting Carroll in a department store dressing room in 1996 and sub-



Former magazine columnist E Jean Carroll leaves the Manhattan federal court.

sequently defaming her in 2022, when he called her a "complete con job." In that case, the jury awarded Carroll \$5 million in damages.

This is only one of many trials swirling over Trump's head. He has been indicted in four criminal cases and faces 91 counts on allegations including his attempts to undermine the 2020 election which he lost to Joe Biden, taking stacks of top-secret documents, and business fraud. Trump has embraced his legal problems as evidence of a conspiracy theory in which a nebulous "deep state" is out to stop him from returning to power.

'Rape' finding

Despite the constant scandal, his fervent base of supporters proved its strength on Monday with an overwhelming victory in the Iowa caucuses to choose the Republican candidate who will face Biden on Election Day in November. Trump has used previous

trial appearances to seize the limelight and deliver invective-filled speeches — both outside courthouses and, when allowed to speak by the judge, on the witness stand. He has also used social media posts to issue crude insults against court personnel.

The judge in Tuesday's trial, Lewis Kaplan, has issued strict instructions to curtail Trump. Carroll says that in 1996, Trump assaulted her against the wall of a Manhattan department store dressing room — and the previous civil jury agreed.

Kaplan stated unambiguously that Trump had "sexually abused — indeed, raped — Ms. Carroll" and that the Republican cannot now claim otherwise in court. Carroll's lawyers last week urged Kaplan to prevent Trump from making "inadmissible, prejudicial" comments in court. Last week, the former president continued to insist that he had "no idea" who Carroll was, calling her "a wack job" and saying the trial was "rigged." — AFP

Demonstrators, police clash in rare riot over Russian jailed activist

MOSCOW: Protesters and riot police were injured Wednesday when clashes erupted in a small town in Russia's central Bashkortostan after an activist was sentenced to four years in prison. Street protests are a rarity in Russia, which has clamped down on dissent since launching its military offensive in Ukraine and has strict anti-demonstration laws.

Crowds of men in the town of Baymak fought with riot police in temperatures hovering around -20 Celsius (-4 Fahrenheit), social media footage showed. Russia's Investigative Committee said both police and protestors sustained injuries in the confrontation.

"During the mass riots, which were accompanied by violence including the use of objects as weapons,

several people were injured, including members of law enforcement," it said in a statement on Wednesday.

The independent OVD-Info rights group, which monitors protests across Russia, said police used tear gas to disperse the demonstrators and that dozens had been detained. The Investigative Committee said it had opened criminal cases into "mass rioting" — a crime that carries a maximum penalty of 15 years in prison—and for violence against a public officer, punishable by up to five years in prison.

'Fought for justice'

The protests were sparked after a court in the town of around 17,000 people sentenced an eco-activist and campaigner for the protection of the Bashkir language — Fail Alsynov — to four years in prison for "inciting hatred". The ruling was issued behind closed doors.

Alsynov was accused of making a racist comment in a speech to a village council meeting against gold digging. He insists his words were mistranslated from the Bashkir language. The SOTA opposition Telegram channel showed a vid-

eo of a handcuffed Alsynov still inside the courtroom after the verdict on Wednesday, protesting his innocence. "I do not admit my guilt," Alsynov said, vowing to appeal the ruling. "I always fought for justice, for my nation, for my republic."

According to SOTA, the clashes started after protesters blocked the court building in a bid to try to stop Alsynov from being taken away. Videos shared on social media showed men washing their eyes with water after reports police used tear gas in the freezing temperatures outside. Anticipating a public response, police had on the eve of the verdict warned people not to take part in "illegal public gatherings".

'Mass riots'

Alsynov's case had already sparked protests of several hundred people in Baymak earlier this week. The head of the local interior ministry, Rafail Divayev, urged demonstrators to back down on Wednesday. "Mass riots threaten our country's national security, therefore the punishment under this article is quite serious," the state-run RIA Novosti news agency quoted him as saying. "I advise you to

come to your senses and not ruin your life."

The protests are some of the country's biggest demonstrations since Russia sent troops into Ukraine and escalated a decade-long crackdown on opposition to the Kremlin. Some of the protesters called for the dismissal of the local governor, Radiy Khabirov, who had accused Alsynov of using racist language.

In the speech that resulted in the charges, Alsynov had used two words in Bashkir that were translated into Russian as "black people". In Russia, the phrase is often used to pejoratively describe people from Central Asia and the Caucasus. Alsynov said he was referring to poor people.

The activist was last year fined for criticizing Moscow's offensive in Ukraine online, saying it was not in Bashkortostan's interests. According to local media, Alsynov called Russia's mobilization drive a "genocide of the Bashkir people" and said Moscow's offensive "was not our war". Multiple independent analyses have shown a disproportionately high number of military call-ups and fatalities among Russia's minority national groups, including from Bashkortostan. — AFP

Amir calls on new Cabinet...

Continued from Page 1

come into effect from the date of its publication, and will be published in the official gazette.

HH Sheikh Dr Mohammad was named as prime minister two weeks ago after former premier HH Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah submitted his resignation on Dec 20, hours after HH the Amir took the oath as the new ruler. The new Cabinet however does not have a full-time interior minister after reports said former interior minister Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Sabah declined to continue in the new Cabinet.

New Defense Minister Sheikh Fahad Yousef Al-Sabah, a retired brigadier in the Amiri Guard, who replaced outgoing defense minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Fahad Al-Sabah, was appointed as acting interior minister.

The entire economic team was changed. Emad Al-Atiqi, a professor of petroleum engineering, was appointed as oil minister. Anwar Al-Mudhaf, an experienced top banker, was appointed finance minister. Abdullah Al-Jouan, the chairman of the fund for

small and medium enterprises, was given the commerce and industry portfolio. Noura Al-Meshaan, a US-educated civil engineering professor, was appointed minister of public works and municipality.

Salem Al-Hajraf, a specialist in renewable energy, was appointed minister of electricity and water and renewable energy, in addition to minister of state for housing. Adel Al-Adwani, a senior professor of information technology at Kuwait University, was appointed minister of education and higher education, and Faisal Al-Ghareeb, a government legal advisor, appointed minister of justice and Islamic affairs.

MP Dawood Maarafi, the only elected lawmaker in the Cabinet, was appointed minister of state for National Assembly affairs, minister of state for youth affairs and minister of state for communications. The ministers of information, health and social affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, Ahmad Al-Awadhi and Sheikh Feras Saud Al-Sabah, respectively, were retained from the outgoing Cabinet.

Under Kuwaiti law, the Cabinet can be of a maximum of 15 ministers in addition to the prime minister, which means that two more ministers can be appointed later if the prime minister wishes. The new Cabinet will not take the oath in the National Assembly before Feb 6, the next regular session of the Assembly.

mad Reza Ashtiani said Tehran would set "no limits" to its security. China, close partners of Iran and Pakistan, urged restraint, with foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning saying both should "avoid actions that would lead to an escalation of tension".

Pakistan's official statement did not specify where the strike took place, but Pakistani media said it was near Panjgur in southwest Balochistan province, where the countries share a sparsely populated border of nearly 1,000 km. Hours before the strike, Pakistan's caretaker Prime Minister Anwar-ul-Haq Kakar had met the Iranian foreign minister on the sidelines of the WEF. "This violation of Pakistan's sovereignty is completely unacceptable and can have serious consequences," Pakistan's foreign ministry statement said. It said the strike caused the "death of two innocent children while injuring three girls". — AFP

US envoy lauds humanitarian...

Continued from Page 1

Dr Sayer welcomed the US envoy's visit to KRCS, stressing the society carries out its mission with due diligence and accuracy. He affirmed KRCS

Zionists step up Gaza raids, kill...

Continued from Page 1

The agreement announced by Qatar on Tuesday following French and Qatari mediation will allow medicines to reach Zionist captives and aid to enter the besieged Palestinian territory. The International Committee of the Red Cross welcomed the deal, under which 45 captives are expected to receive medication, as "a much-needed moment of relief".

A security source in Egypt said a Qatari plane carrying medicines had arrived on Wednesday at El-Arish near the Rafah border crossing with Gaza. France said the drugs would be sent to a hospital in Rafah, given to the Red Cross and divided into batches before being transferred to the hostages. A top Hamas official announced new conditions for the deal on Wednesday, however. Writing on X, formerly Twitter, Musa Abu Marzouk demanded 1,000 boxes of aid for Gaza for every one going to the captives and that a country Hamas trusts, not France, supply the medicine.

At the Abu Yussef Al-Najjar hospital in Rafah, Palestinians stood in front of bodies wrapped in shrouds, mourning the loss of loved ones killed in an overnight Zionist strike. "Why are they doing this? They are destroying us," Umm Muhammad Abu Odeh, a woman displaced from the north Gaza town of Beit Hanun, told AFP. The Zionists "told us to go south, and we came here... but there is no safe place in Gaza".

The United Nations says the war has displaced roughly 85 percent of Gaza's 2.4 million people, many

is looking forward to helping more people in the region and the world, saying this is part of the society's ethos.

With regards to his meeting with Sasahara, Dr Sayer said the envoy was informed about KRCS' missions to aid people affected by manmade or natural disasters. He affirmed the meeting also commended the level of cooperation between Kuwait and the US, hoping to expand such cooperation in the near future. — KUNA

of whom have been forced to crowd into shelters and struggle to get food, water, fuel and medical care. In Rafah, Safa Fethi Hamad has been anxiously waiting for more than a month to cross the border to Egypt. "We are all going to die. Food is very limited, we have no protection," she told AFP.

Meanwhile, Zionist strikes killed ten people in the occupied West Bank on Wednesday, emergency services and the army said, as violence in the territory sees no let-up. The Palestinian Red Crescent said a Zionist strike killed five people inside Tulkarem refugee camp early in the morning. "Palestine Red Crescent teams transport four martyrs from inside Tulkarem camp due to the occupation's bombardment," the group said in a statement.

An official at the camp confirmed the strike and the death toll. "The camp is besieged by aircraft and heavy numbers of the (Zionist) army and tanks," Faisal Salama told AFP. Later on Wednesday, loud explosions were heard in the camp as thick smoke billowed into the sky amid sporadic gunfire, an AFP correspondent reported. The Zionist entity has occupied the West Bank since the Six-Day War of 1967 and its troops regularly carry out incursions into Palestinian communities.

A separate strike near Balata refugee camp, east of the city of Nablus, killed five fighters with the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, the armed wing of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah party, it said in a statement. The group and the Zionist army said Ahmed Abdullah Abu Shalal, a Palestinian fighter, had been killed.

Camp resident Sajed Hazeem said he was awoken at dawn by a loud explosion. Minutes after the blast, an ambulance arrived at the scene but its access to the car was blocked by Zionist troops who arrived at the same time, Hazeem said. "The army pulled out the bodies and after about half an hour it withdrew," he said. — AFP

Pak recalls envoy after Iran strike...

Continued from Page 1

Amir-Abdollahian said "Jaish al-Adl is a terrorist group that acts against the common security of the two countries", according to a summary of the conversation released by Tehran. Iran had earlier launched missile attacks on "spy headquarters" and "terrorist" targets in Syria, and Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan region.

The Iranian strikes add to multiple crises across the Middle East, with the Zionist entity waging a war against Hamas in Gaza and pro-Palestinian Houthis rebels in Yemen attacking commercial vessels in the Red Sea. On Wednesday, Iran's Defense minister Moham-

International

Money weighs heavy on would-be Chinese parents

Exuberant costs of marriage, child-rearing make ‘raising pets more appropriate’

SHANGHAI: Young Chinese are increasingly hesitant to start families, citing economic concerns exacerbated by rigid social norms around child-rearing, even as their government grows desperate to boost the birth rate and stave off a demographic crisis.

China's population decline accelerated in 2023, official figures released on Wednesday showed, shrinking by more than two million people. Long-alarmed by falling fertility, the government has relaxed its decades-long one-child policy in recent years to allow three children per family, while rolling out subsidies and calling on women to become homemakers.

But the incentives and exhortations are doing little to change what demographers describe as an economic crisis in the making, as the number of working adults shrinks while a booming contingent of retirees chips away at finite social security funds.

Twenty-six-year-old Xiaopeng works at a Shanghai event space that hosts classes and parties for children, but said he prefers his pets to having children of his own. “For me, children could be a bit more difficult, with all the practical concerns you have to consider,” he told AFP. Childbirth in China usually comes after a wallet-draining process of buying a home, finding a spouse, and paying for a lavish wedding, with government policy penalizing births out of wedlock despite recent moves in some regions to support unwed mothers.

Parents then race to ensure their children excel at school and university to succeed in the cut-throat jobs market, feeding a massive afterschool tuition market that the government has cracked down on with limited success.

The average cost in 2019 of raising a child in China from birth to age 18 was 485,000 yuan (\$68,000), according to Beijing-based thinktank YuWa Population Research. That was nearly seven times the country's GDP per capita that year — a ratio far exceeding the United States' 4.11 or Australia's 2.08.

That does not include the apartment that parents are often expected to help sons buy to secure a bride. “For my friends, if they have a stable job and their



BEIJING: Two young children and two women stand on the pavement on a street in Beijing.

careers are stable ... they will start to want children,” Xiaopeng said. “For me, I feel like raising pets is more appropriate than raising a child.”

