
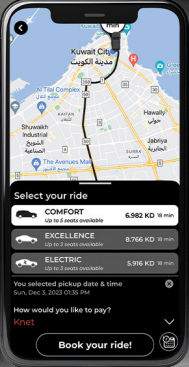


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Zionists bogged down in Gaza

Famine looming in Gaza • Martyrs reach 25,490 • 24 Zionist soldiers killed

Amir receives Saudi Minister of State



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Tuesday Saudi Minister of State and member of the Saudi Council of Ministers Prince Turki bin Mohammad and his delegation on their official visit to the country. Prince Turki conveyed the greetings of Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz and the Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammad bin Salman. — KUNA

GAZA: The Zionist entity said Tuesday 24 soldiers were killed in the biggest single-day losses since the start of its ground war in Gaza amid growing pressure on the government to find a way to end the conflict. The heavy clashes came as a White House official was due in the region for talks aimed at securing more hostage releases, and as US media reported a new Zionist proposal for a deal that would involve a two-month pause in fighting.

On the ground, fighting raged in Khan Yunis, the biggest city in southern Gaza, which the army said it had “encircled”. Witnesses said powerful explosions rocked Khan Yunis, as well as Deir al-Balah in north Gaza and Rafah in the south. Medical charity Doctors Without Borders (MSF) said its staff at Khan Yunis’ Nasser Hospital felt the “ground shaking”. The Palestinian Red Crescent said Zionist forces had hit its headquarters in Khan Yunis “resulting in injuries among internally displaced individuals who sought safety on our premises”.

The health ministry said Tuesday the Zionist army fired directly at Nasser hospital, where civilians are caught amid heavy fighting. “(Zionist) tanks are firing heavily on the upper floors of the specialized surgery building and the emergency building of Nasser hospital, dozens expected wounded,” a ministry statement said.

The United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees said one of its Khan Yunis shelters for displaced people “was hit during military operations” on Monday. “At least six displaced people were killed and many more injured during intense fighting around our shelter,” UNRWA chief Philippe Lazzarini wrote Tuesday on X, formerly Twitter.

Twenty-four Zionist soldiers were killed on Monday, with the army saying 21 of them were reservists slain when rocket-propelled grenade fire hit a tank and two buildings they were trying to blow up. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said an investigation was launched into the “disaster” and that the Zionist entity “must learn the necessary lessons”. Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said the “deaths of 24 of our fighters, our best sons... is a heavy blow”.

An analyst said the mounting toll of soldiers killed — now 221 — since the Zionist entity launched its ground offensive in Gaza would heap pressure on the government. “Everybody is mourning the soldiers this morning and I think people will demand clear answers about the purpose and the goal of this operation in Gaza,” said Israella Oron of the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev.

UN agencies and aid groups have sounded the alarm about the growing threat of disease and famine in Gaza, where 1.7 million people are estimated to have been uprooted. “The situation in Gaza is of course slipping every day into a much more catastrophic situation,” with “a looming threat of famine”, said Abeer Etefa, the World Food Program’s senior spokeswoman for the Middle East. A study conducted between Nov 24 and Dec 7 found that all 2.2 million people living in the Palestinian territory were in a crisis level of

Continued on Page 6

Visas expected to open by April with new curbs, fees

KUWAIT: The interior ministry has reiterated that the issuance of visit, family and entry visas will remain limited to specific categories until the National Assembly completes the approval of the new foreign residency law, after discussions with the government by the parliamentary interior and defense committee.

Security sources have clarified that this policy will not change with the replacement of former interior minister Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Sabah with Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Al-Sabah, who is now in charge while awaiting the appointment of a new minister. They said the decision was made after thorough consideration and is not tied to a specific minister.


The interior ministry is aligned with the government’s direction to open the country to visits and promote tourism, expected no later than April. New procedures will be announced for family reunion visas after amendments to previous measures. Fees will be increased to align with those in neighboring countries.

Sources added family reunion visas will be limited to children under 16, spouses and parents, each with varying fees, and will exclude siblings. Those allowed to obtain such visas must have a minimum monthly salary of at least KD 600, not counting income from various sources.

On Thursday, the interior ministry started allowing residency violators living illegally in the country prior to March 1, 2020 to regularize their status after paying the prescribed legal fines. Security sources had said residency departments have begun receiving violators, who should first consult with residency affairs investigators to obtain a “no objection certificate”, then pay the fine amounting to KD 600 to complete the renewal of their residency permits. Sources however said if this decision is found to be ineffective, it will be officially canceled, and violators from before 2020 will be treated similarly to other violators.

I could’ve been one of those who broke through the siege

By Dr Salman Abu Sitta



Dr Salman Abu Sitta

Yes, I could have been one of those who broke through the fence had I been much younger and was still living in the concentration camp called the Gaza Strip. My story is the same as all of them. On May 14, 1948, my family on our land, “Ma’in Abu Sitta”, was attacked by a Haganah force of 24 armored vehicles. The force destroyed and burnt everything. The soldiers demolished the school that my father built in 1920; they stole the motor and equipment in the flour mill and well pump; they killed anyone in sight. (See Page 5)

US, UK hit targets in Yemen as Houthis vow to strike back

SANAA: The United States and Britain launched a second round of joint military strikes on Yemen’s Houthis on Tuesday over their attacks on Red Sea shipping, as the Iran-backed rebels vowed to hit back. The latest raids, heard by residents of the rebel-held

‘Doomsday Clock’ remains at 90 secs to midnight

WASHINGTON: The symbolic “Doomsday Clock” was held at 90 seconds to midnight Tuesday, reflecting existential threats to humanity posed by potential nuclear escalation from the war in Ukraine and the multiplying impacts of the climate crisis following Earth’s hottest recorded year. Set by top scientists and security experts, the timing of the clock remains the same as last year and the closest it has ever been to midnight in its more than 75-year-history.



GAZA: Palestinians take control of a Zionist Merkava battle tank after crossing the border fence with the Zionist entity from Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip on Oct 7, 2023. — AFP

capital Sanaa around midnight (2100 GMT), hit eight Houthi targets, a joint US-UK statement said, while the Houthis listed 18 strikes across their territory.


US and British forces carried out a first wave of strikes against the rebel group earlier this month, and the United States launched further air raids against missiles that Washington said posed imminent threats to both civilian and military vessels. But the Houthis have continued their attacks on shipping — just one part of a growing crisis in the Middle East linked to the Zionist-Hamas war, which has raised fears of a broader war directly involving Iran.

The latest US-UK strikes were against “eight Houthi

targets in Yemen in response to the Houthis’ continued attacks against international and commercial shipping as well as naval vessels transiting the Red Sea”, they said in a joint statement with other countries that supported the military action. “These precision strikes are intended to disrupt and degrade the capabilities that the Houthis use to threaten global trade and the lives of innocent mariners,” the statement said.

The US Central Command said in a separate statement that the targets of the strikes “included missile systems and launchers, air defense systems, radars and deeply buried weapons storage facilities”.

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WASHINGTON: In this handout photo provided on Jan 23, 2024, Rachel Bronson, President and CEO of the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, stands next to the Doomsday Clock. — AFP

“Trends continue to point ominously towards global catastrophe,” said Rachel Bronson, president and CEO of the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists. “The war in Ukraine poses an ever present risk of nuclear escalation, and the October 7 attack in (the Zionist entity) and war in Gaza provides further illustration of the horrors of modern war, even without nuclear escalation.”

Rather than abandoning nuclear weapons, countries that possess them are upgrading their arsenals, while massive floods, fires and other climate disasters threatened billions of lives and livelihoods in a year that saw record-shattering temperatures caused by mankind’s reluctance to turn away from fossil fuels. “Biological research aimed at preventing future pandemics has proven useful, but also presents the risks of causing one,” Bronson said, while recent

Continued on Page 6

Local

Cabinet reviews executive and legislative committee meeting

Council of ministers rejects cancellation of price liberalization



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah presides over the Cabinet meeting. — KUNA photos

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Cabinet held its weekly meeting at Seif Palace on Monday. The meeting was chaired by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah. It highlighted the recent committee coordination meeting between the executive and legislative branches. After the meeting, Minister of Social Affairs, Family, and Childhood Affairs and Acting Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Feras Saud Al-Sabah said the following: During the meeting, the ministers reviewed a recently held coordination committee meeting between the government and parliament in the National Assembly.

The committee meeting was attended by the Speaker of the National Assembly, Ahmad Abdulaziz Al-Saadoun, His Highness the Premier Sheikh Dr Mohammad

Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, and a number of ministers and members of parliament (MPs). The Premier confirmed that there is almost a parliamentary government consensus on what should be done during the next period, noting that the government is currently preparing its agenda, which will be presented to the National Assembly, expressing the government's aspirations that such a program will satisfy the Kuwaiti people and achieve their ambitions.

Sheikh Feras added that the Prime Minister affirmed during the Cabinet meeting the government's keenness to enhance cooperation, coordination, and fruitful work between the executive and legislative branches. In compliance with the provisions of Article 98 of the Constitution, the government shall submit its work program immediately after its formation.



The Cabinet also reviewed a visual presentation submitted by the ministerial committee charged with following up on the government's agenda and work. The Council of Ministers decided to assign the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development to prepare a draft of the government's program in preparation for referring it to the National Assembly.



Price liberalization

The Council of Ministers asked the Ministry of Commerce to submit an urgent action plan to confront the high inflation rate, the justifications for its rise, and practical steps to address the price increase, despite the fact that the ministry is conducting continuous inspection and monitoring campaigns. Informed sources reported that the Council of Ministers is tackling the

increasing prices. "The Council does not intend to liberalize prices, as it is still adhering to this decision taken since the Corona crisis," the sources said, pointing out that the Council questioned the Minister of Commerce Abdullah Al-Jaw'an on the unjustified price increase. The sources said that Commerce will present his extensive and comprehensive report at the Cabinet meeting next week. — KUNA

MoH adopts resolutions for radiation protection

KUWAIT: The minister of health, Dr Ahmad Al-Awadi, has adopted three ministerial decisions on the use of ionizing radiation and the prevention of its risks, based on the recommendations of the radiation prevention committee and the proposals of the radiation prevention department of the public health sector.

The ministry said in a press release on Tuesday that the three decisions come as part of updating the legislative framework for radiation protection and maintaining the safe and peaceful use of all radiation sources in the country. She explained that the first decision included the adoption of the regulation on the security of radioactive and nuclear sources, pointing out that it clarifies the basic parameters of how to maintain the safe and peaceful use of all radiation sources in the country and how to preserve them.

The minister pointed out that the decision included, for the first time, new regulatory issues, as it ensures the security of nuclear materials through the detection-delay mechanism—addressing and managing security to prevent the possibility of unauthorized withdrawal of nuclear and radioactive materials.

He pointed out that the second decision specified the procedures and documents required to apply for a license for entities dealing with ionizing or non-ionizing radiation sources. The decision is aimed at simplifying the procedures and reducing the process of obtaining the license for the location and use of ionizing or non-ionizing radiation.

The ministry said that the third decision included exposure limits and radiation safety standards to deal with non-ionizing radiation sources, as this decision paves the way for Kuwait to enter the field of communication networks to ensure the safety of workers, the general public, and the environment from the risks of exposure to electromagnetic fields arising from non-ionizing rays of various spectra. — KUNA

Parliament Group meets with senior Slovenian officials

LJUBLJANA: The Fifth Kuwaiti Parliamentary Friendship Group began its meetings on Tuesday with Slovenia's senior officials on expanding bilateral cooperation in various fields between the two countries. The Kuwaiti parliamentary delegation is led by MP Osama Al-Zaid, and it includes MPs Shuaib Ali Shaaban, Hamad Abdul-Rahman Al-Olayan, and Abdul-Wahab Arif Al-Issa.

The delegation is scheduled to hold a series of meetings with the Speaker of the Slovenian Parliament, Urška Klakochar, the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Sanja Stiglic, and the Chair of the Economic Committee in the Slovenian Parliament, the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Slovenian Parliament. The Kuwaiti parliamentary delegation visit to Slovenia is the fourth, within the framework of strengthening existing relations between Kuwaiti parliamentarians and their counterparts in Slovenia.

The meetings will also deal with developments in the Middle East, especially the continued Zionist aggression against the Palestinians and cutting off humanitarian aid. Meanwhile, the Kuwaiti parliamentary delegation arrived at Ljubljana International Airport last Sunday and was received by the non-resident Ambassador of Kuwait to Slovenia, Talal Al-Fassam, in addition to a number of staff from the Kuwaiti embassy in Vienna and representatives of the Slovenian Parliament. — KUNA



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah receives Saudi Minister of State and member of the Saudi Council of Ministers Prince Turki bin Mohammad and his delegation on their official visit to the country.- KUNA photos



His Highness the Prime Minister received the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) Dr Hilal Al-Sayer.

PM receives Saudi Minister of State, other top officials

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah received on Tuesday at Bayan Palace Saudi Minister of State, and member of the Saudi council of ministers Prince Turki bin Mohammad and his delegation on their official visit to the country. Prince Turki conveyed the greetings of the Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz and the Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammad bin Salman, congratulating His Highness on forming the new government.

Both sides also discussed various regional and international issues of common interest, adding that the meeting was attended by Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Mubarak Al-Sabah, Head of the Diwan of the Prime Minister Abdulaziz

Al-Dakheel, and Saudi ambassador to Kuwait Prince Sultan bin Saad.

PM receives KRCS Chairman

In another development, His Highness the Prime Minister received Tuesday the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS), Dr Hilal Al-Sayer, and KRCS Secretary-General, Maha Barjas Al-Barjas. During the meeting, KRCS efforts and humanitarian activities were touched on.

World Govt Summit

Meanwhile, His Highness the Prime Minister, Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, met with the UAE Ambassador to Kuwait, Dr Matar Hamed Al-Neyadi, at Bayan



His Highness the Prime Minister meets the UAE Ambassador to Kuwait, Dr Matar Hamed Al-Neyadi, at Bayan Palace on Tuesday.

Palace on Tuesday. During the reception, the ambassador handed His Highness the Prime Minister a letter from UAE Vice-President, Prime Minister, and Ruler of Dubai Sheikh Mohammad bin Rashed Al-Maktoum,

inviting him to attend the World Government Summit 2024 due in the UAE in February. The Chief of His Highness, the Prime Minister's Diwan Abdulaziz Dekheel Al-Dekheel, was present at the meeting. — KUNA



Ambassador Haifa Abu Ghazaleh and Dr Leila Bakr sign the action plan. — KUNA

Arab League, UNFPA ink cooperation plan

CAIRO: The general secretariat of the Arab League and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) signed on Tuesday an action plan on cooperation between the two sides in 2024. The action plan was signed by the head of the Social Affairs Sector, Ambassador Haifa Abu Ghazaleh and the UNFPA's Dr Leila Bakr.

Abu Ghazaleh said in press statements that the plan included a number of programs, events, and activities that will be implemented in the Arab countries, indicating that it focuses on the implementation of various social and development policies, plans, and programs approved within the framework of the system of joint Arab social development work, especially those approved by the Arab summits, ministerial councils, and specialized Arab committees working in various fields and sectors of joint Arab social development work.

She pointed out that the social, humanitarian, and

health conditions in the Gaza Strip and the Occupied Palestinian Territories formed a major part of the consultations that were elaborated in the plan, especially with regards to the readiness to provide the required social, humanitarian, and health services as soon as possible.

She expressed her hope for the immediate cessation of the brutal aggression on the Gaza Strip and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territories. Abu Ghazaleh stated that persons with disabilities, the elderly, and youth, in addition to policies aimed at eradicating multidimensional poverty and issues related to family, childhood, and health, represent the priorities of the action plan through the implementation of a number of specialized programs.

The action plan focuses on strengthening the efforts of Arab countries to implement international charters and treaties related to population policies and the Sustainable Development Plan 2030, focusing on youth policies and other policies related to the empowerment of women. The action plan comes within the framework of the memorandum of understanding signed with the regional office of the fund.

For her part, Al-Bakr praised the partnership between

the United Nations Fund and the Arab League, stressing that the action plan is the starting point for enhancing cooperation between the two sides. She pointed out that population issues have become an existential issue in all Arab countries, especially Palestine, Yemen, and other countries, expressing pride in integrating population and development issues as part of the work of the specialized Arab ministerial councils.

Joint Gulf work

In another development, Gulf Cooperation Council Secretary General Jassem Al-Budaiwi discussed with Qatari Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammad bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani joint on Gulf work and efforts to meet the aspirations of gulf leaders and their people. These were expressed during a meeting between the two in the capital of Doha, reported the General Secretariat. The meeting handled discussions of tabled items to be discussed during the ministerial council session, including regional and international issues. Al-Budaiwi also took the time to hail the Qatari role, its presidency during this current session, and its contributions to the secretariat. — KUNA

Local

Arabs denounce Zionist atrocities, warn against forcible evacuation

Gazans defy aggressors, set tents on demolished houses



Palestinian families living in tents in Gaza. — KUNA photos

CAIRO: The Arab League reiterated its denunciation of the atrocities being committed by the Zionist occupation forces against Palestinian residents in the Gaza Strip, including the killing of dozens of civilians and the stifling blockade of the enclave. The emergency meeting of the League's Council, held on the permanent-delegate level on Monday at the request of Palestine and under the chairmanship of Morocco, adopted a resolution to reaffirm rejection of the Zionist designs against the Palestinian people.

The resolution cited the large-scale destruction of civilian infrastructure, including residential areas, hospitals, universities, mosques, and churches, as examples of the scorched-earth policy of Zionists, which aims to turn Gaza into uninhabitable territory. It also denounced the hate speech practiced by the government of the occupation against the Palestinians, noting that all of these crimes are tantamount to genocide.

The League's Council urged the UN Security Council to shoulder its responsibility for protecting international peace and security and adopt a binding resolution to halt the atrocities being perpetrated systematically by the occupation forces. It also urged the United States to do away with the policy of double standards and stop providing political support to the Zionist occupation at the UN Security Council when it comes to the ordeal of the Palestinian people.

"Instead, the United States should adopt stances that are consistent with the rules of international law and humanitarian law and back the calls for a full and durable ceasefire," the resolution said. The United States and other permanent members of the UN Security Council have to force the occupation authorities into halting the aggression on the Palestinian people, pulling back their forces from the Gaza Strip, lifting the embargo on the Strip, and canceling the plans for the forcible evacuation of Palestinians, it urged.

'Catastrophe scenario'

"The plans, made public by the extremist members of the Zionist cabinet, to evict nearly one million Palestinians forcibly from their homes and turn them into refugees or internally displaced persons pose grave risks to regional and international security. "The Arab countries cannot tolerate the recurrence of the Nakba (catastrophe) scenario of 1948 and will adopt all legal, diplomatic, and economic steps to prevent the displacement of the Palestinian people," according to the resolution.

The League's Council cautioned all countries and organizations against any form of cooperation with the occupation authorities in their criminal designs to forcibly evacuate the Palestinian residents of Gaza. It was noted that such cooperation would turn those involved into accomplices in crimes stipulated in international laws and relevant UN conventions.

