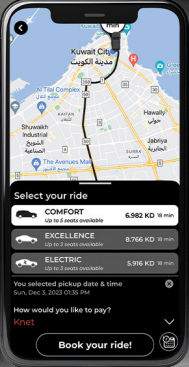



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Mauritania victory condemns Algeria to shock AFCON exit



Amir assigns PM to act as Deputy Amir when Amir is out of country

Deputy PM to act as premier when Amir is abroad • Govt to take parliamentary oath on Jan 29

Amir receives Ras Al-Khaimah ruler



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Wednesday visiting Member of the UAE's Federal Supreme Council and Ruler of Ras Al-Khaimah Sheikh Saud bin Saqr Al-Qasimi. He congratulated HH the Amir on assuming the top office and conveyed the greetings of UAE President Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, wishing him good health and further progress to his country and people. HH the Amir sent his sincere gratitude and appreciation to the Emirati President, wishing him and his people further progress and prosperity under his wise leadership. — KUNA

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Wednesday appointed HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah as the Deputy Amir who will lead the country throughout HH the Amir's absence abroad. The unprecedented decision was taken because a crown prince has not been appointed so far. Under the constitution, the crown prince becomes the deputy Amir during his absence.

HH the Amir said this measure would remain valid until a crown prince is named. The decree stipulates that HH the Prime Minister should inform the National Assembly of this order and that it takes effect once published in the official gazette.

Another Amiri decree was issued appointing Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Al-Sabah as acting premier during the Amir's absence abroad, while HH the Prime Minister assumes the role of Deputy Amir. The decree also stipulates that HH the Prime Minister should inform the Assembly of this decree and it takes effect once published in the official gazette.



HH Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah



Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Al-Sabah

Speaker Ahmad Al-Saadoun later in the day invited MPs for a special Assembly session to be convened on Monday, Jan 29 at the request of the government. During the session, the prime minister and the ministers, who

are not elected MPs, will take the oath to become members of parliament. In addition, HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad will take the constitutional oath to become Deputy Amir during the absence of HH the Amir abroad. HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal received a letter on Wednesday from

Continued on Page 6

Biometrics of most expats in Kuwait have been taken

KUWAIT: The interior ministry in Kuwait has completed the biometrics of most expatriates who left the country for regular travel and returned. This process, which began last year for Kuwaitis and residents, is now nearing completion. According to informed sources, the remaining expatriates yet to undergo biometrics are those who have not traveled or are violators of residency laws.

Over a million expatriates, including first-time visitors to Kuwait, have already been fingerprinted. The sources revealed the ministry also took biometrics of all expatriates who were deported from the country. This measure aims to prevent manipulation, such as fraudulent activities and the use of fake passports. Some deportees had previously resorted to plastic surgery on their fingers or faces to alter fingerprints and identities.

The sources said the department of deportation at Talha Prison is directly deporting individuals holding passports, while efforts are made to coordinate with embassies to secure documents for those without passports or with expired ones. Before deportation at the airport or from prison, all individuals are subjected to having their biometrics taken.

Sources emphasized the dedication of officials in the administration, who work seven days a week to process and deport individuals according to their travel dates. The prison's capacity is limited to 1,500 people, both male and female, and the recent increase in numbers is attributed to intensified security campaigns.

ICJP seeks Kuwait's support to prosecute Zionist war crimes

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: As part of a diplomatic mission, Tayab Ali, an international solicitor and Director of the International Centre of Justice for Palestinians (ICJP) met HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah to discuss collaborative endeavors aimed at bringing the Zionist entity to justice for

war crimes before the International Court of Justice. This meeting signifies a diplomatic commitment on behalf of Kuwait to actively engage in legal proceedings, reinforcing the nation's dedication to addressing human rights concerns and pursuing accountability within the framework of international law.

In an exclusive interview with Kuwait Times, Ali said the purpose of his visit to Kuwait is for a collaborative effort with legal teams in the country, revealing ICJP aims to share expertise and provide assistance in understanding the legal intricacies of the complaint, offering guidance on collecting evidence effectively. The focus is on empowering Kuwaiti legal teams to navigate international laws related to the Palestinian case and ensuring that evidence is presented in a compelling and usable manner. (See Page 2)



KUWAIT: Director of ICJP Tayab Ali speaks during an interview with Kuwait Times on Jan 24, 2024. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Zionists hit UN shelter, besiege hospitals in Gaza

GAZA: Fighting intensified Wednesday in Gaza's Khan Yunis, the focus of the Zionist entity's war with Hamas, with the UN saying a shelter for the displaced was hit by deadly tank shelling as combat

drew closer to hospitals. The Zionist army says it has "encircled" southern Gaza's biggest city, the birthplace of Hamas' Gaza chief Yahya Sinwar, accused of being the mastermind of the Oct 7 attacks against the Zionist entity.

Tank shelling on a United Nations shelter in the city killed at least nine people, said the Gaza head of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees. "Two tank rounds hit building that shelters 800 people — reports now 9 dead and 75 injured," Thomas White, UNRWA's Gaza director, said on X, formerly Twitter. Teams from the UNRWA and the World Health Or-

ganization were trying to reach the shelter, which has been blocked for two days, White said.

Heavy fighting was meanwhile reported close to hospitals in the city, including Al-Aqsa, Nasser and Al-Amal, with reports of Palestinians trying to flee, said UN humanitarian agency OCHA. "No-one can enter or exit (Nasser Hospital) due to ongoing bombardments," OCHA said, citing medics who also reported that staff were digging graves on the grounds of the facility "due to the large numbers of fatalities anticipated".

Continued on Page 6

Saudi to open alcohol store for diplomats

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia plans to allow alcohol sales to non-Muslim diplomats for the first time, two sources familiar with the plan told AFP on Wednesday, modifying strict rules governing liquor in the conservative country. Alcohol "will be sold to non-Muslim diplomats" who previously had to import alcohol via a diplomatic pouch, or sealed official package, one of the sources said.

The sales will take place in a store in Riyadh's Diplomatic Quarter, a neighborhood of foreign missions and residences west of the city center, according to a document seen by AFP. Access to the store will be restricted to people who register on an application known as the Diplo App, and monthly quotas will be enforced, the document said.

Prohibition has been the law of the land in Saudi Arabia since 1952. Rumors have swirled for years that alcohol would become available in the Gulf kingdom amid a wave of social reforms introduced as part of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's Vision 2030 agenda, among them the introduction of cinemas and mixed-gender music festivals.

Continued on Page 6



RIYADH: Lebanese bartender Hadi Ghassan prepares a drink behind the counter at "Meraki Riyadh", a pop-up bar offering non-alcoholic bellinis and spritzes, on Jan 23, 2024. — AFP (See Page 13)



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ICJP, Kuwait seek to bring Zionist entity to justice over war crimes

International solicitor holds talks with Kuwait PM

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: As part of a diplomatic mission, Tayab Ali, an international solicitor and director of the International Centre of Justice for Palestinians (ICJP) met HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah. The discussions centered on collaborative endeavors aimed at bringing the Zionist entity to justice for war crimes before the International Court of Justice. This meeting signifies a diplomatic commitment on behalf of Kuwait to actively engage in legal proceedings, reinforcing the nation's dedication to addressing human rights concerns and pursuing accountability within the framework of international law.

In an exclusive interview with Kuwait Times, Ali said the purpose of his visit to Kuwait is for a collaborative effort with legal teams in the country, revealing ICJP aims to share expertise and provide assistance in understanding the legal intricacies of the complaint, offering guidance on collecting evidence effectively. The focus is on empowering Kuwaiti legal teams to navigate international laws related to the Palestinian case and ensuring that evidence is presented in a compelling and usable manner.

During this diplomatic mission, Ali and his team engaged with the Kuwaiti government, particularly meeting with the prime minister. They provided a legal briefing, outlining potential actions within the framework of international laws. Ali commended the Kuwaiti government's strong stance on the Palestinian cause and expressed their commitment to supporting these efforts. The collaboration involves offering investigative expertise, advising on legal frameworks and guiding Kuwait in supporting both South Africa and ICJP in their investigations.

South Africa has brought a case before the UN's International Court of Justice, which accuses the Zionist entity of genocide in its offensive in Gaza. South Africa launched the emergency case at the ICJ in The Hague this month, arguing



Director of the International Centre of Justice for Palestinians (ICJP) Tayab Ali

the Zionist entity had breached the 1948 UN Genocide Convention. South Africa demanded the judges order the Zionist entity to halt its offensive in the Palestinian territory.

The ongoing partnership with Kuwait's legal team underscores a commitment to assisting Palestinians and fostering international cooperation in pursuing justice. "The UK-based ICJP operates as an independent organization comprising lawyers, academics, and politicians united in advocating for Palestinian rights. With a primary focus on analyzing the situation in Palestine, where we submitted evidence of alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by (the Zionist entity) in Gaza to London's Metropolitan Police, following calls for evidence by its war crimes unit," he said, adding that it is very clear that the Zionist entity attempts to eradicate Palestinians not only but bombings and shootings, but also by removing life-sustaining infrastructure.

"From our analysis, it is clear that (the Zionist entity) committed a war crime way before the Gaza war. For example, in 2009, we issued an arrest warrant for the Zionist entity's former foreign minister Tzipi Livni over war crimes allegedly committed in Gaza that year. My firm was ready, willing, and able to act for clients to seek the arrest of anyone suspected of war crimes," Ali said.

Ali emphatically emphasized the inhumane conditions prevailing in Gaza, un-



GAZA: A picture shows smoke billowing over the Gaza Strip during Zionist bombardment on January 24, 2024. — AFP

derscoring a lack of accountability for actions committed by the Zionist entity. His assessment pointed out a stark asymmetry, where instances of wrongdoing by Zionists seemingly evade consequences, while Palestinians face swift and punitive measures for their actions.

He underscored a fundamental challenge to achieving peace, pointing at the imbalanced distribution of power and resources between the conflicting parties. "There will be no peace if just one side holds all the cards and has everything and doesn't want to give anything away, while the other side is left with nothing," he stressed.

"The (Zionist) side doesn't want to give Palestinians their rights and why should they? There is no accountability internationally. And if the Palestinians complain to the international community about what (the Zionist entity) is doing, the community decides to rally around (the Zionist entity), which will be provided with more funding and weapons. This relationship is destructive," Ali added.

Regarding ICJP's role, he stated: "When the war in Gaza started, what we

did was collect evidence and interview victims for hours and days in a recorded format. Once we complete this, we will take the information from hour to hour and find evidence, and in the end, put that in a big timeframe and see how we can benefit from it in the case of the war crimes against (the Zionist entity)," adding that they have interviewed over 50 victims and collected videos and images they have in their devices.

"I came to Kuwait with Professor Ghassan Abu-Sittah, a surgeon specializing in conflict medicine, who provided us with information and photographs and videos of Gaza. He not only spent 80 hours a day saving lives, but also collected evidence of what (the Zionist entity) has been doing, including what happened to victims and photographs of children with wounds caused by white phosphorus," Ali explained.

"Our evidence is like collecting pieces of a jigsaw. We are putting pieces of evidence in a timeline. For example, Dr Ghassan, as a well-known surgeon, had the ability to explain and expose what was happening in the hospitals of Gaza.

At the same time, we have photographs from journalists of injuries and bombings and videos of Dr Ghassan treating the victims with timestamps and dates and the evidential narrative to support our allegations," Ali indicated.

"It is very difficult to collect information from Gaza: so what we decided to do is to collect it from people who left Gaza with photographs in their mobile phones. We wanted to collect the evidence from inside Gaza, but (the Zionist entity) bombed universities where they had the research. They targeted journalists and doctors and they destroyed infrastructure. Even humanitarian workers were under attack," he highlighted.

Ali expressed profound concern, asserting that the failure of the International Criminal Court to prosecute the Zionist entity for war crimes in Gaza could signify a significant blow to the foundations of international law. He called upon countries worldwide to actively participate in addressing the issue. "A war crimes complaint must be filed with every police force in every country across the globe," he asserted.



stc, KCST sign MoU

KUWAIT: Kuwait Telecommunications Company – stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, announced that it has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Kuwait College for Science and Technology (KCST). The collaboration falls under stc's educational 'upgrade' initiative and will focus on organizing a range of student activities including workshops, training courses, and specialized seminars.

The MoU between stc and KCST was made official during a signing ceremony held at stc's head office and was attended by executives from both parties including Ahmed Al Nowaibet, Manager of Public Relations and Social Media at stc and Ibrahim Al-Mutawa, Director of Public Relations and Marketing at KCST, as well as Abdulaziz Almathkour, General Manager - Rewards & Organization Effectiveness at stc, and Professor Khalid Al-Begain, President of KCST. The MoU serves as an initial step towards fostering cooperation between the two organizations. It is a part of stc's educational "upgrade" initiative, fundamentally aimed at empowering students through diverse programs designed to enhance knowledge.

The MoU outlines various collaborative efforts that will assist the college in enhancing and updating its curriculum with skills pertinent to Kuwait's private sector job market, where stc serves as prominent player. Additionally, the college's offerings are closely aligned with the immediate and future demands of Kuwait's job market. KCST is the only university in Kuwait offering Bachelor's degrees in Electronics and Communications Engineering, and Computer Engineering, with specializations in Cyber Security and Artificial Intelligence.

The objective behind signing the MoU is to strengthen the collaboration between stc and KCST. stc will support KCST by providing practical training opportunities for the college's students and graduates. Additionally, KCST will utilize its advanced laboratories to offer training courses for stc employees to develop their professional and practical performance.

The objectives defined under the MoU strongly align with the goals that stc aims to achieve for the community under its strategic CSR pillars. Through flagship programs such as the educational 'upgrade' initiative, stc envisions a future where its efforts ripple through the Kuwaiti economy, fostering innovation, driving growth, and most importantly, empowering the nation's future leaders to steer Kuwait towards unparalleled success and prosperity.

During the signing ceremony, Ahmad A Nowaibet, Manager of Public Relations and Social Media at stc expressed that the Company is proud to partner with an innovative educational institution like KCST as part of stc's educational 'upgrade' initiative with the core objective of empowering the local education framework and aligns with stc's efforts towards creating a sustainable future. Furthermore, he also shed the light on the value of this partnership as it reflects the Company's commitment to empowering the youth with essential skills to excel in their careers, while providing stc employees with additional platforms to develop their professional and practical skills.

Ibrahim Al-Mutawa, Director of Public Relations and Marketing at KCST, highlighted during the signing ceremony that this memorandum will enhance cooperation in several areas, most importantly in education and training, as the university will offer training programs through its Center of Innovation and Continuing Education and Training to stc employees, in addition to enhancing partnerships in community initiatives. It is worth mentioning that stc has consistently invested in student and youth initiatives, recognizing them as future leaders and pillars of the Kuwaiti economy, as part of its diverse and sustainable CSR program. stc has leveraged its resources and expertise to launch or participate in initiatives that positively impact the community.

The Company has implemented community programs aimed at fostering long-term development under the "Weyak" umbrella to support Kuwaiti SMEs and startups, as well as the educational "upgrade" umbrella in collaboration with various state institutions from both public and private sectors. Through these efforts, stc has established itself not just as a telecom service provider, but as a significant contributor to strengthening the social and economic fabric of Kuwait.

14 Kuwaiti officers graduate from Qatari Military College

DOHA: Qatari Ahmad bin Mohammad Military College celebrated Wednesday the graduation of the 19th batch of officers, including 14 members of the Kuwait National Guard. The ceremony was patronized and attended by the Amir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani. Kuwaiti military attaché to Qatar, Brigadier General Raed Al-Sunni, congrat-

ulated the graduates via a statement to KUNA and commended their performance and commitment, wishing them success in serving their homeland.

He highlighted the importance of such training courses in developing human capital and benefiting from information and practical application. He also commended the advanced technical and administrative level of the college. Kuwaiti officer Waleed Ali Ibrahim was awarded first place in computer information systems, whereas officer Sultan Ali Al-Shammari took first place in management. Attending the ceremony were Ambassador of Kuwait to Qatar Khaled Al-Mutairi, Commander of Ali Al-Sabah Military College Brigadier General Khaled Al-Otaibi, and a number of officials. — KUNA



DOHA: Qatar military college celebrates the graduation of the 19th batch of officers, including 14 members of the Kuwait National Guard. — KUNA

KU, KPC discuss the roadmap for joint agreement

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (and its subsidiaries) and Kuwait University held their first coordination meeting to implement and develop the roadmap for the joint cooperation agreement. The meeting was organized by the Health, Safety, and Environment Group of Kuwait Oil Tankers Company (KOTC) at their headquarters. Kuwait University's Acting Dean of the College of Life Sciences, Dr. Nawaf Al-Hajri, as well as other authorities in the university attended.

The meeting discussed how to develop a mechanism to measure the maturity level of the current comprehensive risk management programs of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation, compare them with those of counterpart companies in the region or globally, and work on developing the program to comply with the latest international standards. They also discussed the mechanism for receiving Kuwait University students in field training programs for the next four years in various companies affiliated with the KPC. KOTC was assigned to supervise this



Kuwait Petroleum Corporation and Kuwait University held their first coordination meeting to implement and develop the roadmap for the joint cooperation agreement.

agreement and commit to holding monthly coordination meetings to follow up on the implementation of its provisions.

The agreement came to activate the principle of joint cooperation between state institutions and was in line with the policy of exchanging experiences in the scientific, academic, consultative, technical, and training fields in the field of comprehensive risk management.

Local

Kuwait urges Security Council to protect Palestinian people

UK and Kuwait officials meet on sideline of UNSC session

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah relayed Kuwait's speech to the United Nations Security Council's (UNSC) ministerial session's open debate on "the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question." Ambassador Al-Sabah commenced his speech by situating this current session against the circumstances in which it is being held; he spoke of the catastrophic conditions in the Gaza Strip, recounting the indescribable crimes and suffering.

He reproved the UNSC's incapability of performing its political, legal, and humanitarian duties, its double standards, its failure to take a stance against the blatant violations of the Zionist occupation, as well as its failure to adopt a resolution putting an immediate end to its crimes in favor of geopolitical interests. The Ambassador further asserted that they are speaking in defense of the Palestinian people and of the entirety of international law and its stipulations, as it is the protector of the rights of individuals and the stability of member states.

He took the time to reiterate Kuwait's unwavering stance in support of Palestinian people in the face of a conflict caused primarily by the existence of an expanding occupation. Sustainable peace and security could only be achieved through adherence to agreed-upon stipulations, UNSC resolutions, and the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative ensuring the political rights of Palestinians, commented Ambassador Al-Sabah.

Once again, Kuwait vehemently rejected and condemned the occupation's ongoing aggression, called for an immediate end to the destruction, and

demanded the unimpeded delivery of aid. The Ambassador expressed Kuwait's regard to the nation of South Africa for the unprecedented step of filing a lawsuit against the occupation at the International Court of Justice. Concluding his statement, Ambassador Al-Sabah urged the UNSC to undertake its responsibility and protect the Palestinian people. He called on the international community to support the resilience of Palestinian people on their own land and warned against attempts at forced eviction.