‘No marriage, no kids’

“The younger generation has fundamentally changed its conception of fertility and is generally unwilling to have more children,” He Yafu, an independent Chinese demographer, told AFP. Growing numbers of young adults proudly flaunt their childfree lifestyles on social media. “No marriage, no kids” is a popular topic on the Chinese pop culture website Douban, with thousands of users exchanging views and seeking reassurance on their childfree lifestyles. “Can you really sacrifice so much just to hear someone

call you ‘mama’?” one asked recently.

Cao, a mother-of-one in her thirties from the western city of Xi'an, said a lot of her friends were “DINKs”, an acronym for couples with double incomes and no kids. She cited economic concerns as a reason people hesitated to have children.

“Before you have a child you have to think about educating them, and people definitely want their children to go to better schools,” she told AFP. While public education fees are relatively affordable in China, prestigious schools prioritize admission for children living nearby, resulting in sky-high prices for cramped, outdated accommodation in areas near sought-after schools.

Women's work

Unlike many, Cao, who asked to be identified only by her surname, said she can count on substantial childcare help from her husband. In 2021, 63.7 percent of Chinese children under the age of three were cared for primarily by their mothers during the day, according to a UN report. Working women spent double the amount of time men did caring for family members.

Despite scattered government efforts to increase fathers' involvement in child-rearing, the national paternity leave allowance is around two weeks — measly compared to around three months for new mothers. Xiaopeng said that at his workplace he sees mainly women accompanying their children.

Visiting a hospital in Shanghai with her husband, 28-year-old Xiang, who is expecting her first child, said being pregnant was “exhausting”. She is considering hiring a confinement nanny or even moving into a specialized hotel after giving birth, during the traditional 30-day period when new mothers are expected to receive special meals and care — a custom that can cost tens of thousands of dollars for each birth. She believes most young people are “comprehensively” weighing the cost of childcare before having babies. “You can't just say you are having a child and then do it ... the process of raising a child requires huge support in terms of mental effort and finances.” — AFP

Austrian heiress pays to give away bulk of fortune

VIENNA: The rich and famous are paying top dollar for a place at this week's Davos summit but heiress Marlene Engelhorn is on the other side of the fence at the glitzy Swiss resort, demanding that they pay more in taxes. The 31-year-old is also pursuing an ambitious plan to pay people to come up with ideas for her to give away the bulk of her 25 million euro (\$27.4 million) wealth so she can escape what she calls a “dynastic rich swamp”. “I've inherited a fortune and therefore power, without having done anything for it. And the state doesn't even want taxes on it,” said the Austrian-German activist and founder of the Taxmenow initiative.

Engelhorn is joining several protests by a wealthy minority on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum calling for higher taxes on the rich. The scion of the founder of BASF chemical giant, Friedrich Engelhorn, is among an exclusive group of millionaires pushing for governments to tax them more to bridge the growing wealth gap. The estimated 2,150 billionaires around the world are \$3.3 trillion richer than they were in 2020, while nearly five billion people worldwide have grown poorer, the charity Oxfam said in a report on Monday, slamming “levels of obscene inequality”.

‘Dynastic rich swamp’

Engelhorn — who inherited millions when her grandmother died in 2022 — announced this month that a citizens group of 50 Austrians will be set up and paid to devise ideas for the future of her fortune. To make the process more democratic, 10,000 randomly selected Austrians aged over 16 are being invited to apply to join the group by filling out a questionnaire. Fifty will then be selected.

From March to June, the group will gather on several weekends in Salzburg to develop solutions “in the interests of society as a whole”, according to a statement. Engelhorn was not immediately available to comment on the project. If the group does not manage to suggest ideas with broad support, the inheritance will be returned to the heiress. Engelhorn, who studied German at university, said she will get a regular job after “more than 90 percent” of her wealth has been redistributed. “I'll switch from the wealthiest one percent of society to the less wealthy 99 percent ... I think that's an improvement. I'm moving up into a democratic society, out of this dynastic rich swamp,” she told the German daily Tagesspiegel.

Wealth inequality

Europe's wealth inequality is particularly pronounced in Austria, economist Emanuel List of Vienna's University of Economics and Business told AFP. Quoting European Central Bank estimates, he said “the top five percent own about 54 percent of Austria's net wealth, while the entire bottom half of households only owns four percent, so basically nothing.” At least 15 billion euros are inherited or passed on in Austria every year, and whether one receives an inheritance or not “plays a very big role” in moving up the net worth ladder, he added. In Austria — where conservatives have held the economy ministry for decades — inheritance tax was scrapped in 2008, one of few EU countries to do so.

Compared to campaigns such as US billionaire Warren Buffett's pledge to donate 99 percent of his fortune to philanthropic causes, List says Engelhorn's scientifically supported initiative is “innovative”. Amid a persistent cost-of-living-crisis, Austria's opposition Social Democrats (SPOe) last year made a new call for an inheritance tax to be revived.

The ruling conservative People's Party (OeVP) however firmly rejected the proposal. Austria's far-right Freedom Party (FPÖe), which leads in polls ahead of a general election this year, called the Social Democrats' tax plans “an attack on families, entrepreneurs and all top performers”. — AFP



WUHAN: People pose next to a newly renovated statue of a pair of parents and three children in Hankou Park in China's central Hubei province. — AFP photos

Cocaine seizures in Europe's drug capital hit record high

VLISSINGEN: Cocaine seizures at the Belgian port of Antwerp, the top gateway into Europe for mainly South American drug cartels, hit a fresh record high last year, authorities said on Wednesday.

Some 116 tons of cocaine were seized in Antwerp alone, Belgian Finance Minister Vincent van Peteghem told reporters, a five-percent rise on 2022 which itself was a record figure. “These are quantities that pose a gigantic danger to safety in our ports and cities, to the safety of the many hundreds of customs and dock workers on site and to the safety of our families,” the minister told reporters.

Belgium, neighboring Netherlands and Spain are the top three European nations for illegal cocaine imports, mostly from Panama, Colombia and Ecuador. At the same news conference, Dutch officials said they had seized 59.1 tons of cocaine in 2023, also a sharp rise compared to the previous year.

Ecuador was by far the biggest country of origin for drugs seized in the Netherlands, with just under 27 tons impounded. Antwerp and the Dutch port of Rotterdam regularly experience gunfire and explosions linked to turf wars between powerful international drugs gangs.

The two ports were the two main entry points used by a Dubai-based “super cartel” supplying a third of Europe's cocaine, which Europol said it busted in late 2022. The cocaine is usually hidden in containers, or sometimes underneath ships in openings below the water line where they are then recovered by divers. — AFP



VLISSINGEN: Outgoing Dutch State Secretary Aukje de Vries (left) and Belgian Finance Minister Vincent van Peteghem give a speech on drug seizures on Jan 17 2024. — AFP

India bans foreign funding to leading think tank

NEW DELHI: A leading Indian think tank confirmed Wednesday it had been banned from taking foreign funding, the latest organization among foreign charities, rights watchdogs and others similarly targeted after criticizing the government.

The Centre for Policy Research (CPR) is one of the country's most highly regarded public policy forums. Its staffers are prominent talking heads and columnists who have been rare dissenting voices in the media on sensitive political issues, including national security policy and governance in the restive territory of Kashmir.

The home ministry had already provisionally suspended the CPR's license to receive foreign donations after raids in 2022 by the tax department, severely curtailing its operations. Local broadsheet The Hindu reported that authorities had resolved to cancel the license because it had published reports on “current affairs programs”.

“The basis of this decision is incomprehensible and disproportionate,” CPR president Yamini Aiyar said in a statement on social media. “Some of the reasons given challenge the very basis of the functioning of a research institution”.

An undated home ministry gazette confirmed the license was cancelled “on violation” of foreign funding rules without giving further details. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the US State Department were among the organization's prominent international donors.

Last year Aiyar wrote that the tax raids and suspension of foreign donations had left the think tank in a “precarious financial position”. Local media outlet Newsland also reported last year that the blocking of foreign donations had forced the CPR to cut its headcount by 75 percent and significantly scale down its operations.

The CPR is the latest of several independent civic organizations accused of falling afoul of India's strict foreign funding rules. Authorities similarly raided Oxfam's India offices in 2022 in what Amnesty International said was the weaponization of investigative agencies “to harass, intimidate, silence, and criminalize independent critical voices”.

Amnesty saw its own local offices raided in 2019 in a foreign funding investigation and announced it was halting operations in India the following year after the government froze its bank accounts. Rights groups say freedom of speech in India has suffered since Prime Minister Narendra Modi took office in 2014. The country has fallen 21 spots to 161 out of 180 countries in the World Press Freedom Index, compiled by Reporters Without Borders, in the decade since. — AFP

Business

THURSDAY, JANUARY 18, 2024

Heavy snow, freezing rain hobble European travel

Frankfurt, Oslo airports axe flights; snow wreaks havoc on roads

BERLIN: Severe winter weather in northern Europe prompted the cancellation of hundreds of flights Wednesday at Frankfurt airport, Germany's busiest, while heavy snow in Scandinavia shut down air travel in Oslo for several hours. A Frankfurt airport spokeswoman said 570 of 1,047 flights had been axed by late morning as Germany's business capital prepared for dramatic weather conditions.

By early afternoon, all remaining departures were temporarily struck from the schedule due to the onset of freezing rain although landings were still possible, a spokesman said. It was not immediately clear how long the disruption would continue.

Munich airport also reported "significant restrictions in flight service" due to bad weather, with 250 of 650 scheduled flights cancelled. Oslo airport said it closed for several hours because of heavy snow, before reopening at 3.30 pm (1430 GMT). Most buses in the Norwegian capital were cancelled and train operator Vy announced the closure of routes in large parts of the east of the country. In neighboring Sweden, heavy snow led to multiple traffic incidents in western and southern parts, causing traffic jams along several key roads. "The road surface is reported to be very slippery and the police are urging the public not to go out on the roads unless absolutely necessary," police said in a statement.

German flag carrier Lufthansa advised passengers to confirm that their flights were still scheduled before setting off for airports. Low-pressure system Gertrud bearing down on southwestern and central Germany promised up to 40 centimetres (16 inches) of snow and treacherously icy road conditions, particularly in the state of Baden-Wuerttemberg. Police there reported an "accumulation of accidents" on roads near Baden-Baden while a 34-year-old driver in neighboring Rhineland-Palatinate crashed into a



FRANKFURT: Passengers queue to rebook their flights at the airport in Frankfurt am Main, western Germany, on January 17, 2024, as severe winter weather warnings prompted the cancellation of hundreds of flights. — AFP

tree and died after skidding off a rural road.

Firefighters and other first responders in Rhineland-Palatinate had prepared for a rash of road accidents and other emergencies by calling up extra staff and vehicles. They urged motorists not to take to the roads unless unavoidable. National rail company

Deutsche Bahn said it was slowing down its high-speed trains due to slick conditions and warned of delays and cancellations in its regional and long-distance network, particularly between the western cities of Cologne and Frankfurt.

Bus routes in Rhineland-Palatinate and Saarland

were also deprived of service as the German Weather Service warned of extremely slippery roads and the risk of tree branches and power lines breaking under the weight of ice and snow. In large parts of Bavaria, Germany's biggest state, schools were shuttered in anticipation of dangerous winter conditions. — AFP

IEA chief: Trade barriers can slow energy transition

DAVOS: Trade barriers can slow the world's energy transition but commerce also needs to be fair, International Energy Agency chief Fatih Birol said Wednesday, as world powers tussle over the technologies key to fighting climate change.

Clean energy is among the hot topics this week at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, with China denouncing "barriers to green trade" and the EU voicing concerns about "trade imbalances". "Trade barriers can well be a factor slowing down the global clean energy transitions," Birol told AFP on the sidelines of the conference in the Swiss Alpine resort. "But the general philosophy is, fair trade is a good friend of (the) clean energy transition," he said.

China leads the world in the deployment of solar and wind energy and it is also the biggest producer of electric cars. Fears of a trade war erupted after the European Union launched a probe into Beijing's subsidies for its electric car industry, which could lead to punitive tariffs. But EU nations are also worried about losing business to huge energy transition subsidies in the United States, which include tax breaks for US-made electric vehicles.

Birol said China "plays a critical role when it comes to clean energy" that "provides a service to the rest of the world". "But of course countries have to look what are the trade implications ... for their economies, whether or not this production is done in a fair way compared to other production," he added. Chinese Premier Li Qiang told the forum on Tuesday



DAVOS: Participants use a staircase under signage which reads "Annual Meeting 2024" at the World Economic Forum (WEF) meeting in Davos on January 17, 2024. — AFP

that "discriminatory" trade measures are a threat to the world economy as "some high quality and efficient green and low carbon technologies and products cannot flow freely".

European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen told reporters that she had "clear and frank" discussions with Li on the "trade imbalances" with China. Birol said Europe was at a "crossroads" as it was behind China in clean technology manufacturing, "and maybe soon behind the United States". "It is time for Europe to come up with a roadmap, how we are going to revive our technological leadership in Europe, looking at the new market and technolog-

ical framework conditions," he said.