The Council's resolution stressed the need for practical steps to foil the Zionist designs, including lobbying for an immediate halt to the military aggression, lifting the siege on Gaza, rehabilitating the health facilities and civilian infrastructure, and resuming the flow of humanitarian aid and the activities of international aid agencies.

In this context, the resolution recalled UN Security Council Resolution 2720 (2023), calling for immediate, unhindered delivery of aid on a safe and large scale across Gaza. It welcomed the decision of UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in late December to appoint Sigrid Kaag as Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza pursuant to Security Council Resolution 2720.

On the situation in the occupied West Bank, the Arab League's Council denounced the deadly attacks on Palestinian refugee camps and homes, the detention of thousands of Palestinians on a daily basis, and the attacks and intimidation perpetrated by Jewish settlers against Palestinian residents under police protection. The Council

also condemned the 100-day siege laid by the occupation authorities on the holy Aqsa Mosque, which undermined the freedom of worship, as well as the repeated incursions into and desecration of the site by Jewish settlers.

It reaffirmed the Jordanian Hashemite's jurisdiction over all Islamic and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem. The Jerusalem Waqf Department of the Jordanian Ministry of Awqaf Islamic Affairs and Holy Places is solely entitled to manage the financial, religious, and maintenance affairs of the purely Islamic site of Aqsa Mosque, which amounts to 144 sq. m.

The Council urged the supporters of the occupation authorities to stop providing them with munitions that could be used in atrocities against the Palestinians; otherwise, those countries would be accomplices in crimes against humanity. The countries that have some nationals working with the occupation army against the Palestinian people must bring those mercenaries to book and adopt legal action against them, the resolution urged.

South Africa hailed

The League's Council appreciated the efforts made by the Republic of South Africa to prosecute the occupation entity at the International Court of Justice for violating its obligations under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (CPPCG). It called on the peace-loving, law-abiding countries to back the legal steps initiated by South Africa, welcoming the decision of the Libyan Presidential Council to join the genocide case against the Zionist entity.

It called on Arab and international bar associations and organizations to file lawsuits with national and international courts against perpetrators of crimes against the Palestinian people and designate them as terrorists. Regarding the aggression on Syria and Lebanon, the Council renewed its condemnation of the recurrent attacks, the latest of which took place in Damascus on Saturday. Such attacks undermine the sovereignty of Syria and pose a serious threat

to regional and international security, according to the Council's resolution.

The Council stressed that the only way to regional stability is through recognition of the Palestinians' legitimate and inalienable rights, notably the right to establish an independent, fully sovereign, and viable state within the pre-June 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital city. It praised the Qatari-Egyptian mediation efforts aiming to reach a durable ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and deliver aid to the residents of Gaza.

It also appreciated the call of Algeria, a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, to hold an emergency session by the Council to discuss the Zionist plans for the forcible evacuation of the Gazans. It also extolled the UAE's successful lobbying during its term as a non-permanent member of the Council (2022–2023) for the Palestinian question, which led to the adoption of Council resolutions 2712 and 2720 last year.

Tents on the ruins

Meanwhile, thousands of forced displaced Palestinians from various areas of the Gaza Strip headed south due to the bombings that destroyed their homes, forcing them to set their tents on the ruins of demolished houses in the city of Rafah. The city of Rafah, adjacent to the Egyptian border, shelters the largest number of displaced people from the south, central, and north of Gaza after Zionists forced them to leave.

According to the latest data, the occupation forces dropped 65,000 tons of explosives since October 7, which completely destroyed 70,000 units, while 290,000 partially destroyed units became inhabitable. The occupation forces also destroyed 138 governmental buildings, demolished 97 schools, and partially destroyed 295 schools. According to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), there are approximately 1.4 million refugees placed in 154 of their facilities in Gaza's five governorates. — KUNA

In my view

Who decides the endgame?



Dalal Behbehani

Local@kuwaittimes.com

If there was one unifying issue that the entire Arab civil society would unequivocally converge on, it is, without a doubt, the Palestinian struggle for liberation. Today, Palestine has become the avatar for human liberation. A colonial settler project that started with ethnic cleansing and genocide 75 years ago, today the Zionist entity having been granted "no red lines" is committing a genocide that we are witnessing live on the screens of our phones.

It has become clear to 500+ million citizens of Arab countries that there is a significant gap between feelings of outrage and necessary political, legal and even economic actions that can be taken by our governments. As a Kuwaiti, I am both proud and relieved in my ability to voice my outrage, as well as acknowledge that the government of my country has reiterated since the beginning of the Aqsa Flood operation its position of being at war with the Zionist entity.

Alongside scenes of death and carnage in Gaza, our social media feeds are dispersed, even more intensely lately, with clips of Arab politicians and diplomats not just discussing, but insisting, on a two-state "solution". Take a moment and consider this: During the Holocaust, would the Jews sit with Nazis and negotiate a solution that is "safe for all"? Even more importantly, the Arabs should not be pontificating about the political destination of Palestine without the Palestinians.

Have we not learned? The two-state solution that is currently being brokered by the US is in fact one dominant state and another Palestinian non-contiguous state cantonized, demilitarized, dominated and absent of sovereignty. Palestinians understand that, so we shouldn't claim to be supporting in good faith the Palestinian struggle for liberation.

To be clear, this proposal translates to a one state and a Bantustan solution. This "solution" does not offer the Palestinian people their inalienable rights under international law. If we insist on using international law as a frame of reference, then we should insist on the following: (1) Enact an immediate ceasefire; (2) lift the inhumane Gaza blockade of 19 years; (3) end the illegal occupation of 57 years; (4) stop the illegal settlements that usurp land and most water resources. Then, and only then, a discussion that centers Palestinians and Palestinian voices can be discussed and a political solution supported to ensure a durable and lasting peace.

Real talk though? Those who do support a two-state solution, do not acknowledge the facts on the ground. Out of ignorance, racism or to advance an alternative agenda, it's not clear why some act as Zionist mouthpieces, but none of those are a good look. Those who do support a two-state solution, the essence of the Peel Commission of 1937, also do not see anything wrong with a colonial settler project.

A true solution cannot entertain racist ideologies. Today, in 2024, the two-state "solution" should be relegated to the circus. Talking about it makes us look like clowns. So please, don't.

Diplomatic Institute holds symposium on Palestinian cause

KUWAIT: Saud Al-Nasser Al-Sabah Kuwaiti Diplomatic Institute, an affiliate of the Kuwaiti Ministry of Foreign Affairs, organized on Tuesday a symposium entitled "Kuwait's Position on the Palestinian Issue." The event is part of the ministry's training cultural season, with several representatives of embassies and different agencies attending. Dr Mohammad Al-Rumaihi, a professor of political science at Kuwait University, said Kuwait is an integral part of Arab culture, and that's why it has always been active in healing up Arab or Gulf rifts.

Economically, he cited the establishment of the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED), which serves more than 100 countries and offers huge aid to needy countries. Politically, he stressed Kuwait's enduring support for the Palestinian people and their cause since the beginning of their crisis, but he called for Palestinian unity as very necessary. For his part, Chairman of Sheikh Abdullah Al-Nouri Charity Society Jamal Al-Nouri addressed the symposium by elaborating Kuwait's history of relief and humanitarian aid provided by official and unofficial agencies to the Palestinian people.



Jamal Al-Nouri



Dr Mohammad Al-Rumaihi

He added that the Palestinian people need urgent medical aid as 53 hospitals have been destroyed, regretting that more than 25,000 Palestinians have been killed since the Zionist occupation started the aggression on Palestinians on October 7. He estimated that a total of 8,900 trucks carrying relief aid to Palestinians have entered Gaza since January 20. — KUNA



Kuwait diplomatic body holds symposium on Palestinian cause.— KUNA photos

Kuwait's Deputy FM and UN official meet

NEW YORK: Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah met in New York late Monday with UN Undersecretary General for Political and Peace-building Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo. This meeting came ahead of the UNSC open session, which would touch on a number of issues including the Palestinian cause. The meeting also discussed regional and international developments. — KUNA



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Kuwait partakes in undersecretaries meeting

ABU DHABI: A Kuwaiti delegation in Abu Dhabi representing the Ministry of Finance took part in the 9th Arab Finance Under-secretaries meeting Monday, during which they discussed ways to enhance shared financial cooperation among Arab states by addressing various economic and financial issues. The head of the delegation, Kholoud Al-Mutawa, told KUNA after the meeting that the most notable discussions centered around Arab cooperation in the economy and finance. The focus was on the role of fiscal policy in integrating the informal and national economic sectors and the resulting repercussions for the economy.

The meeting also touched on other matters, said Al-Mutawa, including the risk of fiscal policy amid an economic decline and the significance of incorporating clean and sustainable energy. Al-Mutawa's remarks were reported by the Finance Ministry via a statement. She affirmed the importance of reinforcing the country's capability of facing obstacles and maintaining its financial resilience by addressing and labeling the sustaining debts as one of the highest priorities. She also emphasized the critical role of organizing social security networks in Kuwait and improving living standards while putting forth effective proposals through a visual presentation. — KUNA



Head of the Kuwaiti delegation
Kholoud Al-Mutawa

National Bank of Kuwait Hospital launches engineering cell therapy



Participants take a group photo.



Dr Sundus Al-Sharida

KUWAIT: The National Bank of Kuwait specialized children's hospital announced on Tuesday the introduction of an engineering cell therapy service in the Department of Hematology, pediatric cancer, and cell transplantation with a success rate of 95 percent. The head of the Department of Hematology, Pediatric Cancer, and Stem Cell Transplantation at the hospital, Dr Sundus Al-Sharida, stressed in a speech at the opening of the third Kuwait conference on pediatric stem cell transplantation and cell therapy the keenness to keep abreast of the developments and novelties of patient treatment and follow-up on the various therapeutic options for pediatric cancer patients.

KU to open dorms in Sabah Al-Salem City

KUWAIT: Kuwait University announced that the Committee for the Receipt of Contracting and Construction Works (Major Projects) at Sabah Al-Salem University City approved the partial primary receipt (No. 4) of the student housing buildings, female students' housing buildings, and the hospitality club



She added that the phototherapy service has been introduced as a new step towards treating complications of stem cell transplantation for patients, during which universal therapeutic protocols are adopted. She pointed out that cortisone constitutes the first therapeutic stage, while aphasia comes in the third stage, noting that this therapeutic service was provided for seven cases, all of which achieved positive results.

She pointed out that immunotherapy is one of the options that have been provided recently and is an effective alternative and less effective than chemotherapy, pointing out that the Ministry of Health is working to provide advanced medicines, equip-

ment, devices, and new treatments in this field. The two-day conference is being held under the auspices of the minister of health, Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi, and brings together experts and researchers in the field of pediatric stem cell transplantation science. 18 speakers from inside and outside Kuwait will participate in the summit.

The conference is interspersed with many scientific papers and lectures, such as stem cell transplantation from an identical and half donor and others related to gene therapy (for sickle cell anemia) and thalassemia. The conference will also discuss cell engineering therapy, in addition to the latest developments in the treatment. — KUNA

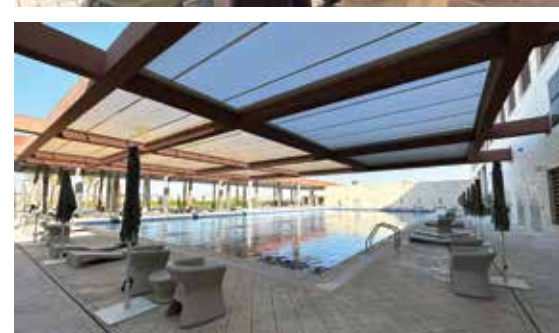
building plots (601,602,225), taking into account the observations of the committee members, in its meeting held on Monday, January 22, 2024, at the headquarters in Sabah Al-Salem University City.

The Chairman of the Committee, Acting Secretary General of the University, Dr Fayez Al-Dhafiri, stated that the committee approved the partial initial receipt of the facilities mentioned within the work package. The package also included the hospitality club, the model school, the supporting buildings, and the academic unit in Sabah Al-Salem University City. After reviewing the technical reports prepared by the Construction and Maintenance Department on the initial receipt of those works, the committee then moved on to a field visit to inspect and ensure the readiness of the projects.

Dr Al-Dhafiri stressed that the completion of the hospitality club buildings translates to the university's philosophy and its conviction of the importance of work-life balance, in the sense of encouraging a balance between job responsibilities and expanding recreational activities for its employees. "It contributes to achieving a creative work environment. The students' housing projects confirm the position of Kuwait University as an institution that is committed to the mission of spreading science and transferring knowledge," he added.

It is worth mentioning that the total area of the student housing buildings (plot 601) is 39,847 square meters and includes (304) residential rooms, (56) living rooms, tennis, basketball, and football courts, a diwaniya, a lecture hall, a multi-purpose hall, a restaurant, a central kitchen, a men's chapel, a bodybuilding hall, main stores for various materials, (8) laundry rooms, (4) guard rooms, (8) supervisors' rooms, administrative offices, a main computer room, and reception and waiting areas.

The total area of the female dormitory buildings (plot 602) is 29,757 square meters and includes (222) residential rooms, (42) living rooms, a diwaniya, a theater, a lecture hall, a multi-purpose hall, a



restaurant, a central kitchen, a women's chapel, a bodybuilding hall, main stores for various materials, (6) laundry rooms, (3) guard rooms, (6) supervisors' rooms, administrative offices, a main computer room, and reception and waiting areas.

The Hospitality Club Building (Plot 225) has a total area of 15,266 square meters and includes an Olympic swimming pool, another for children, (4) tennis courts, a basketball court, an indoor games hall, a children's play room, two diwanias for men and women, a theater, two lecture halls, a multi-purpose hall, a restaurant and kitchen, a prayer room for men and another for women, two gymnasiums for men and women, steam rooms, sauna and jacuzzi, main stores for various materials, administrative offices, a main computer room, and reception and waiting areas.



Officials inspect the housing projects at Sabah Al-Salem University City.



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Echoes of France remain in ex-colony on Indian land

Blinken lauds Ivory Coast anti-extremism model



KHAN YUNIS: Palestinians take control of a Zionist Merkava battle tank after crossing the border fence with the Zionist entity from Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip on October 7, 2023. — AFP

I could have been with those who broke through the siege on Oct 7

Nothing can hide the determination and courage of those young people

By Dr Salman Abu Sitta

Yes, I could have been one of those who broke through the fence had I been much younger and was still living in the concentration camp called the Gaza Strip. My story is the same as all of them. On May 14, 1948, my family on our land, “Ma’in Abu Sitta”, was attacked by a Haganah force of 24 armored vehicles. The force destroyed and burnt everything. The soldiers demolished the school that my father built in 1920; they stole the motor and equipment in the flour mill and well pump; they killed anyone in sight.

On that day, when Ben-Gurion announced his state, I became a refugee. We were pushed into the prison compound called the Gaza Strip, 4 kilometers away from my home. I was not alone. Palestinians living in 247 towns and villages in southern Palestine were driven to this enclave by dozens of massacres, such as in Bureir, Abu Shusha, Ed Dawayima, and many others. The tiny Gaza Strip, only 1.3 percent of Palestine, became a temporary home for 2.3 million Palestinian refugees. The (Zionist) attacks against them, by land, air, and sea, and with a complete siege, never stopped for 75 years.

I went to school in Egypt, but my cousins never wavered to cross the barbed wire called the Armistice Line and tried to return home, in the same manner of October 7. They crossed the barbed wire and attacked the occupiers of our land. They retrieved an elderly relative who remained, they watered the remaining cattle, and they general-

ly tried to restore life to Ma’in Abu Sitta, our land. I can never forget my cousin, Hassan Madi, with his smiling face and pleasant demeanor. He used to come back to tell us what happened to our groves and what the settlers did to our place. He was a very brave fida'i. He used to sneak into the settlers' camp and listen to them talk. He was killed by a mine buried on his route. Fifteen other young people from my family were killed in the couple of years after 1948. In the period from 1948 to 1956, an estimated 5,000 Palestinians were killed trying to return home.

The settlers set up prefab units on my land, which developed into kibbutzim. Their names are current in the media nowadays. Nirim was built on my father's land. I was born a few meters away from the kibbutz site. Ein Hashlosa Kibbutz, a few kilometers to the north, is built on land that belonged to my father and his cousins, a huge wheat and barley field. Nir Oz was built on the land of my father's uncle, Haj Mahmoud. His son Hamed, a civil engineer, devoted his life to the liberation of Palestine and was a key actor in forming the PLO in 1964, remaining in its executive committee for over 40 years.



Dr Salman Abu Sitta

The fourth kibbutz on our land was named Magen. This is the site of Sheikh Nuran, a venerated site where women sought blessings for their newborns. This was the ancient site of St Hilarion, a key figure in Christian Palestine. The site was his worshipping retreat in fourth-century Byzantine Palestine. Today, when you hear the names of these kibbutzim, you must recall on whose land they were built. You must remember that the owners of this land have never given up their right to return home.

This applies to over two million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. When you hear talk about the hostages, remember they are the true hostages for over 27,000 days. They came from 247 towns and villages in southern and central Palestine. See Map 1 for the origin of Gaza refugees. They are crowded in camps at a density of 8,000 persons/sq km.

Not only were they expelled and made refugees in 1948, but they were constantly attacked in camps in exile in 1953, 1956, 1967, 1971 and 1987, and with fierce regularity since 2006 up until today. In a twist unknown in colonial history, their ethnic cleansing has been upgraded in 2023 to a genocide of unparalleled proportions. The extent of its ferocity, the number of women and children killed, the vast areas of destruction, and the number of dropped bombs on such a tiny place in less than three months exceeds anything known in two World Wars.

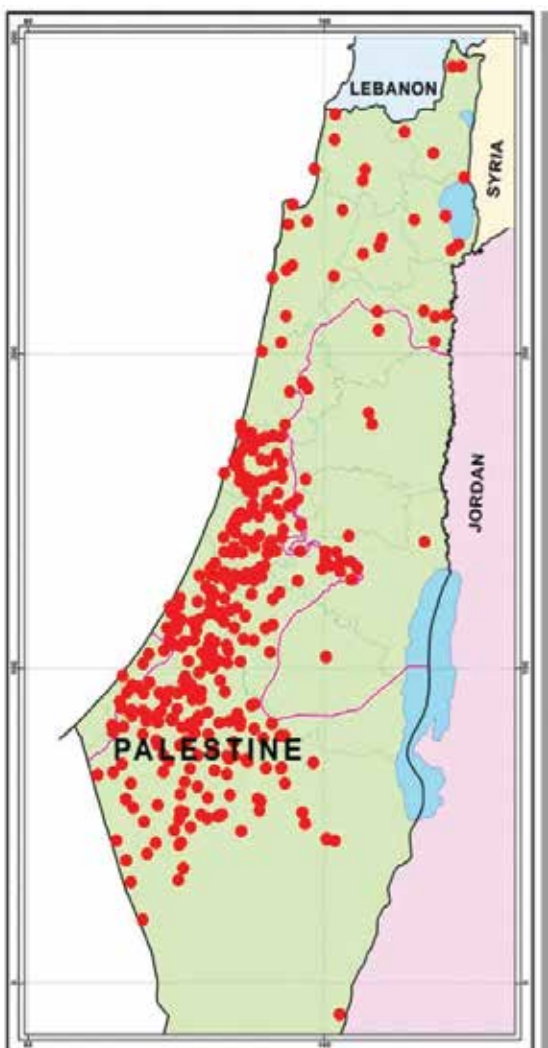
The Gaza Strip is bound by the Armistice Agreement signed between Egypt and (the Zionist entity) on February 24, 1949. See Map 2 of Gaza's armistice line below. Article 2 of the agreement states that the line does not confer or deny rights to the warring parties. It is merely the line at which warring parties stopped on that date.