Kuwait, UK official meet

Meanwhile, Kuwaiti Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah met on Wednesday with a British official in New York, discussing a multitude of regional and international issues. Sheikh Jarrah and the British State Minister for the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia, the Commonwealth, and the UN Tariq Ahmad's meeting was held on the sidelines of the UNSC open debate on the Middle East situation, including the Palestinian cause. The two officials also touched on the historical relations between Kuwait and the United Kingdom as well as a score of regional and international issues.

British FM visits the Mideast

British Foreign Secretary David Cameron headed to the Middle East to visit occupied Palestinian territories in Qatar and Turkey to discuss the latest developments in Gaza with the aim of reaching a permanent ceasefire. The British Foreign Office said in a release that Cameron is conducting meetings with regional leaders to discuss ways of al-



Kuwait's Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah

lowing the entrance of humanitarian aid to Gaza and releasing prisoners.

The release affirmed that during meetings with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Cameron would focus on the deep concerns over the continuous killings of civilians in Gaza and emphasize the need to restore essential services such as water, electricity, and fuel. It added that his meeting with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas would shed light on Britain's support for reaching a two-state solution and

discuss the possibility of restoring power to Palestinian authorities to control Gaza.

Furthermore, the release noted that Britain is working side by side with Qatar and Turkey to reach regional stability and the safe return of prisoners, noting that Qatar is one of the main mediators in this issue. On the other hand, it said that Cameron will meet with several senior officials in the Turkish government to discuss regional security in the Middle East, in addition to several other issues. — KUNA



Kuwait, Azerbaijan parliamentary friendship group holds fresh talks.—KUNA

Kuwait, Azerbaijan parliamentary group hold fresh talks

KUWAIT: A joint friendship group comprised of lawmakers from Kuwait and Azerbaijan convened for talks on Tuesday with Azerbaijan's Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov in attendance. The talks focused on bilateral ties. The group, chaired by Kuwaiti lawmaker Mohammad Al-Mutairi,

agreed that there remains more room for progress in bilateral relations, citing sectors to be explored like, the energy, tourism and agricultural sectors.

Amid a sharp rise in the number of Kuwaiti tourists visiting the transcontinental nation, the talks also looked into a mutual visa exemption agreement that could be up and running in the near future, said the Kuwaiti lawmaker. Current developments around the wider Middle East region were among the topics discussed - chief among them the worsening wave of violence that has gripped the Gaza Strip. The group underlined the need to provide urgent aid to Palestinians there. — KUNA



Speaker of the Slovenian Parliament Urska Klakochar meets with head of the Kuwaiti Parliamentary Friendship 5th Committee delegation Member of Parliament (MP) Osama Al-Zaid. — KUNA photos

Slovenia supports Kuwait's deal on Khor Abdullah

LJUBLJANA: Slovenia has stressed its support to abide by the Kuwait-Iraq deal on 'Khor Abdullah', signed in 2012 and submitted to the UN in 2013, said a Kuwaiti lawmaker on Tuesday. Speaking to KUNA and Kuwait TV, MP Osama Al-Zaid, head of the parliamentary friendship group, lauded the results of the visit to the Slovenian capital. He said that the Kuwaiti delegation held some fruitful meetings with

Slovenian officials and bodies as well as lawmakers, including heads of foreign and economic affairs committees in the parliament.

He pointed out that he and his accompanying delegation met with the speaker of the Slovenian parliament and minister of state for foreign affairs, adding that this visit would have positive impacts in the future. The visit's timing is important as it came after Slovenia, supported by Kuwait, obtained a non-permanent seat in the UN Security Council, he said, indicating that Slovenia backed Kuwait to get a UN human rights' seat. Meanwhile, Al-Zaid said that they discussed exempting Kuwaitis from Schengen visas and that the Slovenian side affirmed that it would support Kuwait on that matter.

He went on to say that the Kuwaiti delegation informed Slovenia about Kuwait's stance, at the parliamentary, government, and people levels, towards the Palestinian cause. Kuwait calls for stopping the massacres and war crimes committed by the Zionist entity against Palestinian people, Al-Zaid noted. During the meetings, the two sides agreed on forming a joint Kuwait-Slovenia parliamentary economic committee, and the Slovenian side was invited to visit Kuwait to activate economic cooperation between the two sides, he made clear.

Kuwait's delegation includes MPs Shuaib Ali Shaban, Hamad Al-Olayan, Abdulwahab Al-Issa, and Kuwait's Ambassador to Austria and non-resident envoy to Slovenia, Talal Al-Fassam. The delegation is set to leave Slovenia this evening, heading to Vienna, where it will meet senior officials with the aim of boosting ties between the Kuwaiti and Austrian parliaments. — KUNA



Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Sanja Stiglic takes a photo with head of the Kuwaiti Parliamentary Friendship 5th Committee delegation Member of Parliament (MP) Osama Al-Zaid.

KISR organizes seminar, exhibition on university majors

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR) organized on Wednesday a seminar and an enlightening exhibition on university majors, the unified national test, and admission requirements with the participation of several colleges from public, private, and foreign missions. The Director of the Manpower Development Department at the Institute, Mona Al-Failakawi, stated that this is the first time that the Institute has organized such an event. Al-Failakawi said that the exhibition aims to enlighten students about the university majors available and required in the labor market, in addition to introducing them to



the admission requirements. She pointed out that the exhibition will continue until Thursday in two periods: morning from 9 to 1 pm and evening from 5 to 8 pm at the main building of the institute in Shuwaikh. — KUNA



Participants are pictured during the exhibition.

PAM, PAAET eye occupational tests for expat workers

KUWAIT: Within the framework of the implementation of the development project "Professional System for Smart Recruitment," Eng. Rabab Al-Osaimi, Acting Deputy Director General for Planning and Administrative Development at the Manpower Authority (PAM), received a delegation from the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET) headed by Eng. Sayed Al-Tabtabai, Deputy Director General for Training, to discuss the mechanism of activating a joint cooperation protocol with the aim of starting the implementation of professional tests for workers in order to raise the skill level of the Kuwaiti labor market.

During the meeting, it was agreed to form a high-



er committee between the two sides to supervise the implementation of the project through effective executive steps. One of the tasks of the committee is to supervise the number of specialized teams to develop the mechanisms of executive work for the project. The Labor Market Standards Department was assigned to the Planning and Administrative Development Sector to start implementing professional tests for the construction sector in the labor market, which includes about 400,000 expatriate workers.



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Govt 'committed to Amiri vision on justice, efficiency'

KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Oil Minister Dr. Emad Al-Atiqi affirmed on Tuesday his full commitment to the vision of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah with regards to achieving justice, efficiency, and taking care of the human element. In his statement delivered at a conference organized by Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) titled 'Excellence in Leadership' and held at Al-Abdaliya Natural Reserve, which belongs to KOC, Al-Atiqi stressed the importance of following His Highness the Amir's instructions aimed at disciplining all departments and administrative and financial works, rejecting any form of favoritism.

He added that the human element in the oil sector in general and in engineering work in particular is considered crucial to achieving all performance incentives in administrative and engineering works and to ensuring the quality and improvement of KPC's work to the best international standards in human performance. The conference was attended by Vice Chairman and CEO of KPC Sheikh Nawaf Saud Nasser Al-Sabah, former Minister of Oil and Housing Affairs Dr. Adel Al-Sabeh, and CEO of the National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) Isam Al-Sager.

The speakers shared their experience leading the most important economic sectors in Kuwait, including the oil and gas industry, banking, and construction sectors, focusing on leadership qualities and skills to be used in the oil sector in the future. The conference aimed at embodying the role of human resources as an essential partner in all KPC sectors, highlighting the importance of leadership in transforming the Kuwait 2040 master plan into tangible results, and activating the role of planning, organizing, and monitoring in achieving the KPC vision. — KUNA

Inspectors close store in Hawally

KUWAIT: Inspectors from the Commerce Ministry closed down a store in Hawally after they discovered large quantities of meat, chicken, and other foodstuffs that did not carry labels of 'country of origin' or source. These food items were not being stored in a healthy way. Sources said the inspectors also discovered around 2,000 bottles and sachets of medicines and food supplements. Investigations revealed that the store owners were selling the items online.

Photo of the day



KUWAIT: This photograph taken from Kuwait City shows an aircraft flying in front of a waxing gibbous moon. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Alghanim Industries renews 'Kuwait Codes' partnership

Coding for the future

KUWAIT: Alghanim Industries (Kutayba Alghanim Group), one of the largest privately-owned companies in the region, has announced the continuation of its strategic partnership with CODED Academy for the third consecutive year, supporting the "Kuwait Codes" initiative. This initiative focuses on teaching high school students in Kuwait the fundamentals of coding, a vital skill for shaping the future.

"Kuwait Codes" offers students in Kuwait a unique opportunity to choose from four specialized educational paths: web development, game creation, versatile Python programming, and smartphone app development. This diversity in educational programs aims to equip students with practical skills in their chosen field, preparing them to be creative and effective contributors in the advanced world of technology. To date, the initiative has benefited over 2500 students, primarily from the public education sector.

Previous winners of the "Kuwait Codes" initiative, which began four years ago, have exhibited a wide range of innovative projects. These include the development of websites and applications with specially designed tools to support mental

health, along with applications focused on environmental protection and interactive educational platforms for students. This variety in projects highlights the students' endeavor to provide innovative solutions that meet the needs and challenges of the local community.

In a recent meeting at Alghanim Industries' headquarters in Al Hamra Business Tower in Kuwait City, Kutayba Yusuf Alghanim, Executive Chairman of Alghanim Industries, met with Ahmad Marafi and Hashim Behbehani, founders of CODED Academy. During this meeting, Alghanim expressed his profound appreciation for their pioneering efforts in establishing the 'Kuwait Codes' initiative. He commended their visionary approach in enhancing technological skills among Kuwait's youth, creating an innovative educational platform that inspires and empowers young people to actively engage in the world of technology.

Commenting on the growing importance of learning coding, Alghanim said: "In our rapidly evolving technological era, coding has become a fundamental language for understanding and mastering future technologies. Investing in learning this vital skill is not only a step towards individual capability development but also a crucial element in building an innovative and advanced future. The 'Kuwait Codes' initiative inspires hope in preparing a new generation capable of effectively using this skill to become producers of technology, not just consumers."

Alghanim also commented about the 2023 edition of the program, noting the significant increase in female participation: "The diversity we witnessed this year, especially with the notable participation of young women, reflects substantial progress in achieving balance and diversity in the technology field. This development enhances the capabilities of our next generation in facing challenges and seizing opportunities in the digital economy, highlighting the effective role of both government and private sectors in supporting education and innovation in areas such as programming, data science, and artificial intelligence. Supporting initiatives like 'Kuwait Codes' is an integral part of our strategy to develop a workforce with diverse skills and expertise."

Ahmad Marafi, CEO of CODED Academy, ex-



KUWAIT: Kutayba Alghanim, Hashim Behbehani and Ahmad Marafi are pictured during the event.

pressed his deep gratitude to Alghanim Industries for their continuous support, stating: "Our partnership with Alghanim Industries is highly valuable for the 'Kuwait Codes' initiative. Their support enriches our program with practical knowledge and advanced technical skills, benefiting our students. This cooperation plays a vital role in empowering Kuwait's youth, providing them with the tools and knowledge necessary to excel in a rapidly evolving technological environment." Alghanim Industries' involvement in "Kuwait Codes" goes beyond traditional support, offering students enriching interactive experiences. This includes organizing visits to its various business units, such as e-commerce and IT, to demonstrate the practical application of coding skills in real-life business operations.

With the renewal of the partnership for the third year, Alghanim Industries reaffirms its commitment to developing the technological capabilities of Kuwaiti youth and fostering innovation. This partnership aims to prepare youth for active participation in a world increasingly reliant on digital technologies, equipping them to face future challenges with efficiency and creativity. The partnership to support 'Kuwait Codes' is part of Alghanim Industries' broader vision to enhance education, empowerment, and entrepreneurship, aiming for a better future for the youth of Kuwait and the Arab world.



KUNA, Kuwait sports media coordinators society hold talks

KUWAIT: The Director General of Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), Dr. Fatima Al-Salem, discussed on Wednesday with Kuwait sports media coordinators and society ways of bolstering media cooperation. During her meeting with the CEO Munawer Al-Mutairi and Secretary Bander Al-Mutairi,

Al-Salem said that KUNA always seeks to shed light on the efforts of Kuwaiti public benefits societies that serve Kuwait each through their own specialty and field.

She added that the media sector in Kuwait is evolving constantly, which makes developing institutional labor inevitable, and that displaying Kuwaiti sports efforts is the main target everyone aims for. On his part, Munawer Al-Mutairi affirmed the importance of this cooperation between the Kuwait Sports Media Coordinators Society and KUNA to exchange expertise, experiences, and training programs. He also praised KUNA's efforts in developing the media field in general. — KUNA

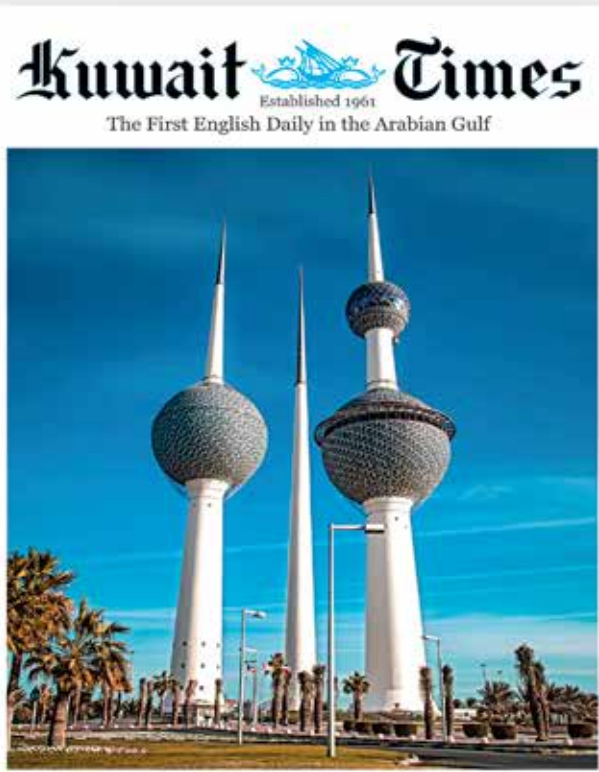


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Trump-Biden rematch looms

Iran’s Raisi flies to Turkey for delayed Gaza talks

Turkey’s lawmakers approve Sweden’s NATO membership

Budapest last holdout in Sweden’s accession process but Orban reaffirms ‘support’



ANKARA: Lawmakers attend a session before voting on a bill regarding Sweden's accession to NATO, on Jan 23, 2024 at the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (TBMM) in Ankara. — AFP

ANKARA: Turkey’s parliament on Tuesday ratified Sweden’s NATO membership after more than a year of delays that upset Western efforts to show resolve in the face of Russia’s war on Ukraine. Lawmakers voted 287-55 in favor of the Nordic nation’s bid to become the 32nd member of the alliance after it won the public backing of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

The Turkish leader is expected to sign Sweden’s ratification document and conclude Ankara’s role in the protracted saga in the coming days. “Today we are one step closer to becoming a full member of NATO,” Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson said on social media after the vote.

NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg welcomed Turkey’s move and called on Hungary to do the same, urging Budapest to “complete its national ratification as soon as possible”. The United States also applauded the Turkish parliament’s vote, with National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan saying on social media that Sweden’s addition to NATO will make the alliance “safer and stronger”.

Turkey’s green light leaves Budapest as the last holdout in an accession process that Sweden and Finland be-

gan in response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine nearly two years ago. Ankara forced the northern neighbors to split up their applications after finding fault with Sweden and approving Finland after a few rounds of talks.

Hungary in favor

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban on Wednesday said he reaffirmed in a phone call with NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg his “support” for Sweden’s membership to the security alliance.

“I reaffirmed that the Hungarian government supports the NATO membership of Sweden,” Orban wrote on X, formerly Twitter. “I also stressed that we will continue to urge the Hungarian National Assembly to vote in favour of Sweden’s accession and conclude the ratification at the first possible opportunity,” he added.

On Tuesday, Orban sent a letter to his Swedish counterpart Ulf Kristersson inviting him to Budapest to discuss the bid “at your earliest convenience”. Last week, Hungary criticized Sweden for not taking steps to strengthen bilateral relations.

Stoltenberg welcomed the “good call” with Orban. “I welcome the clear support of the Prime Minister and his government for Sweden’s NATO mem-

bership. I look forward to the ratification as soon as parliament reconvenes,” he wrote on X. Parliament is scheduled to reconvene in mid-February.

End of non-alignment

Sweden and Finland pursued a policy of military non-alignment during the Cold War era between the Soviet Union and the West. But the Ukraine war upturned geopolitical calculations and forced the two to seek the nuclear protection afforded by the world’s most powerful defense bloc.

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban on Tuesday invited his Swedish counterpart to Budapest to discuss the bid, although hints emerged of strains between Stockholm and Budapest. Orban and Erdogan have maintained good rapport with Russian President Vladimir Putin throughout the Ukraine war.

NATO leaders had feared that the Kremlin was trying to use the two mercurial leaders — both regular visitors to Moscow — to seed divisions in the West. The bloc’s commanders have cast the latest round of expansion as a show of Western resolve in the face of Russia’s aggression.

Turkey demands jets

Erdogan’s objections to Sweden’s bid initially focused on Stockholm’s perceived acceptance of Kurdish groups that Ankara views as “terrorist”. Sweden responded by tightening its anti-terrorism legislation and taking other security steps demanded by Erdogan.

But Erdogan then turned his gaze on an unmet US pledge to deliver a batch of F-16 fighter jets that has met resistance in Congress because of Turkey’s perceived backsliding on human rights and stand-offs with fellow NATO member Greece.

Turkey also wants Canada to follow through on its promise to lift a ban on the sale of a key component used for making combat drones. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken told Turkey over two visits in the past three months that the Swedish candidacy’s ratification could help break congressional resistance to the F-16 sale.

Turkish opposition lawmaker Cengiz Candar said during Tuesday’s ratification debate that Ankara had “blackmailed” its Western partners during the drawn-out negotiation process. “Turkey violated three pillars of foreign policy: predictability, credibility and consistency,” he said before voting for the bid.

Orban tangled up

Hungary had followed Turkey’s lead during Finland’s accession process and was largely expected to back Sweden’s candidacy without much delay. But Orban got tangled up in an unexpected tiff with Swedish leaders on Tuesday that revolved around his invitation for Kristersson to come and discuss Stockholm’s candidacy in Budapest.

“I invite you to visit Hungary at your earliest convenience to exchange views on all issues of common interest,” Orban wrote in the letter seen by AFP. Orban then added in a social media statement that Kristersson should come to Hungary “to negotiate” Sweden’s accession.

Swedish officials immediately countered that there was nothing to negotiate because — unlike Turkey — Hungary never presented conditions when Sweden was invited at the 2022 NATO summit in Madrid. Swedish Foreign Minister Tobias Billstrom said he saw “no reason” to negotiate with Hungary about Stockholm’s NATO candidacy “at this point”. “It is now time for Hungary to conclude the remaining steps so that we can welcome our Swedish friends into the Alliance,” the German foreign ministry said after the Turkish vote. — AFP

Russia says Kyiv downed Ukrainian prisoner plane

MOSCOW: Russia on Wednesday accused Ukraine of shooting down a military transport plane carrying dozens of Ukrainian prisoners headed for a prisoner exchange, killing everyone on board. Kyiv confirmed that a prisoner exchange was due to take place on Wednesday, but said it had no reliable information on the passengers of the downed plane.