The wealthiest countries also need to fund the energy transition in developing nations for the world to meet its goal of tripling renewable energy capacity by 2030. The target was agreed at the UN's COP28 climate summit in Dubai last month, along with an agreement to work towards "transitioning away" from fossil fuels. Financing for developing countries was "the single most important item missing" in Dubai, Birol said. Birol said he told a minister from Azerbaijan in Davos on Tuesday that he hopes the issue will be discussed when the country hosts COP29 in Baku later this year. — AFP

WTO head 'less optimistic' for world trade

DAVOS: The World Trade Organization's chief Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala on Wednesday said she was "less optimistic" about world trade in 2024, pointing to tensions in the Red Sea. The head of the international trade body said weaker global economic growth, "worsening geopolitical tensions, the new disruptions we see in the Red Sea, on the Suez Canal, the Panama Canal" meant "we are less optimistic".

She was speaking to journalists at the World Economic Forum in the Swiss resort of Davos where political and economic elites are meeting to discuss global challenges. Before the massive Hamas attack on the Zionist entity in October and the subsequent outbreak of war in Gaza, the WTO had predicted trade would grow by 0.8 percent in 2023 and projected growth of 3.3 percent this year. But Okonjo-Iweala warned the figure for 2024 would now be lower in future forecasts.

"We think there are a lot of downside risks to the forecasts we had made last year of 3.3 percent of growth of merchandise volumes this year. So we ex-



DAVOS: World Trade Organization (WTO) Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala attends a session at the World Economic Forum (WEF) meeting in Davos on January 17. — AFP

pect weaker performance," she said.

"We will be revising estimates for this year, but they won't be ready for another month or so," Okonjo-Iweala added. A spate of attacks by Yemeni rebels on Red Sea shipping has disrupted the vital trade route while the worst drought in decades to hit the Panama Canal has forced authorities to slow transits. Yemen's Houthi rebels say their strikes are in solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza. The attacks have, however, also caused shipping companies to avoid the Suez Canal. — AFP

Japanese shipping firms suspend Red Sea sailings

TOKYO: Japan's three major shipping firms said Wednesday they are joining other major companies in suspending routes through the Red Sea over Houthi rebel attacks on vessels in the vital waterway.

"We have suspended navigation through the Red Sea by all ships we operate," a spokesman for Nippon Yusen, also known as NYK Line, told AFP, adding the decision was to "ensure the safety of crews".

Two other major Japanese shipping firms—Kawasaki Kisen Kaisha and Mitsui OSK Lines—have also suspended navigation through the Red Sea, company spokespersons said. Since Friday, US and British forces have been bombing scores of targets inside Houthi-controlled Yemen in response to the attacks by the rebels, who say they are targeting the Zionist-linked shipping in the Red Sea in solidarity with Gaza. The situation has heightened fears of the Zionist-Hamas war flaring across the region and disrupted trade in one of the world's key maritime commercial routes. The waterway between Asian and European markets normally carries about 12 percent of global maritime trade. — AFP

Apple ends Samsung's 12-year run as world's top smartphone seller

SAN FRANCISCO: Apple's iPhone for the first time became the world's biggest selling smartphone after rival Samsung's 12-year run as leader, data showed.

According to data from the International Data Corporation released on Monday, the iPhone stole Samsung's crown in 2023 with 234.6 million units sold, compared to the South Korean firm's 226.6 million units. The US tech giant commanded a 20.1 percent market share ahead of Samsung's 19.4 percent, the IDC said.

Analysts from the closely watched market tracker said Apple's rise was due to the success of premium devices such as the iPhone. They also pointed to an increasingly fragmented market for smartphones that run on the Android operating system, citing low-end Samsung rivals such as Transsion and Xiaomi as well as Honor and Google.

The success of Huawei's well received offerings in China also had an effect on Samsung's drop in sales, the IDC said. The sales data came ahead of the latest release of Samsung models expected at an event in California on Wednesday. According to IDC, global smartphone shipments declined 3.2 percent to 1.17 billion units in 2023, though the group said the industry was recovering after a sluggish period.

"Growth in the second half of the year has cemented the expected recovery for 2024," the IDC said in a statement. Meanwhile, the CEO of Fortnite-maker Epic Games said Tuesday the company's court battle to open up Apple's iPhone to alternative app stores was lost after the US Supreme Court declined to hear the case.

The high court announced it would not hear appeals by either Apple or Epic in the long-running case, effectively putting an end to the legal saga. Epic in 2020 launched a case aiming to break Apple's grip on the App Store, accusing the iPhone maker of operating a monopoly in its shop for digital services.

Apple takes a cut of as much as 30 percent on all financial transactions in its app shop, prompting complaints about an unfair "tax" for companies. A federal court in San Francisco overwhelmingly rejected the lawsuit, offering only a concession that apps could indicate to users other ways of paying for services outside of Apple's ecosystem.

Both companies launched appeals, which worked themselves through the appellate process up to the Supreme Court. "The Supreme Court denied both sides' appeals of the Epic v. Apple antitrust case," Epic CEO Tim Sweeney said on X, formerly Twitter.

"The court battle to open iOS to competing stores and payments is lost in the United States. A sad outcome for all developers," he said. Sweeney said it was now up to governments and regulators to order that Apple make its iPhones allow new payment systems. He praised the European Union's Digital Markets Act, which will do that in Europe starting on March 7. Epic last month won a similar court battle in the United States against Google when a jury decided that the search engine giant wields illegal monopoly power through its Android app store. — AFP

Business

UK inflation unexpectedly quickens

Data suggests a prolonged cost-of-living squeeze before election

LONDON: British inflation unexpectedly rose in December, data showed Wednesday, dashing expectations of a slowdown, dimming hopes of an early interest rate cut and prolonging a cost-of-living squeeze before an election. The Consumer Prices Index accelerated slightly to four percent last month, as rising alcohol and tobacco prices sparked the first increase since February, the Office for National Statistics said in a statement.

That is double the Bank of England's official target of two percent and the highest level in the Group of Seven rich nations. The hotter-than-expected data is a blow to embattled Conservative Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, who is trailing behind opposition Labour leader Keir Starmer in opinion polls ahead of a general election this year. Britain's recession-threatened economy is already buckling under a cost-of-living crisis and increasing industrial unrest over pay. The BoE has lifted interest rates to a 15-year peak in a bid to dampen inflation, but this has worsened the squeeze because commercial lenders pass on loan costs to businesses and consumers.

"Today's UK inflation numbers serve to reinforce the challenge facing the Bank of England in returning inflation to target... with markets pushing back the timing of the first cut to the middle of the summer," said CMC Markets analyst Michael Hewson. "The only debate now is not whether we see rate cuts this year, it is when we see rate cuts." Sunak had in October achieved his long-held goal of CPI falling below five percent.

Most analysts had forecast a December slowdown to 3.8 percent, after the rate touched a two-year low

of 3.9 percent in November. "As we have seen in the United States, France and Germany, inflation does not fall in a straight line, but our plan is working and we should stick to it," said finance minister Jeremy Hunt in response to the data.

Wednesday's data comes one day after news that UK unemployment steadied and wages growth re-treated in the three months to the end of November, partly soothing inflation concerns.

Analysts predict inflation will slow this year but warn that shipping costs will increase as a result of ongoing attacks on global trade transiting the Red Sea. Markets are waiting to see when major central banks, notably the US Federal Reserve, European Central Bank and BoE, will start to cut interest rates as inflation cools.

"Despite a December rise, inflation is expected to continue falling this year," added KPMG UK chief economist Yael Selfin, citing an expected decline in domestic energy bills. "Nevertheless, disruptions in the Red Sea impacting supply chains could cause further increases in goods prices adding uncertainty to the economic outlook." The BoE had in December frozen its key interest rate at a 15-year peak of 5.25 percent—and warned that it will remain elevated to tackle stubbornly high consumer prices.

The bank implemented 14 hikes in a row since late 2021, when inflationary pressures started to build after the end of the COVID pandemic. Yet inflation surged to a 41-year high at 11.1 percent in October 2022, stoked by spiking energy prices after the invasion of Ukraine by major oil and gas producer Russia. — AFP



BURNLEY, UK: Britain's Prime Minister Rishi Sunak (third left) stands with VEKA Managing Director Neil Evans (second left) and Conservative MP for Burnley, Antony Higginbotham (left), as he is shown a manufacturing process during a visit to UPVC door and window supplier, VEKA Plc, in Burnley, north west England. --AFP

ECB's Lagarde says summer rate cut 'likely'

DAVOS: The European Central Bank could start cutting interest rates this summer, president Christine Lagarde said Wednesday, while stressing that any such move would depend on the latest economic data. The ECB began hiking borrowing costs at an historically fast pace in July 2022 to tame red-hot inflation after Russia's war in Ukraine sent energy costs soaring. Easing inflation and a darkening economic picture since then led the ECB to freeze borrowing costs at its last two meetings, prompting speculation about when the Frankfurt institute might start cutting rates. In an interview with Bloomberg television in Davos, Lagarde was asked to comment on hints by ECB governing council members that cuts could come in the summer. "I would say it's likely too," Lagarde said.

"But I have to be reserved because we are also saying that we are data-dependent and that there is still a level of uncertainty and some indicators that are not anchored at the level where we would like to see them." Markets have been pricing in rate cuts from as early as April, but ECB governors



European Central Bank (ECB) chief Christine Lagarde arrives to take part in the World Economic Forum (WEF) meeting in Davos on January 17, 2024. -- AFP

have been at pains to tamp down those expectations in recent weeks.

Eurozone inflation stood at 2.9 percent in December, down significantly from a double-digit peak in late 2022, but still above the ECB's two-percent target. Lagarde said inflation was "on the right path" but it was too early to declare victory. She cited energy prices and possible supply chain disruptions as key risk factors. The ECB was also keeping a close eye on wage negotiations in the eurozone as well as companies' profit margins for their potential "serious impact" on the bank's battle against inflation, she

added. "We will know a lot more, probably in April, May," Lagarde said, once wage agreements have been concluded.

Lagarde had said on Thursday that interest rates in the eurozone had reached their peak after rising rapidly in response to high inflation last year. "I think that we are at the highest point and barring additional shocks... rates are very probably not going to continue to rise," Lagarde said in an interview on French broadcaster France 2.

"I think they have reached their peak," she said, but refused to be drawn on a possible cut to borrowing costs. "I cannot give you a date," she told her interviewer. "If we win the battle against inflation, if we are sure inflation will be at two percent, then the rates will start to go down," Lagarde said, referring to the ECB's inflation target.

The ECB raised rates higher and faster than ever to tackle sky-high inflation, driven by soaring energy prices in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The pace of consumer price rises has cooled significantly since inflation hit its double-digit peak at the end of 2022, but remains above the ECB's target. Most recently, eurozone inflation rose slightly in December to 2.9 percent, an increase that was widely anticipated. At its last meeting at the end of last year, the ECB warned that the fight was not over but held borrowing costs steady for a second consecutive time. The pause left the benchmark deposit rate at a record high of four percent. — AFP



Murray Auchincloss

BP picks new CEO following Looney sacking

LONDON: British oil giant BP on Wednesday named veteran employee Murray Auchincloss as chief executive officer following a period as interim boss in the wake of Bernard Looney's sacking. BP's former chief financial officer Auchincloss took the reins in September after Looney resigned and was later officially sacked over his failure to dis-close past relationships with colleagues.

"BP announced today that the board has appointed Murray Auchincloss as chief executive officer with immediate effect," the group said in a statement, sticking to a policy of promoting from within. Canadian national Murray, 53, joined BP in 1998, rising to finance boss four years ago. "The board is in complete agreement that Murray was the outstanding candidate and is the right leader for BP," chairman Helge Lund added in the statement.

Three months after Looney resigned, BP announced he had been sacked, resulting in the Irishman foregoing more than £32-million (\$40-million). The company said Looney had "knowingly misled the board" and dismissed him for "serious misconduct". BP's shares were down 1.5 percent following the announcement, although analysts said it was mainly owing to tumbling oil prices on weak Chinese growth data and following a surprise jump to UK inflation.

London's benchmark FTSE 100 index, on which BP trades, was 1.8-percent lower overall in mid-day trading. Analysts pointed to the benefits of appointing Auchincloss but said he had work to do to improve BP's reputation, including over its transition away from fossil fuels.

"Auchincloss certainly has a job to do to restore investor confidence," noted Derren Nathan, head of equity research at Hargreaves Lansdown. "Continuity of the existing strategy is no bad thing but the shape of returns from the growing focus on energy transition technologies still needs to be proved."

As BP chief for less than four years, Looney steered the energy major through a tumultuous period that included huge swings in oil and gas prices owing to the COVID pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine. He meanwhile faced fierce criticism from environmental campaigners, who continue to accuse BP and rivals of not going far enough in their transition to producing cleaner energy.

As for Auchincloss, "there will be some disappointment about the failure to appoint an external candidate for the first time in its history to shake things up and revive a business which has trailed behind its US counterparts in recent years", noted Russ Mould, investment director at AJ Bell.

Wednesday's announcement comes ahead of BP's annual results due February 6. The oil titan rebounded strongly into net profit in the third quarter after large accounting charges had pushed it into the red a year earlier. Auchincloss will earn £1.45 million a year but could earn many times that amount thanks to performance-related bonuses.