(The Zionist entity) has no borders, neither by its own admission nor by any article in international law. In 1948, (the Zionist entity) occupied 20,500 sq km (80 percent of Palestine), of which only 6 percent was obtained through the collusion of the British Mandate. The rest was obtained just by military force.

One year after the official Armistice Agreement in February 1950, (the Zionist entity) complained that many refugees had crossed the line and suggested to Egypt that to avoid clashes, it should establish a temporary line called modus vivendi, provided that the original agreement remains in force. This reduced the area of the Gaza Strip from 555 sq km to the present 365 sq km. As Map 2 shows, this temporary line became unofficially the regular line shown in maps and maintained by (the Zionist entity).

There is a macabre element in this fact. Many of the attacked kibbutzim, Nirim, Nir Oz and Ein Hashlosa, that were built on my and others' land, actually fall within the Gaza Strip proper, as Map 2 clearly shows. (The Zionist entity) has relentlessly tried to chew more and more of the Gaza Strip as a “buffer zone”. No international body ever contested (the Zionist entity's) continued reduction of the tiny Gaza Strip.

Meanwhile, the war against those young people who crossed the line to return home continues. They

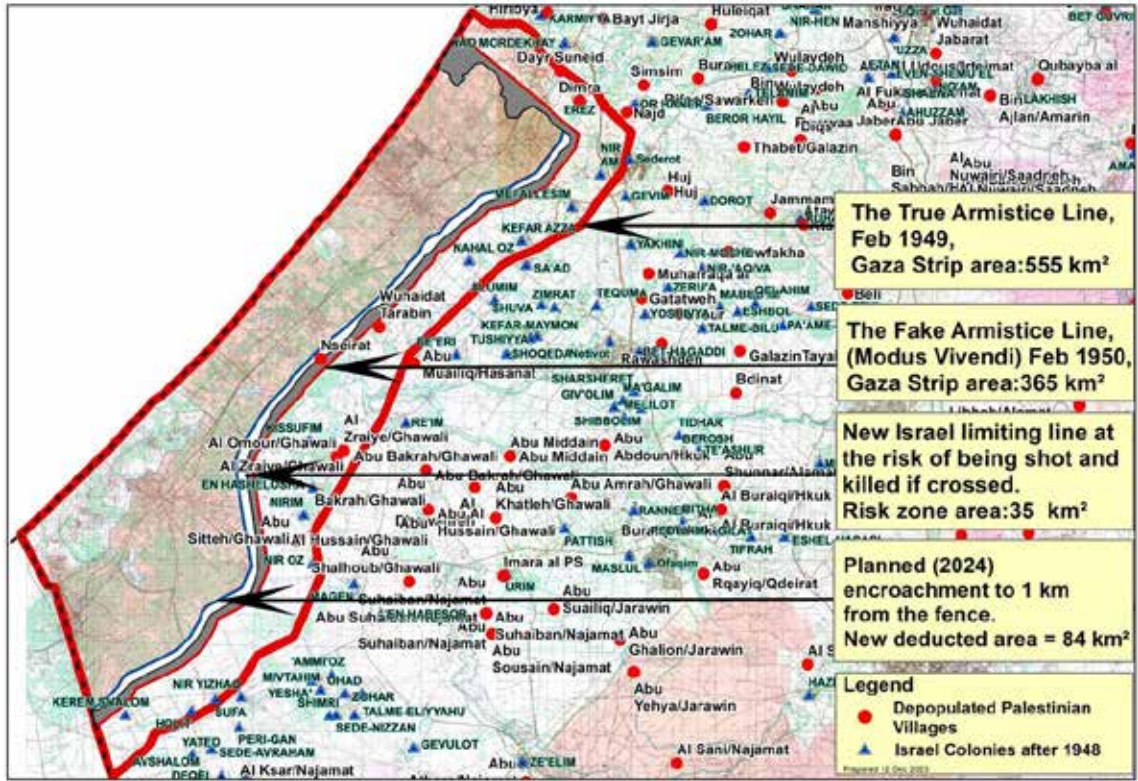


Map 1: Origin of refugees in the Gaza Strip.

have to contend with falling bombs in Gaza and a relentless smear campaign abroad. The false information and ugly defamation attributed to them, like beheading babies and a campaign of raping women, have turned out to be entirely false, but its effect lingers on. Anyone who knows them in Gaza knows they have a strict moral code.

Nothing can hide the determination and courage of those young people. They have stood fast for 90 days, longer than in any (Zionist) war with its neighbors. When the dust settles down, if it does, history will show who heroically defended his homeland and who, on the other hand, committed so many heinous crimes. This memory will chart the history of both peoples.

NOTE: Dr Salman Abu Sitta is the founder and president of the Palestine Land Society, London, dedicated to the documentation of Palestine's land and people. He is the author of six books on Palestine. This article was originally published by Mondoweiss. Republished by Kuwait Times with permission.



Map 2: Gaza Armistice Lines.

International

Blinken lauds Ivory Coast anti-extremism model

US solidifies relations with African allies as Blinken makes first trip to region in 10 months

ABIDJAN, Ivory Coast: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Tuesday praised Ivory Coast for choosing a less militarized approach to security, on a tour to rally African democracies as crises engulf the region and world.

Blinken was meeting separately with two key leaders on the same day — Ivorian President Alassane Ouattara, a veteran leader who has won US praise for consolidating democracy, before heading to Abuja to see Nigerian President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, elected last year on a platform of economic reforms.

In Abidjan, Blinken hailed Ivory Coast's stand against last year's coup in Niger and its approach of "building security together" by investing economically to combat extremism in northern areas bordering Mali and Burkina Faso.

"I have to applaud the approach that's been taken by Cote d'Ivoire — working with communities, listening to communities, making sure that their security forces understand the needs, the concerns of communities," Blinken said alongside Ouattara. "I think that can serve as a very powerful model for other countries," he said.

Ivory Coast has not experienced a major terrorist attack for some two years, despite its troubled neighbor-

hood. Blinken nonetheless promised to boost cooperation on the ground with Ivory Coast, largely training of security forces.

He said that the United States would provide an additional \$45 million to West African nations as part of a plan to battle instability, bringing total funding under the year-old program to nearly \$300 million. Ouattara expressed appreciation for the US assistance and voiced alarm over a spate of coups in West Africa. "Like the United States, we are very committed to democracy and justice," he said, promising that his government would do "everything possible to improve people's day-to-day lives."

Standing by US

Nigeria and Ivory Coast have largely stood by the United States — as another key partner, Kenya — despite unease in much of the continent over the Western focus on arming Ukraine and, more recently, US support for the Zionist entity in its war on Gaza.

Their stance stands in contrast with another heavyweight, South Africa, which the United States has accused of allowing arms shipments to Russia and which most recently annoyed Washington by bring-

ing a genocide case against the Zionist entity before the International Court of Justice.

Blinken will not travel to South Africa on the trip but he will visit Angola, which has transitioned from war to democracy and played a vital role mediating to end unrest in the neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo. And on Monday, he stopped in Cape Verde, a long-standing partner of the United States. Blinken has sought to showcase a softer side during his trip. On Monday, he attended a critical football match in the Africa Cup of Nations between Ivory Coast and Equatorial Guinea, when his hosts gifted him an Ivorian orange jersey bearing his name.

Taking stand on Niger

US President Joe Biden failed to live up to a promise — made to African leaders who visited Washington in late 2022 — to travel to the continent in 2023. Blinken, who has been occupied by the Middle East crisis, is making his first trip to sub-Saharan Africa in 10 months.

On his last visit to the region, he travelled to Niger to bolster the elected president, Mohamed Bazoum. Four months later, the army deposed Bazoum. The coup leaders threw out troops from



ABIDJAN: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken (left) and President of Ivory Coast Alassane Ouattara (right) shake hands following their meeting on Jan 23, 2024. — AFP

former colonial power France but have allowed the presence of some 1,000 US troops, who use Niger's desert as a base for drones in the fight against jihadists.

The coup leaders, however, have also moved closer to Russia, whose Wagner mercenaries are already involved in Mali, Central African Republic and, allegedly, Burkina Faso. Nigeria has also spoken out against the coup. Tinubu met Biden in

September on the sidelines of the Group of 20 summit in India, but Blinken's visit marks the most extensive high-level US interaction with him.

Nigeria is unlikely to receive similar praise for a nuanced approach on extremism, but the United States has welcomed Tinubu's call for an inquiry after a recent Nigerian army drone strike killed 85 civilians by mistake. — AFP

Upper house votes to delay Sunak's Rwanda plan

LONDON: Britain's unelected upper house of parliament inflicted a blow Monday to the government's controversial plan to send migrants to Rwanda, by voting to delay ratification of the treaty with Kigali. The move is a blow for Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, who had urged the House of Lords to pass the plan, saying it was the will of the people.

A majority of peers — 214 against 171 — voted to delay ratification of the treaty that London signed with Kigali until the British government has demonstrated that Rwanda is a safe country for migrants who would be deported there. The treaty is central to the Conservative government's policy to combat illegal immigration by deporting asylum seekers to the East African country.

Sunak, an internal Tory appointment as prime minister after Liz Truss's short-lived tenure ended in disaster in October 2022, is under pressure to deliver on what he has made a flagship policy. The prime minister survived a key test of his leadership last week by fending off right-wing rebels in his Conservative party to win a knife-edge parliamentary vote in the lower House of Commons on the so-called Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill.

He has staked his political future on the scheme, promising to "stop the boats" of migrants crossing the Channel from northern France. The bill is Sunak's answer to a UK Supreme Court ruling late last year that deporting asylum seekers to Kigali is illegal un-



LONDON: In this file photo, Britain's Prime Minister Rishi Sunak hosts a press conference after Britain and Rwanda sign a new treaty to transfer illegal migrants to the African country. — AFP

der international law.

If passed, the legislation would compel judges to treat Rwanda as a safe third country. It would also give UK ministers powers to disregard sections of international and British human rights legislation. But critics dismiss it as an expensive gimmick that will not work, accusing the government of not doing enough to clear asylum backlogs.

Peers in the House of Lords, which include former senior judges, have expressed deep unease about the plan, particularly its calls to ignore international human rights and refugee law. Unlike elected members of the House of Commons, the Lords do not have the power to block ratification of the treaty, which is central to the legislation. But the vote, to which the government will have to respond, suggests new difficulties for the controversial bill. — AFP

US Supreme Court sides with Biden in Texas border dispute

WASHINGTON: The US Supreme Court voted Monday to let the Biden administration remove concertina wire border barriers that Texas erected to fight illegal immigration from Mexico — a hot button issue in this election year.

The barriers are the brainchild of Texas governor Greg Abbott, an outspoken supporter of former president Donald Trump, who is making immigration one of the key tools of his bid to retake the White House in November. Abbott has accused Biden of "deliberate inaction" as record numbers of Central Americans and people of other nationalities have streamed across the US-Mexico border in recent months.

In December a federal appeals court barred the Biden government from removing the concertina wire barrier from the banks of the Rio Grande near the town of Eagle Pass, except in case of medical emergency. This month the Justice Department asked the Supreme Court to remove this injunction in an emergency application while the court considers the full merits of the case.

The court voted 5-4 Monday, including the support of chief justice John Roberts, to side with the Biden administration. Neither side gave reasons for their vote, which is common when the court decides on emergency petitions.

Abbott has made national headlines by bussing



EAGLE PASS: A migrant from Venezuela prays as he waits for a US Border Patrol agent to cut the razor wire after he crossed to Eagle Pass, Texas, in this file photo. — AFP

immigrants to cities seen as traditionally liberal, such as New York, as part of his campaign to draw attention to what he calls Biden's failed border policy. The Texas National Guard seized control January 11 of a park in Eagle Pass that lies along the Rio Grande, a move that heightened tensions with the Biden administration.

The Justice Department has accused the governor of preventing federal border agents from doing their job by denying them access to the border, even in the event of emergency, along a 2.3 mile (3.7 kilometer) stretch of the river. But Texas authorities refute this allegation. — AFP

Zionists bogged down in...

Continued from Page 1

acute food insecurity, or worse. Etefa said that around 70 percent of requests to deliver food to northern Gaza were rejected by Zionist authorities. The last deliveries to the north were around Jan 11 and 13, carrying 200 tons of food for 15,000 people. "That's really very, very small numbers," the spokeswoman said. "This is why we're seeing people becoming more desperate," as they have no confidence that the trucks will come again.

Abu Iyad, his belongings piled on a donkey-drawn cart, said he was moving for the seventh time, fleeing Khan Yunis for Rafah on the Egyptian border, where hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians have sought shelter, many in makeshift tents. "I'm heading to the unknown," he told AFP. "They told us to go to Rafah — where to go in Rafah? Is there any space left?"

The Zionist entity has carried out a relentless offensive that has killed at least 25,490 people in Gaza, mostly women and children, according to the health ministry. US news outlet Axios reported on Monday night that the Zionist entity had proposed to Hamas, via Qatari and Egyptian mediators, a new deal to free all the hostages.

The report, citing unnamed Zionist officials, said the proposed deal would be carried out in multiple stages, and would also involve the release of an undetermined number of Palestinian prisoners. The plan was expected to take about two months to complete. The proposal does not include promises to end the war, but it would involve Zionist troops reducing their presence in major cities in Gaza and gradually allowing residents to return to the territory's devastated north, Axios said.

News of the proposal comes as US media said the White House's coordinator for the Middle East, Brett McGurk, was expected in Egypt and Qatar for meetings aimed at securing a new hostage exchange deal. State Department spokesman Vedant Patel, however, said Washington still believed "a two-state solution, a creation of a Palestinian state, is the only path that gets us out of this endless cycle of violence".

Netanyahu has steadfastly rejected calls for the creation of a Palestinian state, saying the Zionist entity must maintain "security control over all the territory west of the Jordan" River, an area that includes all of the Palestinian territories. EU foreign ministers

pressed the Zionist entity to change its mind at meetings in Brussels on Monday with the top diplomats from the two warring parties and key Arab states.

EU foreign affairs chief Josep Borrell on Tuesday said that the Zionist entity cannot be allowed to unilaterally block the creation of a Palestinian state after the war in Gaza. "One thing is clear — (the Zionist entity) cannot have the veto right to the self-determination of the Palestinian people," Borrell told a Brussels press conference with his Egyptian counterpart. "The United Nations recognizes and has recognized many times the self-determination right of the Palestinian people. Nobody can veto it."

The Gaza war spurred fears of a wider escalation, with a surge in violence involving Iran-backed Hamas allies across the region. Lebanese movement Hezbollah said Tuesday it struck the Zionist air control base of Meron for a second time in recent weeks, in response to Zionist "assassinations" and attacks on civilians. — AFP



GAZA: A picture taken from Rafah on Jan 23, 2024 shows flares fired by Zionist soldiers over Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip during Zionist bombardment. — AFP

US, UK hit targets in Yemen as Houthis...

Continued from Page 1

On Tuesday, British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak urged an end to the attacks on shipping and told parliament the UK was "not seeking a confrontation," but that the country would "not hesitate" to respond to further incidents.

"We cannot stand by and allow these attacks to go unchallenged," he said. Earlier, British Foreign Secretary David Cameron said the Houthis had carried out more than 12 attacks on shipping since the first wave of joint strikes on Jan 11. The Houthis remained defiant, with military spokesman Yahya Saree promising a response. "These attacks will not go unanswered and unpunished," he wrote on X, formerly Twitter, listing 18 strikes in Sanaa, Hodeida, Ta'ez and Al-Bayda provinces.

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said he told Cameron during the World Economic Forum in Davos last week that the attacks were a "strategic mistake". "We sent a serious message and warning to the Americans," he said during a trip to New York, according to Iran's official IRNA news agency. "The action that the United States and the United Kingdom carried out jointly... is a threat to peace and security in the region. It is the intensification of the scope of the war."

A senior US military official said the strikes were car-

ried out using a combination of precision-guided munitions from US and British aircraft, and Tomahawk cruise missiles. There were no concerns about civilian casualties at the sites that were hit, while Houthi losses were unknown, the official told journalists. "The targeting was very specific and... very deliberate to go after the capability that they are using to attack maritime vessels in the Red Sea, Bab al-Mandab and Gulf of Aden," the official added. Saree, the Houthis' military spokesman, did not mention any casualties.

The latest strikes came after the US military on Sunday declared dead two Navy SEALs who went missing during a January 11 operation to seize alleged Iranian weapons bound for Yemen's Houthis. On Monday, hours before the joint operation, the Houthis said they fired on a US military cargo ship off the coast of Yemen. The claim was denied by a US defense official.

The Yemeni rebels began striking Red Sea shipping in November, saying they were hitting Zionist-linked vessels in support of Palestinians in Gaza, which has been ravaged by the Hamas-Zionist war. The Houthis have since declared US and British interests to be legitimate targets as well. In addition to military action, Washington is seeking to put diplomatic and financial pressure on the Houthis, redesignating them as a "terrorist" organization last week after dropping that label soon after President Joe Biden took office. The rebels reiterated on Monday that they will "respond to any attack" on Yemen and continue to "prevent (Zionist) ships" from passing through the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea until the end of the war in Gaza. — AFP

really has come to an end for now," said Alex Glaser, a Princeton University professor of mechanical and aerospace engineering. Russia withdrew from the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), which the United States never ratified to begin with. China is increasing its arsenal, which now stands at 500 nuclear weapons, "and for the first time, at least in my adult life, there is now talk in Washington that the US nuclear arsenal will have to increase also in order to match... Russia and China combined," Glaser added.

On climate, Ambuj Sagar, a professor at the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi said there had been a "mixed story," hailing \$1.7 trillion invested in clean energy at the climate COP in Dubai as a sign of moving in the right direction, albeit "not as fast or as deeply" as required. The clock was originally set at seven minutes to midnight in 1947. The furthest from midnight it has ever been is 17 minutes, following the end of the Cold War in 1991. — AFP

'Doomsday Clock' remains at 90...

Continued from Page 1

advances in artificial intelligence (AI) raise questions about how to control a technology "that could improve or threaten civilization in countless ways."