Videos on social media showed a large plane in Russia’s western Belgorod region falling from the sky on its side before crashing in a fireball. Russia’s defense ministry said the IL-76 plane was carrying 65 Ukrainian soldiers captured in Russia’s offensive, six crew and three escorts.

It claimed Ukrainian forces stationed in the Kharkiv border region had fired two missiles at the transport aircraft and described the incident as a “terrorist act”. Ukraine’s main intelligence agency said in a statement that “a prisoner exchange was supposed to take place today, but it did not take place”.

“According to the Russian side, this was due to the downing of a Russian IL-76 aircraft, which was allegedly transporting our prisoners. We currently do not have reliable or comprehensive information on who was on board the plane or in what number,” it said.

A Ukrainian government body responsible for issues linked to prisoners of war said earlier that it was probing Russia’s claims. AFP could not independently verify the Russian claims but the incident would represent one of the single most deadly episodes of the full-scale conflict in weeks.

The Russian defense ministry said the crash had come just hours ahead of an agreed prisoner exchange later on Wednesday that was set to take place at a border crossing in Belgorod. “The Ukrainian leadership was well aware that, in accordance with established practice, the Ukrainian servicemen to be exchanged would be transported by military transport aircraft to the Belgorod aerodrome today,” it said.

Muted reaction

Local Ukrainian media initially cited defense sources saying that the Ukrainian army had downed the plane, and that it was carrying missiles. The claim was later retracted. In a carefully worded statement published hours after the crash, the Ukrainian army said it would continue to target Russian aircraft in Belgorod region.

But the statement did not mention Wednesday’s crash, or address Moscow’s accusations. It said that a number of shelling attacks on Ukrainian territory were “directly related” to Russian military transport aircraft flying to Belgorod airfield. “With this in mind, the Ukrainian army will continue to take measures to destroy delivery vehicles and control the airspace to eliminate the terrorist threat, including in the Belgorod-Kharkiv direction,” it said.

Ukrainian rights ombudsman Dmytro Lubinets, who is among officials responsible for prisoner exchanges, said his office was investigating the

incident. The crash occurred in the Korochansky district, northeast of the Belgorod region’s capital at around 8:00 am GMT, governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said.

He added that the aircraft was downed in a field and the area had been closed off while investigators and emergency services worked at the scene. “The plane crashed far away from the village. It was very loud and very scary,” said Maria Mexentseva, a resident of the nearby village of Yablonovo.

“We just heard a loud rumble. We went outside. There was already smoke, fire and rumbling, that’s it,” she told the RIA-Novosti news agency. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov declined to comment on the crash, saying news was still emerging and that authorities would “look into” the incident. The head of Russian-state broadcaster RT published a list of captured Ukrainian servicemen allegedly on board.

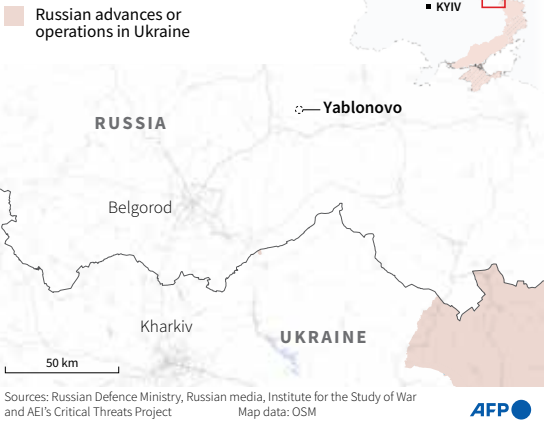
The issue of prisoners of war is sensitive in both countries. Despite full-scale hostilities, the two sides have managed to carry out 49 prisoner exchanges since the conflict began almost two years ago. Ukraine says more than 8,000 Ukrainians remain in Russian captivity, including civilians.

In 2022, Russia and Ukraine accused each other of carrying out deadly bombardments on a jail holding dozens of captured Ukrainian servicemen in Kremlin-controlled Olenivka, in eastern Ukraine’s Donetsk region. Both Moscow and Kyiv blamed each other for the incident, which President Volodymyr Zelensky called a “Russian war crime”.

Since launching large-scale hostilities in Ukraine in February 2022, several Russian military aircraft have crashed, and Ukraine has also claimed to have

Russian military plane crash

It was carrying 65 Ukrainian prisoners



shot down Russian war planes. Last week, Kyiv claimed to have downed an A-50 Russian reconnaissance plane and damaged an Il-22 bomber over the Azov Sea, flying between the two countries.

In Russia, the plane carrying the leader of the Wagner mercenary group, Yevgeny Prigozhin, crashed last August on a flight from Moscow to Saint Petersburg. Moscow denied involvement, claiming instead that the plane crashed because its passengers detonated a grenade on board.

In October 2022, a Su-34 fighter bomber flew into a residential building in the town of Yeysk, on the Russian coast of the Sea of Azov, leaving more than a dozen dead. Both Russia and Ukraine have stepped up strikes on each others’ cities and critical infrastructure in recent weeks. — AFP

Iran's Raisi flies to Turkey for delayed Gaza talks

Raisi, Erdogan put regional disputes on back burner as they seek approach to contain Gaza war

ANKARA: Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi flew to Turkey on Wednesday for twice-delayed talks aimed at ironing out past differences between the two neighbors and trying to halt the spread of the Zionist-Hamas war.

Raisi's visit to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan comes with the war in Gaza starting to enflame tensions and escalate fighting across the Middle East. The United States and Britain have stepped up joint air strikes against Iranian-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen in response to their attacks on Red Sea shipping lanes.

The Zionist entity meanwhile has repeatedly targeted Tehran-linked figures in Syria and appears to be on the brink of launching a full-scale war against Iran-backed Hezbollah militants in Lebanon. Iran and Pakistan last week exchanged strikes against "militant" and "terrorist" targets, and Turkey itself has intensified artillery and drone attacks against Kurdish groups in Syria and Iran.

The rapid pace of the Middle East escalation forced Raisi to delay his visit to Ankara twice. Planned talks in Ankara in early January were called off when twin blasts claimed by Islamic State group jihadists killed 89 people at the shrine of assassinated Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps general Qasem Soleimani.

A trip he had planned for November

was cancelled because of conflicting schedules of diplomats involved in consultations over the Gaza war. "Iran and Turkey have a common position in supporting the Palestinian people and the resistance of the oppressed but powerful Palestinian people," Raisi said before boarding the plane for his first official visit to Turkey since his 2021 election.

'Liberators'

The turmoil engulfing the Middle East since the Zionist entity waged war on Gaza and escalated its violence in occupied Palestine has added a new layer of complexity to Turkey's close but uneasy relationship with Iran. Erdogan depicts the Iran-backed Hamas as legitimately elected "liberators" and not the "terrorist" organization it has been called across the Western world.

He has compared Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to Adolf Hitler for pursuing an offensive that has killed more than 25,000 people — mostly women and children — according to the Gaza health ministry. Relentless Zionist attacks have left much of the besieged Palestinian territory in ruins and starved of food. The entity claims its actions are aimed at destroying Hamas after its armed wing attacked communities and military bases in the entity's south. About 1,400 people died in the attack or as a re-

sult of Zionist attempts to regain control of the areas targeted by Hamas.

Tensions over trade

Analysts note widespread anger in Iran's official and semi-official media about Turkey's continuing trade and diplomatic relations with the Zionist entity. These differences add to existing tensions between the two regional powers in Syria — where they supported opposing camps in the country's civil war — and in the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia over the Nagorno-Karabakh enclave.

"Relations between Turkey and Iran have always been complex and multidimensional," Istanbul's Centre for Iranian Studies director Hakki Uygur told AFP. "Turkey has always able to manage it, to somehow to find a middle ground. I think a similar thing will happen now."

Raisi said he hoped to sign "important documents" that could eventually boost annual trade between the two neighbors to \$30 billion. Analysts estimate the current level at \$6 billion.

Containing the conflict

Iran and Turkey share a 535-kilometre (330-mile) border and a long history of both close economic relations and diplomatic feuds. Turkey backed rebel efforts to topple Iranian- and Russian-backed President Bashar al-Assad during Syria's civil war.



ANKARA: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (right) shakes hands with Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi (left) during a welcoming ceremony on January 24, 2024. — AFP

Iran grew increasingly anxious as Turkey supplied arms to help Azerbaijan beat back Armenian separatists from Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020 and then again last year. Tehran fears that Baku's resurgence in the Caucasus region could feed the separatist ambitions of Iran's large ethnic Azerbaijani minority.

Analysts believe the Gaza war has helped put regional disputes on the back

burner and force the two leaders to seek a joint approach to the Middle East. "It is possible that Raisi and Erdogan might declare some symbolic measure about Palestine out of the meeting," said Clemson University professor Arash Azizi. "But I think their focus will be mostly on how to contain the conflict and make sure it doesn't expand further, something that Ankara and Tehran both want." — AFP

Iraq rebukes US over strikes on Iran-backed groups

BAGHDAD: Iraq accused the United States of contributing to a "reckless escalation" of violence in the region after American air strikes targeted Iran-backed groups in the country on Wednesday. The pre-dawn air raid came against an already explosive regional backdrop, fueled by the war in Gaza between Washington's ally the Zionist entity and the Iranian-backed Palestinian Islamist movement Hamas.

Pentagon chief Lloyd Austin said US forces had carried out "necessary and proportionate strikes" against "three facilities used by the Iranian-backed Ketaeb Hezbollah militia group (the Hezbollah Brigades) and other Iran-affiliated groups in Iraq".

"These precision strikes are in direct response to a series of escalatory attacks against US and coalition personnel in Iraq and Syria by Iranian-sponsored militias," he said, referring to the US-led coalition against the Islamic State (IS) jihadist group.

US-led coalition forces in Iraq and Syria have been targeted in more than 150 attacks since mid-October, many of them claimed by the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, a loose alliance of Iran-linked groups that oppose US support for the Zionist entity in the Gaza conflict.

US forces have carried out a number of air strikes against the groups they hold responsible, drawing a backlash from Iraq which has demanded the coalition's withdrawal, accusing it of overstepping its mission to assist the campaign against IS jihadists.

"This unacceptable act undermines years of co-

operation, blatantly violates Iraq's sovereignty and contributes to a reckless escalation... at a time when the region is already grappling with the danger of expanding conflict," said a spokesman for Iraqi Prime Minister Mohamed Shia al-Sudani. "We will treat these operations as acts of aggression and take necessary actions to preserve the lives and dignity of Iraqis," added Yehia Rasool, the Iraqi leader's spokesman for military affairs.

'Flagrant violation'

His comments were echoed by Iraqi National Security Adviser Qassem al-Araji who said the pre-dawn strikes were another "flagrant violation of Iraq's sovereignty" and "do not help bring calm". "The US side should pile on pressure for a halt to the (the Zionist entity's) offensive in Gaza rather than targeting and bombing the bases of an Iraqi national body," Araji said in a post on X, formerly Twitter, referring to the Hashed al-Shaabi.

According to Iraqi sources, the US strikes targeted the Hezbollah Brigades, a group affiliated with the Hashed al-Shaabi (Popular Mobilization force), an alliance of Iran-backed former paramilitary groups now integrated in Iraq's regular armed forces.

They hit sites in the Jurf al-Sakhr area, south of Baghdad, as well as in the Al-Qaim area on the border with Syria. One person was killed and others were wounded in the bombardments of the Al-Qaim sector, the Hashed said in a statement. Initially, an interior ministry official and a source in the Hashed reported two dead and two wounded in that attack.

After previous US strikes, the Iraqi prime minister has called for the US-led coalition to leave, saying the deployment must end to ensure Iraq's security. There are roughly 2,500 US troops in Iraq and some 900 in neighboring Syria.



This file photo shows a view of the Ain al-Assad air base hosting US forces in Iraq in the western Anbar province. — AFP

Drones targeted

The US military said the latest strikes targeted Hezbollah Brigades "headquarters, storage and training locations for rocket, missile and one-way attack UAV (drone) capabilities". Classified as a "terrorist" group by Washington and subject to US sanctions, the Brigades have already been targeted by US strikes in recent weeks. The group has publicly supported the Islamic Resistance in Iraq.

Late on Tuesday, several drones targeted an airbase in Iraq hosting US troops, causing injuries and damage, a US military official said. "Multiple attack drones were launched" at the Ain al-Assad base in Anbar province, west of Baghdad, a US military official told AFP, speaking on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the subject. "Latest reports include injuries and damage to infrastructure," said the official, adding he did not have further details as yet. — AFP

More than 39 dead in central China fire

BEIJING: At least 39 people died and nine were receiving treatment for injuries Wednesday after a fire broke out at a store in the central Chinese province of Jiangxi, state media reported. "At 3:24 pm (0724 GMT) on January 24, a fire broke out on the below-ground level at a store ... in Xinyu, Jiangxi," the country's state broadcaster CCTV reported.

"Up until now, the accident has resulted in the death of 39 people, injuries to nine people, and others are still trapped," state broadcaster CCTV reported just after 8:00 pm local time (1200 GMT). The report did not specify a precise cause of the fire, or how many people were still in danger.

Chinese President Xi Jinping called for "resolute containment" of deadly accidents in the country, in a statement made after the fire. Xi "issued important instructions ... requiring resolute containment of the frequent occurrence of various safety accidents to ensure the security of people's lives and property and overall social stability", CCTV reported.

Video footage released by CCTV of the scene showed several fire trucks and other emergency response vehicles lined up across the street from a row of businesses. State-backed outlet The Global Times posted a statement by an "emergency command" in the city, which had been set up by local officials after the fire broke out. "At present, on-site search and rescue work is still ongoing, and the cause of the accident is also being investigated," the statement said. — AFP

Amir assigns PM to act as Deputy...

Continued from Page 1

HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad, in which the premier expressed gratitude to HH the Amir for appointing him as Deputy Amir, promising to take on the role with integrity, thanking HH the Amir for the valued trust.

Under the constitution, to become Deputy Amir, the prime minister must take the constitutional oath in the National Assembly. During his time as Dep-

uty Amir, he cannot head the government nor take part in its meetings, for which the defense minister has been appointed. He also cannot attend Assembly sessions. The appointment of the prime minister as Deputy Amir has no precedence in the country's political history and was necessitated because no crown prince has been appointed.

HH Sheikh Mishal took the constitutional oath to become Amir on Dec 20 and has one year from that date to name a crown prince. Under the constitution, he will name a crown prince who must be approved by the National Assembly. If for any reason, the Assembly rejects the appointment, HH the Amir is required to name three people from whom the Assembly will elect one.

Saudi Arabia's 32 million people, who have few ways to imbibe unless they are willing to travel abroad.

Vision 2030 seeks to transform the world's biggest crude exporter into a business, tourism and sports hub, laying the groundwork for a post-oil economy. Wednesday's news came as Saudi Arabia increasingly competes with its neighbors, especially Dubai in the United Arab Emirates, for foreign investment and tourism dollars. This month, for example, authorities implemented a rule requiring multinational firms to set up regional headquarters in Saudi Arabia or lose out on government contracts.

Alcohol is available in myriad hotels, restaurants and bars in Dubai. In neighboring Qatar, alcohol is served in licensed hotels and restaurants to non-Muslims over 21 years old. Last year, Saudi Arabia was granted hosting rights for Expo 2030 and the World Cup in 2034, further fueling speculation that the alcohol ban might be lifted, or at least weakened with carve-outs in places like NEOM, a planned \$500 billion futuristic megacity.

But given that alcohol is forbidden in Islam, the issue remains deeply sensitive in the country that is home to the religion's holiest sites in the cities of Makkah and Madinah. Under Saudi law, penalties for consumption or possession of alcohol can include fines, jail time, public flogging and deportation for unauthorized foreigners. Saudi officials had until Wednesday dismissed suggestions of any major policy change. "The short answer is, we are going to continue with our current laws," deputy tourism minister Princess Haifa Al-Saud said when asked directly about the issue at the World Economic Forum in Davos in 2022. — AFP

Zionists hit UN shelter, besiege...

Continued from Page 1

OCHA said about 18,000 people uprooted from their homes were reported to be at Nasser Hospital alone. An AFP journalist saw Palestinians who fled Khan Yunis arriving in the southern town of Rafah on the backs of pick-up trucks along with their belongings. Gaza hospitals had already received the bodies of at least 125 people killed overnight, the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory said.

"Dozens of (Zionist) tanks are surrounding Nasser Hospital from all sides, except for a corridor for displaced people to leave," the Hamas government said. The Palestinian Red Crescent Society said Al-Amal hospital was also surrounded. The Zionist entity has carried out a relentless military offensive that has killed at least 25,700 people in Gaza, about 70 percent of them women and children.

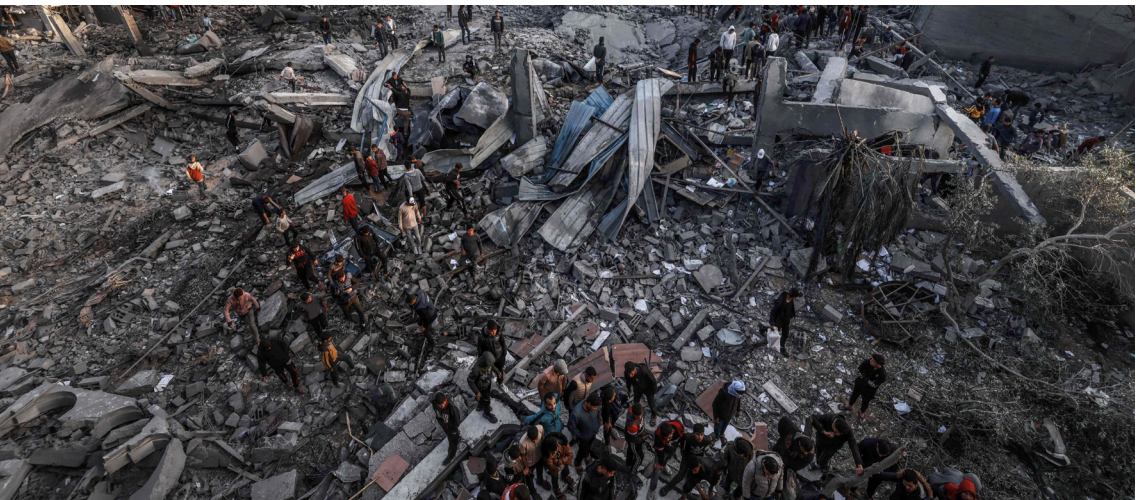
The government of Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has come under mounting pressure from the Zionist public to end the war. That pressure intensified after 24 soldiers were killed Monday in the army's dead-

liest single day since it launched ground operations in Gaza. The military said 21 of them were reservists killed "when a squad of terrorists surprised the force" with rocket-propelled grenade fire.

Zionist army chief Herzli Halevi said "they fell in battle near the border fence during a defensive operation in the area separating (Zionist) communities from Gaza". Citing Zionist officials, the New York Times said the operation was to demolish part of a Palestinian neighborhood as part of a plan to create a "buffer zone" inside Gaza along the Zionist border.