Looney became CEO in February 2020, just as the pandemic took hold around the globe, causing him to axe thousands of jobs. While BP suffered a huge loss on its exit from Russia following the country's invasion of Ukraine, the war sent oil and gas prices soaring, handing energy majors massive revenues. — AFP



DAVOS: Participants wait for a session at the World Economic Forum (WEF) annual meeting in Davos, on January 16, 2024. -- AFP

Women's health gap costs \$1tn worldwide: Report

DAVOS: The huge gap between how women and men's health are treated costs \$1 trillion a year worldwide, the World Economic Forum said on Wednesday. Women spend a quarter more of their lives suffering from poor health than men, a disparity that includes an unequal focus on men across medical research, diagnosis and treatment, the report said.

Closing this gap would boost the global economy by \$1 trillion annually by 2040 -- a 1.7 percent increase in per capita GDP driven by women, it added. The report was released as the WEF hosts its 54th annual conference in Davos, Switzerland. The Swiss firm Ferring Pharmaceuticals and McKinsey Health Institute also contributed to the 42-page report.

Every US dollar invested in women's health would return three dollars in projected economic growth, the report said. A large part of this growth would come from sick women getting back into the workforce. The gender health gap causes around 75 million

years of life lost due to poor health annually, equating to a week per woman every year, the report said.

For example, addressing the inequities related to endometriosis and menopause—which only affect women and have long been considered under-studied—could contribute \$130 billion to global GDP by 2040, it estimated. Research also suggests that fewer than half the women living with endometriosis have been properly diagnosed, the report added.

The study also looked at how treatment and diagnosis has benefitted men more than women. Asthma inhalers, for example, have been found to be significantly less effective for women than men. Women are diagnosed later than men for 700 different diseases, previous research has shown. It also takes women two and a half years longer to be diagnosed with cancer.

WEF healthcare head Shyam Bishen said the analysis demonstrates that "investing in women's health must be a priority for every country". "Beyond improving women's quality of life, ensuring women have access to innovations in healthcare is one of the best investments that countries can make for their societies and their economies," he said in a statement.

The WEF announced it was launching the Global Alliance for Women's Health, with \$55 million pledged for women's health. — AFP

Renault ends years of declining sales with strong 2023

PARIS: Sales in French auto giant Renault rose last year, the company said Wednesday, ending four years of decline. The group said it had sold some 2.2 million vehicles in 2023 -- an increase of nine percent on the previous year. It put the increase down

to growth in its three core brands—Renault, Dacia and Alpine—and said sales were particularly strong in Europe, where it posted growth of 19 percent.

The Alpine brand led the sales growth with 22 percent, Dacia with 14.7 percent and Renault with 9.4 percent. The strong sales figures put Renault in second place in Europe in terms of market share—up from fifth position in 2022. The carmaker said it plans to launch 10 new models through 2024.

In December, Renault said it was selling to Nissan part of the stake it owns in the Japanese automaker as the two companies rebalance their alliance. Their

Google eliminates hundreds of jobs in ad team tweak

SAN FRANCISCO: Google on Tuesday confirmed it is eliminating "a few hundred" positions from its global ad team, amid a push to use artificial intelligence for efficiency and creativity. The job cuts to its "large customer" sales team are intended to result in better support for small and medium size businesses advertising on Google's platform, according to the internet giant.

Expansion of small business ad teams at Google was expected by the company to result in increased hiring this year. Google made no mention of generative AI, which is disrupting many sectors including advertising.

Last week, Google's cloud computing unit announced new AI tools to help retailers "personalize online shopping, modernize operations, and transform in-store technology rollouts." Google cited research indicating that some 80 percent of US retailers feel it is urgent to adopt generative AI in their operations. "In only a year, generative AI has morphed from a barely recognized concept to one of the fastest-moving capabilities in all of technology and a critical part of many retailers' agendas," Google Cloud strategic industries vice president Carrie Tharp said in a release.

New Google AI tools included enabling retailers to easily embed virtual agents in websites or mobile apps to provide personalized help and recommendations to shoppers, according to a release.

Google AI is also being put to work analyzing product images and producing product descriptions or terms suited to optimize discovery in online searches, the company said. Google laid off around 12,000 people this time last year, about six percent of its workforce, in the face of inflation and rising interest rates. The Silicon Valley company has since invested heavily in generative AI. — AFP

partnership began in 1999, when Renault rescued Nissan from bankruptcy. Mitsubishi Motors joined in 2016, with Nissan taking a 34-percent stake in its struggling Japanese rival. But numerous tensions emerged within the group, including by the French state increasing its stake in Renault in 2015 and the 2018 arrest of its leader Carlos Ghosn in Japan on suspicion of financial misconduct and his subsequent flight from the country.

As part of the rebalanced alliance, Nissan took a stake in Renault's new electric car division called Ampere. — AFP

Business

China sees one of its worst years of growth since 1990

Recovery stalls amid sluggish consumption and global economic turmoil

BEIJING: China's economy last year grew at one of its slowest rates in more than three decades, official figures showed Wednesday, as it was battered by a crippling property crisis, sluggish consumption and global turmoil.

The figures were in line with expectations and even beat Beijing's target but will likely pile fresh pressure on officials to unveil more stimulus measures to kickstart business activity and get the country's army of consumers spending again. China's National Bureau of Statistics revealed that gross domestic product expanded 5.2 percent to hit 126 trillion yuan (\$17.6 trillion) last year.

Markets in Asia fell on the news, with Hong Kong's exchange closing down 3.7 percent and Shanghai off more than two percent. The reading is better than the three percent recorded in 2022, when strict zero-COVID curbs destroyed activity, but marks the weakest performance since 1990, excluding the pandemic years. While 5.2 percent would be looked on enviously by other governments such as the United States and those in the eurozone—which each expanded around two percent in 2022 -- it is well down from the levels around six or seven percent enjoyed in the 2010s.

After lifting its draconian COVID measures at the end of 2022, Beijing set itself a growth target of "around five percent" for last year. The economy enjoyed an initial post-pandemic rebound, but ran out of steam within months as a lack of confidence among households and businesses hit consumption. "With investment in the property sector falling, the economy is more dependent on the manufacturing sector and service sector," Zhiwei Zhang, President and Chief Economist at Pinpoint Asset Management, said in a note.

And Teeuwe Mevissen, China economist at Rabobank, told AFP: "The main challenges for China continued to be the malfunctioning real estate sector and related to its low levels of private consumption."

Statistics last month showed deflation continued for the third month in a row, likely deepening consumer reluctance to spend. And exports, historically a key growth driver, fell last year for the first time since 2016, reflecting how tensions with the United States and a stuttering global economic recovery are compounding Beijing's struggles to kickstart growth at home.

China's GDP figures remain a key source of insight into the health of the world's second-largest economy, despite being eminently political. Officials are due to release their growth target for 2024 in March. Between the third and fourth quarters—figures more reflective of the real-time economic situation—it only grew one percent.

And December saw retail sales—a key indicator of household spending—slow after a rebound the previous month. Unemployment also increased slightly to 5.1 percent—though the statistics effectively exclude millions of migrant workers from rural areas. Official statistics also showed China's population decline accelerated in 2023, extending a downward streak after more than six decades of growth as the country battles a looming demographic crisis.

"What China saw last year was possibly the most disappointing post-COVID recovery imaginable," Shehzad Qazi, managing director of China Beige Book, a consultancy firm that tracks the Chinese economy, told AFP. "The economy limped to calendar's end," he said.

"Any true acceleration next year will require either a major global upside surprise or more active government policy," Chaoping Zhu, at JP Morgan Asset Management, added: "Stronger fiscal stimulus are essential to support growth and market confidence."

Weighed down by a lack of business confidence and sluggish consumption, China has sought to lure back international investors. Speaking at the annual meeting of global elites in Davos on Tuesday, Premier Li Qiang painted a bullish picture of



QINGZHOU, China: Employees work on an assembly line producing wheel loaders at a factory in Qingzhou, in eastern China's Shandong province on January 17, 2024. — AFP

the economy. "Choosing the Chinese market is not a risk but an opportunity," Li said. But risks abound, most prominently in the country's teetering real estate market, which has long accounted for around a quarter of China's economy and experienced dazzling growth for two decades.

Financial woes at major firms such as Evergrande and Country Garden are now fuelling buyer mistrust against a backdrop of unfinished housing developments and falling prices. Property was for years seen by many Chinese as a safe place to park savings, but

price drops have hit their wallets hard and Beijing's support measures for the sector have so far had little effect. Also weighing down the economy is a lack of jobs for the country's youth. A record of more than one in five people aged 16 to 24 in China were unemployed in May, according to officials. Beijing then suspended the monthly publication of youth unemployment figures in August. But it shared on-year figures on Wednesday, saying the unemployment rate of 16 to 24 year-olds—excluding students—was 14.9 percent in 2023. — AFP

Stocks, oil prices slump on global economic headwinds

LONDON: Stock markets and oil prices slumped Wednesday as investors reacted to weak Chinese growth data and an unexpected rise in UK inflation.

China's economy, the world's second biggest after the United States, grew last year at one of its slowest paces in more than three decades. China's National Bureau of Statistics said that gross domestic product expanded 5.2 percent, in line with expectations.

However, official data showing UK annual inflation inched up to 4.0 percent in December from 3.9 percent the previous month confounded market forecasts of a slight reduction.

It dashed hopes the Bank of England would cut interest rates in the first half of 2024, boosting the pound against the dollar and euro. The surprise rise in UK inflation came as traders increasingly expect the US Federal Reserve and European Central Bank (ECB) to also delay cutting rates as global inflation takes longer to come down than thought. "Investors have had to rip up their game plan after UK inflation went in the wrong direction to support the narrative for interest rate cuts," noted AJ Bell investment director Russ Mould.

Over in the eurozone, the ECB could start cutting interest rates this summer, President Christine Lagarde said Wednesday, but she stressed that any such move would depend on economic data.

As for China, it "may have hit official growth targets, but it is still an economy under pressure", said XTB research director Kathleen Brooks. The Shanghai stock markets closed down more than two percent Wednesday and Hong Kong tumbled nearly four percent.

"The headwinds facing China's economy in 2023 have not subsided, and the geopolitical environment may become more contentious following election results in Taiwan," warned SPI Asset Management's Stephen Innes, referring to the victory for pro-sovereignty candidate Lai Ching-te in a weekend presidential vote. — AFP

Gulf Bank introduces 15% cashback for Visa credit cardholders

KUWAIT: To promote the adoption of cutting-edge payment technologies and uphold its commitment to delivering superior services, Gulf Bank is introducing an exclusive promotion for Visa credit cardholders. This enticing offer entails a 15 percent cashback reward for transactions made at both local and international cafes and restaurants, through Apple Pay, Google Pay, and Samsung Pay.

To enjoy the benefits of this offer, customers must spend a minimum of KD 100 in restaurants and cafes, whether inside or outside Kuwait, during the offer's period from Jan 14 to Feb 15, 2024. The maximum cashback amount the customer can get is KD 75 and it will be credited to customers' card by March 10, 2024, and customers will be notified via SMS.

Sharing his thoughts on this occasion, Mohammed Taqi, Assistant General Manager of Consumer

Banking, highlighted Gulf Bank's commitment to introducing exclusive offers for its credit cardholders, as a continuation of its ongoing efforts to recognize and meet their needs.

He emphasized the bank's dedication to delivering high-quality products and services, all geared towards ensuring an outstanding customer experience. Taqi highlighted the numerous features of Gulf Bank's credit cards, providing customers with benefits across various sectors such as restaurants, hotels, tourism, travel, entertainment, health and beauty, car rental, and more.

Gulf Bank takes pride in having the leading and most efficient rewards program in Kuwait, recognized as the Gulf Points program. This initiative enables customers to exchange points for airline tickets and book accommodations at more than 300,000 hotels worldwide. Every Gulf Bank credit cardholder is automatically enrolled in the Gulf Bank Points Program, which provides the customers with many advantages, including the flexibility to travel throughout the year, earn Airline Frequent Flyer miles when using their points to book a flight with their Gulf Points in addition to earning points when paying the remaining booking value using their Gulf Bank credit cards.

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.



Mohammed Taqi

Jakarta-Bandung HSR aims to serve 31,000 passengers per day

JAKARTA: The Jakarta-Bandung High-speed Railway (HSR), the first of its kind in Indonesia and South-east Asia, has set a target to serve 31,000 passengers per day throughout this year, said PT Kereta Cepat Indonesia-China (KCIC), a joint venture consortium between Indonesian and Chinese state-owned firms that constructs and runs the HSR, reports Xinhua.

KCIC's manager of corporate communications, Emir Monti, told local media on Wednesday that the HSR, locally known as Whoosh, can serve 31,000 passengers with 68 trips per day, an outcome of study by the University of Indonesia, said Monti.

He said that KCIC is continuing the work on increasing the number of trips while improving services and facilities at stations and providing attractive promotions for passengers. "Our trips are still limited to 40 trips per day with a volume between 15,000 and 17,000 passengers per day. So we will continue to gradually increase the number of trips, occupancy, with various service improvements," he said.

According to him, Whoosh has delivered more than 1.3 million passengers since it was officially put into commercial operation in October last year.

Monti said achievements over the past three months showed a high public demand for modern public transportation and that he is optimistic that the

With elections due this year in countries including the United States, India and Britain, OpenAI said Monday it will not allow its tech—including ChatGPT and the image generator DALL-E 3 -- to be used for political campaigns. "We want to make sure our technology is not used in a way that could undermine" the democratic process, OpenAI said in a blog post.