Russia's invasion of Ukraine, now just a month away from its second anniversary, was the principal reason behind the clock being moved to 90 seconds before midnight in 2023, and continued to overshadow this year's update. Moscow's thinly veiled threats of nuclear war, its attacks on nuclear sites, and its erosion of international norms of conduct have all contributed to heightened risk, the Bulletin said, while the Zionist entity's war in Gaza threatens to evolve into a wider regional conflict involving nuclear states.

Meanwhile, "traditional nuclear arms control

International



Workers build a replica of the Eiffel Tower at a park in Puducherry, a former French colony, on Jan 18, 2024, ahead of French President Emmanuel Macron's visit to India.



A woman walks past 'Foyer Du Soldat', a French Army veterans club, in Puducherry.—AFP photos

Echoes of France remain in ex-colony on Indian land

Territory in India's southeast becomes a symbol of growing Franco-Indian friendship

PUDUCHERRY, India: Seventy years after France quit once hard-fought for territories seized from India, the dwindling influence of Paris on the bustling streets of Puducherry is still reflected in language, architecture and cuisine.

It is more than 8,000 kilometers (5,000 miles) from Paris to Puducherry, but some women dressed in colorful saris still chat in French, policemen wear the peaked kepi hats of the gendarme, and road signs mimic the famous blue and white enamel lettering of Paris.

As President Emmanuel Macron heads to New Delhi to celebrate Republic Day on Friday — marking the day independent India's constitution came into force — Francophiles in Puducherry say the impact of France's colonial rule was better than British brutality elsewhere in the country.

"Indians of Pondicherry were considered as French nationals — culturally and legally," said 96-year-old David Annoussamy, a former judge who served in the French court in the port city, using its colonial-era name. "Nationality wasn't about color, it's about knowing France," the author told AFP, wearing a traditional Tamil wrap around his waist and speaking from his sprawling home with a tree-lined central courtyard. "The main thing was to know French".

Today, New Delhi and Paris celebrate growing ties, with France seeking to boost economic deals includ-



PUDUCHERRY: Saloua Sahl, founder of 'Eat My Cake' bakery, speaks during an interview with AFP.

ing already valuable military contracts with India, the world's fifth-biggest economy and most populous nation. Prime Minister Narendra Modi was guest of honor at France's annual Bastille Day celebrations last July, and Macron is expected to be likewise feted this week in India.

Adopted country

The territory on India's southeastern coast was taken by France in 1674 when the French East India Com-

pany set up a trading center to exploit its rich spices and goods. France only left in 1954 — seven years after India's independence from Britain — and it took until 1962 for Paris to formally cede full sovereignty.

The former French trading post has since changed its name to Puducherry, an administrative territory also incorporating other French ex-colonial enclaves including Karaikal, Mahe and Yanam. Together, 1.25 million people reside in the Puducherry territory, according to the last census in 2011, and most speak the Tamil language. Just 5,000 French nationals live in Puducherry city today, the majority having Indian forebears who took citizenship from France.

Annoussamy took French nationality at the time of the handover, something he is proud of. "Someone born in Paris or someone born in Pondicherry both had the same rights," he said, speaking in fluent French. He counts Provençal-style bouillabaisse fish soup as his favorite dish. "It's a country we've adopted, and it's become our country," said Franco-Indian fashion designer Vassanty Manet, showing a black and white photo of her father when he served in the French army. "We're a population that looks Indian but has a French culture, and that's what's so special".

Franco-Indian friendship

Manet said she grew up with stories about France that "fed our imagination", adding her un-

cle also fought for France during World War II in Algeria. "We've never had any resentment towards France," she said. Unlike elsewhere in India, where there have often been wholesale name changes of streets to strip away Britain's legacy and statues of London's imperial leaders torn down, echoes of France remain.

A white marble statue of France's patron saint Joan of Arc — who battled the English in the 15th century, just as the French fought British forces for control of Puducherry in the 19th century — stands tall.

The old French quarter — "La Ville Blanche" or "White Town" — is a favorite with tourists for its colonial architecture with centuries-old mansions. Elegant streets are adorned with bougainvillea-laden bungalows, with the aroma of freshly baked baguettes from cafes filling the air. "They want to try French croissants, baguettes, pain au chocolat, lemons tarts and chocolate tarts," said, Saloua Sahl, 44, who was drawn from France to set up a bakery.

And, in another sign of French ties, Puducherry is preparing to unveil a 13-metre (42-foot) high replica Eiffel Tower, said Chantal Samuel-David, an elected representative of the French community for southern India. "The idea is to have a symbol of Franco-Indian friendship, a symbol that everyone here knows, that everyone in the world recognizes," she said. — AFP

Germany defunds neo-Nazi party as AfD threat grows

BERLIN: Germany's constitutional court on Tuesday approved a request to withdraw public funds from the neo-Nazi Homeland party, offering what one official called a possible "blueprint" for action against the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD).

The verdict comes as Germany debates how to counter the rising popularity of the AfD, which is under close surveillance by domestic intelligence after being classed a "suspected case of far-right extremism".

Homeland, known until 2023 as the NPD, was "excluded from state funding for a period of six years", the court said. In its reasoning, the court said Homeland sought to "eliminate the free democratic order" and had a "racist, in particular anti-Muslim, anti-Semitic and anti-Gypsy, attitude" that clashed with Germany's constitutional principles.

The neo-Nazi group would therefore lose access to state funding available to parties, as well as any tax breaks. The ruling was a "confirmation of the pathway to not offering much space to the enemies of freedom", Chancellor Olaf Scholz told journalists.

"The forces that want to dismantle and destroy our democracy must not receive a cent of government funding," Interior Minister Nancy Faeser said. The AfD currently sits second in national polls and is leading them in several eastern regions where elections are set to be held later this year.

'Confirmed' extremist

Markus Soeder, the conservative premier of the southern region of Bavaria, said ahead of the ruling that withdrawing funds from Homeland could be a "blueprint" for dealing with the growing threat from AfD. Three of the party's regional branches—in the eastern states of Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt and Thuringia — are classed as "confirmed" extremist organizations for their efforts to undermine democracy and their anti-immigrant rhetoric. Over the weekend, hundreds of thousands of people came out to protest against the AfD after its members were revealed to have discussed a mass deportation plan at a meeting with extremists. The mooted mass deportation plan was "an attack on the foundations of our society", Faeser said. "Right-wing extremism is the greatest extremist threat to our democracy — and to people in our country," added Faeser.

Withdrawing public funding was "another instrument" to defend democracy, Faeser told journalists at a press conference, while refusing to rule out a similar move against the AfD. Some government figures have urged caution, however, and warned against giving the AfD material for an anti-establishment campaign. The challenge to the AfD needed to be "political", while any action should be limited to the "constitutionally necessary and possible", Finance Minister Christian Lindner told broadcaster Welt TV. —AFP



ZHAOTONG: Chinese military personnel and rescue workers search for missing victims following a landslide in a village in southwestern China's Yunnan province on January 22, 2024. — AFP

Rescuers search for survivors after China landslide kills 31

BEIJING: The death toll from a landslide that struck a remote and mountainous part of southwestern China reached 31 on Tuesday, state media said, as rescuers raced to find those still trapped under the debris. The pre-dawn landslide buried 18 homes and sparked the evacuation of more than 200 people when it struck in Zhenxiang county, Yunnan province early Monday.

Nearly 36 hours since the disaster, 31 people have been confirmed dead, state news agency Xinhua said. An earlier report Tuesday afternoon by state broadcaster CCTV, which announced the toll had risen to 20, added that 24 people were still missing at that time.

Xinhua said rescue workers were in a "race against time" to find those still missing, after a night of sub-zero temperatures. "Search and rescue efforts persisted through the night," firefighter Li Shenglong told Xinhua.

Wu Junyao, director of the natural resources and planning bureau of Zhaotong, told Xinhua that the disaster "resulted from a collapse in the steep cliff area atop the slope". Two hundred rescue workers have been dispatched to the scene as well as dozens of fire engines and other equipment.

The site was covered in thick snow and res-

cuers were "using all kinds of tools to search for survivors", Xinhua reported. Wu said the rescuers were digging through collapsed debris of "100 meters in width, 60 meters in height, with an average thickness of around 6 meters".

CCTV showed footage of rescue workers digging through twisted metal and concrete overnight in a bid to find survivors. Other CCTV footage showed locals huddling for warmth around a fire in a shelter, eating instant noodles. People from the surrounding area have chipped in to help with relief efforts, state media said. "Our main focus is on distributing supplies, cooking, and delivering food to those in need," Hong Jie, a 38-year-old resident of a nearby village, told Xinhua.

'All-out' efforts

Chinese President Xi Jinping on Monday ordered "all-out" rescue efforts. Landslides are common in Yunnan, a far-flung and largely impoverished region of China where steep mountain ranges butt against the Himalayan plateau.

Monday's disaster occurred in a rural area surrounded by towering peaks dusted with snow, state media footage showed. China has experienced a string of natural disasters in recent months, some following extreme weather events such as sudden, heavy downpours.

Rainstorms last September in the southern region of Guangxi triggered a mountain landslide that killed at least seven people, according to media reports. In August, heavy rains sparked a similar disaster near the northern city of Xi'an, killing more than 20 people. — AFP

Curfew in Nigerian state after surge in deadly violence

JOS, Nigeria: Nigerian officials declared a curfew on Tuesday in parts of a north-central Nigerian state after more deadly attacks in the latest in a recent surge in intercommunal violence. Plateau State governor Caleb Mutfwang ordered the 24-hour lockdown in Mangu local government district to try to control deteriorating security, his spokesman said in a statement. "Only persons on essential duties are allowed to move within the local government area until further notice," it said.

Local resident Joseph Moses told AFP that dozens of homes, places of worship and other buildings had been set on fire during the violence. Officials gave no toll for the latest attack.

But a local imam Abdullahi Maisaje told AFP at least six people had been killed in his community. "I cannot tell you the exact number of deaths because in some other communities reports are saying people have died," he said by telephone.

Brigadier General Gakji Shipi, a special security advisor to the governor, said the violence escalated from a dispute between a Fulani Muslim herder and another local man over cattle grazing and the roadway. But he did not give any toll for the violence.

Sitting on the division between Nigeria's mostly Muslim north and the predominantly Christian south, Plateau often faces outbreaks in ethnic and religious tensions. Over Christmas, nearly 200 people were killed after gunmen raided mostly Christian villages in Bokkos and Barkin Ladi local areas of Plateau. Thousands of people were also forced from their homes.

The coalition of Muslim herders' groups said some of their communities were also affected by the Christmas violence. Clashes in Nigeria's northwest and north-central states have their roots in tensions over land between nomadic herders and pastoral farmers.

Competition for natural resources, intensified by rapid population growth and climate pressures, has spiraled into broader criminality. Heavily armed gangs known locally as bandits raid villages especially in the northwest states, looting and kidnapping for ransom.

Rural villages often form self-defense vigilante groups to protect themselves and their farms from raids. President Bola Ahmed Tinubu has made improving security a priority since coming to office last year, as he seeks to encourage foreign investment in Africa's most populous country. — AFP

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 24, 2024

Business

Pakistan, Afghanistan reopen key border crossing after negotiations

Islamabad to reimpose restrictions on Torkham border from April 1

PESAWAR: Pakistan and Afghanistan reopened a key trade crossing on Tuesday, officials on both sides said, after a row over travel papers as Islamabad cracks down on cross-border movements. The Torkham border closure since Jan 21 came after Islamabad imposed tighter controls requiring drivers from both sides to have visas and passports—documents many Afghans do not have.

Ties between the two countries have increasingly frayed in recent months, with Islamabad accusing the Taliban government of failing to root out militants staging attacks in Pakistan from their soil. Kabul has always rejected the allegations.

A Pakistan border official, who asked not to be named, confirmed the reopening to AFP after negotiations between Islamabad and Kabul, allowing hundreds of waiting trucks to cross. “It was agreed during the discussions that until March 31, Pakistani and Afghan drivers can cross the border without a visa and passport,” he said.

“However, starting on April 1, both a visa and passport will be mandatory.” Afghan Torkham official Abdul Jabbar Hikmat confirmed lorries were allowed to cross again on Tuesday “without the need for passports and visas”.

Pakistan’s casualties from armed groups hit a six-year high in 2023 with more than 1,500 civilians, security forces and militants killed, according to Islamabad’s Center for Research and Security Studies.

The biggest militant threat to Pakistan is its domestic chapter of the Taliban movement, known as Tehreek-e-Taleban Pakistan (TTP).

Pakistan officials said tighter restrictions on trade and on-off border closures are a pressure tactic to get the Taliban government to work with Pakistan on security. “Pakistan desires Afghanistan to adopt a tough stance against the TTP,” a senior provincial government official in Peshawar city who asked not to be named told AFP. “If they do not, the trade route will be intermittently closed for various reasons.” Islamabad has also recently forced out hundreds of thousands of undocumented Afghans living in Pakistan. More than 500,000 Afghans fled in the four months since Islamabad imposed a deadline ordering 1.7 million Afghans it says are living in the country illegally to leave or risk arrest and deportation. Millions of Afghans escaping conflict poured into Pakistan in past decades, including around 600,000 since the Taliban ousted the US-backed government and imposed its harsh interpretation of Islamic law.

Some of the Afghans crossing into Afghanistan as a result of Islamabad’s eviction scheme were entering the country for the first time, having lived their whole lives in Pakistan. Upon arrival, migrants have received only modest assistance from the government and NGOs in a country contending with one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world. — AFP



TORKHAM, Afghanistan: Afghan people along with their belongings arrive to enter Pakistan near the zero point Torkham border crossing between Afghanistan and Pakistan, in Nangarhar province on January 23, 2024. — AFP

India’s stock market pips HK to become world’s 4th largest

NEW DELHI: India’s stock market has edged out Hong Kong to become the world’s fourth-largest, a milestone that underscores growing global investor optimism about New Delhi’s economic prospects, Bloomberg said Tuesday. The total value of shares listed on Indian exchanges hit \$4.3 trillion on Monday, slightly higher than Hong Kong’s \$4.29 trillion, according to data compiled by Bloomberg.

The shift in the global pecking order reflects the standout market year that India has had in 2023, as higher retail investor participation, strong economic growth and increased liquidity boosted the combined value of shares listed on Indian exchanges. The Indian stock rally comes as Hong Kong’s market grappled with its fourth consecutive year of losses, with money managers moving billions out over worries of China’s economic downturn.

In the last two years, there has also been increasing political pressure on US investors to cut their exposure to Chinese companies. India’s Nifty 50 index jumped 20 percent in 2023, its eighth straight year of gains. On the other hand, Hong Kong’s benchmark Hang Seng index, which includes shares of many influential Chinese companies, ended last year 14 percent lower.

“We think India is among the most attractive long-term opportunities... India offers meaningful pro-growth policy support, unique demographic tailwinds, [and] superior economic and earnings growth potential,” Rashmi Gupta, portfolio manager at JP Morgan Private Bank, said in a recent note.



MUMBAI: Pedestrians walk past the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) building in Mumbai on January 23, 2024. India’s stock market has edged out Hong Kong to become the world’s fourth-largest, a milestone that underscores growing global investor optimism about New Delhi’s economic prospects. — AFP

Separately, shares of India’s Zee Entertainment nosedived on Tuesday after a proposed \$10 billion merger with the local unit of Japanese giant Sony was called off. The initial 30 percent plunge saw Zee lose as much as 55 billion rupees (\$661 million) in market value. At least five brokerage firms, including Hong Kong’s CLSA, have slapped a “sell” rating on the stock.

The merger’s failure, reportedly because of disagreements over who would lead the new entity, has

also reignited worries over Zee’s ability to thrive in an increasingly competitive entertainment market. The collapsed deal leaves both Sony and Zee more vulnerable at a time when billionaire Mukesh Ambani-led Reliance Industries (RIL) is negotiating a merger with Disney’s India unit, Bloomberg News reported. India’s entertainment market, worth tens of billions of dollars, is already one of the world’s biggest, while smartphone adoption is forecast to expand further in the coming years. — AFP

Red Sea attacks latest threat to Yemen’s oil tanker

RIYADH: Mounting maritime security threats off Yemen’s coast have stalled work on scrapping a decrepit oil tanker, officials have told AFP, jeopardizing a rare success story in the war-torn country. The FSO Safer, a 48-year-old vessel with a corroding hull, was for years described as a “ticking time bomb”, going unserved as fighting raged in Yemen and fears grew that a leak or on-board explosion could release its 1.14 million barrels of crude into the Red Sea.

But last August, the United Nations announced the completion of a complex transfer of the oil to a new vessel, a crucial step in staving off an environmental and economic calamity.

The UN said at the time that completing the project would involve towing and scrapping the Safer, which still posed “a residual environmental threat, holding viscous oil residue and remaining at risk of breaking apart”. However, after delays over a \$22 million funding shortfall and other challenges, security in the Red Sea has deteriorated dramatically, a knock-on effect of the conflict between Zionist entity and Hamas.

Houthi forces, which control the capital Sanaa and the waters where the Safer is located, began attacking Red Sea shipping in November, and the United States has carried out several rounds of strikes on Houthi targets this month along with two joint operations with Britain. The situation has “re-



HODEIDA, Yemen: The beleaguered Yemen-flagged FSO Safer oil tanker, is anchored in the Red Sea off the coast of Yemen’s contested western province of Hodeida on July 15, 2023. — AFP

sulted in unforeseen operational and financial challenges” for the Safer project, making it difficult to move forward, a spokesperson for the UN Development Programme told AFP.

“After much consideration, the UN had no option but to pause the project at this time and has informed the authorities accordingly,” the spokesperson said. “We continue to follow developments on the ground very carefully and closely.”

Edrees Al-Shami, the Sanaa-appointed executive general manager of SEPOC, the Yemeni oil and gas company, said there was a “big risk” of the ships being struck by a stray missile as Houthi-controlled areas come under attack.

Completing the Safer project was always expected to be complicated because of Yemen’s war,

which has killed hundreds of thousands of people, either directly in the fighting or indirectly as a result of war-induced shortages. It pits the Houthis, who took control of Sanaa in 2014, against a Saudi-led coalition supporting the internationally recognized government based in the southern city of Aden.

Though a six-month truce that took effect in April 2022 has largely held, analysts say the recent regional turmoil threatens efforts to secure a durable ceasefire. The Houthis say their activities in the Red Sea are aimed at Zionist entity-linked vessels in support of Palestinians in Gaza, where Zionist entity’s withering retaliatory campaign against Hamas has killed more than 25,000 people, mostly women and children, according to the Gaza health ministry.

The Houthis have also declared American and British interests to be legitimate targets. The group “will use all cards at their disposal to tarnish this US-led coalition”, said Bader al-Saif of Kuwait University. A delay for the Safer project “fits into the anti-US propaganda (the Houthis) are good at assembling”.