In Gaza City, people displaced by the war said they were stuck in a new conflict zone without provisions. "They besieged us in the camp and brought us here, and even here, the shelling continued," Umm Dahud al-Kafarna, originally from Beit Hanun, told AFP TV. "They have besieged us for six days, leaving us with nothing to eat or drink while bombing us from the air, sea and tanks."

Zionist media reported that a far-right fringe group had attempted to disrupt aid deliveries at the Kerem Shalom border crossing to Gaza, but it was unclear whether their protest caused any delays. US President Joe Biden's Middle East envoy Brett McGurk is in the region for talks aimed at brokering a new deal to free the remaining captives in exchange for a pause in fighting. —AFP



GAZA: Palestinians stand amidst the rubble of a mosque and buildings which collapsed during Zionist bombardment around Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on Jan 24, 2024. — AFP



CONCORD, United States: New Hampshire residents cast their ballots in the state's primary on January 23, 2024. — AFP photos



NASHUA, United States: Republican presidential hopeful and former US President Donald Trump speaks during an Election Night Party in Nashua, New Hampshire, on Jan 23, 2024.

Trump-Biden rematch looms

Trump's New Hampshire win means he's likely to secure Republican presidential nomination

MANCHESTER, United States: Get ready for round two: Donald Trump is set to face off with President Joe Biden for the White House once again after winning the New Hampshire primary, promising 10 months of extraordinary tension and bitterness. The only remaining challenger for the Republican presidential nomination, Nikki Haley, vowed to fight on — but her defeat on Tuesday left her with no realistic chance of chasing down the 77-year-old former president.

Trump previewed the divisive rhetoric to come in the campaign for November's cliffhanger election with an angry victory speech that attacked Haley for having a "very bad night" and even lashed out at her dress. Even Biden, 81, accepted it was "now clear" that he faced a rematch with Trump — one that polling suggests many Americans don't want — and warned that the future of American democracy itself rode on the result of the election in November. Haley had hoped for a major upset in the northeastern state, but Trump — her former boss when she was UN ambassador during his chaotic administration — won by around 54 percent to 43 percent, with some 91 percent of votes counted. Having crushed his rivals in the first vote of

the campaign in Iowa, Trump said that when the primary contest reaches Haley's home state of South Carolina in February "we're going to win easily."

The twice-indicted former president kept to his hard-right messaging, with no hint of reaching out to the more moderate voters who supported Haley, some of whom were concerned by the 91 criminal indictments facing Trump. At one point swearing on prime-time TV, Trump said the United States was a "failing country" and loaded his speech with ominous warnings about immigration and false claims about winning the 2020 election.

High stakes

President Biden responded by saying: "It is now clear that Donald Trump will be the Republican nominee." "And my message to the country is the stakes could not be higher. Our Democracy. Our personal freedoms — from the right to choose to the right to vote," Biden said in a statement.

His campaign had even started selling merchandise for a rematch, including a t-shirt with the slogan: "Together, we will beat Trump. Again." Haley insisted the race was "far from over" and told supporters that

Democrats actually want to run against right-wing populist Trump due to his record of sowing "chaos."

"They know Trump is the only Republican in the country who Joe Biden can defeat," said Haley, 52, who has recently stepped up attacks on Trump as showing signs of being cognitively impaired. But no Republican has ever won both opening contests and not ultimately secured the party's nomination. "I think it's a two-person race now between Trump and Biden," Keith Nahigian, a veteran of six presidential campaigns and former member of Trump's transition team, told AFP.

US media said that the New Hampshire results did hold hope for Biden, despite recent polling showing him neck and neck or even behind Trump in a rematch. Not only did Trump lose nearly half the Republican vote despite effectively running as an incumbent who is known to voters, but his failure to win over independents and floating voters gave succor to Democrats.

'Good night for Biden'

"This was actually a fairly good night for Joe Biden," Trump's former press secretary Kayleigh

McEnany told conservative Fox News. Trump responded by ridiculing McEnany as a "RINO" (Republican in name only) and saying: "Save your advice for Nikki." New Hampshire was markedly more Haley-friendly than the next states she will face if she stays in. A once crowded field of 14 Republican candidates narrowed down in recent months before turning into a one-on-one match-up after Florida Governor Ron DeSantis dropped out after Iowa.

"I think it's gonna be a wipeout for Biden. He's gone," said supporter Luis Ferre, 72, who traveled from New York to be at Trump's election night party at a Nashua hotel. Biden, meanwhile, cruised to victory in an unofficial Democratic primary in New Hampshire, giving him a symbolic boost. He had not appeared on the ballot after he moved the first primary of the calendar to South Carolina, but the northeastern state went ahead with the vote anyway. However, voters "wrote-in" Biden for the win. Biden is focusing on hot-button issues including abortion and portraying Trump as a threat to democracy, as his economic message fails to resound with inflation-hit voters. — AFP

3-year drought persists in Spain's Catalonia

VALLIRANA, Spain: Although Atlantic storms regularly sweep through Spain they always seem to peter out before reaching Catalonia, which is experiencing its worst drought in living memory and may soon have to restrict water use.

Ghost villages that were flooded to create reservoirs in this northeastern region are once again emerging because water reserves have run so low. And when the reservoirs fall below 16 percent of their capacity — which seems imminent — the region will declare a state of emergency.

Barcelona and its metropolitan area would likely be the most affected in a move that could reduce water pressure in the homes of its five million residents to bring daily consumption down from 200 liters per person to 160. In Vallirana, a village about half an hour's drive from Barcelona, the 16,000 residents are already familiar with the rigors of reducing usage.

"You can't do the washing up, you can't wash your clothes by putting a load of washing on... you can't even go to the loo because there's no water. It's quite hard to live like this in 2024," said Alex Fonseca as he stood by a water tanker filling up several eight-liter jerrycans to cover his household use. The lack of

rainfall has dried up several wells in the village and turned others to mud, and there are many areas that no longer have access to clean drinking water. "In the last two decades, we've never experienced anything like this," Mayor Eva Martinez said.

Crops take hit

Rainfall has been lower than the average in Catalonia for the past three years, with the drought lasting more than twice as long as the previous dry spell of 2008, the regional government says. Global warming is increasing both the frequency and the intensity of droughts that are having an impact on food security that could continue even if the world manages to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial emissions.

"Last year, this area lost 100 percent of its grain crops, 90 percent of its fodder and its olive oil," Francesc Bancells, a spokesman for the regional farmers' union Unio de Pagesos, told AFP. People versed in the ancient medieval art of water dowsing to find underground water sources are now in heavy demand, says 78-year-old Enric Colom, who has spent a third of his life detecting wells with divining rods and a pendulum.

Part of the problem is that rural areas have been largely abandoned and are no longer being managed, so that uncontrolled undergrowth needlessly absorbs water, adding to the shortages. "An unmanaged forest can retain all of the little rain that falls, meaning the water doesn't end up reaching the watersheds," said Joachim Englert, a German forestry engineer with BOSCAT, the Catalan federation of

forest owner associations, which helps manage the Sierra de Collserola mountain range near Barcelona.

Water-guzzling tourism

The Agua Es Vida "Water Is Life" NGO has denounced the regional authorities for failing to regulate tourism and continuing to host major events in Barcelona, both of which consume huge quantities of water. The Catalan government gives water to "farming, livestock, the hotel sector and cities without first thinking how much water we actually have. And this has brought us to the point of collapse," said a spokesman, Dante Maschio.

A project to ship water to Barcelona is under way, but this is little more than a stopgap, said Xavier Sanchez-Vila, head of the civil and environmental engineering department at Catalonia's Polytechnic University (UPC).

During the last drought 15 years ago, boats "brought 20 million liters" of water to the region, but today it needs "a billion liters per day. So, they are only bringing in 2.0 percent of what we need", he said. "And it is very, very expensive."

Catalonia has built desalination plants and adopted other measures but Sanchez-Vila says it is crucial to improve the use of both wastewater and groundwater resources. The other Spanish region struggling with a severe drought is Andalusia, where regional president Juan Manuel Moreno has warned there will be restrictions in cities like Seville and Malaga in summer if the lack of rain persists. "We need 30 days of rain. But real rain, not just drizzle, at least 30 straight days of it," he said. — AFP



In this photo by Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, healthcare providers pose for a photo with Aissam Dam, 11-year-old patient who received the gene therapy treatment (center) and his father Youssef Dam (right center). — AFP

Deaf boy can now hear after gene treatment

WASHINGTON: His father's voice, the sounds of passing cars and scissors clipping his hair: An 11-year-old boy is hearing for the first time in his life after receiving a breakthrough gene therapy. The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) which carried out the treatment — a first in the United States — said in a statement Tuesday the milestone represents hope for patients around the world with hearing loss caused by genetic mutations.

Aissam Dam was born "profoundly deaf" because of a highly rare abnormality in a single gene. "Gene therapy for hearing loss is something that we physicians and scientists in the world of hearing loss have been working toward for over 20 years, and it is finally here," said surgeon John Germiller, director of clinical research for CHOP's otolaryngology division. "While the gene therapy we performed in our patient was to correct an abnormality in one, very rare gene, these studies may open the door for future use for some of the over 150 other genes that cause childhood hearing loss."

In patients like Aissam, a defective gene prevents the production of otoferlin, a protein necessary for the "hair cells" of the inner ear to be able to convert sound vibrations into chemical signals that are sent to the brain. Otoferlin gene defects are highly rare, accounting for 1 - 8 percent of hearing loss present from birth.

On October 4, 2023, he underwent a surgical procedure that involved partly lifting his eardrum and then injecting a harmless virus, which had been modified to transport working copies of the otoferlin gene, into the internal fluid of his cochlea. As a result, the hair cells began making the missing protein and functioning properly.

Almost four months since receiving the treatment in one ear, Aissam's hearing has improved to the point he only has mild-to-moderate hearing loss and he is "literally hearing sound for the first time in his life," said the statement. The New York Times reported that despite being able to hear, Aissam, who was born in Morocco and later moved to Spain, may never learn to talk, as the brain's window for acquiring speech closes around the age of five. The US Food and Drug Administration, which greenlighted the study, wanted to start the research on older children first, for safety reasons. The trial, sponsored by Akouos, Inc., a wholly owned subsidiary of Eli Lilly and Company, is one of several underway or about to start in the United States, Europe and China, where a handful of other children have already been reportedly cured. — AFP



This photograph taken on January 15, 2024 shows a kayak left on the dry soil next to the low water-level reservoir of Sau. — AFP photos

Mali gold mine collapse kills more than 70

BAMAKO, Mali: More than 70 people have been killed after a tunnel collapsed at a Malian gold mining site last week, local sources told AFP Wednesday, the latest disaster in a region prone to mining accidents. Mali, which is among the world's poorest countries, is one of Africa's leading gold producers.

Gold mining sites are regularly the scene of deadly landslides and authorities struggle to control artisanal mining of the precious metal. "It started with a noise. The earth started to shake," Oumar Sidibe, an official for gold miners in the southwestern town of Kangaba, told AFP, of the incident on Friday.

"There were over 200 gold miners in the field. The search is over now. We've found 73 bodies," he said. The same toll was given by a local councilor. Mali's ministry of mines in a statement on Tuesday had announced the death of several miners but did not give precise figures.

The government offered its "deepest condolences to the grieving families and to the Malian people". It also called on "communities living near mining sites and gold miners to scrupulously respect safety requirements and to work only within the perimeters dedicated to gold panning".

Dangerous business

Gold mining in the Sahel region is a dangerous business. In February 2022, at least 59 people were killed in southwestern Burkina Faso after the explosion of a stockpile of dynamite at an artisanal gold mining site. Mining accidents are also regularly reported in Guinea, Senegal and western Mali.



GIRONA: Spanish dowsers Enric Colom and Lluís Sarsanedes Bosch (right) show how they search for water with pendulums and rods in a field in Sant Feliu de Pallerols near Girona on January 15, 2024.

Mali produced 72.2 tons of gold in 2022 and the metal contributed 25 percent of the national budget, 75 percent of export earnings and 10 percent of GDP, the then minister of mines Lamine Seydou Traore said in March last year. Since taking power in 2020, the military leaders in Mali have pledged to restore sovereignty and enable the country to benefit from its natural wealth. It adopted a new mining code in August, enabling the state to take up to a 30-percent stake in new projects.

The government has said the move should bring in at least 500 billion CFA francs (\$830 million) to the annual state budget. Mali's mining sector is dominated by foreign groups, including Canada's Barrick Gold and B2Gold, Australia's Resolute Mining and Britain's Hummingbird Resources, which continue to operate despite the political instability that has plagued the country for years. But artisanal mines also continue to flourish and attract thousands of gold miners. — AFP

THURSDAY, JANUARY 25, 2024

Business

QatarEnergy: Red Sea attacks
‘may impact’ gas shipments

EU says attacks cause 22% drop in Red Sea traffic

DOHA: Qatar’s liquefied natural gas (LNG) deliveries may be delayed by attacks in the Red Sea, QatarEnergy warned on Wednesday, stressing that production had not been impacted. The state-owned giant confirmed in a statement that “Qatar’s LNG production continues uninterrupted, and our commitment to ensuring the reliable supply of LNG to our customers remains unwavering”.

“While the ongoing developments in the Red Sea area may impact the scheduling of some deliveries as they take alternative routes, LNG shipments from Qatar are being managed with our valued buyers,” it added. Yemen’s Iran-backed Houthi rebels began strikes in the Red Sea in November, saying they were targeting the Zionist-linked vessels in support of Palestinians in Gaza, which has been ravaged by the Zionist war on Gaza. To avoid the conflict, rather than use the key route between Asia and European markets, which normally carries about 12 percent of global maritime trade, some shipping companies are now taking a major detour around southern Africa.

Earlier this month, Qatar’s Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani said LNG shipments would be affected, like other merchant

shipping, by the Houthi strikes and called the crisis in the Red Sea “the most dangerous escalation” in the region because of its impact on global trade.

His intervention came amid reports of at least five LNG vessels operated by Qatar stopping en route to the Red Sea. US and British forces carried out a first wave of strikes against the Iran-backed rebel group earlier this month and followed that with further joint strikes on Tuesday. The Houthis have since declared US and British interests to be legitimate targets as well.

Maritime traffic through the Red Sea shipping route has fallen by 22 percent in a month due to attacks on international vessels by Yemen’s Houthi rebels, the EU’s trade commissioner said Tuesday. “That decrease should be bigger now that shipping companies are rerouting their vessels around the Cape of Good Hope,” Valdis Dombrovskis told journalists. The Red Sea is vital for international, and particularly European, trade, with Dombrovskis saying that up to 15 percent of global maritime traffic usually passes through the route. “The broader economic impact, impact on consumer prices and the EU economy in general, will depend very much on the length of this crisis,” Dombrovskis said. — AFP



HODEIDA, Yemen: Workers gather on the deck of the tanker FSO Safer (left) as they get ready to transfer oil to the UN purchased vessel Nautica, in the Red Sea off the coast of Yemen’s contested western province of Hodeida on July 24, 2023. — AFP

EU tools up to
protect key
tech from China

BRUSSELS: The European Union unveiled Wednesday plans to strengthen the bloc’s economic security including measures to protect sensitive technology from falling into the hands of geopolitical rivals like China.

Brussels has bolstered its armory of trade restrictions to tackle what it deems to be risks to European economic security, following Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine and global trade tensions. The fallout from the war in Ukraine hit Europe particularly hard, forcing the bloc to find alternative energy sources. Now, it wants to avoid a similar over-reliance on China, which dominates in green technology production and critical raw materials.

On Wednesday, EU officials outlined an economic security package containing five initiatives, including toughening rules on the screening of foreign direct investment (FDI) and launching discussions on co-ordination in the area of export controls. The EU has already proposed new rules that it says are necessary to keep the bloc competitive during the global transition to clean technology and to bring more



BERLIN: ECB President Christine Lagarde and President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen arrive for a memorial event to honor the late politician Wolfgang Schäuble at the German lower house of parliament Bundestag in Berlin. — AFP

production to Europe. “In this competition, Europe cannot just be the playground for bigger players, we need to be able to play ourselves,” said the EU’s most senior competition official, Margrethe Vestager.

“By doing what we are proposing to do, we can de-risk our economic interdependencies,” she told reporters in Brussels. Wednesday’s package is part of the EU’s focus on de-risking but not decoupling from China, pushed strongly by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen.

“The change in EU-China relations has been the driving force of this embrace of economic security, which is something extremely new for the EU,” said Mathieu Duchatel, director of international studies at the Institut Montaigne think tank. EU officials also pushed back on claims the package had been watered down and that some of the initiatives would kick in too late. One of the initiatives is to revise the EU’s regulation on screening FDI, but others recommend further discussions, raising concerns that action could come too late.

For example, the commission said it wanted to promote further discussions on how to better support research and development of technologies that can be used for civil and defense purposes. The EU also wants all member states to establish screening mechanisms, which could later lead to investments being blocked if they are believed to pose a risk.

“I would not agree that the package is watered down,” the EU’s trade commissioner, Valdis Dombrovskis, said. He later said the EU wanted “to focus on riskier transactions and spend less time and resources on low-risk ones”. The negotiations are likely to prove a delicate balancing act for the commission. Investment and export control decisions are up to national governments, therefore it must avoid overstepping its mark. The package also recommends looking at outbound investments since the bloc currently has zero measures in place to scrutinize them. — AFP

Did central banks
break inflation?
Many have doubts

PARIS: Central bankers who orchestrated the wave of interest rate hikes over the past two years, hoping to avoid a painful inflationary spiral, are now facing an uncomfortable question: Were their moves helpful? The debate is heating up as European Central Bank policymakers meet this week, with many observers now expecting its benchmark lending rates to start coming down by this summer.

Governors at the US Federal Reserve are also weighing cuts for later this year, fanning hopes that the price surges seen in the wake of COVID-19 lockdowns and Russia’s war on Ukraine have been brought under control.

But some economists argue that the spikes were only temporary—and that inflation would have eased anyway, whether or not central banks tried to contain it with tighter monetary policy. “It was not because of Fed action that the prices of cars, oil, food, or the host of other goods affected by supply-side interruptions came down, but because the underlying shortages were at least partially resolved,” said Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz. Higher rates, however, are often the tool of choice by central bankers to increase borrowing costs for business, which can often spark an increase in jobless rates.

Households, meanwhile, are suddenly confronted with higher mortgage and housing costs, leading them to curb spending and drive down inflation through a fall of demand.

For Stiglitz and other critics, inflation was not being driven by increased demand—which can be influenced more directly by the cost of credit—but by supply constraints due to COVID and the Ukraine war. “In many ways the Fed made things worse. It was more difficult to make the investments required to alleviate shortages,” Stiglitz wrote in an essay for The American Prospect this month.

Alan Blinder, an economist at Princeton and a former Fed vice chairman, agreed that global economic shocks—by nature temporary—stoked the inflation they have now eased even as economic growth on both sides of the Atlantic remains relatively robust. “What the central banks did went in the right direction for sure, but it was of secondary importance,” Blinder told AFP. “The irony is that they got more blame than they deserved for letting inflation get out of control, and now they are getting more credit than they deserve for bringing it down,” he said.

Other economists counter that it was massive COVID stimulus spending, from direct payouts to unemployment and business support, that flooded economies with money likely to drive prices higher.