"We're still working to understand how effective our tools might be for personalized persuasion," it added. "Until we know more, we don't allow people to build applications for political campaigning and lobbying."

AI-driven disinformation and misinformation are the biggest short-term global risks and could undermine newly elected governments in major economies, the World Economic Forum



BANDUNG, Indonesia: The Jakarta-Bandung high-speed train is parked at the Tegalluar station depot in Bandung, West Java, on January 17, 2024. — AFP

number of passengers will continue to increase. With a design speed of 350 km per hour, the 142.3 km HSR cuts the travel time between Jakarta to Bandung in West Java province from over three hours to around

40 minutes. "People feel comfortable enough to use this high-speed train to have a one-day tour in Bandung, or have a one-day business in Jakarta and return the same day," Monti said.—Agencies

OpenAI to launch anti-disinformation tools for 2024 polls

SAN FRANCISCO: ChatGPT maker OpenAI has said it will introduce tools to combat disinformation ahead of the dozens of elections this year in countries that are home to half the world's population. The explosive success of text generator ChatGPT spurred a global artificial intelligence revolution but also triggered warnings that such tools could flood the internet with disinformation and sway voters.

warned in a report released last week.

Fears over election disinformation began years ago, but the public availability of potent AI text and image generators has boosted the threat, experts say, especially if users cannot easily tell if the content they see is fake or manipulated. OpenAI said Monday it was working on tools that would attach reliable attribution to text generated by ChatGPT, and also give users the ability to detect if an image was created using DALL-E 3. "Early this year, we will implement the Coalition for Content Provenance and Authenticity's digital credentials—an approach that encodes details about the content's provenance using cryptography," the company said.

The coalition, also known as C2PA, aims to improve methods for identifying and tracing digital content. Its members include Microsoft, Sony, Adobe

and Japanese imaging firms Nikon and Canon.

OpenAI said ChatGPT, when asked procedural questions about US elections such as where to vote, will direct users to authoritative websites. "Lessons from this work will inform our approach in other countries and regions," the company said.

It added that DALL-E 3 has "guardrails" that prevent users from generating images of real people, including candidates. OpenAI's announcement follows steps revealed last year by US tech giants Google and Facebook parent Meta to limit election interference, especially through the use of AI.

AFP has previously debunked deepfakes—doctored videos—of US President Joe Biden announcing a military draft and former secretary of state Hillary Clinton endorsing Florida Governor Ron DeSantis for president. — AFP



Sudanese singer Mazin Hamid (center) performs during a concert at the Goethe institute.

After fleeing war, Sudanese artists recreate scene in Cairo

When the first bombs rang out in Sudan, Amjad, Fatima and Mazin abandoned their paintbrushes, musical instruments and studios, leaving behind the lives they knew for unfamiliar shores. Now in Egypt, they have sought to bring back the sights and sounds of a long-lost home to an audience of about a hundred, just a stone's throw away from Cairo's iconic Tahrir Square. Mazin Hamid, a celebrity in his native Khartoum, thrilled the crowd with his homegrown beats at a concert accompanying an exhibition.

When war broke out in his home country last April, Hamid was under a tight deadline to produce the soundtrack for "Goodbye Julia", the first-ever Sudanese film to be screened and awarded at Cannes. Having already experienced a revolution, a coup and a brutal crackdown on pro-democracy activists in just four years, the 31-year-old producer just locked the door to his studio and kept working.

"In the soundproof walls of the studio" he could only hear the occasional sound of scattered gunshots, Hamid told AFP in Cairo. But when the sound of fighter jets burst through the walls, "I understood things were serious." The hours of fighting turned into days and months, and the war between the army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces would come to grip much of the already impoverished country, with no signs of abating.

The most reliable toll—over 13,000 dead according to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project—is

a conservative estimate at best. In the western region of Darfur, the United Nations and international lawyers have warned another wave of ethnic cleansing is taking hold. With millions displaced, disease outbreaks across the country and a stillborn agricultural season, Sudan has been brought to its knees.



Sudanese photographer Hashim Nasr points at one of his pictures during an exhibition concert at the Goethe institute in the Egyptian capital Cairo.

Like more than a million others, Hamid knew he had to leave. He fled, leaving behind "his instruments and equipment, so as not to attract attention at the checkpoints" set up by soldiers and paramilitary fighters across the city.

'From scratch'

At first, Fatima Ismail holed herself up in her apartment, "in silence for fear of the paramilitaries posted downstairs," she told AFP in Cairo, where artworks

depicting her life in exile were on display. From the first days of the war, stories spread of horrific sexual violence committed by RSF fighters.

"If they had known there were young women in the apartment, it would have been terrible," the 26-year-old said. She eventually managed to escape, pulling her family onto the first



Sudanese guitarist Elzain Ali performs during a concert at the Goethe institute in the Egyptian capital Cairo.

minibus they found, speeding through neighborhoods in ruins.

Before she left, she sketched every inch of their lives in the apartment—"my mother cooking", "my father reading the Koran", the everyday memories gone forever. Now safe in Cairo, she works through her sketches, processing the war through her art after having to relaunch her practice from scratch.

"I had to leave without any of my equipment... God and drawing saved me," she said, surrounded by her art-

work as music by fellow artists played around her. Among them was Amjad Badr, 28, who also left his instruments and studio behind in Sudan. "I'm playing with a guitar a friend lent me," he told AFP at the gathering in Cairo.

'We will return'

After a long journey to Egypt and "11 days spent sleeping", Badr found his way back to music. "It was extremely important for me to express everything I had been through," he said. That sentiment is prevalent among Sudanese "artists in Cairo, but also in Nairobi or in Ethiopia," Badr added, referring to some of the destinations where over 1.5 million people have fled.

Over 400,000 have come to Egypt, according to the United Nations. Also at the exhibition in Cairo, Hashim Nasr presented stylized photos representing his family—its missing members, the impact of death and exile, but also of rebirth. The 33-year-old former dentist made a new home in the coastal city of Alexandria, where he took up photography again.

But there, Nasr told AFP, he "doesn't know anyone". Without models, he took to photographing his own family. Far from home and all too aware of the carnage they left behind, the musician Badr said it's hard to find "motivation or inspiration". But "we will return", he vowed, as though reassuring himself. "The music scene was really starting to take off before the war, so soon we'll be back, and even stronger."—AFP

Japan plane turns back after man bites cabin attendant

A US-bound ANA plane had to return to Tokyo after an intoxicated passenger bit a cabin attendant mid-flight, the Japanese carrier said Wednesday. The passenger, reportedly a 55-year-old man believed to be American, sunk his teeth into crew member's arm while "heavily drunk", leaving her mildly injured, an All Nippon Airways spokesman told AFP. The incident prompted pilots of the plane with 159 passengers on board to turn back over the Pacific to Haneda airport, where the man was handed over to police, according to ANA.

Japanese broadcaster TBS quoted the passenger as telling investigators that he "doesn't recall at all" his behavior. The incident left some social media users likening it in mock horror to the "beginning of a zombie movie". Others lamented the litany of Japanese aviation woes so far this year—with four other incidents making headlines in just over two weeks.



The most serious was a near-catastrophic collision at Haneda between a Japan Airlines aircraft and a smaller coast guard plane on January 2. All 379 people on board the JAL Airbus escaped just before the aircraft was engulfed in flames. Five of the six people on the smaller aircraft, which was helping in a relief operation after a major earthquake in central Japan, died.

Then on Tuesday, the wing tip of a Korean Air airliner struck an empty Cathay Pacific plane while taxiing at an airport in the northern island of Hokkaido. Korean Air said the accident, which caused no injuries, happened after "the third-party ground handler vehicle slipped due to heavy snow."

A similar mishap took place on Sunday when an ANA aircraft came into "contact" with a Delta Air Lines plane at a Chicago airport, the Japanese airline told AFP, also causing no injuries. Another ANA flight reportedly had to turn back on Saturday after a crack was discovered on the cockpit window of the Boeing 737-800.—AFP

Guinness World Records has doubts about age of world's oldest dog

Bobi the Dog's title as the world's oldest canine was suspended on Tuesday after Guinness World Records officials began to have doubts about his real age. He died in October at the official age of 31 years and 165 days, eight months after the record-breakers' hall of fame declared on its website that he was the world's oldest living dog.

The purebred Rafeiro—a Portuguese race of livestock guard dog whose life expectancy is usually 12 to 14 years—was also declared the oldest dog ever, breaking a nearly century-old record held by an Australian cattle dog named Bluey, who died in 1939 aged 29 years and five months. "While our review is ongoing we have decided to temporarily pause both the record titles for Oldest Dog Living and (Oldest Dog) Ever just until all of our findings are in place," a Guinness spokesman told AFP.

The reference site for extreme achievements did not say what had raised their suspicions. But skeptics cited by British and US media said Bobi's feet appeared to be a different color in photos of him as a puppy and snaps of him in his dotage. And Miguel Figueredo, a veterinarian in Lisbon, told AFP last year: "He doesn't look like a very old dog... with mobility problems... or with an old dog's muscle mass."

Guinness World Records insisted the suspension was "temporary, while (the review) is ongoing". Bobi's owner,

Leonel Costa, insisted that all the "suspicions are unfounded". In a statement sent to AFP, he said that the certification procedure "took almost a year" and that he had complied with all the requirements demanded by Guinness.

Costa accused "a certain elite in the veterinary world" of being behind these suspicions, because they had difficulty accepting that Bobi had always fed on a "natural diet" instead of dog food. Bobi, who was officially born on May 11, 1992, cheated death in his first days of life.



This 2023 image provided by Guinness World Records shows Bobi in Conqueiros, Portugal. Guinness World Records says the world's oldest dog recently celebrated his 31st birthday.

He and three other puppies were from a litter born in a woodshed owned by the Costa family in the village of Conqueiros in central Portugal. Because the family already owned so many animals, the parents decided to get rid of the newborn puppies. They unwittingly left one puppy—Bobi—behind and were eventually persuaded by Leonel Costa and his sister to keep him.—AFP

Scientists clone first rhesus monkey using new method

Scientists in China on Tuesday announced that they have cloned the first healthy rhesus monkey, a two-year-old named Retro, by tweaking the process that created Dolly the sheep. Primates have proved particularly difficult to clone, and the scientists overcame years of failure by replacing the cloned cells that would become the placenta with those from a normal embryo.

They hope their new technique will lead to the creation of identical rhesus monkeys that can be experimented on for medical research. However, outside researchers warned that the success rate for the new method was still very low, as well as raising the usual ethical questions around cloning. Since the historic cloning of Dolly the sheep using a technique called somatic cell nuclear transfer (SCNT) in 1996, more than 20 different animals have been created using the process, including dogs, cats, pigs and cattle.

However it was not until two decades later that scientists managed to clone the first primates using SCNT. A pair of identical crab-eating macaques named Hua Hua and Zhong Zhong were created using SCNT in 2018 by researchers at the Chinese Academy of Sciences Institute of Neuroscience in Shanghai. But that breakthrough, led by the institute's Qiang Sun, only resulted in live births in fewer than two percent of attempts.

Qiang was also a senior author of the new research published in the journal Nature Communications. He told AFP that the team had extensively re-



This handout photograph shows ReTro, a then 17 month-old somatic cell-cloned Rhesus monkey, produced through trophoblast replacement.—AFP

searched why previous efforts to clone the rhesus monkey (Macaca mulatta) had failed.

In an earlier attempt, one monkey—out of 35 implanted foetuses—was born alive, but it died in less than a day. Qiang said that one of the "major problems" was that the placentas of cloned embryos were showing abnormalities compared to those from in vitro fertilization.

So the researchers replaced the cells that later become the placenta, which are called the trophoblast, with those from a healthy, non-cloned embryo. The trophoblast cells provide nutrients to a growing embryo, and turn into the placenta that supplies oxygen and other life-supporting assistance to the foetus. The technique "greatly improved the success rate of cloning by

SCNT" and led to the birth of Retro, Qiang said.

Human cloning 'unacceptable'

However Lluís Montoliu, a scientist at the Spanish National Centre for Biotechnology who was not involved in the research, pointed out that just one out of 113 initial embryos survived, meaning a success rate of less than one percent. If human beings were to ever be cloned—the great ethical fear of this field of research—then other primate species would have to be cloned first, he said.

But so far, the poor efficiency of these efforts has "confirmed the obvious: not only was human cloning unnecessary and debatable, but if attempted, it would be extraordinarily difficult—and ethically unjustifiable," Montoliu said. Qiang emphasized that cloning a human being was "unacceptable" in any circumstance.

For the SCNT procedure, scientists remove the nucleus from a healthy egg, then replace it with another nucleus from another type of body cell. The embryo therefore grows into the same creature that donated the replacement nucleus. A rhesus monkey named Tetra was cloned in 1999 using a different technique called embryo splitting. But this simpler technique can only produce four clones at once. Scientists have focused on SCNT in part because it can create far more clones, with the goal of creating identical monkeys to study a range of diseases as well as test drugs.—AFP



ARMANI'S MEN MIX REFINEMENT AND NONCHALANCE

The "king" of Italian fashion, Giorgio Armani, unveiled Monday his latest men's collection marked by fluid cuts and soft lines. Under the piercing blue eye of the 89-year-old maestro, projected on the runway's backdrop, models showed off the autumn-winter 2024/2025 collection in the intimate setting of his historic headquarters on Via Borgonuovo.