Yemen’s rival authorities in Sanaa and Aden are at odds over who owns the oil that was on the Safer as well as the new tanker that now holds it, the MT-Yemen. The Houthis have previously said they want to sell the oil and use the revenue to cover their employees’ salaries. They have also called for the completion of onshore storage facilities that could potentially hold the crude. Under the terms of the handover deal announced last summer, the MT-Yemen was to be managed by a UN-contracted firm for at least six months. But Shami, the Sanaa-appointed executive general manager of SEPOC, told AFP the firm “wants to leave the vessel due to the recent developments in the region”. — AFP

Iraq’s no-frills carrier slams US sanctions

BAGHDAD: Iraqi no-frills carrier Fly Baghdad has condemned Washington’s imposition of sanctions, saying the US Treasury provided no proof of its allegation the airline had assisted Iran’s Revolutionary Guards. In a statement on Monday, the US slapped sanctions on Fly Baghdad and its CEO, Basheer Abdulkadhim Alwan al-Shabbani, accusing them of “providing assistance to the Quds Force”, the foreign operations arm of the Revolutionary Guards, “by delivering material and personnel throughout the region” including weapons.

Responding in a statement late Monday, the airline said the US decision was “based on misleading and unreal information that cannot stand up to the law”. Fly Baghdad demanded that the US Treasury provide evidence that could “convict the company or its management”.

The airline said it had “worked for years under the direct supervision of the Iraqi government, represented by the Iraqi Civil Aviation Authority and the ministry of transport”. The low-cost carrier, which offers flights to Aleppo, Beirut, Damascus, Dubai, Istanbul, Mumbai and Tehran,



BAGHDAD: Iraqi airline Fly Baghdad’s Director of Aviation Security Nameer Al-Qaisi speaks during a press conference at the company’s headquarters in Baghdad International Airport in the Iraqi capital on January 23, 2024. — AFP

said its services were “continuing as usual and have not been suspended”. However videos circulating on social media, which AFP could not independently verify, purported to show passengers at Baghdad airport venting their frustration over a flight cancellation. Property in the United States of individuals designated by the Treasury are blocked and must be reported. Financial institutions and others are restricted in their transactions with sanctioned entities. On Monday, the Treasury also announced that it had imposed new sanctions against “three leaders and supporters” of Kataeb Hezbollah, a pro-Iran armed group in Iraq. It accused Kataeb Hezbollah of having “used Fly Baghdad flights on multiple occasions to transport bags of US currency and US-made weapons... from Iraq to Lebanon”.

It also accused Fly Baghdad of having transferred “hundreds of Iraqi fighters” affiliated with pro-Iran groups “in support of the Iranian proxies’ attacks on Zionist entity”. The US sanctions come after a spate of attacks on US troops in Iraq and neighboring Syria since an unprecedented attack on Zionist entity on Oct 7 by Hamas sparked war with Zionist entity in Gaza. — AFP

Business

Gulf Bank funds many large-scale sustainable projects in Kuwait

Al-Amir takes part in conference organized by Kuwait Pavilion at Expo 2023 in Doha

KUWAIT: In its ongoing commitment to promoting environmental sustainability principles, Gulf Bank actively participated in the International Horticultural Exhibition, Expo 2023, hosted in the Qatari capital, Doha. The exhibition, themed “Green Desert, Better Environment,” is scheduled to conclude on March 28, 2024. During the conference organized by the Kuwait Pavilion, under the theme “The Role of the Private Sector Towards Sustainability,” Ahmed Al-Amir, the Deputy General Manager of Corporate Communications at Gulf Bank, delivered a presentation on Monday, titled “Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) and Sustainability Progress.” The lecture centered around a comprehensive framework of standards and components aimed at enhancing organizational capacity and fostering an understanding of governance management strategies.

Al-Amir emphasized Gulf Bank’s close collaboration in supporting and advancing the national sustainability agenda aligned with Kuwait Vision 2035. The bank strategically implements initiatives that effectively contribute to a sustainable approach within the community. This is achieved by adopting responsible practices with a proactive stance, delivering distinguished financial and banking services, and offering innovative digital solutions to its customers.

Funding projects

Al-Amir highlighted Gulf Bank’s significant contribution to funding sustainable development projects, highlighting its position as a leading financial institution in Kuwait and the region. The bank has actively participated in financing a diverse array of sustainable



DOHA: Ahmed Al-Amir delivers a presentation titled “Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) and Sustainability Progress.”

to oversee program implementation, and facilitate advanced training for leaders. Sustainability stands as a central emphasis across all facets of the bank’s operations and services.

Reusable bags

He further highlighted that, in collaboration with five major Cooperative Societies and the Environment Public Authority in Kuwait, the bank initiated a significant environmental sustainability effort. This initiative aims to foster a societal shift towards the

Additionally, Al-Amir highlighted various initiatives implemented within the bank to cut-down on greenhouse gas emissions, decrease paper usage, advocate for environmental cleanliness, reduce waste, and shift towards energy-efficient lighting.

Developing environmentally friendly branches

He pointed out that, as part of an ambitious plan to make its branch network environmentally friendly and increase reliance on renewable energy, the bank has renovated several branches, including its head-

- Our close collaboration aims to strengthen and hasten the national sustainability agenda, in alignment with Kuwait Vision 2035.

- We actively contribute to fostering a sustainable approach within the community through carefully selected initiatives.

- The 2024/2030 strategy serves as the fundamental framework guiding our sustainability efforts in the upcoming phase.

Gulf Bank’s vision

Gulf Bank aspires to be the leading financial institution in Kuwait, fostering an inclusive and diverse environment for its employees to deliver exceptional customer service, while ensuring a commitment to sustainable community initiatives. With an extensive network of branches and cutting-edge digital services, customers have the flexibility to choose how, and where, they conduct their banking transactions, ensuring a seamless and efficient banking experience.

In alignment with its support for Kuwait Vision 2035, known as “New Kuwait,” and its dedication to collaborate with various stakeholders to achieve these goals, Gulf Bank is steadfast in driving significant advancements in sustainability across environmental, social, and governance (ESG) realms. This commitment is realized through a range of strategically selected sustainability initiatives, both within and beyond the bank.

It is noteworthy that the International Horticultural Exhibition, Expo 2023 Doha, is currently featuring participation from 80 countries, alongside numerous organizations, non-governmental entities, international experts, private sector companies, universities, and laboratories. The event anticipates a total of 3 million visitors, hosting significant conferences, workshops, and discussions to innovate global solutions. The focus is on addressing issues such as desertification, climate change, and sustainability challenges, with a particular emphasis on utilizing modern technologies for resource sustainability.



DOHA: The International Horticultural Exhibition Expo 2023 in Doha.

development initiatives, such as the “Al-Shagaya” renewable energy project and the Clean Fuels project.

2024/2030 strategy

On the flip side, Al-Amir highlighted the bank’s endeavors to solidify sustainability principles both internally and externally. This effort materialized in the release of the third annual Sustainability Report, showcasing noteworthy accomplishments in environmental, social, and governance domains. The bank also introduced its ESG 2024/2030 strategy, serving as the foundational framework for sustainability efforts in the upcoming phase. Additionally, a high-level sustainability committee, chaired by a Board of Directors member, was established

use of reusable bags, reducing reliance on plastic bags. The initiative aligns with Goal No. 17 of the sustainable development goals, highlighting the importance of enhancing implementation methods through extensive state-level partnerships across different sectors.

Internal initiatives

Furthermore, Al-Amir mentioned Gulf Bank’s continuous dedication to the annual Environment Month initiative, organized by the Scientific Center. This involvement encompasses activities commemorating World Recycling Day, World Water Day, World Aquatic Animals Day, and World Health Day.

quarters in the capital. This includes the opening of the first fully environmentally friendly branches in the Sabah Al-Ahmad area.

Recycling e-waste

Moreover, Al-Amir mentioned that the bank has maintained its dedication to recycling e-waste (electronic waste), by partnering with a specialized recycling company, ensuring the safe disposal of around 22.3 tons of electronic waste.

He concluded by emphasizing, “At Gulf Bank, we prioritize implementing the highest standards of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) sustainability to ensure that our operations, initiatives, and invest-

- An ambitious initiative has been launched to foster a societal shift towards the use of reusable bags.

- The launch of our first fully environmentally friendly branch marks a significant step, and we are currently improving sustainability across our branch network and main building through continuous development initiatives.

IMF: Finnish recovery stalled by Russian invasion of Ukraine

HELSINKI: The Finnish economy recovered swiftly from the pandemic, but Russia’s invasion of Ukraine worsened the outlook, with high inflation and rising interest rates weighing on household purchasing power and investment. Recent estimates indicate that the economy contracted in 2023 (–0.5 percent), and modest growth is anticipated in 2024, with risks to the downside, the International Monetary Fund said in its report.



It recommended that Finland’s fiscal policy should focus on putting debt on a declining path through a gradual but sustained fiscal adjustment. Structural reforms should center on labor markets: reducing skills mismatches, encouraging employment, and boosting productivity.

Despite large buffers, large cross-border exposures, a weakening housing market, and high household debt pose risks to the financial system. This necessitates tightening liquidity regulation and enhancing the macro-prudential toolkit.

Finland’s economic growth has stalled, but employment remains relatively robust. Finland is likely in recession, with high interest rates, weak trading-partner growth, and a downturn in the housing market all weighing on activity. A recovery in household purchasing power, along with easing financial conditions, is expected to support a modest

recovery in 2024, with growth projected to be ½ percent, it said.

The labor market remains relatively strong, but unemployment is likely to increase modestly, as the construction sector continues to shed jobs. In the medium term, growth is expected to improve to around 1½ percent due to an anticipated increase in investment and employment resulting from the labor market reforms.

Inflationary pressures are diminishing. Twelve-month headline inflation, which peaked at 9.1 percent in November 2022, has receded to 1.3 percent in December 2023, primarily driven by declining energy prices. Core inflation, although more persistent, has also shown deceleration, particularly in non-energy goods and non-housing services. Supported by modest wage growth, negative base effects, and a growing output gap, headline inflation is anticipated to remain below 2 percent in 2024, gradually recovering over the medium-term.

The fiscal deficit has widened. The deficit is expected to have increased to 2.5 percent of GDP in 2023, primarily due to higher discretionary spending, notably energy-related compensation, defense spending, humanitarian aid, high index-linked increases in social benefits, and support for wellbeing services counties. Gross public debt is expected to have reached 75 percent, further exceeding Nordic peers. Deficits are projected to remain substantial over the medium-term.

Finland’s economic outlook is subject to downside risks. Finland faces several significant external risks, including from greater geo-economic fragmentation and a rebound in international energy prices. But domestic risks are also elevated. The combination of high household debt, falling house prices, higher unemployment, and rising interest rates could tip the economy into a deeper “balance sheet recession”. Large-planned investments from the green transition represent an upside risk over the medium term, according to the Fund.

The government’s ambition to reduce the fiscal deficit is welcome, but stronger policies are needed to achieve this. The government program targets a medium-term fiscal adjustment of about 2 percent of GDP over the next 4 years through spending cuts and fiscal gains from higher employment. This ambition is welcome. However, current policy measures fall well short of achieving this, with the fiscal deficit projected to increase in 2024 and debt to continue to rise. Additional measures are needed to close this gap.



IMF: Africa moving to a new digital and green economy

WASHINGTON: Africa and the world are on a journey from a period marked by the pandemic and high inflation, to a new digital, climate-friendly economy. To get there, we must navigate high debt levels and limited policy space, and we must work together to overcome fragmentation, said Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva. Speaking at the 10th anniversary conference of the IMF’s Africa Training Institute, she said, “This journey will test IMF member countries in a new way, ways that require, more than ever, agile and flexible economic institutions.”

The IMF’s regional capacity development centers have been helping its member countries build these institutions—and the skills that are necessary to formulate and implement sound macroeconomic policies. “We have done it through demand-driven technical assistance and training to members across the region, including fragile, low-, and middle-income countries. In other words, the whole range of our members there,” Georgieva said.

The IMF’s experts provide depth of advice that helps our member countries safeguard macroeconomic and financial stability, promote regional economic integration, and steer economic transformation. This complements the Fund’s policy analysis and advice – as we call it surveillance –, and it also prepares the ground for effective use of IMF financing. “Our commitment to this work, and the geographical footprint of our centers, have never been greater. —AFP

Swatch says net profit fell in 2023

ZURICH: Switzerland’s Swatch, maker of luxury timepieces Tissot, Longines and Omega, reported on Tuesday a lower-than-expected net profit for 2023 as sales figures were hit by a strong Swiss franc. The company said its net profit rose by 8.1 percent to 890 million francs (\$1 billion), lower than the 972 million francs forecast by analysts surveyed by Swiss news agency AWP.

Sales grew 5.2 percent to 7.9 billion francs—in line with expectations. They were up 12.6 percent when excluding the effects of foreign exchange rates. “The rapid erosion of major currencies against the Swiss franc could not be offset by continuous price adjustments,” Swatch said in a results statement. The “hugely negative currency impact... weighed on profitability”, the statement said. In Asia, sales grew by double digits in China, Hong Kong, Macau, Thailand, India and Japan.

The company said a “strong growth trend continued” in North America, with the Omega, Tissot and Swatch brands “breaking records”. Swatch reported single-digit growth in Europe but sales “sky-rocketed” in Switzerland where they rose more than 30 percent, Swatch said. The group said it “anticipates excellent opportunities for further growth in local currencies in 2024”, with Omega garnering publicity as the official timekeeper of the Olympic Games in Paris. —AFP



Business

BoJ maintains ultra-loose policies

Japan inflation eases as pay negotiations stay in focus

TOKYO: The Bank of Japan maintained its signature monetary easing measures on Tuesday, as speculation grows of a shift away from its ultra-loose stance. After a two-day policy meeting, board members decided to keep interest rates in negative territory—a global anomaly that has depreciated the yen—while also leaving unchanged the band in which rates for 10-year government bonds fluctuate. Analysts had predicted the BoJ would stand pat on Tuesday, partly to avoid further disruption after an earthquake on New Year's Day killed at least 233 people in central Japan.

But Governor Kazuo Ueda is eventually expected to move away from the bank's long-standing ultra-loose policies that economists see as unsustainable. After the policy announcement, Ueda suggested that a major shift was not on the horizon.

"Even if... hypothetically, the negative interest rates were lifted, we can say that the extremely easy financial environment will continue for the time being," he told reporters. The likelihood of Japan meeting the central bank's long-standing goal of sustained two percent inflation "continues to grow gradually", Ueda said.

Japan's inflation, excluding fresh food, slowed in December to 2.3 percent, figures showed Friday.

But the BoJ sees the increases as driven by temporary factors including higher energy costs, and instead wants to see a "virtuous cycle" of inflation fuelled by demand and higher wages. On Tuesday

the bank revised down its inflation forecast for the next fiscal year to 2.4 percent from 2.8 percent.

All eyes are now on upcoming annual pay negotiations, with unions expected to make more ambitious demands than in previous years. Ueda said the bank would "continue to carefully analyze various data" including the wage negotiations to assess whether its two percent target had been achieved in a demand-driven way.

The bank in April launched a review of its "non-traditional" attempts to end the deflation that has plagued Japan since the 1990s, after the bubble era. And for several months, policymakers have hinted that they could be willing to change direction, including by making minor tweaks to their yield curve control program that keeps a grip on bonds. Timing is everything, however—with Ueda facing pressure to normalize while minimizing any economic shocks.

"As a virtuous cycle from income to spending gradually intensifies, Japan's economy is projected to continue growing at a pace above its potential growth rate," the BoJ said in a statement on Tuesday.

Even so, "there are extremely high uncertainties surrounding Japan's economic activity and prices", it added. "The bank will patiently continue with monetary easing while nimbly responding to developments in economic activity and prices as well as financial conditions."

Former BoJ board member Sayuri Shirai told AFP that if the bank wants to achieve two-percent inflation in a stable manner, "it's not the right time, be-



TOKYO: Bank of Japan Governor Kazuo Ueda (center) and others attend a monetary policy meeting at the BOJ headquarters in Tokyo on January 23, 2024. — AFP

cause Japanese consumption is so weak" and wage rises are low in real terms.

However, "if the BoJ wants to implement normalizes regardless of the sustainability of the two percent target, it's better to do it this year," before inflation dips back below two percent, said Shirai, an economics professor at Keio University. Katsutoshi Inadome, senior strategist at SuMi TRUST, noted

before Tuesday's decision that the bank was likely to "only change policy tentatively and in stages".

The shock of the January 1 earthquake, which devastated parts of the remote Noto Peninsula, may also have made bank officials think twice this time.

"Until the damage and economic impact of the Noto earthquake are assessed, it is difficult for the BoJ to change its policy," Inadome said. — AFP



WASHINGTON: A Macy's department store is seen in Washington, DC. — AFP

US retailer Macy's rejects \$5.8bn takeover offer

NEW YORK: The US department store Macy's, which has had financial troubles for years, announced it has rejected a \$5.8 billion takeover offer, citing reservations about its would-be investors' financing capacity.

In a statement on Sunday, the company, which also owns the Bloomingdale's store chain, confirmed it had received "an unsolicited, non-binding proposal from Arkhouse Management and Brigade Capital Management to acquire all of the outstanding shares of the company for \$21 per share in cash on December 1, 2023." Speculation about the \$5.8 billion deal has been swirling since the Wall Street Journal first reported on it in December.

However, Macy's said the proposal "does not constitute a basis to enter into a non-disclosure agreement," with Arkhouse and Brigade. In a letter to the two firms cited in the statement, Macy's chairman Jeff Gennette said he had "serious reservations" about their ability to finance the deal.

Arkhouse confirmed the bid in a statement published Sunday, adding that the offer to Macy's represented a premium of almost 57 percent over the company's adjusted 30-day average share price on November 30. "We see the potential for a meaningful increase to our original proposal if we are granted access to the necessary due diligence," Arkhouse managing partners Gavriel Kahane and Jonathon Blackwell said in the statement.

"We have conviction in the long-term success of Macy's but believe that its potential will only be realized as a private company," they added.

Macy's share price closed up more than 3.5 percent on Monday after the news was made public. Department stores like Macy's have seen their results suffer for years as consumers increasingly moved online, and have been forced to reduce in size—a trend exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. On Thursday, Macy's announced it was cutting its workforce by 3.5 percent. According to its most recent annual report, the group employed around 94,500 people in 722 stores at the end of 2022. Macy's net profit more than halved in the third quarter to \$43 million, compared with \$108 million during the same period a year earlier.

The company's sales fell by seven percent to \$4.9 billion, with the decline seen in the same proportion in shops and online. In its earnings results, the group announced plans to close fewer than 10 shops this year, citing an "uncertain macro-economic climate and the related pressures on consumers." — AFP

France fines Amazon's warehouses over staff surveillance

PARIS: France's data protection agency said Tuesday that it had fined Amazon's French warehouses unit 32 million euros (\$34.9 million) for an "excessively intrusive" surveillance system to keep track of staff performance.