That view was countered in June 2022 by Fed chairman Jerome Powell, who discounted the impact of government pandemic aid but insisted nonetheless that sharply higher interest rates were necessary—even if it meant a recession. For Stiglitz, Powell and his supporters were effectively prescribing economic pain for millions: “By killing the economy, there would be no excess demand, and by definition (in their minds) no inflation,” he wrote.

Some proponents of the rate hikes argue that regardless of the source of inflation, unless central bankers showed they were serious about tackling it, expectations of persistent and widespread price increases would only grow. “Without a tightening, economic agents could have anticipated inflation would have stayed high,” Benoit Mojon, head of economic analysis at the Bank of International Settlements, wrote in a December report. Those price hikes could have rippled throughout the economy “and resulted in higher wages”, he wrote. — AFP

Alaska Airlines
finds many loose
bolts on Boeings

NEW YORK: Boeing came under renewed pressure Tuesday as the head of Alaska Airlines said inspections carried out after a dangerous incident had found many loose bolts on its 737 MAX 9 aircraft. The Federal Aviation Administration grounded 171 Boeing 737 MAX 9 aircraft following the incident on January 5th, when a panel blew off the Alaska Airlines plane mid-flight, leaving a hole in the fuselage and forcing an emergency landing.

The company’s chief executive Ben Minicucci told NBC News Tuesday that an in-house inspection of its Boeing 737 Max 9 fleet carried out after the incident had found that “many” of these aircraft had loose bolts. “I’m more than frustrated and disappointed. I am angry,” he said. “This happened to Alaska Airlines. It happened to our guests and happened to our people,” he added, calling on Boeing to “improve their quality programs in-house.” Earlier Tuesday, United Airlines cast doubt Tuesday on future orders and deliveries of Boeing 737s in the wake of the near-disaster, in which no people died or were seriously injured. In a conference call Tuesday, its chief financial officer Michael Leskinen said 31 out of the 107 aircraft United expects to take delivery of this year are Boeing 737 Max 9 aircraft. “It is unrealistic at this time to believe all of those aircraft will deliver as currently planned,” he said.

Alongside its MAX 9 orders, United also has 277 as-yet-uncertified Boeing 737 MAX 10 aircraft on order through the rest of the 2020s, and options to purchase 200 further aircraft, Leskinen told the conference call. “We also expect a reduction in orders and deliveries from Boeing in 2025,” he said, noting that orders of 737 MAX 10s would also likely be affected.

The MAX grounding was “the kind of straw that broke the camel’s back with believing that the MAX 10 will deliver on the schedule we had hoped for,” he said. “So we are working through an alternate plan,” he added. United’s shares finished up 5.3 percent on Tuesday, the first trading day after Monday’s strong fourth-quarter results were published. Boeing’s shares fell 1.6 percent, and slipped further into the red in after-hours trading. — AFP



LAGOS: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken (center) meets Nigerian artist Bruce Onobrakpeya (right) during his visit to the Nike Art Gallery in Lagos on January 24, 2024. — AFP

Blinken nudges Nigeria
on capital flows
for US businesses

LAGOS: Secretary of State Antony Blinken voiced hope Wednesday for greater US investment in Nigeria, but called on Africa’s largest economy to reassure investors that they can repatriate their funds. A day after meeting President Bola Tinubu in the capital Abuja, Blinken toured the commercial metropolis Lagos where he visited a complex of IT startups and inaugurated a new US space showcase American technology. Blinken’s motorcade passed through teeming streets of the city of more than 20 million before entering the sparkling complex of 21st Century Technologies, where he was shown Nigerian innovations in software and virtual reality. Hailing Nigerian ingenuity, Blinken said that the United States had a growing interest “in working with Nigeria, investing in Nigeria, partnering with Nigeria”.

But he added: “There are challenges that still need

to be met to make sure that this is the most inviting business environment possible.”

He said he spoke to Nigerian leaders about issues “including the ability to repatriate capital, including the ongoing challenge of rooting out corruption”.

Foreign businesses in Nigeria require permission from the central bank to return funds to their home countries. While the central bank has assured investors, businesses have complained about long delays in recent years as Nigeria’s foreign reserves dwindle as a result of a drop in global oil prices and Nigeria’s own crude production.

Foreign airlines, for example, have been complaining about the slow pace of resolving access to millions of dollars in profits they say are caught in Nigeria. In Abuja on Tuesday, Blinken also publicly raised the funds repatriation issue but praised economic reforms promised by Tinubu, who was elected last year. I know that President Tinubu is focused on these challenges, and we also welcome his very bold economic reforms to unify the currency and fuel subsidies,” Blinken told reporters at the presidential palace in Abuja. “We also recognize that, in the short term, these reforms have created pain for vulnerable communities,” he said. — AFP

Business

Impressive response from employees in NBK's 'Your Voice Matters 2023' survey

Response rate exceeds global average for employee engagement surveys

KUWAIT: Seeking to improving employee engagement, and to foster a positive organizational culture and workplace environment, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) held its third bank-wide Employee Engagement Survey called "Your Voice Matters 2023", where employees had the chance to provide their feedback about work environment at the bank.

The survey was first launched in 2018 for NBK Kuwait only, then the second survey in 2021 was expanded to include all international locations, furthering it this year to Group level by including employees in NBK Wealth Management, for the first time. NBK has partnered with a third-party organization "Willis Towers Watson" to ensure utmost confidentiality and give employees the freedom to express their opinions.

The aim of the survey is to measure employee engagement and satisfaction, and highlight NBK's key strengths and areas to improve, which helps make NBK a better workplace, and increase employee satisfaction and retention. It covers 21 main categories, with this year featuring two additional aspects namely 'Employee Wellbeing', Diversity & Inclusion'.

The survey that ran for 3 weeks in 4 languages attained a remarkable response rate at 86 percent, significantly higher than the global average response rate, showing high levels of pride and commitment to NBK as a great organization to work for, with the number of participants reaching 5,200 employees. It also achieved a high 'Sustainable Engagement' score of 84 percent for NBK Group, ahead of the global average rate for financial institutions, with main strengths being Learning & Development, Image and Reputation, and Employee Well-Being.

Other key highlights of the survey in-



Emad Al-Ablani

- The survey reflects our dedication to make NBK a better workplace
- We aimed to highlight NBK's key strengths and areas to improve

cluded 93 percent of employees expressing their pride to be associated with NBK, 96 percent stating they work beyond what is required to help it succeed, and 86 percent seeing that their work gives them a sense of personal accomplishment. In addition, 92 percent of employees said they fully support the values for which the Bank stands, and 84 percent believe

strongly its goals and objectives.

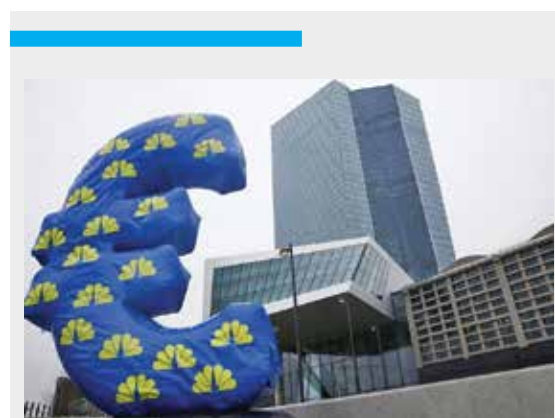
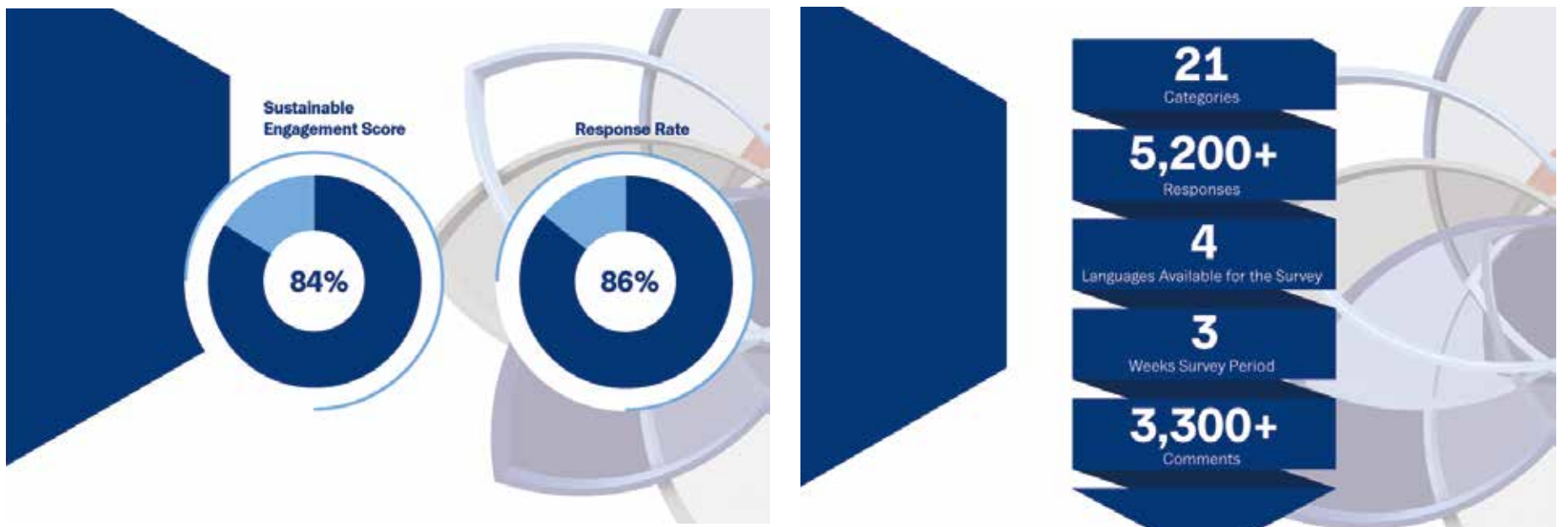
On this occasion, Emad Al-Ablani, Head of Group Human Resources at National Bank of Kuwait said, "Your Voice Matters survey is a great opportunity for our employees to play an active role in shaping the future of the work environment at NBK." "Our role is to listen to the opinions of our employees and work

with them to improve the work environment in the bank, reflecting our belief that every voice in NBK really matters and contributes to change," he noted. "The survey results are shared directly with the executive management, and we have started working on implementing the received feedback by a specialized team formed from different departments that works carefully to address the issues and suggestions raised in the survey," he explained. "This initiative reflects NBK's unwavering dedication to enhancing the work environment, by evaluating employees' opinions, interests and experiences, and taking decisions and actions accordingly," he added.

It is worth mention that NBK has taken many actions in response to employees' feedback received in the previous surveys; mainly including entitling

female employees to tickets payout for their spouse and children, allowing flexible working hours, enabling employees to benefit from annual leave balance in advance, and outsourcing the management of NBK Clinic to ensure high-quality healthcare services.

Regarding its human capital as the most valuable asset and an instrumental element for success and growth, NBK strives to attract and nurture high-caliber talent, and to create a diverse, inclusive and equitable workplace. It always focuses on employees' physical, mental, and financial well-being to thrive at work. As the leading organization in the banking sector, NBK stands out as the employer of choice for Kuwaiti talent, leading the entire private sector in terms of national labor ratio, while also enjoying the highest retention rates of Kuwaiti employees.



Decline in eurozone business activity slows in January

BRUSSELS: Eurozone business activity fell in January for the eighth straight month, but the rate of decline slowed from December, a closely-watched survey showed Wednesday. The HCOB Flash Eurozone purchasing managers' index (PMI) published by S&P Global registered a figure of 47.9 in January from 47.6 in December. It is the smallest decline since July last year. A figure below 50 indicates contraction.

"The reading nevertheless suggests that the eurozone's deepest contraction since 2013 (if early pandemic months are excluded) has persisted into the new year," S&P Global said. While there are worries over the impact of strikes in the Red Sea by Yemeni rebels on global shipping, the survey found despite disruptions, "manufacturing input costs continued to fall on average".

Cyrus de la Rubia, chief economist at Hamburg Commercial Bank, said the attacks had made "discernible impacts on supply chains". But he pointed to industry reports showing that this time, "businesses are not caught off guard like they have been previously, having learned from past disruptions".

The coronavirus pandemic that began in 2020 exposed many weaknesses in supply chains worldwide, forcing governments and businesses to think differently to avoid similar issues in the future. But weaknesses persist in the EU's economic powerhouses of France and Germany. In France, the EU's second-biggest economy, manufacturing and services sectors recorded steepening contractions as output fell at the sharpest rate since September. Business activity also slumped at a faster rate in Germany, the bloc's biggest economy. De la Rubia said the contraction in output was more pronounced in France than in Germany, a major exporter which may have benefited from a pick-up in external demand. — AFP

China to cut amount banks hold in reserve to boost lending

BEIJING: China on Wednesday said it would next month cut the amount banks must hold in reserve in order to boost lending, state media reported, as officials look to reignite stuttering growth. The decision comes with the world's second-largest economy facing multiple headwinds, including a prolonged crisis in the property sector, sluggish domestic consumption and weakening foreign demand. "People's Bank of China Governor Pan Gongsheng said at a press

ASML profits soar, positive signs for chips despite trade spats

THE HAGUE: Dutch tech giant ASML, which supplies chipmaking machines to the semiconductor industry, reported Wednesday a rise in annual net profit despite a high-tech trade spat between China and the West. The firm painted a bright future, especially in 2025, as the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) was poised to fuel a boom in demand for semiconductors.

Net profits came in at 7.8 billion euros (\$8.5 billion) for 2023, the firm said in its annual results, compared to 5.6 billion euros the previous year. "The semiconductor industry continues to work through the bottom of the cycle," CEO Peter Wennink said in a statement.

"Although our customers are still not certain about the shape of the semiconductor market recovery this year, there are some positive signs," he added. Traders cheered the results, with ASML stock soaring around seven percent at the opening bell, outperforming the wider Amsterdam market, which was up 1.5 percent. ASML is one of the world's leading manufacturers of equipment to make state-of-the-art semiconductor chips, which power everything from mobile phones to

cars. "Without high-end logic, there's no AI. Without high-end memory, there's no AI. Without ASML, there is no high-end logic or high-end memory," said chief financial officer Roger Dassen.

"It's very very clear that the AI development will have a very significant contribution to our business in 2025." But the semiconductor industry has become a geopolitical battleground as the West seeks to restrict China's access over fears the chips could be used for advanced weaponry.

ASML announced earlier this month that it had been blocked from exporting "a small number" of its advanced machines to China, amid reports of US pressure on the Dutch government. At the time, Beijing lashed out at what it called "bullying behavior" by Washington, adding that it "seriously violates international trade rules". China has described the restrictions placed on exports as "technological terrorism". Amid the trade tensions with China, there are also concerns Beijing may introduce its own export controls on gallium and germanium—two rare earth metals critical for the manufacture of semiconductors.

ASML has shrugged off the financial impact of the geopolitical headwinds, with top officials saying the firm is well placed to weather the storm. The firm said that 29 percent of its sales came from China, more than double the percentage of last year (14 percent). The impact of the restrictions on the Chinese business was expected to be around 10-15 percent of the 2023 sales, ASML said.—AFP



ASML had faced restrictions in exporting advanced machines to China due to US pressure on the Dutch government.

conference of the State Council Information Office on January 24 that the reserve requirement ratio (RRR) will be lowered by 0.5 percentage points on February 5," state broadcaster CCTV reported.

The move will provide "one trillion yuan (\$140 billion) of liquidity to the market", it added. China last cut its RRR in September, by 0.25 percentage points to around 7.4 percent. The latest decision is "another step in the right direction, but monetary policy by itself is not enough to boost economic momentum". Zhiwei Zhang, President and Chief Economist at Pinpoint Asset Management, told AFP. "A more proactive fiscal stance focusing on consumption is more important and effective," said Zhang.

"The allocation of fiscal resources to consumption instead of investment is critical, as China faces deflationary pressure." The central bank's governor also

said Wednesday that more policies to offer support for the country's struggling property sector would soon be announced.

China last year recorded one of its worst annual rates of growth since 1990, dampening hopes for a rapid economic recovery following the end of draconian COVID restrictions in late 2022. The country's gross domestic product expanded 5.2 percent to hit 126 trillion yuan (\$17.8 trillion) in 2023, national statistics authorities revealed last week. The reading was an improvement on the three percent recorded in 2022, when zero-COVID weighed heavily on activity, but it also marked the weakest performance since 1990, excluding the pandemic years. China's economy enjoyed an initial post-pandemic rebound, but ran out of steam within months as a lack of confidence among households and businesses hit consumption.—AFP

UK says Royal Mail delivery obligation 'unsustainable'

LONDON: An obligation that Royal Mail delivers letters six days per week risks becoming "unsustainable", a UK regulator said Wednesday as it proposed less frequent service. Communications watchdog Ofcom proposed that the former state-monopoly cut delivery to five days, or even three days per week, potentially saving the company hundreds of millions of pounds.

Its conclusions followed a report last year by British MPs that showed Royal Mail had "systemically failed" to meet its delivery requirement, as it prioritizes parcels in the age of the internet. Ofcom on Wednesday said "the universal postal service risks becoming unsustainable as people send fewer letters and receive more parcels, meaning reform is necessary to secure... long-term future" of the postal operator set up more than 500 years ago.

The regulator proposed "reducing the number of letter delivery days in the service from six to five or three", adding that this "would require government and parliament to change primary legislation".

Ofcom estimated that Royal Mail could save up to £200 million (\$255 million) if deliveries of letters were reduced to five days—and as much as £650 million for a reduction to three days.

The watchdog noted that other European countries had reduced the frequency of delivery or extended delivery times for letters—including Sweden in 2018, Belgium twice since 2020, and Norway and Denmark twice each since 2016. Ofcom will consult on its proposals, which include also suggestions on prices paid to send letters, before providing an update in the summer.

"Postal workers are part of the fabric of our society and are critical to communities up and down the country," Ofcom chief executive Melanie Dawes said Wednesday. "But we're sending half as many letters as we did in 2011, and receiving many more parcels. The universal service hasn't changed since then, it's getting out of date and will become unsustainable if we don't take action," she added.

Royal Mail's universal service obligation (USO) stipulates that it must deliver letters six days a week to all 32 million addresses in the UK for the price of a stamp. A first class stamp costs £1.25 and should guarantee next-day UK delivery for a letter, although the target is not always met. A second class stamp, costing 75 pence, means a letter should arrive within three days. — AFP



Business

Fears over German economy grow as train drivers begin longest strike

Train stoppages can cost up to 100 million euros a day

BERLIN: German train drivers began on Wednesday their longest-ever strike, piling on travel misery for thousands of passengers in an escalating industrial dispute that economic experts warn could cost the economy up to a billion euros (\$1.1 billion).

Transport Minister Volker Wissing has slammed as “destructive” the six-day industrial action that heaps further pressure on supply chains that are already facing disruption because of attacks by Yemen’s Houthi rebels on shipping via the Red Sea. The prolonged action “is a strike against the German economy,” said Deutsche Bahn spokeswoman Anja Broeker, noting that cargo traffic handled by the service includes supplies for power plants, refineries.

“DB Cargo will do everything to secure the supply chain, but it’s clear that there will be some impact,” she added. The walkout called by the GDL union runs from 2 am (0100 GMT) Wednesday through to 1700 GMT on Monday for passenger traffic while the strike for freight trains began earlier on Tuesday.