"Men's fashion must not be an object of desire at any cost, it must be a nice suit, a beautiful jacket, a lovely fabric, a perfect color and nothing more, or else we descend into carnival," Armani said. Loyal to his DNA of relaxed chic, Armani presented ample but refined trousers, and half-length unbuttoned coats that allowed freedom of movement.

For next winter, shapes have enlarged "to provide even more ease and fluidity", he said. His signature offering—unstructured jackets with no shoulder pads or lining—were presented in a variety of styles: for a dandy with vest and pleated trousers, or in a sporty version with cargo pants tucked into boots. The ever-existing challenge for a designer is to "do the usual in an unusual way", Armani said after the show on the fourth day of men's Fashion Week.

Ties were discreet in his show, generally thin, black or grey, hidden under a blazer or often replaced by a scarf. "A tie depends on the occasion. We have one for the man who goes to the office, with the respect for this office, because I hope he's not going to an important meeting in a T-shirt," he said. Armani had already presented on Saturday a maritime-inspired collection for Emporio, the upscale pret-a-porter line intended for a trendier clientele.

Zegna's 'cashmere oasis'

Fluid cuts and effortless elegance was also the mantra of Zegna's show, which transformed an immense hangar on the outskirts of Milan into an "oasis of cashmere". "It's a collection for collectors. I hope these clothes will be bought by people who will keep them for a long time," said artistic director Alessandro Sartori. The pleated trousers were ample, to be combined with turtleneck sweaters and short vests of the same fabric. The vest lapels are detachable.

Sartori left nothing to accident, closely studying the tiniest details to reflect men's needs. Pants and coat pockets were deepened "to let you slide in your hands with ease," he said. Colors ranged from olive green to royal blue, passing through eggshell, beige and grey. Milan's Fashion Week finishes Tuesday with digital shows before the fashion world moves on to Paris, first for men's fashion and then haute couture.—AFP



Models walk the runway at the Armani collection show during the Milan Fashion Week Menswear Autumn/Winter 2024/2025. —AFP photos



Models walk the runway at the Zegna collection show during the Milan Fashion Week Menswear Autumn/Winter 2024/2025.



Lifestyle

PHARRELL WILLIAMS BRINGS OLD WEST STYLE TO PARIS



Pharrell Williams brought the American West to Paris on Tuesday as he presented a collection full of cowboy hats and rhinestones for his latest show as creative director at Louis Vuitton. Williams, known for hit singles such as "Happy" and singing on Daft Punk's "Get Lucky", joined the French brand last year in a sign of the increasingly lucrative cross-pollination between fashion, music and celebrity.



US rapper, artist and fashion designer Pharrell Williams acknowledges applause after presenting creations for the Louis Vuitton Menswear Ready-to-wear Fall-Winter 2024/2025 collection as part of the Paris Fashion Week, in Paris.--AFP photos

He was the headline act on the first day of Paris Fashion Week, with a collection full of denim, tassels, Native American-inspired ponchos, pearl and sequin floral embroideries, and enough varieties of cowboy boots and hats to fill a country music festival. The show notes described it as "an exploration of the origins of workwear through the savoir faire of Louis Vuitton".

The show was held in a large han-

gar beside the company's Louis Vuitton Foundation art museum in western Paris and attracted stars including actors Bradley Cooper and Omar Sy, and rappers Playboi Carti and Pusha T. The night ended with Williams performing

Designers under pressure

The luxury sector has become one of the most crucial success stories in the European economy despite its associations with social inequality and

active directors last year. There are few major changes in this week's line-up, though Balmain is returning to menswear shows for the first time in several years.

Forty-two brands are holding run-



Models present creations for the Louis Vuitton Menswear Ready-to-wear Fall-Winter 2024/2025 collection as part of the Paris Fashion Week, in Paris.

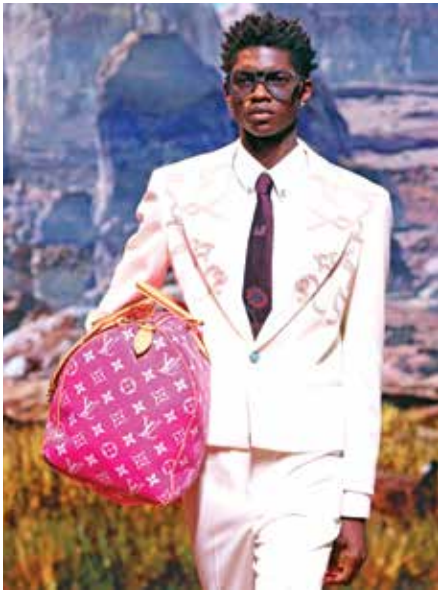
alongside the British band Mumford and Sons and a group of Native American musicians.

It was another extravagantly expensive publicity stunt for Vuitton, which last year became the first to hit 20 billion euros (\$21.8 billion) in revenues. There has been criticism from local officials over the brand's intrusions on daily life in Paris, particularly after Williams took over the entire Pont Neuf bridge for his debut runway show last summer, shutting down traffic in the city's historic center.

the environmental damage wrought by the fashion industry. The season began in Milan last week and continues in Paris with autumn/winter menswear collections from the likes of Dior, Hermes and Loewe.

Other brands are racing to keep up, with several big-name designers booted out recently in the cutthroat race for profits. Givenchy parted ways with menswear boss Matthew Williams this month. His replacement has yet to be announced. Gucci, Chloe and Alexander McQueen all saw new cre-

way shows during the menswear week, and another 32 organizing presentations of their new collections. The pace is relentless—After menswear comes the haute couture week in Paris for the most luxurious and bespoke outfits. Having already been through Milan, the fashion caravan decamps after Paris for Miami, Copenhagen, New York and London, and then back to Milan and Paris for womenswear shows in February.—AFP



Paris gang arrested over Balmain fashion robbery

Six people have been arrested over the theft of some 50 items from French luxury brand Balmain last September that almost derailed its Paris Fashion Week show, a police source said Wednesday. The men, all aged in their twenties, were arrested the previous day in the Paris suburbs, the source told AFP, confirming information first reported in lifestyle magazine Elle.

Balmain creative director Olivier Rousteing revealed on social media on September 17 that an armed group had "hijacked" a van transporting the items from Charles de Gaulle Airport to the brand's Paris headquarters, just 10 days before they were to be shown at its womenswear show. "This is so disrespectful. I wanted to share this with you as a reminder to never take anything for

granted," Rousteing said at the time.

The police source told AFP the group had been tracked down and several Balmain pieces found during home searches. They believe the label was not specifically targeted. "If it had been carried out to a specific order, the items would have been sold," the source said.

For the fashion world, it was an unprecedented incident, and the Balmain

team raced to remake the outfits in time for the show. They managed to pull together an exuberant collection, full of unabashed primary colors, shiny vinyl-style materials and elaborate flower arrangements.—AFP

Lana Del Rey, Doja Cat, Tyler, the Creator to headline Coachella 2024

Lana Del Rey, Doja Cat and Tyler, The Creator will headline this year's edition of the Coachella music festival, organizers said Tuesday. No Doubt—the group fronted by Gwen Stefani, which reached peak fame in the 1990s—will also reunite onstage at the festival for the first time since 2015, organizers said.

Mexican sensation Peso Pluma, Bronx rapper Ice Spice and Colombia's J Balvin are all also set to perform at the three-day weekend in the California desert that kicks off the music festival circuit. The major festival takes place over two

three-day weekends, this year scheduled to begin April 12-14 with a repeat slated for April 19-21. The lineup reveal follows last year's history-making weekend, when Bad Bunny became the first Spanish-language and first Latin American solo act to headline, and K-pop group Blackpink of South Korea was the first Asian act to perform in a top slot. The late 1990s rockers Blink-182 also reunited at the 2023 festival.

Earlier this week New York's Governors Ball festival also released its lineup, with headliners to include Post Malone,

The Killers, and SZA, as well as Rauw Alejandro, 21 Savage and Peso Pluma. Renee Rapp and Victoria Monet are among the rising stars who are scheduled to perform at both festivals.

Also set to perform at both Coachella and Governors Ball is Saint Levant, an artist of Palestinian-French-Algerian-Serbian descent who spent his childhood years in Gaza before he and his family were forced to flee to Jordan. The artist is now based in Los Angeles.—AFP



Lana Del Rey, Tyler and Doja Cat

Sports

Debutant Joseph gives W Indies some hope after taking 2 top-order wickets

‘You don’t have to bowl too quick, just hang around the off stump’

ADELAIDE: Debutant Shamar Joseph gave the West Indies some hope after taking two top-order wickets during Australia's reply to the visitors' first innings total of 188 in the opening Test in Adelaide Wednesday. Australia were 59-2 at stumps, with Usman Khawaja not out 30 and Cameron Green on six.

Australia were only 129 runs behind, but with key batsmen Steve Smith and Marnus Labuschagne back in the pavilion. Earlier, Australian captain Pat Cummins won the toss and sent the West Indies in to bat on a cool and overcast morning, a decision that proved fruitful when the visitors were reduced to 133-9. But Joseph, playing only his sixth first class match, gave the score some respectability with a breezy 36 off only 41 balls.

The best was still to come for the 24-year-old, who came on as first change and had Smith caught at third slip with his first ball in Test cricket. It was Smith's first outing at the top of the order since taking over from the now-retired David Warner, and may raise some concerns in the Aussie camp regarding the belligerent left-hander's long-term replacement.

Joseph was not done, following the Smith wicket with that of Labuschagne, caught on the hook by Gudakesh Motie at deep fine leg to leave Australia 45-2. "I had a few conversations with the boys in the dressing room," Joseph said.

"I told them I would get a wicket with my first ball, but I didn't know it would be Steve Smith. "I will remember this for the rest of my life." Things could have been even better for the Windies had wicket-keeper Josh Da Silva not dropped Khawaja on one, a catch he should have taken.

Earlier, Josh Hazlewood took 4-44, including his 250th Test wicket, and Cummins 4-41 as Australia ran through the West Indies batting line-up. Hazlewood

said the wicket had played a bit differently from how it usually did in Adelaide.

"The wicket was an interesting one, not much pace and bounce and the odd one nipped around. I love playing here," he said. "You don't have to bowl too quick, just hang around the off stump. Hopefully we bat the whole day tomorrow."

Australia had gone into the Test making only one change from the team that beat Pakistan 3-0 earlier in the summer, bringing in Cameron Green for the retired Warner. It was a different story for the West Indies, who gave debuts to Joseph and all-rounders Kaveem Hodge and Justin Greaves.

Windies skittled out

West Indies openers Kraigg Brathwaite and Tegenarine Chandernaul began sedately, content to leave as many balls as possible. Cummins brought himself on in the 10th over with immediate results, a fuller ball enticing Chandernaul into an expansive drive, only to slice the ball to gully where Green used all his height to take a comfortable catch.

Cummins then removed Brathwaite with a beautiful ball that was angled in, then straightened and took the top of off stump to leave the West Indies 27-2 after the first hour. Alick Athanaze and Kirk McKenzie then steadied the ship and looked to take the West Indies to lunch at two down, but with the score on 52, Athanaze opted to leave a Hazlewood delivery only to see the ball cannon into his off stump.

It was Hazlewood's 250th wicket in Test cricket, meaning the four main bowlers in Australia's attack—Hazlewood, Mitchell Starc, Cummins and Nathan Lyon—have all reached that milestone. Hazlewood continued after lunch with the wickets of Hodge (12), McKenzie (50) and Greaves (5) to leave the West Indies reeling at 108-6.



ADELAIDE: West Indies' Alzarri Joseph (L) bowls during the day one of the first cricket Test match between Australia and the West Indies at the Adelaide Oval in Adelaide on January 17, 2024. — AFP

That became 132-7 when Cummins had Da Silva caught at deep square leg for six, before one run later they lost both Motie and Alzarri Joseph. But Shamar Joseph rescued the situation, showing no fear as he reached his highest first class score, with Kemar Roach offering solid support.

"Their tail wagged and we needed to work in the

last wicket stand," Hazlewood said. The West Indies needed to make an early breakthrough and they put the disappointment of dropping Khawaja behind them with the important wicket of Smith. There were some Australian nerves jangling when Labuschagne fell, but Khawaja and Green saw the home side safely to stumps. — AFP

Allen's 137 gives NZ series-clinching Pakistan T20 win

WELLINGTON: New Zealand sealed their T20 series against Pakistan with two games to spare Wednesday on the back of a record 137 off 62 balls by opener Finn Allen at University Oval in Dunedin. The Black Caps, sent in to bat in game three of the five-match series, won by 45 runs after posting a colossal 224 for seven and restricting Pakistan to 179 for seven.

It followed their victories by 46 and 21 runs respectively in the first two matches. The swash-buckling Allen, following on from his 74 off 41 balls in game two, frequently belted the ball out of the ground as he smashed 16 sixes and five fours in his whirlwind innings.

He said he has been working on trying to spend more time in the middle while still being explosive. "It's a bit of both, you know, picking my moments when to go and picking bowlers too. For me, playing the ball on its merits and hitting it where it's supposed to go is kind of what I've been trying to do," he said.

Mitch Santner, standing in as New Zealand captain for the injured Kane Williamson, said the innings went as planned. "The way he constructed his innings, we talked about trying to do it for as long as he can, and he did it for a long time today."