Amazon France Logistique monitored the work of employees in particular through data from scanners used by the staff to process packages, according to the agency, known by its initials CNIL. Scanners alerted management of inactivity

Will sanctions easing reboot Venezuela's oil industry?

CARACAS: On paper, the easing of US oil sanctions against Venezuela should allow its battered economy to once again profit from a resource it has more of than any country in the world. But as Venezuela patches up ties with corporations returning to its shores after being forced to leave post-embargo, experts say the dividends will take time to filter through.

After Venezuela opened talks with the opposition last year and agreed to hold free and fair elections in 2024, the US eased sanctions to allow Chevron to resume limited oil extraction—part of an effort to keep down global prices as the West pressed sanctions on Russia.

Since then, Caracas has also signed contracts with French hydrocarbons company Maurel & Prom and with Repsol of Spain. The details are confidential, but these deals will allow Venezuela to start settling its debts with the companies which had to leave the country—and their assets there—said oil expert Rafael Quiroz.

They were forced to leave after the US imposed sanctions in 2019 following elections, widely dismissed as rigged, that returned Nicolas Maduro to office.

Paying off its debts is important for Caracas to improve its image as a serious business partner and attract new investment. Venezuela owes Maurel & Prom an estimated \$900 million, according to data provided by the company. The extent of the debt to Repsol is unknown.

Estimations are that state-owned

oil company PDVSA owes its partners and contractors about \$15 billion, which could take it years to pay off.

A new inflow of foreign investments will also allow Caracas to generate revenue through tax collection, said Francisco Monaldi, director of the Latin American Energy Program at the Rice University's Baker Institute in Texas.

The PDVSA, which in its heyday produced more than three million barrels of crude per day (bpd), is betting on an "accelerated increase" in production this year. But experts expect the easing of sanctions will have a more "modest" impact than hoped. At best, they calculate, the contracts with Repsol, Maurel & Prom and Chevron would raise production by about 150,000 bpd to around 900,000 — still short of the million bpd the government is targeting.

Maurel & Prom has projected between 20,000 and 24,000 bpd in 2024. Repsol told AFP it expected "a substantial increase," without producing numbers. Last year, the country closed at a production rate of 801,000 bpd, according to the OPEC bloc of petroleum exporting countries.

PDVSA's revenues grew from \$3 billion in 2022 to \$6.32 billion last year, according to government data. In 2024, Venezuela could earn about \$16 billion from oil, according to Monaldi.

"It is a very big increase. It means the contracts will not only serve to pay debt, but also to make

the Conservative government to unveil sweeteners in their budget due March, analysts said.

"The pickup in the UK's public sector finances comes at an opportune time for the government as they try to sweet talk voters ahead of the upcoming general election," said Kathleen Brooks at trading firm XTB. Sunak's Conservatives badly trail the main opposition Labour party in opinion polls, with the UK facing a dark economic outlook amid a drawn-out cost-of-living crisis.

Britain's economy shrank 0.1 percent in the third quarter of last year and a fourth-quarter contraction would place it in a technical recession. Data on Friday showed that UK retail sales—a major driver of economic output—slumped in December by the largest drop since January 2021 as shoppers tightened their belts. That followed news of a surprise December acceleration in inflation to 4.0 percent, which is double the Bank of England's official target. — AFP

exceeding 10 minutes or the handling of packages and parcels "right up to the second", the CNIL said in a statement. One surveillance method targeted by CNIL was the use of so-called "stow machine guns" to note if an article was scanned "too fast", or in less than 1.25 seconds.

It said workers were under constant pressure and had to regularly justify absences. Even the time between the employees' entry into the warehouse and the start of work was monitored.

The agency added that they were not adequately informed about the surveillance, with the data kept for 31 days. The surveillance was deemed in contravention with the EU's general data protection regulation (GDPR), which imposes strict rules on companies for obtaining consent on how personal information is used.

The fine was equivalent to about three percent

of the annual revenue at Amazon France Logistique, which reached 1.1 billion euros in 2021, for a net profit of 58.9 million euros. Several thousand employees were affected by the systems, said the CNIL, which had opened its inquiry in 2019 following media articles and complaints by workers. The watchdog said the fine was "nearly unprecedented" and not far from the CNIL's maximum four percent of revenue.

An Amazon spokesman said the company rejected the findings as "factually incorrect and we reserve the right to appeal", adding that such systems were needed "to guarantee security, quality and efficiency". The company employs around 20,000 people overall on permanent contracts in France, with the warehouse workers spread over eight massive distribution centers.

David Lewkowicz, president of Amazon France Logistique, told AFP during a visit at its warehouse

near Douai in northern France this month that the management tools were necessary for the precise handling of the tens of thousands of packages that move through the centers each day.

The "stow machine guns", for example, aim to ensure that employees are properly checking items for damage or other problems before they are scanned for shipping "in a manner that conforms with safety rules, in particular by ensuring proper postures", Amazon said in its statement.

Measuring "idle time", meanwhile, was not to control a worker's every movement but to ensure that any supply chain anomaly is quickly investigated and rectified. But Amazon said that in response to the CNIL's findings it would deactivate the ability of the "stow machine guns" to signal handling speeds, and extend the "idle time" warnings to 30 minutes from 10. — AFP



PAMPATAR, Venezuela: The Crude Oil Tanker President is anchored in Margarita Island. The relaxation of the oil embargo allows the Caribbean country's battered industry to recover old routes to market its crude oil and resume partnerships with transnational companies. — AFP

more income" including through tax collection, he added. How much of this will filter through to the general population, however, remains to be seen. More than seven million people have fled the country that was once one of the world's top-10 oil producers and a Latin American economic heavyweight.

The petroleum industry is now on its knees following decades of mismanagement and corruption, worsened by sanctions.

Vested economic interests make this unlikely, say the experts, especially at a time of concern over oil supply amid the conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East.

Only if licenses are respected will investors keep coming, said Monaldi, underlining that to reach a level of two million bpd, the coun-

try needs \$100 billion of investment. Quiroz pointed out Venezuela was still in a precarious spot as the PDVSA "does not have a penny to invest" and "no transnational company will come to invest" without a reliable local partner. Even as it battles to get its petroleum industry back on track, Venezuela has upped the ante on a border row with neighbor Guyana over an oil-rich region in which huge reserves have been discovered.

Tiny Guyana sits on reserves estimated at 11 billion barrels of crude—the highest per capita in the world. Venezuela, which held a non-binding referendum in December which approved the annexation of the Guyana-administered Essequibo region, has the world's largest proven reserves at some 300 billion barrels. — AFP

Ericsson expects further market drop after loss

STOCKHOLM: Swedish telecoms equipment giant Ericsson warned Tuesday that it expected further market decline outside China this year after booking a sizeable loss in 2023 due to a write-down and restructuring costs.

Ericsson said it was 26.1 billion kronor (\$2.5 billion) in the red last year after making a 19-billion-kronor profit in 2022, but the loss was slightly less heavy than forecast by analysts surveyed by financial data firm FactSet. The loss was due to a write-down in October on the value of US cloud operator Vonage, which Ericsson acquired in 2022.

Ericsson, which is in a fierce competition over 5G networks with Finland's Nokia and Chinese high-tech firm Huawei, also launched a

cost-cutting program that includes eliminating 8,500 jobs.

Sales fell three percent to 263.3 billion kronor—lower than expected by analysts—amid a "very weak" mobile networks market, the company said in its earnings statement.

"As we look to 2024, we expect the market outside China to further decline, with similar uncertainties as experienced in 2023," Ericsson chief executive Borje Ekholm said. "In this environment, we remain laser focused on managing elements within our control, including operational efficiency and tight cost management," he added.

Ericsson said it produced "solid" results in the last three months of 2023 despite an eight percent drop in its operating profit in the fourth quarter. "While the actions we have taken to improve performance are paying off, we are not satisfied with our profitability and there is more work to do," Ekholm said.

Ericsson has warned in recent months that a customer spending was falling due to a slowing global economy. — AFP

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 24, 2024

In Singapore, where graffiti is banned, young creatives have taken over an abandoned mall, spray painting colorful murals and holding art workshops to bring the space back to life. Around half a century old, Peace Centre is scheduled to face the wrecking ball later this year, but fans say it has provided a rare space for self-expression. Permission from authorities is required for any kind of street art in the Southeast Asian country.



This photograph shows murals and graffiti on the walls inside the Peace Centre building in Singapore.

In August last year, PlayPan, an initiative co-founded by entrepreneur Gary Hong, convinced developers to postpone the mall's demolition. The answer the initiative's backers received was that they could go ahead and use the space for "a social experiment to bring (the) community together", Hong told AFP.

They were given the space to host performances and workshops for several months, allowing artists, students, charities and small businesses to set up shop for free or at heavily discounted rates. The eclectic mix of pop-up stores, art tours and musical performances has transformed the once lacklustre mall into an unexpected art



Abandoned Singapore mall becomes unlikely art haven

haven. At the end of January, however, the mall will close definitively, bringing an end to the art project. Peace Centre was once a popular mall but lost its shine to glitzier shopping centers that mushroomed over recent years. In the last two decades it was mostly known for its printing shops and seedy karaoke lounges.

Since its revamp into an art space, young people have attended graffiti workshops, coloring shuttered shopfronts with spray cans while punters browsed through second-hand clothing stalls and exhibits. "It's not something you do on a normal weekend, less so inside an indoor area, in a

mall," said Darryl Poh, a 29-year-old sales trader who took part in a spray-painting workshop.



A woman walks past murals at the Peace Centre.

'Very organic'

The bathroom walls and mirrors were splattered with graffiti, while a Rage Against the Machine song blared from one of the pop-up stores. Craft cocktails were served on the ground floor and nearby, death metal CDs and trinkets were on sale. Such spaces are uncommon in Singapore, a top financial hub in Asia.

"I think you just got to know where to look. The government can curate things, but people are still going to do their own thing," said Ning Fei, 34, who was selling typewritten poems.

The outer walls were plastered with flyers advertising activities from ukule-

le classes to pebble painting, while a futuristic mural welcomed visitors arriving at the main entrance. Gabriel, a 43-year-old photographer who asked to be identified only by his first name, set up a booth to take portraits of passersby for charity.

"The energy here was really exciting. There were a lot of things you don't typically see in Singapore malls," he told AFP, describing the vibe as "very non-Singaporean, very organic". "I'm going to miss this community very much. I'm glad to have plugged in and participated in this swan song."—AFP



People stand in a fashion shop at the Peace Centre, an abandoned mall turned into an unexpected art enclave, in Singapore. — AFP photos



People walk past drawings and graffiti at the Peace Centre.



People walk past murals and graffiti at the Peace Centre.

'Pokemon with Guns' proves a blast

The makers of a video game dismissed as "Pokemon with Guns" when it was announced said Monday the game has proved a hit, with "Palworld" selling more than five million copies in just three days. The game released Friday on the online Steam platform blends weapon-wielding player avatars with monsters that look eerily similar to those in Nintendo's wildly popular "Pokemon" franchise. "Most people, myself included, thought this game was going to be a meme," read a review left on Steam by the account of game developer Pirate Software.

"It's actually insanely detailed, extremely well optimized, and compelling as hell." One player responded by saying they were "blown away" by the game and contending it has potential to become "legendary." As of now "Palworld" is in early-access mode and still

being developed, with the help of feedback from players, Japan-based PocketPair said in describing its new game. Palworld has sold more than five million copies since its release on Steam, where it is priced at \$27, the company said in a post on X, formerly Twitter.

Bows and assault rifles

The game is home to more than 100 different characters—called "Pals"—that players can capture and turn into allies for adventures in the game, according to its creators. Palworld integrates "elements of battle, monster-capturing, training, and base building," according to the game's description on Steam.

Players can battle with weapons from classic bows and spears to assault rifles and rocket launchers, the description added. Players have the option of working together in a virtual world set-

ting, working as a team or battling one another, and even stealing items, the game maker explained.

'Death threats'

But some on social media accused PocketPair of copying from Pokemon, posting images of very similar-looking characters and features from the game and the franchise. "This is a COMPLETE carbon copy," one X user said. "Another copied design, shame on you palworld," commented another. PocketPair's CEO Takuro Mizobe said the company was "receiving slanderous comments against our artists, and we are seeing tweets that appear to be death threats."

"I would appreciate it if you would refrain from slandering the artists involved in Palworld," he said on X.

Others backed PocketPair. "Any

Pokemon fan angry at this game and demanding it be banned for one reason or another should be blaming Nintendo for missing what has been an untapped market for years now," read another comment on X.

"This is a testament to just how much PC gamers wanted some kind of Pokemon game on PC," the comment continued, referring to personal computers. Serkan Toto from Tokyo-based consultancy Kantan Games said that the success of the game was an "absolute surprise," including for PocketPair. "This only happens in gaming every several years," Toto told AFP. "But would anybody be interested in the game if these characters didn't look like Pokemon? Of course, the answer is most probably no," he added. —AFP



This illustration photo shows the trailer for the game "Palworld" being played on a smartphone in front of a screen showing the PocketPair website, in Los Angeles.--AFP photos



League of Legends maker Riot Games to slash 530 jobs

League of Legends maker Riot Games said Monday it will cut around 530 jobs worldwide, describing the layoffs as "a necessity." The layoffs at Riot—owned by Chinese tech giant Tencent—follow a turbulent year for the gaming industry, with job cuts at major firms including Electronic Arts and Ubisoft. Riot has developed global hits including League of Legends and Valorant, but said it had launched too many projects in recent years.

"Today, we're a company without a sharp enough focus, and simply put, we have too many things underway," Riot CEO Dylan Jadeja said in an email to staff. "Some of the significant investments we've made aren't paying off the way we expected them to. Our costs have grown to the point where they're unsustainable." Jadeja said around 530 jobs, or 11 percent of staff, would be cut globally, without providing a breakdown by location.

In addition to its headquarters in Los Angeles, Riot's website lists offices in 20 locations, including Berlin, Sao Paulo, Seoul and Sydney. Thousands of people have lost their jobs in the tech sector over the past 18 months, including at some of the world's biggest gaming companies. Electronic Arts, Ubisoft and streaming platform Twitch have all announced layoffs in this period. Riot's League of Legends has rapidly grown into one of the most-watched esports in the world, with tens of millions tuning in to livestreams from competitions every year. —AFP



A participant skis during the opening ceremony of Khelo India Winter Games at a ski resort in Gulmarg north of Srinagar.



Snow covered huts are pictured during the opening ceremony of Khelo India Winter Games at a ski resort in Gulmarg north of Srinagar. — AFP photos



In this photograph guides lead visitors during a horse ride past ski slopes usually covered in snow at this time of the year at a ski station in Gulmarg, some 55 km from Indian-administered Kashmir's capital Srinagar.



Slope maintenance machines are pictured during the opening ceremony of Khelo India Winter Games at a ski resort in Gulmarg north of Srinagar.



Participants walk during the opening ceremony of Khelo India Winter Games at a ski resort in Gulmarg north of Srinagar.

Winter in the Himalayas should mean blanketing snow, and for Gulmarg in Indian-administered Kashmir, one of the highest ski resorts in the world, that usually means thousands of tourists. This year, the deep powder once taken for granted is gone. The slopes are brown and bare, a stark example of the impact of the extreme weather caused by the rapidly heating planet, experts say.

The lack of snow is not only hampering the ski industry but has a worrying impact on agriculture, the mainstay of Kashmir's economy. "Seeing this snowless Gulmarg, I feel like crying every day," said adventure tour operator Mubashir Khan, who has put wedding plans on hold with his business teetering near collapse. "In the 20 years of my working here, this is the first time I see no snow in Gulmarg in January," said Majeed Bakshi, whose heliskiing service for high-spending tourists stands idle.

A lone helicopter waits for the few tourists who have still come, offering flights over higher peaks that have a dusting of snow. "Our guests are mainly skiers, and they have all cancelled their bookings," said hotel manager Hamid Masoodi. "Those who come despite no snow are also disappointed."

Ski lifts are closed, rental shops are shut and a newly constructed ice rink is a pool of dank water. "The current dry spell is an extreme weather event—which are predicted to become more intense and frequent in the future," said climate scientist Shakil Romshoo, from Kashmir's Islamic University of Science and Technology.

Rising temperatures
For decades, an insurgency seeking independence or a merger with Pakistan—and military operations to crush that movement—has seen tens of thousands of civilians, soldiers and rebels killed in Kashmir. The rebellion has lost much of its former strength, and India



has been heavily promoting domestic tourism in the region, home to spectacular mountain scenery

But in Gulmarg, hotel bookings have plunged by as much as three-quarters, tourism professionals say, as hundreds of guides and scooter drivers sit waiting in the sunshine, praying for snow. "Most foreigners who mainly come for skiing on the deep powder slopes have cancelled," Bakshi said. "I have lost about

70 percent of bookings so far." Perched at 2,650 metres (8,694 feet), the Himalayan resort is also home to the Indian army's High Altitude Warfare School, located close to the highly militarised Line of Control, the de facto border that divides contested Kashmir between India and Pakistan.



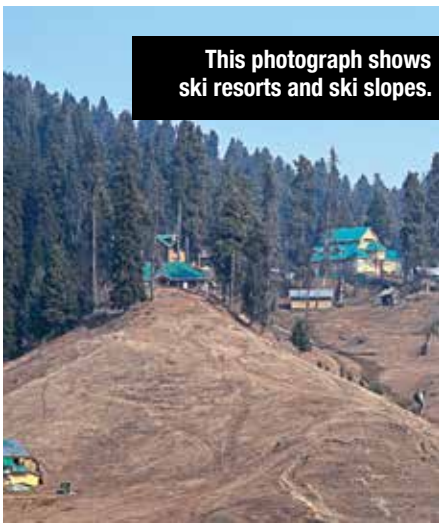
Kashmir has recorded little rain, and temperatures are about six degrees Celsius (42.4 degrees Fahrenheit) higher than normal since autumn last year, according to meteorology officials. Last month, precipitation across Kashmir was down 80 percent from past years.

Gulmarg received a few snow showers, but that soon melted. India's Ministry of Earth Sciences said in a 2020 report they expected the Himalayas and

Kashmir would be "particularly subject" to warming temperatures. Earlier this month, the UN's World Meteorological Organization said the 2023 annual average global temperature was 1.45 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels (1850-1900) -- the warmest year on record. The nine hottest individual years on record were the last nine. In Kashmir, the impact is clear. Gulmarg's bowl-shaped landscape, beloved by tourists for the snow in winter and meadows of flowers in spring, is brown and bleak.

'Prolonged dry spells'
Scientists warn rising global temperatures are unleashing a cascade of extreme weather events. Beyond the collapse of the skiing industry, many in the ecologically fragile region are worried about impending water shortages that would have a dire potential impact on agriculture. Romshoo, the climate scientist, said research indicates Kashmir "will experience more frequent and prolonged dry spells", worsening in the decades ahead.