Not only long-distance trains but also suburban services, some of which like Berlin’s are operated by Deutsche Bahn, are affected, just over a week after the last round of walkouts between Jan 10 and 12. The fourth strike since November left passengers scrambling to rebook or cancel their plans, and sparked warnings of huge costs to the state and industry at a time when the German economy was already ailing.

Deutsche Bahn estimated each strike day to cost “a low two-digit million figure”, but industry experts warned the impact on the economy would be far bigger.

Michael Groemling of Cologne’s Institute for Economic Research said nationwide train stoppages can cost up to 100 million euros a day to the economy, but warned that the impact “may not rise linearly in a strike that lasts several days, but partially multiplies”. Given the disruptions with sea freight over the Houthi attacks, as well as issues on road transport, “rough estimates suggest that in extreme cases, this strike can cost up to a billion euros”, he said.

Tanja Goenner, managing director of Germany’s federation of industries BDI, pleaded with the union to “come to its senses”, saying the walkout would hurt the economy. “There is a threat of further severe restrictions including production losses, or slowdowns or even shutdowns in industry,” she said in a statement. Wissing slammed the GDL union for refusing to negotiate during the walkout.

“I find that it is unreasonable vis-a-vis train travelers that the trains are standing there blocked, while one’s not at the same time sitting at the negotiations table,” said the transport minister. But the union said it had rejected Deutsche Bahn’s “third and allegedly improved offer” because bosses had shown “no sign of a willingness to reach an agreement. The GDL is seeking higher salaries to compensate for inflation, as well as a reduced working week from 38 to 35 hours with no loss in wages, arguing that it needed to make train driver jobs “more attractive” to young people.

But Deutsche Bahn blasted the latest round of industrial action, saying it had offered pay rises of up to 13 percent and a one-off inflation bonus, as well as the chance to reduce the working week by one hour



STUTTGART: Passengers wait on a platform for a train of private railway operator Flixtrain at the main railway station in Stuttgart, southern Germany, on early January 24, 2024, on the first day of a six-day train drivers’ strike of Deutsche Bahn. — AFP

from 2026. Deutsche Bahn last year also clashed with the EVG rail union, which represents around 180,000 non-driver rail personnel, reaching an

agreement in late August. The latest walkout breaks the previous record of a May 2015 action, also called by GDL, that lasted around five days. — AFP

French waste group Veolia hungry for lost UK energy

LONDON: A giant crane-operated claw plunges into a mountain of rubbish before dumping its load into a huge furnace, where the waste is engulfed in flames to generate electricity. French waste company Veolia’s incineration plant in south London handles some 1,000 tons of non-recyclable waste per day, heating water to produce steam that creates power and heats thousands of nearby homes.

Incineration is one part of Veolia’s strategy to transform its operations—and those of client companies—to preserve valuable energy supplies and boost efficiency. Veolia, one of Europe’s main players in waste treatment, views recycling lost energy as a key growth engine that will help it reach net-zero targets—and make money.

The global energy recovery market will be worth 500 billion euros (\$543 billion) per year by 2030, according to the group.

“It’s a really untapped resource and reservoir, which corresponds in Europe alone to 400 gigawatts... it’s the equivalent of energy demand of a country like Italy,” Veolia chief executive Estelle Brachlianoff told journalists on a visit to the London facility. “Wasted heat, waste water (and) non-recyclable waste can produce energy and bio energy.” Such local schemes include the conversion of waste heat, wastewater and non-recyclable waste into energy and bioenergy.

The company wants to do even more to save wasted energy, but environmentalists say burning trash produces greenhouse gas emissions. Nina Schrank, plastics team leader for Greenpeace UK, is scathing about the methods used to capture such lost energy.

“In waste management terms, incineration represents a triple failure—a failure to reduce, a fail-



LONDON: A waste refuse bunker operator moves a claw to collect waste before being incinerated at a Veolia waste management plant, in south London. — AFP

ure to reuse and a failure to recycle,” she said. “Much of the material being burned is plastic, and so is, in fact, fossil fuel that has been mixed with various other chemicals.”

The French company operates 10 similar facilities in Britain, processing around 2.3 million tons of non-recyclable waste in order to generate electricity for more than 400,000 homes.

Brachlianoff also hailed a pilot project for electric refuse trucks to feed the operator of Britain’s electricity grid. She told AFP at the company’s waste treatment works on the same London site that the lorry scheme was a “first of its kind” in the world. Outside, a 10-strong fleet of the electric trucks was parked before emptying litter for local authorities in London.

“We call it ‘vehicle to grid’ when you come back

to the depot (and) the battery still has some energy into it, some power to it. “And then it gives back some power to the grid, and specifically when the grid needs it the most—which is... in the evening.”

Energy prices remain elevated after rocketing following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine nearly two years ago, fuelling high inflation and a cost-of-living crisis. “What Veolia does in the energy sector is producing and distributing... energy which helps reduce carbon footprints,” added Brachlianoff. At the London site, known as Landmann Way, the fleet of electric rubbish-collecting lorries form part of that global strategy after they drop off their loads at the incineration plant. Veolia hopes the “vehicle to grid” initiative can be extended across the company’s UK fleet of 1,800 vehicles, which it plans to fully electrify by 2040. — AFP

Huawei’s flagship FreeBuds Pro 3 now available in Kuwait

KUWAIT: Huawei announced the availability of its latest flagship wireless earbuds, the Huawei FreeBuds Pro 3, in Kuwait at a price of KD 64.9. These new generation of TWS earbuds combine fashionable design aesthetics with class-leading audio. They redefine sound fidelity, pushing industry standards to new heights. Besides, the FreeBuds Pro 3 offer a superior call experience with Pure Voice 2.0, noise cancellation with Intelligent ANC 3.0 and Triple Adaptive EQ, as well as a smart connectivity experience for seamless listening.

The Huawei FreeBuds Pro 3 come in two vibrant colours: Green and Silver Frost. They will be available on Huawei’s official website in Kuwait priced at KD 64.9.

Huawei FreeBuds Pro 3

The Huawei FreeBuds Pro 3 is powered by Ultra-Hearing Dual Drivers that delivers an excellent, true-to-life audio experience without minimal latency. The sound can soar as high as 48 kHz and drop all the way to 14 Hz without missing a beat. Moreover, the Huawei FreeBuds Pro 3 supports the L2HC 2.0 and LDAC™ codescs, and is certified by both HWA and Hi-Res Audio Wireless. This double certification ensures that the earbuds deliver high-resolution audio that brings rich details and textures.

Huawei FreeBuds Pro 3 also features a Triple Adaptive EQ algorithm that ensures that users’ favorite music always sounds just the way they like, offering an exceptional personalized listening experience anywhere, anytime.

Pure Voice 2.0: Crystal-Clear Communication with Precision Voice Pick-Up

When it comes to phone calls, the Huawei FreeBuds Pro 3 uses the Pure Voice 2.0, incorporating a high-sensitivity bone conduction microphone that stays closely fixed to your ears. This improves voice pick up by 2.5 times during voice and video calls compared to the previous generation. It can effectively isolate noise and ensures that the person on the other end hears your voice clearly, even in the noisiest environments, and hears less of the surrounding noise.

The new generation FreeBuds Pro 3 takes noise cancellation to the next level with an upgraded Intelligent ANC 3.0. The updated AI adaptive noise cancellation algorithm provides a 50 percent improvement in noise cancellation compared to the previous generation. This makes the FreeBuds Pro 3 an ideal travel companion, whether the users are on a flight or a train ride.

The FreeBuds Pro 3 are 5 percent lighter than the previous generation, weighing just 5.8g each, lighter than a coin. The earbuds also feature new groove designs on the stems for easy and intuitive control. The charging case has gotten 4.5 percent smaller, making it more compact and easier to store.

Huawei FreeBuds Pro 3 come with four pairs of silicon tips that can fit a wider range of ear canals, including the new XS sized ear tips. These tip options make the earbuds more comfortable and secure for more users. A better fit also enhances the ANC performance of the earbuds.

Long battery life

When it comes to battery life, the earbuds offer up to 31 hours of listening time with the charging case and up to 6.5 hours on a single charge. Users can also charge them wirelessly, allowing them to pickup their Huawei FreeBuds Pro 3 and start using it right away. In terms of connectivity, users can connect to two devices simultaneously and switch audio between them, even with two iOS and Android devices, without having to disconnect and pair repeatedly. The Huawei FreeBuds Pro 3 are the result of years of research and development. They take wireless sound quality to new heights with L2HC 2.0 support. With an improved sound pickup system and the upgraded intelligent noise cancelling algorithm, the FreeBuds Pro 3 offer an unparalleled audio experience.



Synthetic aviation fuel has yet to take off in Europe: Study

PARIS: The EU has set targets for using synthetic sustainable aviation fuels in European flights but no projects to produce the fuel have yet received a final investment decision, a study published Wednesday said. Transport and Environment, a non-governmental organization that promotes sustainable transport, said it had identified 25 large-scale industrial plus another 20 pilot projects to produce synthetic sustainable aviation fuel in Europe.

However, it said none of these projects had yet to reach a final investment decision where companies and investors commit money to develop the project.

Aviation is responsible for between two to three percent of global CO2 emissions but it is one of the most difficult industries to decarbonize. The EU last year adopted legislation that will require to airlines to gradually increase their use of sustainable aviation fuels (SAF) — both those developed from biomass and synthetic sources—in order to decarbonize the industry. Starting next year, the Euro-

pean aviation sector will be required to use two percent SAF rising to six percent in 2030, when synthetic SAF should account for 1.2 percent.

Transport and Energy said the industrial synthetic SAF projects it identified have potential production capacity of 1.7 million tons, more than the 600,000 tons needed to meet the 1.2 percent requirement.

But until final investment decisions, the “capacity referenced in this analysis should be considered as hypothetical until they actually materialize,” said the study. Jerome du Boucher, who follows the aviation sector at Transport and Environment, said “we need to pass from theory to practice and ensure these (synthetic SAF) projects get off the ground, otherwise the law will be just wishful thinking.” Synthetic SAF is produced by combining green hydrogen with CO2 to create a liquid fuel that can be burned by most commercial aircraft in use.

While synthetic SAF could be produced from CO2 obtained from industrial exhaust gasses or pulling it out of the atmosphere, Transport and Environment found that the projects plan to source it from decomposing biomass. Norway had the most synthetic SAF projects on the drawing board, followed by France, Germany and Sweden. Transport and Environment said it was surprised that Spain was far behind as it has taken a lead in projects to produce green hydrogen needed for synthetic SAF. — AFP

EasyJet trims loss, remains upbeat despite war impact

LONDON: British airline EasyJet said on Wednesday that it trimmed first-quarter losses and expressed optimism despite news of a £40 million (\$51 million) hit from the impact of the Zionist entity war on Gaza. Losses after taxation stood at £126 million in the three months to December, down from £132 million for the same period a year earlier, it said in a results statement.

EasyJet added that it expects to narrow losses in its first half, or six months to March, despite taking “a direct impact of £40 million, and further indirect impacts, from the conflict in the Middle East”. Many airlines tend to post losses over the period because it covers the winter months, when demand is traditionally weak. EasyJet added Wednesday that revenue jumped 22 percent to £1.8 billion in the first quarter, boosted by rising passenger numbers and higher ticket prices.

“EasyJet’s financial performance in the first quarter showed year-on-year improvement,” the low-cost carrier said citing also falling jet fuel costs. “The onset of conflict in the Middle East on Oct 7 had short term impacts from a pause in flights to the Zionist entity and Jordan, which currently remains in place, and a temporary slowdown in flight bookings for the wider industry. “Demand and bookings have recovered strongly from late November.” EasyJet had warned in November that its winter results would be dented by the impact of war in the Middle East. — AFP

Lifestyle

THURSDAY, JANUARY 25, 2024



A worker prepares incense sticks.



A worker prepares incense sticks.



Vietnam's incense village turns into Instagram hotspot

A tourist poses in front of incense sticks drying in a courtyard in the village of Quang Phu Cau on the outskirts of Hanoi. --AFP photos



Tourists pose in front of incense sticks.

In a tiny village in northern Vietnam, Dang Thi Hoa ties up a bundle of freshly dried incense sticks ahead of Lunar New Year and watches a line of tourists waiting to pose for pictures. Three generations of Dang Thi Hoa's family have been dyeing incense sticks scarlet red, or magenta pink, ahead of the new year celebrations—known as Tet in Vietnam.

But Hoa, and many other families living and working in the “incense village” of Quang Phu Cau, now also make sticks in yellow, blue and green, catering to visitors eager to snap shots for Instagram. In front of one village temple, hundreds of bundles of multi-colored sticks were laid to dry in the sun—arranged in the form of a giant Vietnamese map.

“Our village has become a hotspot for tourists,” said Hoa, 45, who has been crafting incense sticks for three decades. The villagers make a healthy sum from the selfie snappers. For 50,000 VND (\$2), tourists can spend as long as they like taking pictures with a



Tourists pose in front of incense sticks.

workshop's sticks—which themselves cost just 50 cents for a pack of 20.

At a nearby home, a metal stairway has been erected to allow shots from above. Nguyen Huu Long told AFP that he was extremely busy, with orders

assign one or two people to help visitors find the best angle for photos—and to make sure they don't mess up the drying of the sticks,” Long, 58, told AFP.

The tourists seem appreciative. “The place is very nice, very colorful, and it's really an Instagram-worthy place,” said Catherine Caro from the Philippines. Quang Phu Cau, on the outskirts of Hanoi, is among several villages across Vietnam involved in the ancient incense stick trade, with many families living down its small alleys involved in the dyeing, drying or whittling down of the bamboo bark.

The full work sequence includes hacking down bamboo branches to feed into a whittling machine, dipping the thin strips into buckets of colorful dye, before leaving the sticks fanned out on the street like bouquets to air dry. “I am proud of our family's traditional craft... and also feel happy as our village has become more well known,” said Hoa. “I am also earning more,” she said, happily.—AFP



A worker prepares incense sticks in a courtyard in the village of Quang Phu Cau on the outskirts of Hanoi.



Workers prepare incense sticks.



A tourist takes a selfie picture in front of incense sticks.



A tourist poses in front of incense sticks.



Marco Antonio Nina, 26, who lost his left arm at the age of 14 in a work accident, tests his bionic arm prosthesis that Roly Mamani made for him in his "Robotics Creators" workshop in the town of Achocalla, 18km from La Paz, Bolivia.--AFP photos



Electrical engineer and robotics expert Roly Mamani (left) explains the operation of the bionic arm prosthesis to Marco Antonio Nina.



Electrical engineer and robotics expert Roly Mamani explains the process of manufacturing robotic and bionic prosthesis to help low-income people at his workshop "Robotics Creators".



View of bionic prosthesis made by Roly Mamani at his workshop "Robotics Creators" workshop.

BOLIVIAN TOYMAKER RESTORES LIMBS, DIGNITY WITH 3D-PRINTING

As a kid growing up in poverty in rural Bolivia, Roly Mamani built his own toys. Now a 34-year-old engineer, he 3D prints limbs for Indigenous compatriots scarred by life-changing accidents. Mamani funds the endeavor with the money he makes from selling robotic toys he makes—his other passion, which, after building his first remote-controlled toy car as a child, he never abandoned. Surrounded by prostheses, plants and 3D-printed dinosaurs in his study, Mamani pores over an arm he is devising for a boy who lost his due to an electric surge. It is his purpose, the engineer told AFP, "to improve people's quality of life." The son of small-scale farmers, Mamani grew up in Achocalla, a community nestled between two lagoons some 15 kilometers (10 miles) north of the capital La Paz, verdant with pasture, vegetables and tubers. With no money for toys, he started building his own play cars from plastic and cardboard at a young age, upgrading in primary school to a motorized version.

Before entering public university, Mamani worked for two years at an automobile workshop where he was exposed to "the first real machines I ever saw." Ten years ago, he opened his own workshop in Achocalla to build robotic toys and educational aids. "You could say I have all the toys I want now," he said. Then everything changed when he heard about a rural man without hands and thought to himself: "I can make them for him."



Pablo Matha, 59, speaks about how he makes a living playing guitar at fairs and in the streets thanks to the prosthesis that Roly Mamani made for him, in El Alto, Bolivia.

In 2018, the toymaker of Achocalla set out to find life-improving solutions for other disfigured Bolivians with his 3D printers. "Science is like a superpower. Robotics is a trend, but if it does not address important things, it doesn't mean anything," he mused.

More than 400 made
Against the background noise of printers at work, Mamani told AFP he can create six units a month. Since 2018, "we have made more than 400 prostheses," he said. Half were delivered free of charge

or at the cost of production, funded by his robotics sales. On average, a 3D-printed prosthesis in Bolivia costs about \$1,500, more than five times the minimum salary. A functional prosthesis—the type that allows certain movements—can cost as much as \$30,000.

Yet the public health system does not cover prosthetics, in a country where some 36,100 people have physical and mobility problems, according to the state-aligned National Committee of People with Disabilities. Mamani himself chooses the recipients of his donations from the countless requests he receives, including from abroad. "The people in the most need are those who work precarious jobs without safety, which is why they have these accidents in which they lose a limb," he said.

'A blessing'
One of their beneficiaries is 59-year-old Pablo Matha, who lost his vision and right hand seven years ago in a mining accident involving dynamite. After that, "I went out every day to ask for some coins (on the street.) That's where my friend Roly and his brother found me," Matha told AFP. Mamani's brother Juan Carlos is a physiotherapist, who helps with the patients' physical rehabilitation. Matha said the prosthesis helped him regain his self-respect. He now plays the guitar to earn a living. He said he used to "feel people looking at me and laughing. But now that I have the prosthesis...



Marco Antonio Nina, 26, tests his bionic arm prosthesis that Roly Mamani made for him in his "Robotics Creators" workshop .

sometimes I feel that I am like any ordinary person." Marco Antonio Nina, 26, was another recipient. As a teenager, working on a masonry project, an electric shock severed his left arm and stunted the right one. "I like to sing, but without the prosthesis it hurt to hold the microphone... Now with this, it's a blessing," he said. Mamani wants to use the recognition he has won for his work—he has been awarded a US robotics scholarship—to set up a rehabilitation center. "I want to generate my own technology, I have to improve," he said. —AFP

AI audience row at Sundance sparks walkout, highlights division

An audience member was ejected from a Sundance festival event Tuesday in a spat over artificial intelligence, triggering a walkout that illustrates the divisions the technology has rapidly wrought in the film industry. AI—a key driver of the recent and devastating Hollywood strikes—has been debated extensively at this year's indie movie festival in Utah.

Filmmakers have experimented with using the technology as a creative tool, while also cautioning about its potential to erase jobs and stifle human expression and connection. At a Tuesday screening of "Being (The Digital Griot)," in which audience members were encouraged to approach the screen and discuss issues like racism and the patriarchy with an AI bot, an audience member appeared to shout "fuck this AI." "I'm not here to be cursed out and I'm not going to have my AI child be cursed out either," responded the film's creator, artist Rashad Newsome, refusing to participate in a post-screening Q&A until action was taken.

Festival staff forced the woman who had apparently yelled to leave the auditorium, prompting jeers. Roughly a quarter of the auditorium walked out in solidarity, with some complaining that debate was being shut down and others insisting the lady expelled had not been the actual culprit.