The opener's 137 is the highest score by a New Zealander in a T20 International, surpassing the previous best of 123 set by Brendon McCullum, and it equalled the world record of 16 sixes in an innings held by Afghanistan's Hazratullah Zazai.

He dominated the bowling, taking 27 off one over by Haris Rauf with three sixes, two fours and a single. Rauf conceded 60 off his four overs while



DUNEDIN: Pakistan's Mohammad Rizwan (L) dives for his crease as New Zealand's wicketkeeper Tim Seifert fields the ball during the third Twenty20 international cricket match between New Zealand and Pakistan University Oval in Dunedin on January 17, 2024. — AFP

Mohammad Nawaz gave up 44 and Shaheen Afridi 43 on a dismal day with the ball for Pakistan.

After the early dismissal of Devon Conway for seven, Allen and Tim Seifert put on 125 for the second wicket, with Seifert only contributing 31 as he opted for singles to keep the hard-hitting opener on strike. The umpires had to call for replacement balls three times, after Allen smacked missiles out of the ground.

The opener was eventually undone in the 18th over when he was bowled by an off-cutter from

Zaman Khan, who then applauded the New Zealand batsman as he left the field. In reply, Pakistan never looked like getting close to the required 11.25 run rate.

They reached 95 for two in the 11th over, but saw a clutch of wickets derail their chase, losing four for just 39 runs. Babar Azam top-scored with 58 off 37 deliveries while Mohammad Nawaz contributed 28 off 15 in a late cameo. The remaining two matches are in Christchurch on Friday and Sunday. — AFP



MARSEILLE: (FILES) England's hooker Jamie George celebrates his team's victory at the end of the France 2023 Rugby World Cup quarter-final match between England and Fiji at the Velodrome stadium in Marseille. — AFP

Jamie George to captain England in Six Nations

LONDON: Jamie George will captain England in the Six Nations, the Rugby Football Union announced Wednesday. The hooker, who has previously led Saracens and the British and Irish Lions, succeeds Owen Farrell with his club-mate missing the tournament while he takes a mental health break from international rugby union.

But there is no place in England coach Steve Borthwick's 36-man tournament training squad for the experienced forward duo of Billy Vunipola or Kyle Sinckler. George has won 85 England caps, plus three for the British and Irish Lions.

"Last week Steve asked me to be captain for the upcoming Six Nations and I accepted with huge gratitude and enthusiasm," George said. "I love playing rugby for England. I hope that everyone has seen how much it means to me, I have never shied away from that."

"I am so excited about where this team can go and bringing the fans on that journey with us is something that I care about deeply." He added: "I believe I'm at the stage of my career where I can give my all to the captaincy and give my best on the pitch."

"I don't underestimate the challenge ahead. Owen is a fantastic motivator and tactician, and we will undoubtedly miss his leadership. "But I have got brilliant people around me, many of whom have won major tournaments, and utilising the great experience we have within the group is going to be crucial."

Centre Henry Slade and hooker Luke Cowan-Dickie, who both missed out on the World Cup, are recalled. Uncapped Exeter wing Immanuel Feyi-Waboso, born and brought up in Cardiff, is one of seven uncapped players in the squad. Fellow wings Oscar Beard and Tom Roebuck, back rows Chandler Cunningham-South and Ethan Roots, centre Fraser Dingwall and fly-half Fin Smith are the other squad members yet to make a Test debut.

England finished third at last year's World Cup in France. But they have won just two matches in each of the past three Six Nations. England begin this season's Championship away to Italy on February 3. "Building on the foundations of what we achieved at the Rugby World Cup, I have selected a squad that provides strong continuity and experience, whilst at the same time providing an opportunity to develop the talent of a number of new and less-experienced players," Borthwick said.

"I would particularly like to congratulate the new faces who have their first chance and very much look forward to seeing how that young talent can play an important part in ensuring that England continue to develop our game and move forward," the former England captain added. — AFP



ADELAIDE: UAE Team Emirates rider Isaac Del Toro Romero from Mexico reacts after winning the second stage of the Tour Down Under cycling race in Adelaide on January 17, 2024. — AFP

Mexican Del Toro bolts to overall lead in TDU

ADELAIDE: Young Mexican Isaac Del Toro Romero swept to a surprise stage two win to claim his first WorldTour victory and grab the overall lead in Australia's Tour Down Under on Wednesday. The 20-year-old UAE Team Emirates rider launched a daring attack inside the final kilometre to snatch victory in Lobethal to win the 141.6 kilometre stage and take possession of the leader's ochre jersey.

Del Toro Romero had enough to spare to throw his arms in the air in triumph crossing the finish line ahead of Zionistl-Premier Tech pair, New Zealand's

Corbin Strong and Welshman Stephen Williams. The first Mexican to win a stage at the Town Down Under holds a two-second lead over Strong and seven seconds over Eritrea's Biniam Girmay (Intermarche-Wanty) in the general classification with four stages of the season opener left.

"I'm so happy, I'm so tired but I enjoy every moment. The last kilometre was so hard, but I tried to finish," Del Toro Romero said. "The final climb was crazy for the team and then I tried to catch the gap from Narvaez and Plapp, but later I stayed in the back."

"Then, you know, I'm out and, well, the last chance was the little climb in the final bit and I needed to finish the work." Del Toro Romero took off around breakaway pair American champion Quinn Simmons (Lidl-Trek) and Frenchman Bastien Tronchon (Decathlon AG2r La Mondiale team) and set sail to the finish line. — AFP

Alldritt named France's Six Nations captain

PARIS: Gregory Alldritt will captain France in the Six Nations with regular skipper Antoine Dupont away on Olympic sevens duty, the French Rugby Federation announced on Wednesday. Alldritt faces a tough challenge in his first match in the role fronting up against last season's Grand Slam winners Ireland in Marseille on February 2.

La Rochelle's powerful No 8 Alldritt has been a pivotal figure since Fabien Galthie took over as head coach in December 2019. The 26-year-old pipped flanker Charles Ollivon to the role, after the Toulon back-rower had been the regular stand-in during Dupont's previous absences.

Alldritt took a two-month spell away from the game after France's disappointing Rugby World Cup quarter-final defeat to South Africa in October in Paris before returning for his club in late December. Dupont, 27, will take part in three legs of the world sevens tour, in Vancouver in February, Los Angeles in March and Madrid at the end of May before the Paris Olympic Games, which start in July.

Galthie has named six uncapped players including giant New Zealand-born lock Emmanuel Meafou as well as Racing 92's Nolann Le Garrec who will compete with Maxime Lucu for the starting scrum-half spot.

Meafou 25, who weighs an imposing 145kg (22 stone), is eligible for France having joined Toulouse in December 2018, and is likely to make his Test debut against Ireland. Le Garrec, 21, was an unused substitute during last season's Six Nations and has been in impressive form for his club this season.

The other new faces are Racing half-back Antoine Gibert, Toulon team-mates in back-rower Esteban Abadie and lock Matthias Halagahu as well as young Bordeaux-Begles centre Nicolas Depoortere. — AFP

Sports

Hotto strikes as Namibia shock Tunisia in latest AFCON upset

Namibia to face South Africa in Korhogo on Sunday

KORHOGO: Namibia produced the biggest shock so far in an Africa Cup of Nations full of upsets in the Ivory Coast by snatching a 1-0 triumph over former champions Tunisia on Tuesday. It was a historic first victory in the flagship African tournament for the Brave Warriors, who defeated and drew with another top team, Cameroon, in qualifiers for the 2024 edition.

Deon Hotto headed the only goal of the opening match in Group E with two minutes of regular time remaining to raise the number of surprise results to six from 10 matches after only four days. Before Namibia made a mockery of the world rankings in the northern city of Korhogo, five other former title-holders failed to win their opening matches.

The rush of unexpected results began on Sunday when Equatorial Guinea held Nigeria, then Egypt needed an added-time penalty from Mohamed Salah to snatch a draw against Mozambique. Cape Verde scored in added time to defeat Ghana, the third most successful country in the African show-piece with four titles.

On Monday, 10-man Guinea held five-time champions Cameroon before Angola recovered from a poor first-half showing to draw 1-1 with Algeria, who have conquered Africa twice. Tunisia are currently ranked third of 54 African football nations, behind only 2022 World Cup semi-finalists Morocco and Cup of Nations defending champions Senegal.

They are also 87 places above Namibia in the world rankings, making them hot favourites to get their group campaign off to a winning start. While Tunisia qualified comfortably for the Ivory Coast, Namibia had to overcome a number of off-field obstacles before securing a place.

Sub-standard stadiums in the largely desert

southern Africa country meant playing home qualifiers against Burundi and Cameroon in Soweto on the outskirts of Johannesburg.

'Rusty' players

Coach Collin Benjamin also had to contend with several "rusty" players because a dispute between national association and league officials halted competitions in Namibia for several seasons. But a team captained by forward Peter Shalulile, who plays for South African giants Mamelodi Sundowns, defied the odds, with a 2-1 'home' win over Cameroon the highlight.

Namibia next face neighbours South Africa in Korhogo on Sunday followed by Mali the following Wednesday in the southwestern port of San Pedro. Even one point from the two fixtures would almost certainly secure the Brave Warriors a last-16 place, either as top-two finishers or as one of the four best third-placed teams.

Namibia lie second with three points behind Mali, who overcame disappointing South Africa 2-0 in the second match of a double-header to top the table on goal difference. Appearing in the Cup of Nations for only the fourth time in eight editions, Bafana Bafana missed a first-half penalty when Percy Tau blazed over.

Mali won through two goals within six minutes early in the second half. Hamari Traore pushed home a rebound after a free-kick rebounded off the bar and Lassine Sinayoko got the second. Out-of-favour Aston Villa forward Bertrand Traore came off the bench to convert an added-time penalty and give Burkina Faso a dramatic 1-0 Group D win over Mauritania in central city Bouake.

It was an emotional victory for French coach



KORHOGO: Tunisia's forward #9 Haithem Jouini (L) fights for the ball with Namibia's defender #21 Lubeni Haukongo (R) during the Africa Cup of Nations (CAN) 2024 group E football match between Tunisia and Namibia at Amadou Gon Coulibaly Stadium in Korhogo. — AFP

Hubert Velud, finally making his debut at a Cup of Nations tournament 14 years after expecting to do so. Velud was in charge of the Togo squad forced to withdraw from the 2010 finals after gunmen attacked the team bus in host nation Angola and killed three occupants.

He was foiled again when he qualified Sudan for the 2022 Cup of Nations only to be fired before

the tournament. Burkina Faso top Group D with three points, Angola and Algeria have one each and Mauritania none.

On Wednesday, the final two opening-round group matches will be staged with Morocco taking on outsiders Tanzania before the Democratic Republic of Congo face fellow former champions Zambia. — AFP



MANAMA: The winning Kuwaiti national fencing team. — KUNA

Kuwait fencing team wins six medals in Arab Championship

MANAMA: The champions of the Kuwaiti national fencing team won six various medals in the Arab Fencing Championship for cubs and buds, which began on Monday and will continue

India fans can be the difference at Asian Cup: Stimac

DOHA: Igor Stimac says that India's massed ranks of vocal fans can be the difference when his underdogs face a tough Uzbekistan test at the Asian Cup in Qatar on Thursday. There are an estimated 750,000 Indians living in Qatar, which has a population of nearly three million, and Indian fans roared on their team despite an opening 2-0 defeat to Australia. There was a crowd of over 36,000 at Ahmad bin Ali Stadium in Doha for the

until next February 25.

In detail, the Kuwaiti team won two gold medals by Badriya Al-Daghishim (Fluorescent Weapon) and Khalaf Al-Khalaf (Ebye Weapon - 11-year-old category) and two silver medals by Ismail Qasim (Fluorescent Weapon - 11-year-old category) and Muhammad Sabti (Fluorescent Weapon - 13-year-old category).

The team also won two bronze medals by Jaber Al-Abbasi (Saber Weapon - 11-year-old category) and Youssef Al-Nassar (Fluoriya Weapon - 11-year-old category). — KUNA

game on Saturday, most of them Indian, and Stimac is anticipating an even bigger turnout against Uzbekistan. "We are expecting a huge number, an even bigger number now in this match," the India coach, a former international defender for Croatia, said on Wednesday.

The game against Australia kicked off in the early afternoon but it will be a later start time of 5:30 pm (1430 GMT) against Uzbekistan. Stimac, part of the Croatia side that reached the 1998 World Cup semi-finals, believes that will mean even more Indian fans coming out.

"It's a much better kickoff time, much more convenient for them to attend," said the 56-year-old. "They might be the crucial point for us in this game, and once again, a huge, huge thanks to all of them." Uzbekistan, ranked 68 in the world to India's 102, began their Asian Cup with a 0-0 draw against Syria. — AFP

Shiffrin edges Vlhova in floodlit slalom

FLACHAU: Mikaela Shiffrin got the better of rival Petra Vlhova in the second run Tuesday to claim her 94th career World Cup win in the nighttime slalom in Flachau. Shiffrin trailed Vlhova by 0.07 seconds after the first leg in Austria but the US star wiped out the deficit to collect her sixth victory of the season.

She finished 0.27sec clear of Vlhova, winning for the fourth time in seven slaloms and making amends for straddling a gate in Kranjska Gora earlier this month. "I'm really proud of this evening and very thankful for my whole team," said Shiffrin, wiping away tears.