Changing weather patterns have already altered farming practices. Snow melt usually helps refresh the usually full rivers, but this week, authorities in Kashmir warned of water shortages and the risk of forest fires, with many wooded areas tinder dry. Rice farmers needing plentiful water for their paddy fields have begun switching to fruit. But that crop is also at risk, with the dry spell and sunshine meaning some trees are already flowering, blossoming more than two months early.—AFP



'Oppenheimer' tops Oscar nominations with 13 nods

Oppenheimer" — Christopher Nolan's masterly portrait of the father of the atomic bomb — topped the Oscars nominations Tuesday, earning an impressive 13 nods including best picture. It was followed by "Poor Things", a female-focused take on the Frankenstein myth, on 11, and Martin Scorsese's "Killers of the Flower Moon" on 10, in the race for Hollywood's most prestigious awards.

But it was a somewhat disappointing morning for "Barbie", the other half of last summer's "Barbenheimer" box office phenomenon and the year's highest-grossing film. The comedy had to settle for eight nods — not bad for a satire based on a popular line of plastic dolls, but lower than many had predicted, and missing out on key nominations for Greta Gerwig as director, and star Margot Robbie in best actress.

"Oppenheimer," which came out in theaters on the same day, and itself almost grossed \$1 billion, led the way with nods for its director Nolan, and stars Cillian Murphy, Robert Downey Jr and Emily Blunt. The film — which is the clear favorite to win best picture, the industry's top prize, at the 96th Academy Awards

on March 10 — also racked up nods in an array of technical categories.

"Killers of the Flower Moon", Scorsese's three-and-a-half-hour true crime opus on murders ripping through the oil-rich Osage community in early 20th century Oklahoma, made history. Star Lily Gladstone became the Oscars' first Native American nominee for best actress. She will now go head-to-head with Emma Stone, the star of "Poor Things", which also earned an acting nod for Mark Ruffalo, along with a swathe of technical nominations, from cinematography to costume design. But there was disappointment for "Killers" star Leonardo DiCaprio, who failed to earn a best actor nomination, and the movie also missed out on best adapted screenplay.



Recipient of the Desert Palm achievement Award - Actor for "Oppenheimer" Irish actor Cillian Murphy (right) and US actor Robert Downey Jr arrive for the 35th Annual Palm Springs International Film Festival Awards Gala at the Convention Center in Palm Springs, California. — AFP

Record year for women directors

It proved to be a record year for female directors. Three movies helmed by women — French courtroom drama "Anatomy of a Fall", "Barbie" and "Past Lives" — were nominated for best picture, for the first time in more than nine decades of Academy Awards. Only 19 films by female directors had previously ever been nominated for best picture. Tuesday's announcement was a big success for "Anatomy" — despite it not being France's official entry in the international film category, a decision that has caused a little hand-wringing in Paris.

As well as earning expected best picture and best actress (Sandra Huller) nominations, director Justine Triet secured a nod that had been widely predicted to go to Gerwig, and it also earned recognition for editing and original screenplay. Bradley Cooper earned an impressive three individual nominations for acting in, producing and writing "Maestro". The Leonard Bernstein biopic, which Cooper also directed, took seven nominations.

Other strong performers included Alexander Payne's "The Holdovers", about a teacher, a cook and a student holed up in a boarding school over the festive season. It took five nominations, including acting nods for Paul Giamatti and Da'Vine Joy Randolph, who are both now considered strong contenders in their respective categories.—AFP

'Heat of the Night,' 'Moonstruck' director Norman Jewison dies at 97

Norman Jewison, the Oscar-nominated director of "In the Heat of the Night" and "Moonstruck" whose half-century career of filmmaking defied categorization, has died at age 97, his publicist said Monday. The Canadian-born Jewison worked with some of Hollywood's biggest stars including Steve McQueen, Denzel Washington, Sidney Poitier and Cher. The singer-turned-actress took to social media to bid farewell to a "Sweet Prince."

"Thank U For One Of The Greatest, Happiest, Most Fun Experiences Of My Life," Cher wrote in reference to her Oscar-winning role in "Moonstruck." "Without U, I Would Not Have My Beautiful Golden Man." Over an eclectic career he hopped among genres, helming musicals including "Fiddler on the Roof" as well as comedies and romances, but is best known for films tackling weighty social issues. Jewison began his career in television, but moved to Hollywood in the early 1960s where he teamed up with Tony Curtis for the comedy "40 Pounds of Trouble," a box office hit.

Two films with Doris Day followed with Jewison tied to Universal, a partnership that also saw him working with James Garner on "The Art of Love." Oscar recognition came in 1966 with quirky

comedy "The Russians are Coming, the Russians are Coming," when he scored a nomination for best picture.

But it was with "In the Heat of the Night" that he announced his arrival as a serious auteur, conjuring memorable turns from Oscar-winner Rod Steiger as a racist Southern sheriff playing opposite Poitier. The film won an Academy Award for best picture, and he was nominated as best director.—AFP



Director Norman Jewison speaks onstage during the 65th Annual Directors Guild Of America Awards at Ray Dolby Ballroom at Hollywood & Highland on February 2, 2013 in Los Angeles, California. — AFP



Cameroonian designer Imane Ayissi acknowledges the audience following the presentation of his creations during the Women's Haute-Couture Spring/Summer 2024 Fashion Week in Paris.

IMANE AYISSI BRINGS AFRICAN TRADITION TO PARIS COUTURE



Models present creations for Imane Ayissi during the Women's Haute-Couture Spring/Summer 2024 Fashion Week in Paris. — AFP photos



Imane Ayissi is on a mission to put authentic African textiles in the spotlight but faces an uphill battle as a pioneer African couturier at Paris Fashion Week. The bark of the Obom tree, kente cloth from Ghana and kapok fibres from Burkina Faso are some of the textiles—little-known in Europe—that the Cameroonian turned into bespoke dresses for his haute couture show in Paris on Monday. “Often when we talk about African fashion, we think of colourful fabrics that Africans actually only started wearing relatively recently,” Ayissi told AFP at his workshop ahead of the show.

Ayissi—who in 2020 became the first designer from sub-Saharan Africa at haute couture week—seeks to resurrect more traditional fabrics like raffia, drawn from local trees and plants, that were used before the African market was flooded with imports during the colonial period. “These (foreign) fabrics killed the economy of real African textiles

and their history. It’s painful,” said the 55-year-old former dancer, whose father was a renowned boxer.

Before a crowd including footballer Mamadou Sakho, Ayissi showed how traditional textiles can be reworked—into colorful, statuesque pant suits, intricate floral tops and a flamingo-pink raffia dress. The show coincided with the release of a UNESCO report highlighting the potential of the fashion sector in Africa, where 32 countries already host a fashion week and the sub-Saharan clothing market alone surpassed \$30 billion in 2020.

“African fashion is a very dynamic sector with a bustling creative ecosystem,” UNESCO’s Toussaint Tiendrebeogo told AFP. Ayissi is one of the figureheads, feted in a hit exhibition of African fashion at London’s Victoria and Albert Museum and New York’s Brooklyn Museum last year.

But he admits it is tough to survive as an independent designer, especially since he joined Paris Fashion Week

just as the Covid-19 pandemic struck. “I don’t complain, I adapt, but it can be tiring,” said Ayissi. “I don’t have an investor behind me. When you’re showing alongside Chanel and Dior and the big houses, you have to be up to the task, you have to have the means. It’s not easy. I have to rely on my savoir-faire.”

‘Africans must wake up’

A key difficulty is sourcing quality materials from Africa, where Ayissi says the industry has failed to keep up with international standards, forcing him to import cotton from other places. The UNESCO report backed up his concerns, saying 81 percent of cotton exported from Africa was raw, going elsewhere to be processed and then sold back to the continent at higher prices.

The report also highlighted the failure to protect African intellectual property, citing falling sales of kente fabric from Ghana or Maasai designs from Kenya after they were copied wholesale in Western and other foreign markets. “My challenge is to show that Africa is standing up, and to present these African fabrics that the world doesn’t know about,” said Ayissi.

“But Africans need to be aware, too.” “We have to train. African investors must believe in art and intellectuals. For a very long time, Africans have been buying other people’s luxuries. But the basis of luxury is pride in one’s identity.” He works with embroiderers in Ghana and

elsewhere to raise standards, but says the industry is still too small and piecemeal. “Africans must wake up,” he said. “They need to understand that fashion is a real, noble profession and a big economic machine.”—AFP



Beware teeth-ixing products touted by influencers, dentists warn

By flashing a perfect smile, online beauty influencers have proven adept at convincing their young followers that they too can have blindingly white, perfectly aligned teeth for very little money, time or effort. But the teeth whitening or straightening products these influencers are promoting—often via sponsored ads on social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok—can be dangerous if used incorrectly, dentists have warned.

And some companies pushing these inexpensive, at-home products have fallen far short of their lofty promises. The US-based firm SmileDirectClub aggressively advertised online for its “clear aligners”, which are plastic braces worn daily to straighten teeth. However, the firm filed for bankruptcy in December, leaving many customers in the lurch.

Chantelle Jones, a 32-year-old Briton who paid the firm £1,800 (\$2,300), only had her top teeth straightened and

never received the bottom moulds. “I’m not sure if I’m going to get any money back,” she told the BBC last month. The company has announced its “Lifetime Smile Guarantee” simply “no longer exists”, advising customers to seek professional help. But because a dentist did not initiate the process, they would “have to start everything from scratch”, French dental surgeon Genevieve Wagner told AFP.

These types of products are not used solely for aesthetic purposes, said David Couchat of the French Federation of Orthodontics. “Aligning a few incisors can happen quickly but there is a lot of work to be done afterwards about how someone will use their jaws to chew,” he said.

Whiter shade of pale

The simple online tests offered by these products cannot detect bone loss, tooth loosening or gum disease, said

Christophe Lequart, a dental surgeon and spokesman for the French Union for Oral Health. But if the products are used by customers with such problems, it could lead to serious long-term damage, he warned. Other products promoted by enthusiastic beauty and wellness influencers include teeth whitening strips, pens, gels, lamps and toothpaste.

Some of these products are sold online for as little as \$20 -- compared to potentially thousands for a whitening procedure carried out by a dentist. The active whitening ingredient in many of these products, the chemical compound hydrogen peroxide, is strictly regulated in the United Kingdom and European Union.

The concentration of hydrogen peroxide cannot exceed 0.1 percent in over-the-counter products in the UK and EU. Dentists, however, can use or prescribe products that have up to six percent.

That did not stop the French influenc-

er Poupette Kenza from pushing Crest 3D Whitestrips, which tests have shown contain up to 10 percent hydrogen peroxide. Late last year, the French authorities fined Kenza 50,000 euros (\$55,000) for promoting the banned product, which regularly gets millions of views on TikTok under hashtags such as #crest3dwhite.

‘Big scam’

When used in large quantities, hydrogen peroxide can be harmful—particularly if applied to cavities or diseased gums. Before whitening, dentists clean teeth to remove any surface discoloration, a process which does not happen for at-home products bought online. Dental surgeon Lequart said that using too much of these products can cause irritation or even lead gums to recede—an early warning sign of future tooth loss.

One online customer said the Crest strips “lighten teeth several shades, of course, but give a horrible sensa-

tion during hot or cold meals”. Lequart said that “on social networks, the target audience is relatively young and concerned about savings”. This could lead to a potential “disaster in terms of oral health”, he added. Wagner emphasized that most young people have perfectly healthy teeth and should not use “whitening products, which damage their teeth prematurely via acids”.

Lequart cautioned that before-and-after whitening images on social media are often touched up using Photoshop. And Couchat pointed out that influencers promoting these products often have expensive porcelain veneers covering their original teeth. “They are taking advantage of people’s credulity. It’s a big scam,” he added. These veneers are also popular among Hollywood stars, a common inspiration for many dreaming of a whiter smile.—AFP

Zain continues to support local equestrian talents

Zain sponsors 10th Al Marshoud Int'l Showjumping Championship



KUWAIT: Al Marshoud, Hayat, and Al Khashti award the top winners.



The competition was joined by notable local riders.

KUWAIT: Zain sponsored the tenth season of Atyab Al Marshoud International Showjumping Championship, held at the Kuwait Riding Center in Sabhan. The competition was supervised by the Kuwait Equestrian Federation and witnessed a huge turnout of equestrian fans, along with notable participation from local and international riders.

Zain joined in awarding the tournament's top winners, with attendance from Minister of State for National Assembly

Affairs, Minister of State for Youth Affairs, and Minister of State for Communication Dawood Maarafi, championship host Waleed Sulaiman Al Marshoud, Kuwait Equestrian Federation Chairman Masoud Hayat, and Zain Kuwait Chief Corporate Affairs and Relations Officer Waleed Al Khashti.

Zain is proud of its ongoing yearly support to this competition, which springs from its belief in the role played by the private sector in shouldering the local youth

and sports scenes. The company is also very keen on empowering local talents and athletes who excel in all sports, including equestrian sports that are deep-rooted in the Kuwaiti, Arab, and Islamic identities.

The thrilling competition saw Kuwait Equestrian Club's rider Ali Al Kharafi win the tenth season's title, with a huge turnout of equestrian enthusiasts, including families, young people, and athletes. Zain also set up a special spectators area for fans to enjoy viewing the exciting competition.

The tenth season of Atyab Al Marshoud International showjumping Championship was held at the Kuwait Riding Center in Sabhan, with notable participation from local and international riders who represented the biggest clubs. The competition was refereed by a professional international team, with supervision from the Kuwait Equestrian Federation.

Zain is always keen on supporting the biggest sports programs and competitions in Kuwait with the aim of elevating the Ku-

waiti sports scene. The company strongly believes that the private sector has a vital role in progressing sports and youth initiatives, and it makes this belief a reality by shouldering similar events.

Zain is also proud of sponsoring and supporting many Kuwaiti athletes who represent the nation in the biggest local, regional, and international sporting arenas. These athletes continue to raise Kuwait's flag high in every sport, including equestrian sports.



HYDERABAD: India's cricket team players take part in a practice session at the Rajiv Gandhi International Cricket Stadium in Hyderabad on January 23, 2024, ahead of their first Test match against England. — AFP

India readies for 'tough' series against England

HYDERABAD: Speedster Mark Wood said Tuesday England would deploy their attacking style of cricket in the upcoming five-match Test series, as India's coach Rahul Dravid said he was confident his team was ready.

Dravid warned the visitors faced a "tough series" and conditions would be a "challenge". The Three Lions open the series in Hyderabad on Thursday with their "Bazball" all-action style set to face its biggest challenge on pitches expected to assist the spinners. "I don't think we will be defensive," Wood said. "I think we'll still look to take the game on." England were the last team to beat India on home turf when Alastair Cook's team won a four-match series 2-1 in 2012. "We have to soak up that pressure and create a bit of a theatre or drama on the field and then, when it's time, attack again," 34-year-old Durham fast bowler Wood said.

England coach and former New Zealand captain Brendon McCullum and skipper Ben Stokes have devised an attacking brand of play dubbed "Bazball", in reference to McCullum's nickname. "We know the challenges here. India very rarely loses at home," he added.

"I think it's almost like a bit of a free hit for us—where we can come in here and give it a good go, and try something different."

'Ready to go'

But Dravid said he remains confident of his team's ability to counter England's all-action approach. "They've played really well," Dravid said. "It's certainly been exciting to watch them play and they've had success playing like that."

The batting great said that England faced no easy ride. "We know it's going to be a challenge for them in these conditions as well. These are conditions that we know very well," he said. "We've got a lot of experience in our attack. As a coach, I'm looking forward to how our boys respond, because I know that we'll be put under pressure and I'm really hopeful that we respond positively."

Dravid praised England and said he expects a "tough series and a good series". India's coach confirmed KL Rahul will not be the wicketkeeper, with the gloves going between KS Bharat and uncapped Dhruv Jurel.

The hosts have suffered a blow after star batsman Virat Kohli pulled out of the opening two matches due to personal reasons, but Wood said the host's line-up still includes a raft of "quality players". While England received criticism from some quarters for training in Abu Dhabi and not India, Wood rubbished fears of being "undercooked". "I think we've prepped really well," he said. "It was also good to switch off there as well. We had a good team bonding session. So, we've come here fresh, mentally and physically, and ready to go." — AFP

Al-Amer, Kharafi, Qadeeri Dressage League champions

KUWAIT: With strong competition and large participation, the third edition of Kuwait Equestrian Federation National Dressage League championship concluded at Hunting and Equestrian Club (HEC) in Sabhan area under the patronage of KEF and organized by the dressage committee, chaired by Sheikhha Fajr Al-Sabah.

The championship witnessed the participation of a large number of riders of both genders in the presence of their families and friends. Rider Abdullah Al-Amer won first place of the beginner level followed by Abdulrahman Al-Hawqal and Talal Al-Hazeem.

While in the main level first place went to Hussein Al-Kharafi beating Fadwa Al-Ajeel and Mariam Khalid. Rider Fatima Al-Qadeeri won first place of the training level followed by Talal Al-Hazeem and Afnan Al-Sulaiman. The winners were awarded by Sheikhha Fajr Al-Sabah and Assistant secretary of HEC Khalid Asad.



Al-Nouri demands the withdrawal of decision and stand with athletes

KUWAIT: Chairman of the Board of Tomouh Sports Club for the mentally challenged Eng Jassim Al-Nouri demanded the withdrawal of the decision of cancelling the establishment of Tomouh club, adding that the decision is surprising, unfair, without prior warning to undermine an existing entity that is practicing its activities for six year and has 150 athletes of both genders, and produced many champions and has a long record of global and regional participation and achievements.

Al-Nouri explained, during the press conference the club held to discuss the repercussions of decision to cancel its establishment, that Tomouh club complied with all laws and financial and administrative rules, and all championships it participated in were with prior approval by Public Authority for Sport, and did not have single violation since its establishment. He said the club cooperated with the committee that was formed by former Youth Minister and presented all required data, and the club was not invited to any meeting, only to surprised lately with the shocking ministerial decision.

Al-Nouri found strange "that at the time we were hoping to have multiple clubs for the mentally challenged to increase competition and discover talents, and establish a wide base of athletes, the decision came to undermine the only entity that have this achieving sport and presented a bright front for the Kuwait handicapped sport in many arenas the latest of which winning 21 medals during the world games in Berlin, and were honored by meeting His Highness the Amir and described them as heroes and gave instructions

to support them".

Al-Nouri renewed his call to review the decision and withdraw it, adding the club is ready to cooperate with Public Authority for Sport in all matters and amendments it sees suitable for enhancing the sport of the mentally challenged.

On her part Treasurer of Tomouh Club Hanaa Al-Zawawi said the decision to cancel the establishment of the club represents the closure of the only outlet for our children of mental disabilities to practice sport and a waste of six years efforts of construction, serious work and co-operation between the administration and guardians to enable this group of children and qualify them for sports achievements.

She said that before we talk as an administration, we are parents of children of mental disability and have a cause, and we realize the size of the major quality move the sports achieved in the lives of our children and materialized in great achievements as testified by all, not only in the field of sport habilitation, rather it extended to include health care and awareness along with social programs and initiatives for athletes and their guardians through activities of Special Olympics under the umbrella of Tomouh Club.