Sundance organizers told AFP they were "looking into" the incident and "reviewing all available material to determine what happened so that corrective actions can be taken." But the incident highlighted long-brewing and sharply escalating tensions triggered by the issue of AI in the film world—something that this year's Sundance lineup was specifically programmed to address.

'Scary'
In addition to "Being," the Sundance indie festival has hosted "Eternal You" and "Love Machina," two documentaries about loved ones using AI to communicate after death. Another film, "Eno," explored musician Brian Eno's career and creative process, using a "generative engine" to mesh together near-infinite different versions of a film from hundreds of possible scenes.

AI was also addressed on the fiction side by films like "Love Me," starring Kristen Stewart, which imagined a romance between an AI-powered buoy and a satellite in a post-human world. "Love Machina" director Peter Sillen told AFP that AI could soon mean that making a film will be a similar process to writing a novel.

"You're going to be able to have somebody who's sitting in their room create a masterpiece of filmmaking, probably," he said. The idea was "hard and scary" but "interesting," Sillen said, concluding: "I think you have to be open to it." "Eternal You" director Hans Block pointed out that AI is already widely used in movies—indeed, the Adobe software he used to edit the film is "full of AI" and "helped us as a tool a lot."

"It's so much more easy to make a film nowadays," he said. But Block said that while AI can help as a tool, it is important to debate what harm could be caused if the technology is not regulated. "That's why we are so happy to present the film right now, because it's a perfect time to open the debate about these discussions," he said.

'Human touch'
The danger that AI could replace screenwriters, actors and other professions was a key sticking point in last year's Hollywood strikes, with unions holding out for guarantees from studios that they would not be replaced. The encroachment of AI has sparked resolutely negative reactions from many filmmakers at Sundance.

Anirban Dutta, co-director of "Noc-turnes," an experiential documentary about scientists studying moths in the eastern Himalayas, said his movie is "a response to what's happening to this world where all our human instincts are being mechanized." "Our film is a love letter to invite people to come back to what we are losing... human touch," he said.

The woman who was thrown out of the "Being" screening, who has not been identified, was making a similar point before chaos erupted. "As interesting as this (film) is... all of the knowledge it has comes from people," she said. —AFP

Animal mutant thriller tops nominations for 'French Oscars'

Oscar hopeful "Anatomy of a Fall" was narrowly bested by a beastly sci-fi thriller in the nominations race for France's answer to the Academy Awards Wednesday. "The Animal Kingdom", about a wave of mutations turning humans into hybrid creatures, picked up 12 Cesar nominations, including for best film. Justine Triet's "Anatomy of a Fall", -- one of France's biggest international arthouse hits of recent years—took one less. The thriller about a wife accused of murdering her husband won two Golden Globes this month and has clocked up five Oscar nominations including for best picture.

It was a decent year for women filmmakers, who made up three of the five Cesar nominees in the best director category. The prize has only once gone to a woman: Tonie Marshall for 2000's "Venus Beauty Institute".

Triet is nominated alongside veteran provocateur Catherine Breillat for "Last Summer" and Jeanne Herry for "All Your Faces". The awards ceremony will take place on February 23, with Christopher Nolan, who is leading the Oscars race with "Oppenheimer", to receive an honorary Cesar. Also nominated for best film is "Junkyard Dog" about a friendship upended when one person falls in love, and "The Goldman Case", a courtroom drama about a true-life armed robber who became a media celebrity in the 1970s. —AFP

January 6 role-play film 'War Game' brings 'terrifying' warning to Sundance

It is January 6, 2025, and the US president looks on in horror as his narrowly defeated rival calls on the armed forces to help overthrow the "fraudulent" election result. The scene is from "War Game," a new documentary premiering at the Sundance film festival on Tuesday in which real former government and military officials take part in an unscripted role-play exercise imagining another assault on the Capitol.

But for its directors, the scenario—which echoes the events of January 6, 2021, except that this time, rogue police and soldiers defect to join protests, which spread nationwide—is not so far-fetched. "It's terrifying how timely the film continues to become," said co-director Jesse Moss. "And I do worry about how timely it may be one year from now."

In the film, former Montana governor Steve Bullock assumes the role of US president, who has six hours to decide how to confront the rapidly escalating coup attempt. His advisors are played by real-life US senators, FBI and CIA officers, military colonels and a former NATO commander.

They gather in an elaborate war room—the set was inspired by Stanley Kubrick's "Dr. Strangelove"—and receive updates from intelligence briefings, social media and a fictional rolling news channel. "This was, for six hours, a real experience for all of us," Bullock told AFP. "It was a stressful environment... nobody was thinking about the cameras being there," he added.

'Disturbing'
Simultaneously, a fictional paramilitary group called the "Order of Columbus," played by former US veterans, are gathered elsewhere, sowing disinformation online and encouraging soldiers to break ranks. The role-play exercise was originally inspired by a Washington Post op-ed written by three US generals in 2021, which warned of growing extremism within the armed forces, and urged the military to prepare for possible insurrection after the 2024 election.

"A disturbing number of veterans and active-duty members of the military took part in the attack on the Capitol," it read. "The idea of rogue units organizing among themselves to support the

'rightful' commander in chief cannot be dismissed," the generals wrote.

Vet Voice, a foundation representing US military veterans and their families, decided to undertake the exercise. They agreed to allow cameras in for the documentary, and have provided a report on the exercise to the White House, Congress and the Pentagon. "The only response they have received so far from the US administration is a 'thank you'," said Vet Voice CEO Janessa Goldbeck. "There are many folks in the administration who are working on this topic. But it's controversial," she said. "There's a lot of pushback that it's disrespectful to our troops and to our veterans to talk about this issue," Goldbeck added.



Trump
The premiere of "War Game" happened to fall on the day of the New Hampshire primary, where polls show Donald Trump is likely to trounce his sole remaining challenger and move closer to sealing the Republican presidential nomination. And while "War Game" uses fictional candidates, the former president's influence on the proceedings is hard to escape.

At one point, during a discussion on whether to invoke the Insurrection Act—which allows the president to use federal troops to enforce the law—the former president's name is mentioned by two "advisors." Trump has hinted at an expanded role for the military within the United States if he wins a second term. —AFP



Mocktail mania in Saudi



Bartender Asabek Mashraboy prepares a drink at "Meraki Riyadh".



Lebanese bartender Hadi Ghassan prepares a drink.



Lebanese bartender Hadi Ghassan prepares a drink behind the counter at "Meraki Riyadh", a pop-up bar offering non-alcoholic bellinis and spritzes, served in chilled cocktail glasses, in Riyadh.--AFP photos

The concept was controversial: a pop-up bar offering bellinis and spritzes that, while non-alcoholic, were served in chilled cocktail glasses in the capital of teetotaling Saudi Arabia. But although customers were initially wary of the experiment — which coincided with the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, a time of fasting and forbearance — the bar ended up doing brisk business. Its success highlights widening acceptance of more daring non-alcoholic fare even as booze itself remains strictly off-limits in the Gulf kingdom, home to Islam's holiest sites.

"To be honest, we were skeptical about it, but at the end of the day it worked out," said Evans Kahindi, brand manager for Blended by Lyre's, which organized the pop-up. In Saudi Arabia's main cities, upscale restaurants are unveiling extensive virgin drink menus and seasoned mixologists are relocating from more freewheeling towns like Dubai and Berlin to pour for deep-pocketed customers, as mocktail mania takes root.

Saudis say the trend is consistent with a broader push by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to transform his oil-dependent nation into a foreigner-friendly business, tourism and entertainment hub.

Yet the speed of the changes is sur-



General Manager Jean-Marc Vettesi answers journalists' questions at "Meraki Riyadh".

prising, said Abdullah Raslan, marketing manager for Blended by Lyre's, which recently partnered with a food hall in Riyadh's Kingdom Centre to serve mocktails including a spiced date sour and a "no-groni". "I'm not going to lie to you, Saudi is a bit of a religious country, but we're seeing how it's becoming more adaptable with what's happening in the world," said Raslan, a native of the eastern city of Khobar. "Have we had a lot of pushback in the past? Yes we have. Do

we still need to educate a lot of people about these drinks?... Yes we do. But step by step, that's all we're asking for."

Under Saudi law, penalties for consumption or possession of alcohol can include fines, jail time, public flogging and deportation for foreigners.

'Saudi champagne'

That is welcome news for Asabek Mashraboy, whose sole experience with alcohol ended poorly, said the Uzbeki-

stan native. That has not stopped the 24-year-old, who later relocated to Saudi Arabia, from becoming bar supervisor at Meraki, a Greek-influenced restaurant in Riyadh's Al Faisaliah Tower.

Mashraboy gets rave reviews for his non-alcoholic Mykonos mules and old fashioned, even from foreigners accustomed to the boozy versions.

"I can compete with them," he said confidently when asked how his drinks stack up against those on offer abroad.

It was precisely this challenge that drew marketer Mousa Shihadeh to Saudi Arabia after he completed culinary school in Germany and worked with bars and hotels there. He acknowledged having some doubts at first. "In the beginning it was like, 'You are a juice manager? What exactly are you doing here?'" he recalled.

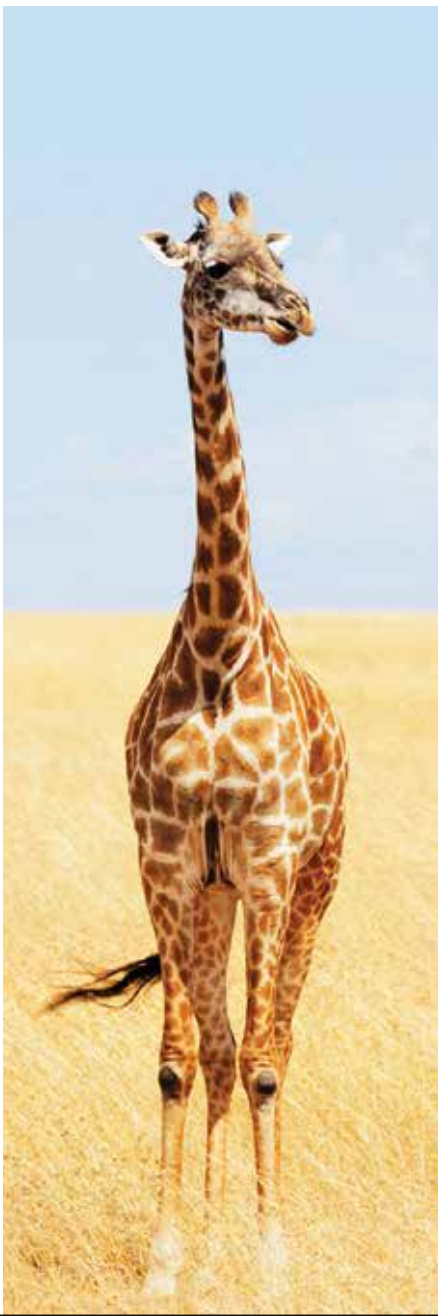
Yet he said he has relished the chance to introduce alternatives to time-honored local favorites like "Saudi champagne" — apple juice and sparkling water — and syrupy mojitos. "As I see it, it's much more complicated to work with non-alcoholic drinks than to work with alcoholic drinks," Shihadeh said. "When you come here, you really need to invent the wheel anew."—AFP

'Lonely' giraffe in Mexico begins long journey to new home

A "lonely" giraffe living in harsh conditions in northern Mexico is heading to a safari park to begin a new life after a campaign by animal rights activists. The male giraffe named Benito began the roughly 2,000-kilometer (1,200-mile) journey on Sunday from Ciudad Juarez near the Mexican-US border to Africam Safari in the central state of Puebla. According to the zoo management, he will live with other giraffes in conditions more similar to his natural habitat.

"It's important that Benito be in favorable conditions, in an enclosure where he can be with a controlled temperature, with all the food he needs," said Africam Safari director Frank Camacho. "We're going to incorporate Benito in a very big herd, very heterogeneous, where there are adults and youngsters," he added.

The road trip, in a special trailer accompanied by a team of experts, is expected to take about 50 hours in total. The move follows a campaign by conservationists who criticized the unsuitable living conditions in Ciudad Juarez, where the giraffe was at the mercy of extreme temperatures. In mid-January, a judge ordered that Benito be sent to Puebla. "Today's a very happy day for us," said Maria Ruiz Varela, a member of the "Let's Save Benito" campaign.—AFP



UN unveils streamlined name for global tourism agency

The World Tourism Organization announced Wednesday that it had changed its name to UN Tourism, to make clear that the Madrid-based agency is part of the United Nations. The new name, along with a new logo featuring a human figure in motion with the tagline "Bringing the world closer", was unveiled at the opening of Madrid's FITUR tourism congress.



"By moving away from acronyms, UN Tourism adopts a more approachable stance," the body said in a statement. An intergovernmental body that promotes tourism and facilitates international trade between nations, the agency has been based in Madrid since it was founded in 1974.

The body, which groups 160 member states, also has regional offices in Japan, Saudi Arabia, Brazil and Morocco, and regularly publishes estimates and forecasts of tourist arrivals by region and country. Its latest report published last week showed that 1.3 billion tourists travelled abroad in 2023, a 44 percent jump from the previous year. That was still just 88 percent of the number of tourists who headed abroad in 2019, the last full year before global travel restrictions imposed to tackle the Covid-19 pandemic.—AFP

Netflix drops \$5 billion to stream WWE wrestling

Netflix on Tuesday sealed a long-term broadcast deal with the WWE professional wrestling juggernaut, as the streaming giant pushes further into sporting events. Beginning in the United States in 2025, Netflix will become the exclusive new home of "Raw," the WWE's flagship program that has been broadcasting on television since 1993.

The agreement will also see WWE shows and live events streamed across the globe as their rights become available. With an initial 10-year term for \$5 billion, the deal has an option for Netflix to extend for an additional 10 years or opt out after the initial five years. "This deal is transformative," said Mark Shapiro, president of TKO, the parent company of the WWE.

"It marries the can't-miss WWE product with Netflix's extraordinary global reach and locks in significant and predictable economics for many years," he added. The three-hour show has helped launch the careers of Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson, "Stone Cold" Steve Austin and John Cena, among other stars.

It is currently the most watched show on the NBCUniversal-owned USA network in the United States. The WWE is a ratings blockbuster that

owes much of its success to entrepreneur and promoter Vince McMahon.

After buying what was then the World Wrestling Federation (WWF) from his father in 1982, he turned the second-rate league into an entertainment giant. Transformed into World Wrestling Entertainment in 2002, the league passed the billion-dollar mark in annual sales last year.

The deal marks another move by streaming giants to build their portfolio of live sporting events. Netflix won the rights last month to a tennis duel between Rafael Nadal and Carlos Alcaraz and previously streamed a golf tournament featuring Formula One drivers and pros.

Amazon announced last week that it would invest \$115 million in Diamond Sports Group, the leading network of local sports channels in the United States, gaining regional rights for sports ranging from hockey to basketball. It had previously acquired certain rights to the English Premier League, the French Ligue 1, the French Open tennis tournament and the NFL American football league. Apple TV, for its part, owns global rights for US Major League Soccer.—AFP



The Netflix logo is displayed at the entrance to Netflix Albuquerque Studios lot in Albuquerque, New Mexico.--AFP

Netflix subscribers jump by 13 million in 4th quarter

Netflix subscription numbers rocketed more than 13 million in the final three months of last year, the company said on Tuesday, despite price hikes at the leading streaming service. Netflix finished 2023 with slightly more than 260 million subscribers worldwide, with a profit of \$938 million in the final quarter versus just \$55 million in the same period a year earlier. "We believe there is plenty of room for growth ahead as streaming expands," the US company said in an earnings letter.—AFP

England's Bashir gets India visa, says cricket board

England and Wales Cricket Board: 'We're glad the situation has now been resolved'

HYDERABAD: England spinner Shoaib Bashir has received his visa for India and will join the touring team this weekend, the country's cricket board said on Wednesday. Britain-born Bashir, a 20-year-old Muslim of Pakistani heritage, was unable to join the rest of the squad flying to India from a training camp in Abu Dhabi and remained unavailable for the first of the five Tests starting Thursday.

The Somerset off-spinner had to fly back to London from Abu Dhabi to finish the required paperwork for his entry to India. "Shoaib Bashir has now received his visa, and is due to travel to join up with the team in India this weekend," the England and Wales Cricket Board said in a statement. "We're glad the situation has now been resolved."

According to reports, the UK government intervened to fast-track the matter. A government spokesperson told ESPNcricinfo: "We absolutely expect India to treat British citizens fairly at all times in its visa process. 'We have previously raised the issues British citizens with Pakistani heritage experience applying for visas with the Indian High Commission in London.'"

England captain Ben Stokes, in a press conference on the eve of the opener, said he was "devastated" at the treatment handed out to the young spinner. "When I first found the news out in Abu Dhabi, I did say we shouldn't fly until Bash gets his visa, but that was a little bit tongue in cheek," the England captain said.

"I know it's a way bigger thing, doing that. That was probably just (my) emotions around the whole thing. 'There was never a chance that we were not

going to travel around this, but Bash knows he's had our full support."

Other cricketers of Pakistani descent have previously had trouble in gaining entry to India, with batsman Usman Khawaja late in joining Australia's tour of the country last year. The Pakistan cricket team also faced a delay in obtaining visas ahead of last year's ODI World Cup in India.

India and neighbouring Pakistan are arch-rivals, both on and off the field. A long-standing diplomatic stand-off between the two nuclear-armed nations has affected sporting ties, with India refusing to tour Pakistan or to play ICC events there.

'Feel for him'

Indian skipper Rohit Sharma said he felt for Bashir after the uncapped spinner was forced to return home. "I feel for him honestly," Rohit told reporters in Hyderabad on the eve of the opening match starting Thursday. "Unfortunately I don't sit in the visa office to give you more details," he added. "But I hope he can make it here quickly and enjoy our country and play some cricket as well." Earlier a spokeswoman for British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's office said while the British government could not "speak to the process and what's happened in this individual case" they had raised the broader issue with the Indian government.

'Absolute beast'

In spite of Bashir's absence England have still picked four spinners for Thursday's opener, in-



HYDERABAD: England's cricket players play football during a practice session at the Rajiv Gandhi International Cricket Stadium in Hyderabad on January 24, 2024, on the eve of their first Test match against India. — AFP

cluding Test debutant Tom Hartley and occasional off-spinner Joe Root. Spin is expected to play a huge part on Indian pitches, but Stokes said the team was prepared to tackle any surface on offer.

"You have always got to think that the ball is going to turn in India but you don't want to go in with

any preconceived ideas," he said. "Any team which comes to India, it's always a tough challenge. You know, India are an absolute beast in their home conditions, there's no doubt about that." India are without star batsman Virat Kohli, who withdrew from the opening two Tests due to personal reasons. — AFP



LONDON: British heavyweight boxer Anthony Joshua (L) and French-Cameroonian boxer Francis Ngannou (R) pose after a press conference in London. — AFP

Ngannou capable of 'massive upset' against Joshua

LONDON: Francis Ngannou can cause a "massive upset" by defeating Anthony Joshua in their heavyweight showdown in Saudi Arabia, according to veteran promoter Frank Warren. British boxer Joshua heads into the March 8 fight looking to back-up his commanding stoppage-win over Sweden's Otto Wallin in December as he continues his quest to become a three-time world champion.