The 28-year-old skipped last weekend's speed events in Austria to recover from a cold. She then went to visit boyfriend Aleksander Aamodt Kilde in a Swiss hospital after his season-ending crash in the Wengen downhill.

Norwegian Kilde underwent surgery in nearby Bern after suffering a dislocated shoulder and a cut to his calf. "These last days have been very challenging. They've been so supportive and helped me go see Aleks," said Shiffrin.

Crashes highlight 'brutal strain' of WCup skiing calendar

KITZBUHEL: Season-ending crashes for two of the biggest names in alpine skiing have laid bare the "brutal strain" of World Cup downhill racing, with organisers facing criticism for packing rescheduled speed events into an already-charged calendar.

Norway's Aleksander Aamodt Kilde (dislocated shoulder, cut calf), France's Alexis Pinturault (knee) and lesser-known Swiss racer Marco Rohrer (knee) all sustained injuries over the past week in Wengen that have put an end to their time on snow for this year. It is a worrying precedent, given the skiers' enviable track records: Kilde and Pinturault have notched up a combined total of 55 World Cup victories alongside 10 world championship medals and five Olympic podium finishers.

There is no time for their rivals to dwell on accumulated fatigue, however, as the men have immediately decamped to Kitzbuehel, home to argu-



FLACHAU: Winner USA's Mikaela Shiffrin celebrates on the podium after the slalom event of the Women's FIS Alpine Skiing World Cup in Flachau, Austria. — AFP

Sweden's Sara Hector, the Olympic giant slalom champion, took third place at 1.11sec. All 14 of her previous World Cup podiums had come in the giant slalom. Vlhova, winner of the three other slaloms this term, moved up to second in the overall standings behind Shiffrin, trailing the five-time World Cup champion by 227 points.

The next stop on the women's circuit is in Jasna, Slovakia, which still stage a giant slalom and slalom this weekend. — AFP

ably the toughest downhill course on the circuit. There are two downhills and a slalom on the programme starting Friday.

"It's a brutal strain," Swiss racer Niels Hintermann said of the week in Wengen, where the FIS—the international ski federation—added another downhill race to make up for one cancelled in Beaver Creek.

It meant racers had to contend with two downhills and a super-G, along with a slalom, over five days of heady competition that also included training runs on the Lauberhorn. It didn't help that the downhill and super-G courses are the longest of the circuit, meaning among the most physically demanding. Kilde, last season's downhill champion and 2020 overall World Cup winner, had a horror fall in the second downhill race, in which 12 of the 57 racers failed to finish and three did not even start.

"The days are also very long," reckoned Beat Feuz, the reigning Olympic downhill champion and multiple World Cup winner in Wengen and Kitzbuehel who is now an analyst for Swiss SRF television. "For the racers, they don't just start with the race and don't end immediately afterwards. It's a lot, a mammoth programme." — 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

Hospitals

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

Change of Name

I, MAYANTI MUTHU, holder of Indian Passport no. Z 2815759 having permanent address at S/o. Mayandi Kayavayal Melasem Bonmari Kallupatty post. Siva Gangai district. Deva Kottai, Tamilnadu pincode 630306 residing in Kuwait at present here by declare that henceforth my name will be read as under given name - Pichaimuthu and surname Mayandi. **(#4582) 18/1/2024**

I, Bayanaboyina Lakshmi Narasaiah, S/o Bayanaboyina Penchalaiah, R/of D.No. 2/65, Upparapalli, Kotha Madhavaram, Siddavatam(M), Kadapa, A.P - 516247, have changed my name from Binaboena Lakshmi Narasaiah (old name) to Bayanaboyina Lakshmi Narasaiah (new name), Passport No. S7633005. **(#4594) 17/1/2024**

I Sahil, holder of Indian Passport No. N6011960 having permanent address, ward No. 23, Raigran Mohalla, Nawalgarh, Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan, Pin-333042, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as under given name Sahil and surname Bisti. **(#4593) 17/1/2024**

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Djokovic survives test but Wozniacki, Jabeur derailed at Australian Open

Tsitsipas comes through ‘insane’ battle at Australian Open



MELBOURNE: Serbia's Novak Djokovic hits a return shot against Australia's Alexei Popyrin during their men's singles match on day four of the Australian Open tennis tournament on Jan 17, 2024. — AFP

MELBOURNE: Novak Djokovic survived a huge test Wednesday to stay on track at the Australian Open but sixth seed Ons Jabeur and former champion Caroline Wozniacki fell victim to exciting young Russians.

The Serbian superstar, playing for an 11th Melbourne Park crown and a record 25th Grand Slam title, was pushed hard in the second round by home hope Alexei Popyrin but prevailed 6-3, 4-6, 7-6 (7/4), 6-3.

Djokovic also dropped a set against unheralded Croat Dino Prizmic and was again under the weather, blowing his nose regularly at the changeovers. Despite being below par, his never-say-die attitude was on full display, saving four set points in the third set to take it to a tie-breaker that swung the momentum back in his favour.

"I haven't been playing my best, I'm still trying to find form," admitted the 36-year-old. "Both my first and second-round opponents were really quality tennis players. I managed to

find a way to win in four, that's what counts in the end.

"Hopefully I can find a way to build on this as the tournament progresses." The hard-earned win put him into a showdown next with Argentine Tomas Martin Etcheverry, who ended Andy Murray's tournament.

Fellow defending champion Aryna Sabalenka had much easier ride, pummeling her second straight teenage qualifier into submission, beating 16-year-old Czech Brenda Fruhvirtova 6-3, 6-2. Sabalenka has yet to be seriously tested as she bids to become the first woman to successfully defend a Melbourne title since Victoria Azarenka in 2013.

"I'm just trying to play my best. If it goes to two sets, I'm happy to win it in two sets. If it's going to be three sets, I don't care," she said. "I just try to focus on myself and fight for every point."

Best ever

Fourth seeds Coco Gauff and Jan-nik Sinner, along with fifth seed Andrey

Rublev and world number 11 Barbora Krejčíková, similarly had no trouble progressing. Last year's beaten finalist Stefanos Tsitsipas also survived, but needed four tense sets to get past Australian Jordan Thompson in a match in which he said "the adrenaline and the rush was insane".

Veteran pair Jabeur and Wozniacki were no match for Mirra Andreeva and Maria Timofeeva, who emphatically stamped their mark on the opening Grand Slam of the year. Andreeva, just 16, was in scintillating form to take down 29-year-old three-time major runner-up Jabeur 6-0, 6-2 on Rod Laver Arena in just 54 minutes.

"Probably it was the best match (ever)," said Andreeva, a schoolgirl who burst onto the scene when she reached the fourth round at Wimbledon last year as a qualifier. "The first set, I didn't expect that I would play this good. Second set was also not bad. So, yes, for me it was an amazing match."

Her reward is a third-round clash

with France's Diane Parry. Timofeeva, a 20-year-old qualifier, was equally impressive against 2018 champion Wozniacki, who flew through the first set and was a break up in the second.

Undeterred, Timofeeva, showing impressive power, hauled herself back into the contest and ultimately prevailed 1-6, 6-4, 6-1. "It was an honour to play here against Caroline today. I'm just beyond happy and couldn't ask for more," she said after setting up a testing meeting next with 10th seed Beatriz Haddad Maia.

With play on outside courts starting more than three hours late due to rain, Sinner was one of the fortunate few to be scheduled in one of the three main arenas, which all have roofs. The Italian wasted no time dispatching Dutch qualifier Jesper de Jong for the loss of just six games on Margaret Court Arena.

US Open champion Gauff was equally untroubled in sweeping past fellow American Caroline Dolehide 7-6 (7/2), 6-2, while Rublev and Krejčíková had easy straight-sets wins. — AFP

VAR confusion as Saudi roar back to beat Oman at Asian Cup

DOHA: Roberto Mancini's Saudi Arabia fought back to defeat Oman 2-1 in the dying seconds at the Asian Cup on Tuesday, but only after some VAR confusion. Also in Group F, Thailand beat Kyrgyzstan 2-0 with Supachai Chaided scoring both goals.

The ambitious Saudis beat eventual champions Argentina in the group phase of the 2022 World Cup and returned to Qatar as one of the favourites for the regional tournament. They are seeking a record-equalling fourth Asian Cup, off the back of a big-money recruitment drive that has lured the likes of Neymar and Cristiano Ronaldo to the kingdom's domestic league.

Saudi Arabia is also set to host the 2034 World Cup. Their opening match at the Asian Cup started badly when they conceded a penalty—and finished in farcical scenes in front of a bemused crowd of 41,987.

Deep into injury time and with the Saudis pushing to make it 2-1, Ali Al-Bulayhi headed in following a corner to spark pandemonium for what they thought was the winner. The goal was disallowed for offside by the assistant referee, and was checked by VAR. He appeared in replays to have been onside.

Then came the confusion when it appeared that referee Shaun Evans had stuck with the original offside call and the game restarted, only for him to call back play and award the goal. Bulayhi, who celebrated by inflating a green balloon as his teammates mobbed him, afterwards called his winner "a gift to the Saudi people".

"Scoring at the end of the match, this is what great players do," said the 34-year-old defender. Mancini, who took the Saudi reins in September, said his side made mistakes in the first half "but this is normal in the first game".

His opposite number Branko Ivankovic said the "Saudi team deserved the victory", citing the tiredness of his players as a reason behind Oman's late collapse.

Mancini's men went behind in the 14th minute when Evans gave a penalty for a trip on Oman forward Muhsen Al-Ghassani, having checked the VAR screen. Salaah Al-Yahyaee converted to give lower-ranked Oman a surprise lead.

Oman sat back for the remainder of the first half, but Saudi Arabia failed to apply any serious pressure. After the break the Saudis continued to huff and puff, but had only registered two shots on target by the hour mark. — AFP

Embiid scores 41 as Sixers down Nuggets, Suns rally stuns Kings

LOS ANGELES: Joel Embiid conjured a second straight 40-point performance to outduel Nikola Jokic as the Philadelphia 76ers downed the NBA-champion Denver Nuggets 126-121 on Tuesday. A heavyweight showdown pitting reigning NBA Most Valuable Player Embiid against Denver's two-time MVP Jokic did not disappoint as the two teams went toe-to-toe from the outset.

Embiid, who scored 41 points on his return from injury in the Sixers' win over Houston on Monday, was once again in superb form, finishing with 41 points, seven rebounds and 10 assists. The 29-year-old was imperious down the stretch, scoring 11 points in the fourth quarter as the Sixers transformed a six-point deficit into victory.

"I'm just letting the game come to me, but the credit goes to my teammates—they put me in the best position to succeed and they trust me, that's the key," Embiid said after a game watched by a sellout crowd of 19,775 at Philadelphia's Wells Fargo Center.

"I would not be doing what I'm doing without the trust they have in me," Embiid added. Embiid embraced Jokic following the final buzzer, with the two men sharing a friendly exchange after a hard-fought game.

"I just told him he's the best player in the league," Embiid said. "He won a championship, and that's the best team in the

league and he's a finals MVP. I just told him to keep going." The game had been finely poised at 111-111 with just over seven minutes remaining.

Embiid re-entered the fray just after Jokic checked back in from the bench, and it was the Cameroon-born power forward who ultimately seized control of the contest. A sublime running reverse layup from Embiid put the Sixers 115-113 ahead, before a jump shot increased the Philadelphia cushion to four points with 5min 30sec remaining. A free throw and a 27-foot three-pointer left the Sixers 121-113 ahead, and Embiid then added a jump shot to extend Philadelphia's advantage to 10 points at 123-113 to effectively seal victory.

Suns late show topples Kings

Embiid received scoring support from Tyrese Maxey with 25 points—including four three-pointers—while Tobias Harris pitched in with 24 points. Kelly Oubre Jr. added 11 points. Jokic led the Denver scoring with 25 points, 19 rebounds and three assists.

Michael Porter Jr. finished with 20 points and Jamal Murray added 17. Philadelphia improved to 26-13 to remain in third place in the Eastern Conference standings, trailing first placed Boston (31-9) with Milwaukee second in the table on 28-12.

Denver remain third in the Western Conference on 28-14, behind Minnesota (28-11) and Oklahoma City (27-12). In other games on Tuesday, the Phoenix Suns produced an extraordinary fourth quarter rally to eclipse the Sacramento Kings 119-117 in Arizona.

Phoenix looked to be heading for certain defeat as they trailed by 22 points with 8min 22sec remaining. But an incredible 32-8 run by Phoenix in the final minutes turned the



PHILADELPHIA: Aaron Gordon #50 of the Denver Nuggets guards as Joel Embiid #21 of the Philadelphia 76ers drives during the third quarter at the Wells Fargo Center in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. — AFP

game on its head to seal a remarkable comeback.

Kevin Durant sparked the rally for Phoenix with 15 points in the fourth quarter, part of a 27-point haul. Grayson Allen led the Phoenix scoring with 29 points. Eric Gordon tied the game for Phoenix with a three-pointer with 45 seconds remaining, before Durant hit two free throws to put the Suns 117-115 ahead. De'Aaron Fox leveled the contest with a floating jump shot but two more Durant free throws were enough to seal victory. Asked afterward how Phoenix had pulled off their win, Durant replied: "I have no clue. I usually know how the game formed, but this was just a blur. Everything happened so fast. I guess we were all in the zone and locked in." — AFP