Al-Zawawi expressed hope that the decision will be withdrawn as soon as possible so our children won't stay home for long. Secretary General of Tomouh Club Sadiqa Al-Ansari condemned the frustrating and surprising decision to cancel the establishment the club following its outstanding achievements in 43 local, regional and international participations including six regional and



(From left) Sadeeqa Al-Ansari, Eng Jassim Al-Nouri, Hanaa Al-Zawawi.

five international championships and two world games, all of which were permitted and approved by Public Authority for Sport and support from all state entities. She hoped the person responsible for the decision to have the courage and admit he was mistaken and not to go far in destroying an existing and achieving entity, and wasted years of work, sacrifice and struggle, and blows away the ambitions of our mentally challenged children, and did not pay attention to the rights of workers, coaches and employees of the club.

Meanwhile, the legal representative of Al-Tomouh Club lawyer Abdulaziz Buresli refuted the legality of the decision to cancel the establishment of the club, adding that legal experts and senior lawyers are unanimous that the decision to cancel the establishment of 43 clubs is a fragile decision that has many legal faults and is destined for cancellation if the clubs resorted to courts, relying on that

the decision was to the contrary to the opinion of Fatwa and Legislation that it is not allowed to cancel the establishment of existing clubs that are practicing their activities.

He spoke about the particular invalidation of the decision to cancel the establishment Al-Tomouh Club, adding that the items the cancellation decision relied on (item 3, and item 11) in regards to the premises and financial resources, do not apply for Tomouh Club what so ever. The club submitted to the Public Authority for Sport proof of that.

Buresli said the decision to cancel the establishment of Tomouh Club along with 19 clubs was issued by a minister in a care-taker government.

The minister could only make decisions for routine work, unless he imagined that closing down clubs and cancelling their establishment and displace its members, and squander the rights of its technical and administrative departments, as routine.

Sports

Syria, Uzbekistan into Asian Cup last 16 as China go out

Syria, Australia, Uzbekistan, Iraq, Iran, Tajikistan, Saudi, Qatar are into knockout phase

DOHA: Syria made history by following Uzbekistan into the Asian Cup knockout rounds on Tuesday—confirming China's exit at the first hurdle. Omar Khribin was Syria's hero in Doha, his 76th-minute goal the difference in a 1-0 victory over Igor Stimac's India. It is Syria's first time into the knockout rounds of the Asian Cup. Australia topped Group B following a 1-1 draw with Uzbekistan, Hector Cuper's Syria going through to the last 16 with those two teams as one of the best third-placed teams.

India came bottom and are heading home with no wins or goals, while the day's action also meant it was curtains for China, who had hoped to sneak through with their third place and two points in Group A. Syria, Australia, Uzbekistan, Iraq, Iran, Tajikistan, Saudi Arabia and hosts and holders Qatar are all into the knockout phase.

"We are very happy with the qualification, very proud of my players, they made huge sacrifices to get this result," Syria's Argentine coach Cuper said. "We played the game with one aim in our mind—to win, and we managed to do that. "We don't want to stop here."

Despite another early exit—in what was a hard group—Stimac said India would take home "good lessons". "It was a learning experience for the boys," he said, having seen his team beaten 2-0 by Australia and 3-0 by Uzbekistan.

"My satisfaction is that we managed to create chances against Australia, Uzbekistan and Syria." In the other game between Uzbekistan and Australia, who had already qualified, the Socceroos took a controversial lead through a Martin Boyle penalty in first-half stoppage time.

A VAR check harshly judged that the ball had hit Uzbek defender Odiljon Hamrobekov's hand in the build-up as he slid in to tackle Australian forward Kusini Yengi. Boyle dispatched the penalty low into the corner.

The Uzbeks, who have been touted as outsiders for the title, levelled 12 minutes from time when substitute Azizbek Turgunboev got on the end of a cross to head home. In later games on Tuesday, Palestine face Hong Kong and Iran play the United Arab Emirates. Iran are already through and the other three are all still alive in the competition.—AFP



AL KHOR: Syria's players celebrate with a national flag on the pitch after the Qatar 2023 AFC Asian Cup Group B football match between Syria and India at Al-Bayt Stadium in al-Khor, north of Doha, on January 23, 2024. — AFP

Egypt held to Cape Verde draw but through to last 16

ABIDJAN: The injured Mohamed Salah watched from the stands as Egypt played out a crazy 2-2 draw with Cape Verde at the Africa Cup of Nations on Monday, a third consecutive stalemate that was enough to clinch a spot in the last 16.

Cape Verde had already secured first place in Group B and were on course to make it three wins from as many games when Gilson Tavares Benchimol put them ahead just before half-time at Abidjan's Felix Houphouet Boigny Stadium. But substitute Mahmoud Trezeguet equalised five minutes after the restart and Mostafa Mohamed lobbed in a brilliant stoppage-time goal for Egypt which was confirmed after a VAR check ruled out a handball.

It was not the winner, with Bryan Teixeira scoring Cape Verde's second goal nine minutes into added time. Yet by that stage the other Group B game had ended, and Ghana's 2-2 draw with Mozambique allowed Egypt to finish second with just three points.

"The important thing is the fact that we have qualified, we are through to the next round. Now we are going to rest because it was very hot and humid," said Egypt coach Rui Vitoria. "We will prepare, wait to see who our next opponents are, and move into a new phase of the competition."

Egypt, the record seven-time African champions who have not won the title since 2010, will head to San-Pedro for a last-16 tie on Sunday. However,



ABIDJAN: Egypt's forward #19 Mostafa Mohamed (UP-L) fights for the ball with Cape Verde's defender #5 Logan Costa (UP-R) during the Africa Cup of Nations (CAN) 2024 group B football match between Cape Verde and Egypt at the Felix Houphouet-Boigny Stadium in Abidjan. — AFP

Salah will miss that game and there are doubts as to whether the Egypt captain will be seen again in Ivory Coast.

The Egyptian Football Association announced on Sunday that he would return to Liverpool after this match to continue treatment on the hamstring injury he suffered in last Thursday's 2-2 draw with Ghana.

They said he would return to the squad for the semi-finals should Egypt get that far, but the play-

er's agent on Monday cast doubt on such a possibility. "Mohamed's injury is more serious than first thought and he will be out for 21-28 days, and not two games," Ramy Abbas Issa wrote on X.

"Mohamed Salah has an injury, which we learned before this game was a longer-term injury than we first thought," confirmed Vitoria. "Now this game is over we will find the best solution for the treatment of the player." — AFP

Martinez fires Inter to Italian Super Cup glory

RIYADH: Lautaro Martinez shot Inter Milan to a third straight Italian Super Cup after netting in the final moments of Monday's 1-0 win over furious Napoli in Riyadh. Argentina striker Martinez swept home Benjamin Pavard's low cross in the first minute of stoppage time at Al-Awwal Park, seeing off Napoli who played the final half-hour with 10 men after Giovanni Simeone was sent off for two bookable offences.

The 26-year-old's winner was his 21st goal in all competitions this season for Inter, who lost their Serie A lead to Juventus while in Saudi Arabia for the four-team tournament. And he whipped his shirt off in celebration after drawing level with Christian Vieri at ninth place in Inter's all-time goalscoring charts, with 123 strikes since arriving in 2018.

"The emotion took over and I couldn't think," Martinez told Mediaset. "It was a unique moment, I scored my 100th goal in the Italian Cup Final and my 123rd goal in the Super Cup, allowing me to match a legend like Christian Vieri."

This year's edition was the first to be played in four-team format, but failed to capture the imagination of the Saudi public. Organisers were also embarrassed by a portion of the crowd, reportedly the locals and not travelling Italians, whistling the quickly-arranged minute's silence for deceased former Italy striker Gigi Riva before the start of the second half.

Riva, who died on Monday evening, is Italy's top



RIYADH: Inter Milan's Argentine forward #10 Lautaro Martinez falls while Napoli's Norwegian defender #55 Leo Skiri Ostigard runs with the ball during the Italian Super Cup final football match between Napoli and Inter Milan at Al-Awwal Park Stadium in Riyadh. — AFP

scorer with 35 goals in 42 appearances and shot Cagliari to their only league title in 1970. Martinez's goal gave Inter coach Simone Inzaghi a record-breaking fifth Super Cup win in his career after winning it for the third successive year.

Inzaghi overtakes Fabio Capello and Marcello

Lippi, two icons of Italian coaching, for Super Cup wins. The 47-year-old also won it twice while managing Lazio, in 2017 and 2019. His victory made Inter the second team to complete the hat-trick after local rivals AC Milan's string of three victories between 1992 and 1994. — AFP

Italy icon Gigi Riva dies at 79

MILAN: Italian football was mourning one of its most important ever players on Monday after iconic striker Luigi "Gigi" Riva died aged 79. Nicknamed "Roar of Thunder", Riva is Italy's all-time top goalscorer and famous in the Mediterranean nation for firing Cagliari to their only league title in 1970.

Cagliari said "Forever GIGI RIVA" in a short post on X, formerly Twitter, which was accompanied by a picture of their hero in the prime of his career. "Italian football is in mourning because a genuine national monument has left us today," said Italian Football Federation (FIGC) president Gabriele Gravina.

Riva's death is of such significance that a minute's silence was held before the start of the second half of the Italian Super Cup final, played on Monday in Riyadh. "Ciao Gigi" was displayed on the screens at Al-Awwal Park in the Saudi Arabian capital, alongside a picture of the deceased Riva. "He will always be remembered for his play with 'his' Cagliari and the national team," said Serie A in a short statement.

Matches across Italy from Monday until the end of the coming weekend will hold a pre-match "minute's reflection" in honour of Riva, added the FIGC. Riva had been in hospital in Sardinian capital Cagliari, where he stayed after the end of his playing career, reportedly after suffering a heart attack over the weekend.

Riva scored 35 times in just 42 appearances for his country, with whom he won the 1968 European Championship and reached the World Cup final two years later. Italy were swept aside in that final in Mexico by Pele's Brazil, considered one of the best teams in the history of football, but he scored a key goal in the dramatic 4-3 defeat of West Germany in the last four.

Riva's Italy career was hampered by two serious injuries, including a broken leg in 1970 which also ended Cagliari's bid for a second straight league title. "It's a huge loss for me, we had been friends for a very long time, since 1967. We did military service together," former Italy goalkeeper Dino Zoff told the AGI news agency.

Riva played almost his entire club career with Cagliari, a club more familiar with relegation than glory, despite being persistently courted by powerhouse Juventus. He signed for Cagliari in 1963 and retiring in 1976 after topping the Serie A charts three times and netting more than 200 times for the island club. — AFP



Luigi 'Gigi' Riva

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
Mirgab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

Hospitals

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

Change of Name

I, AZHER AHMED, S/o KHALEEL AHMED R/o 2-2-111, Ranjel Base, Bodhan Nizamabad-503185 TS. changed my name as SHAIK AZHER AHMED my passport no. U0200951 date of expiry. 17/10/2030 place of issue Kuwait. (#4598) 24/01/2024

I, Kashem Ali, holder of Indian passport no-N4107434 issued at Kolkata having Indian permanent address Chatar Purandarpur, Kandi, Murshidabad, pin-742140 West Bengal, India present hereby declare that hence forth my name will be reads as under given name Kasem and Surname SK. (#4596) 23/01/2024



MELBOURNE: Belarus' Aryna Sabalenka hits a return against Czech Republic's Barbora Krejickova during their women's singles quarter-final match on day 10 of the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne on January 23, 2024. — AFP

Djokovic, Sabalenka make Australian Open semi-finals in title defence

Gauff gives herself 'C' rating after lacklustre march into semis

MELBOURNE: Top seed Novak Djokovic battled past Taylor Fritz into an 11th Australian Open semi-final and a record-extending 48th at Grand Slams on Tuesday, but a rampant Aryna Sabalenka had a much easier ride. The Serbian superstar came through a probing test on Rod Laver Arena against the 12th-seeded American 7-6 (7/3), 4-6, 6-2, 6-3 to keep his bid for an unprecedented 25th major crown on track.

Djokovic almost always gets the evening slot on centre court, but was bumped to the afternoon on a day on which temperatures soared to 32 degrees Celsius (90 degrees Fahrenheit) and the world number one admitted it was tough going. "Physically and emotionally very

draining," he said after the three hour and 45 minute epic, adding that he "suffered a lot" in the first two sets.

"He was serving well, staying close to the line and kind of suffocating me from the back of the court," he said. "I think I upped my game probably mid-way through the third set all the way to the end." The 36-year-old will face either Italian fourth seed Jannik Sinner or Russian fifth seed Andrey Rublev next, with the omens not good for either man.

Djokovic has won all 10 previous semi-finals he has played at Melbourne Park, stretching back to his first title in 2008 and is on a 33-match unbeaten streak on the blue hardcourts. In contrast to his long slog, fellow defending

champion Sabalenka was off court in just 71 minutes, crushing ninth seed Barbora Krejickova 6-2, 6-3 with minimum fuss.

She will face fourth seed Coco Gauff next in a replay of last year's US Open final that the American teenager won in three sets. On current form, Gauff will be the underdog after taking more than three hours to down unseeded Ukrainian Marta Kostyuk 7-6 (8/6), 6-7 (3/7), 6-2 in a scrappy affair.

Great tennis

Sabalenka had won all seven of her previous Grand Slam quarter-finals, and wasted little time laying down the law against Krejickova, the 2021 French Open champion. She broke three times

in each set, with her booming groundstrokes unstoppable.

"I played really great tennis, I just hope I can keep playing this way," said the 25-year-old Sabalenka. "I mean, it's all because of the atmosphere. I have the best support here." Gauff admitted she was below par against Kostyuk, giving herself only a 'C' rating. "Hopefully got the bad match out of the way and I can play even better," she said.

"Really proud of the fight I showed today," added the American, who had never progressed beyond the fourth round at Melbourne Park in four previous attempts. The low standard was not confined to Gauff, with the pair making a staggering 107 unforced errors between them—there were 16 service breaks.

Kostyuk rued missing her chances, letting slip a 5-1 lead and squandering set points in the first set, but said she was proud of how she fought. "Very proud of myself. I won for myself today, and I think it's the most important thing," said the 21-year-old, who has been vocal at the tournament about keeping people's focus on the conflict in her homeland.

Gauff also faltered at crunch moments, broken when serving for the match in the ninth game of the second set, before keeping her cool as Kostyuk became more agitated in the deciding set. It extended her winning streak this year to 10 matches after she won at Auckland in the lead-up, and her unbeaten run at Grand Slams to 12 after her title-winning exploits at Flushing Meadows. — AFP

Embiid scores 70 as Sixers down Spurs

LOS ANGELES: Joel Embiid became only the ninth player in NBA history to score 70 points or more in a single game as the Philadelphia 76ers defeated the San Antonio Spurs 133-123 on Monday. A sensational individual performance from the reigning NBA Most Valuable Player led the way to victory for the Sixers and upstaged an impressive 33-point showing from Spurs rookie Victor Wembanyama.

Embiid finished with 70 points, 18 rebounds and five assists, shooting 24-of-41 from the field and making 21-of-23 free throws. The Cameroonian star's franchise-record effort vaulted him into an elite band of NBA stars who have posted 70 or more points in a single game, joining Wilt Chamberlain, David Robinson, David Thompson, Elgin Baylor, Kobe Bryant, Donovan Mitchell, Devin Booker and Damian Lillard.

"It feels good," Embiid said after the win, paying tribute to his "extremely unselfish" teammates. "I was hot and they just gave me the ball and made sure they put me in the best positions. "Credit to the coaching staff too - I'm just surrounded by amazing people."

Tyrese Maxey added 18 points for the Sixers while Tobias Harris finished with 14 -- the only other Philadelphia players to crack double figures. Sixers coach Nick Nurse said the 7ft (2.13m) tall Embiid's combination of size and skill made him nearly unplayable. "He can score in so many ways," Nurse said. "His sheer size gets him a lot of stuff around the basket and a lot of free throws.

"And his shooting touch is the skill that makes it extra hard to stop him. When he gets motivated like that, anything can happen." Wembanyama, the highly rated No.1 Draft pick from France, produced one of his best performances of the season in a losing effort for San Antonio, who remain at the bottom of the Western Conference with a record of eight wins and 35 defeats. — AFP

Benzema wants to leave Saudi club after bust-up

RIYADH: Karim Benzema wants to leave his Saudi club Al-Ittihad after a bust-up with management, a source close to the club told AFP on Tuesday. The 36-year-old former Real Madrid striker held a "raging" meeting with the club and its Argentinian coach Marcelo Gallardo last Friday, the source said.

Benzema told his coach and club management "he doesn't feel he is able to give his best because of the current pressure at Ittihad". "Benzema asked to leave Ittihad temporarily to change the atmosphere," the source added.

Al-Ittihad offered to loan the French striker to another Saudi Pro League club but he has refused, the source added. Contacted by AFP, Benzema's entourage declined to comment. The 2022 Ballon d'Or winner, who was one of the highest-profile signings of the Saudi league last year and is reportedly being paid 100 million euros (\$109 million) a season, returned to the club 17 days late after its mid-season break.

He has since been training alone in Jeddah, according to the source, not allowed for "discipline

reasons" to rejoin his team-mates who are at a training camp in Dubai. Reports in England say Premier League club Chelsea would be keen to take Benzema on loan in the current transfer window.

His former club in France, Lyon, could not afford his wages, according to their spokesman. He said a possible loan deal for Benzema "had never been studied or considered", adding: "It is not at all within Lyon's financial means."

A source close to the Saudi Public Investment Fund (PIF), which owns Al-Ittihad and three other Saudi clubs, said anyway "there is no option that Benzema leaves this month". Benzema has scored nine goals in the Saudi Pro League this season, but is well behind Cristiano Ronaldo, who has netted 20 times for Al-Nassr.

Al-Ittihad are seventh in the division after three successive defeats. They have scored the fewest goals and conceded the most of the four teams owned by the PIF. The league is due to resume on February 7. Another high-profile recruitment to the Saudi league, former Liverpool captain Jordan Henderson, quit his club Al-Ettifaq to join Dutch side Ajax last week.

Henderson insisted his decision to return to Europe was made for football reasons because he wants to be in contention for England's Euro 2024 squad. His family reportedly found it hard to settle in the Gulf and his reputation as a supporter of LGBTQ rights was tarnished by his move to Saudi Arabia. — AFP



Karim Benzema

Kuwait's annual chess tournament kicks off

KUWAIT: Kuwait's annual men's chess tournament kicked off Monday with 50 participants, ending on February 1.

Vice President of Kuwait Mind Sports Association Adel Al-Ameri stated in a press release that the annual tournament is considered the most important in the season, noting that the tournament is held according to the Swiss rules. Al-Ameri added that the tournament is held at the association's headquarter in Al-Qadsia, wishing all participants the best of luck. — KUNA



Participants taking part in the men's chess tournament. — KUNA