But Warren believes Joshua will have his work cut out in a 10-round bout against the 37-year-old Cameroonian fighter Ngannou. Best known as a mixed martial artist, Ngannou stunned many observers with an early knockdown of Tyson Fury, promoted by Warren, before suffering a controversial split-decision loss to the World Boxing Council heavyweight champion in October.

And Warren believes Ngannou's punching power could pose problems for another British boxer in the 34-year-old Joshua when they meet in Riyadh.

"Joshua's come into this after his last fight against Wallin," Warren said Wednesday.

"He'll be a big favourite going in, but I know that if he gets caught on the whiskers (chin) then this fella (Ngannou) could cause a massive upset because he can whack. "It's going to be interesting to see how he takes the fight and to see if he fights on the outside or the inside. Ngannou's game is getting on the inside. He's a big man, he's strong."

Joshua's victory over Wallin was his third win of 2023 but Warren said his two defeats by Ukraine's Oleksandr Usyk, the man who deprived him of the World Boxing Association, International Boxing Federation and World Boxing Organisation belts, were proof of an enduring vulnerability.

"The two fights to Oleksandr Usyk, we can see what they are," said Warren. "People have seen him (Joshua) wobble a few times in fights, that happens with him. I'm not saying there's a confidence issue, but there wasn't that when he was such an emphatic fighter."

Fury and Usyk will clash for the undisputed heavyweight title in Saudi Arabia on February 17. The winner will be crowned the heavyweight division's first undisputed champion since Lennox Lewis, who held all the major belts from 1999 to 2000. — AFP

he was out lbw to veteran spinner Steve O'Keefe. Renshaw played a key cameo in his quickfire knock by the powerplay proving to be expensive for the Sixers, as they conceded 31 runs off it.

But Sydney came back strongly as paceman Sean Abbott picked three wickets in his final over to end with four for 32. O'Keefe, 39, playing in his final match for the Sixers, finished with 99 BBL career wickets, bowling tidily to deliver figures of 1-26 off four overs. But it was no contest as the Heat's quality set of bowlers demolished the Sixers before their Sydney fans with Johnson's four wickets, backed by leg-spinner Mitchell Swepson's two for 19 and Xavier Bartlett's two for 12.

Skipper Moises Henriques top-scored with 25 off 27 balls for the Sixers and wicketkeeper Josh Philippe chipped in with 23 (22). The Heat's Michael Nesar participated in the catch of the final when he caught Sean Abbott (16) at long-on and managed to somehow flick the ball up to his teammate Paul Walter before he fell over the boundary rope to effect the catch.

"The catch was almost a reflex thing. I knew I was close but not that close to the boundary," Nesar said. "It's a huge win for the group. We've put in a lot of work after the loss in the final last year. I feel we've been the most consistent team." The Sixers were never able to string together any substantial partnerships and the match was effectively over midway through their innings. — AFP

Heat crush Sixers to win Australia's BBL final

SYDNEY: Brisbane Heat crushed the Sydney Sixers by 54 runs to win their second Big Bash League (BBL) title and emphatically take the crown of being Australia's champion Twenty20 team in Sydney on Wednesday. The Heat posted a challenging 166 for eight before routing the Sixers for 112 off 17.3 overs in front of a sell-out crowd of 43,153 at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

Paceman Spencer Johnson was named man of the match with bowling figures of 4-26 while dashing opener Josh Brown clubbed 53 off just 38 balls following his pulsating 140 off 57 balls in the challenger match to get the Heat into the final.

"We wanted to make amends after last year. Nice to contribute. To get a couple of wickets and win it's pretty special," left-arm Johnson said. The Heat, led by Brown's prodigious hitting and Matt Renshaw's 40 off 22 balls, set up a competitive total batting first.

Brown, who hammered 12 sixes in his rollicking 140 to propel the Heat into the final, clubbed three sixes and five fours in his half-century before

Australia face COVID, weather obstacles in second W Indies Test

BRISBANE: Australia will be battling an outbreak of COVID-19 and forecast wild weather in their bid to complete a clean sweep of the summer Test series when they face the West Indies in Brisbane on Thursday. After taming Pakistan 3-0 in December and early January, the world Test champions thumped the West Indies by 10 wickets in Adelaide last week.

They are heavily favoured to again sweep past their under-strength opponents in the pink-ball Test at the Gabba, a format at which the Australians excel. However, COVID has hit their camp with allrounder Cameron Green and coach Andrew McDonald the latest to come down with it on Wednesday.

They fell ill after batter Travis Head contracted the virus at the end of the first Test. He has since tested negative and will play in Brisbane, with Green also set to take the field unless he feels too sick. "Cameron Green and Andrew McDonald will be separated from the group until they return a negative test," Cricket Australia said.

"It will not hinder Green taking part in or McDonald attending the match in line with CA protocols." The Australians may also have to contend with the after-effects of Cyclone Kirrily, which is expected to cross the North Queensland coast in the next few days.

While the weather is predicted to be fine Thurs-

day, there are showers forecast for Friday and heavy rain from Saturday to Monday. Australia head into the match as firm favourites, but they will be concerned with the output from their top six batters. Only Head, with his superb 119 in the first innings in Adelaide, passed 50 runs.

However, the visitors will be even more worried after twice being bowled out for under 200. They rely heavily on opening pair Kraigg Brathwaite and Tagenarine Chanderpaul, with the next four batsmen having only eight caps between them.

The West Indies were, however, boosted by the performance of fast bowler Shamar Joseph who made an impressive Test debut in Adelaide, taking five wickets in the first innings and scoring valuable runs at number 11.

"He is a very confident young man and has shared a lot of information with me," veteran paceman Kemar Roach said. "He is destined to be good if he puts the work in." Barring any more COVID setbacks, Australia will choose the same team, giving the experiment of Steve Smith as opener and Green at four another outing after an underwhelming performance from both men in the first Test.

Captain Pat Cummins said he expected Smith and number three Marnus Labuschagne to have a big impact this week. "You see how hard they work in the nets and even the way they have gone about their innings they look like piling on a big 100 or 200 like we have seen them do in the past," he said.

"Smithy in particular last week looked really sharp up the top but just got a good ball. It feels like they are poised to have a big impact." — AFP

With Kalle Rovanpera resting, rivals start chase for rally title

PARIS: The World Rally Championship begins its search for a new king on Thursday when the season-opening Monte Carlo event starts without champion Kalle Rovanpera. The Finn, who had just turned 23 when he won his second straight world title for Toyota last October, has opted to follow the example of the team's elder statesman, Sebastien Ogier, and race part time.

"It's a little bit like catching up with your (youth), with what you were doing when you were younger," Rovanpera said. "When you are a teenager and you are a professional, you always have some place where you need to be and you miss out on many things that other people are doing," he said, adding he wanted to use the year "for my personal things out of motorsport."

"There are trips to take. I want to visit places where I want to go." "I felt that now would be a good moment to take a year for recharging the batteries," Toyota, who have swept the top category the last three seasons, are again one of three manufacturers in the elite category.

Ford will run two cars, Hyundai will run three and Toyota will enter four, but the last will not score points in the manufacturers' championship. Toyota keep Elfyn Evans, last season's runner-up, and Takamoto Katsuta, as well as the two deluxe part timers, eight-time champion Ogier, who drove in eight of the 13 rallies last year, and Rovanpera.

The 40-year-old Ogier won a record ninth Monte Carlo rally last year. "For me this is a must-do event," he said. "Numbers are never my main motivation, but if I could get a 10th win on this event it would be something very special."

He should feel even more at home this year. The organisers have moved race HQ from Monaco back to Gap, Ogier's home town. With Rovanpera skipping the event, the road seems clear for Evans, runner-up in three of the last four seasons, to chase a first title.

"With Rally Monte-Carlo moving north again this year, we're much more likely to see wintery conditions forming part of the challenge," said the Welshman. Ford have promoted Adrien Fourmaux, a 28-year-old Frenchman, and Gregoire Munster, a 25-year-old Belgian-Luxembourger, from sec-



Kalle Rovanpera

ond-tier WRC2.

"Monte is a notoriously tough event to start the season with, but we feel that both Adrien and Gregoire are prepared for what's ahead of them," said team principal Richard Millener. Pierre-Louis Loubet has dropped to WRC2, while former champion Ott Tanak has switched back to Hyundai.

The Korean marque, still chasing their first drivers' world title, also welcomed back Finn Andreas Mikkelsen from WRC2 alongside Belgian Thierry Neuville, a five-time title runner-up.

'Push hard'

"Our 2024 targets are to push hard for both the drivers' and manufacturers' championships," said Neuville, who has finished third overall the last three seasons. Hyundai also retained Esapekka Lappi, but with only three cars, the Finn will struggle for starts.

Despite speculation that the calendar would expand, it stays at 13 rallies. Saudi Arabia and the United States are among potential additions for 2025. Poland, which was part of the inaugural WRC season in 1973, returns, again, and Latvia joins. Mexico and Estonia are dropped.

The Kenyan Rally, which returned to the calendar in 2020, switches to the traditional Easter slot of the old Safari Rally. Organisers have tweaked the scoring rules, essentially separating the Sunday morning stages for cars that complete the race. That is to prevent drivers taking it easy to preserve their tyres for the closing power stage, which offers a winner's bonus of five points. — AFP

Sports

Algeria crash out of Cup of Nations as Cameroon qualify for last 16

Mauritania certain to advance to knockout phase for the first time

ABIDJAN: Former champions Algeria crashed out of the Africa Cup of Nations in the group stage on Tuesday after a shock defeat against Mauritania, but Cameroon secured a last-16 place with a dramatic victory over Gambia.

Algeria won their second AFCON title in Egypt in 2019 but were then sent packing in the group stage at the last edition in Cameroon two years ago with just one point and one goal scored. This campaign has been equally miserable for Djamel Belmadi's team, who drew their first two matches in Group D against Angola and Burkina Faso but would have qualified for the knockout phase with a point against Mauritania in Bouake.

Yet Mauritania, who had lost their opening two matches in Ivory Coast and had never won in eight previous attempts at the AFCON, ran out 1-0 winners thanks to a 37th-minute goal by captain Mohamed Dellah Yaly, who plays his club football in Iraq.

The result relegated Algeria—who started the game with off-form Riyad Mahrez on the bench—to bottom spot in their group and they head home having now gone six Cup of Nations matches without winning since beating Senegal 1-0 in the 2019 final.

Mauritania make history

Mauritania, meanwhile, are now certain to advance to the knockout phase for the first time in their history as one of the four best third-placed teams. "Nobody was thinking about Mauritania, but football is like that, full of surprises, and we have been rewarded for all the hard work we have put in," Mauritania coach Amir Abdou told broadcaster Canal Plus Afrique.

Angola finish top of Group D ahead of Burkina Faso after beating the Stallions 2-0 in Yamoussoukro thanks to a goal in each half from Egypt-

based striker Mabululu and Zini of AEK Athens. The Angolans are through to the knockout phase for the first time since hosting the tournament in 2010, and will now play a best third-placed team in Bouake in the last 16. Runners-up in 2013 and semi-finalists two years ago, Burkina Faso will head to the northern city of Korhogo for a tie next Tuesday against the winners of Group E, which will be Mali, South Africa or Namibia.

Earlier on Tuesday, five-time champions Cameroon secured qualification for the next round with a 3-2 win over Gambia in an extraordinary match in Bouake. Both teams needed a win to stand a chance of going through from Group C, and Cameroon took the lead early in the second half from a Karl Toko-Ekambi header.

Yet Gambia, quarter-finalists two years ago, drew level on 72 minutes when the unmarked Abbie Jal-low finished past Fabrice Ondoa, preferred in goal to Manchester United's Andre Onana. Ebrima Colley then put Gambia ahead five minutes from time, meaning the Indomitable Lions were heading out.

However, James Gomez turned a cross into his own net two minutes later to make it 2-2, and Christopher Wooh then headed in Cameroon's winner in stoppage time. "It is in our DNA, it's just what we are like," Cameroon coach Rigobert Song said when it was put to him that his team never know when they are beaten.

They will now head to Abidjan for a heavyweight last-16 tie against Nigeria on Saturday, while Gambia go home with three defeats in as many games.

Perfect Senegal, Ghana out

Gambia coach Tom Saintfiet confirmed after the match that he would be leaving his position, despite having a contract until 2026. Meanwhile, reigning champions Senegal beat Guinea 2-0 in Yamoussou-



BOUAKE: Algeria's forward #8 Youcef Belaili reacts as Mauritania's goalkeeper #16 Babacar Niasse makes a save during the Africa Cup of Nations (CAN) 2024 group D football match between Mauritania and Algeria at Stade de la Paix in Bouake. — AFP

kro to top Group C with a 100 percent record, Abdoulaye Seck and Iliman Ndiaye scoring their goals in the second half.

They will stay in Yamoussoukro for a last-16 tie next Monday against one of the best third-placed teams, and there is a good chance they will end up playing hosts Ivory Coast who remain in contention to qualify despite coming third in Group A.

Cameroon's comeback relegated Guinea—

who had star striker Serhou Guirassy back from injury—to third place, but they will go through to the next round. However, those results condemned four-time champions Ghana to elimination. The group stage concludes on Wednesday, with South Africa playing Tunisia and Namibia facing Mali in Group E, while Tanzania take on the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zambia meet Morocco in Group F. — AFP

Palestine 'fulfil promise' after historic Asian win

DOHA: Palestine's captain said his team had fulfilled "a promise to the Palestinian people" after reaching the Asian Cup knockout rounds for the first time on Tuesday. The 3-0 victory over Hong Kong was also their first win in the history of the competition and enough to squeeze into the last 16 as one of the four best third-placed teams.

Oday Dabbagh was the hero in Doha with two goals and at the final whistle Palestine's players and staff celebrated on the pitch, hugging and waving flags. The United Arab Emirates went through in second place in Group C despite losing 2-1 to group winners Iran.

Palestine's victory came against the backdrop of the Zionist entity-Hamas war in the Palestinian territory of Gaza. Players and staff have lost loved ones in the conflict. Captain Musab Al-Battat said that his men had made good on "a promise we made to the Palestinian people".

"I would like to thank all those who supported us," he said. "We managed to put a smile on the faces of those who follow us... inside or outside Palestine." A pre-match moment's silence was overrun by shouts of "Free Palestine".

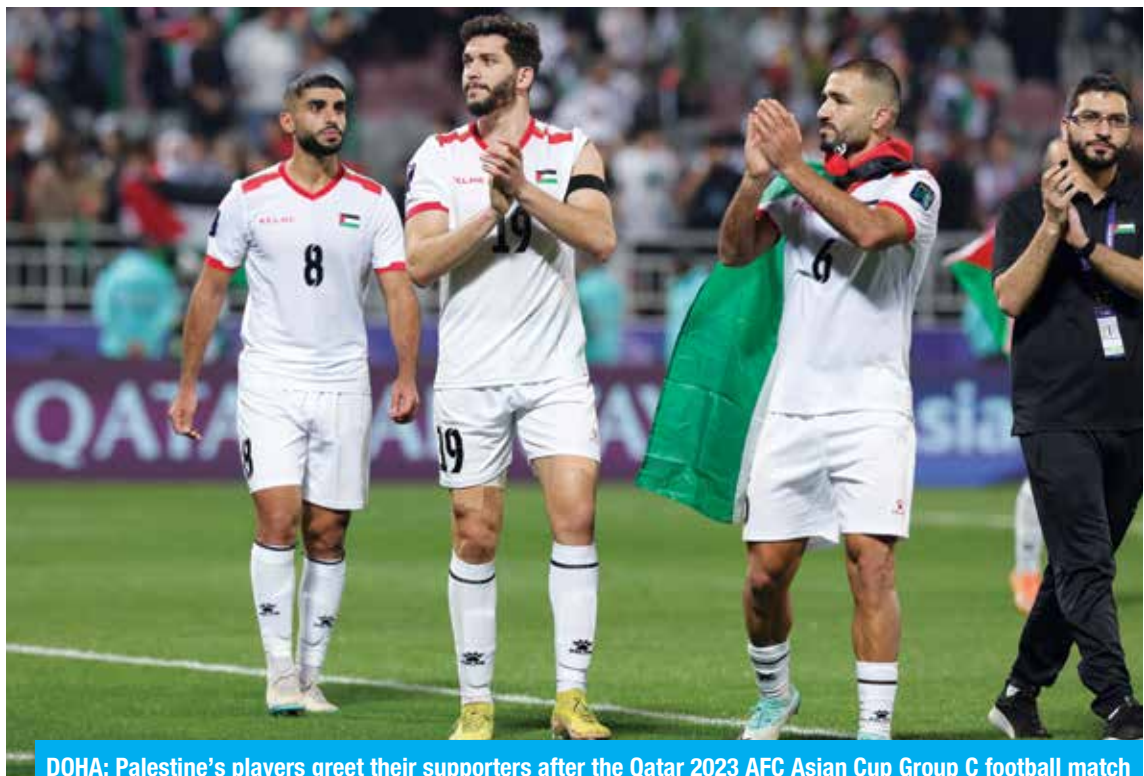
No side had played more Asian Cup matches without a win than Hong Kong (12 games) or Palestine (eight), but victory would offer either side a chance of making the last 16. In the 12th minute Palestine scored when Battat made an overlapping run from right-back and launched a cross into the box which Dabbagh headed into the net.

Heading over to their fans to celebrate, the players raised their hands to make V-signs. Hong Kong were dealt a blow when centre-back and match-day captain Vas Nunez sustained an arm injury and had to be replaced by Li Ngai-hoi.

But the team ranked 150 in the world started creating chances as the half wore on, Philip Chan and Everton Camargo blazing over.

India's Bopanna becomes oldest world No 1 at 43

MELBOURNE: India's Rohan Bopanna will become the oldest number one in men's doubles history after reaching the Australian Open semi-finals on Wednesday at the age of 43. Bopanna, who attributes his longevity to yoga, turned professional



DOHA: Palestine's players greet their supporters after the Qatar 2023 AFC Asian Cup Group C football match between Hong Kong and Palestine at the Abdullah bin Khalifa Stadium in Doha. — AFP

'Everything is possible'

Throughout the game the 6,568 people inside the Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium were almost entirely supporting Palestine, like at most grounds during the team's campaign. But a dense and boisterous bloc of red-clad Hong Kong fans provided an unending beat of encouragement for the minnows from southern China.

Minutes into the second half Palestine doubled their lead, Battat again the provider from the right wing, this time Zeid Qunbar taking him up on a generous invitation to score. Palestine got a third after the hour, Tamer Seyam's long-range effort hitting the bar and falling to Dabbagh, who tapped in his second of the match. They were given a scare during the eighth minute of added time when referee Shaun Evans awarded Hong Kong a penalty

more than two decades ago and his previous highest ranking was third, which he reached in 2013.

Wednesday's win for Bopanna and Australian partner Matthew Ebden against Argentine pair Maximo Gonzalez and Andres Molteni guarantees Bopanna will be top of the new rankings when they are published on Monday. "If a 40-plus-year-old can do this, that is an inspiration," said Bopanna.

"As a tennis player sometimes you think that the journey is done. I stuck to my instincts and believed in myself." Bopanna said his long career had taken its toll on his body and left him with "no cartilage" in his knees.

after a VAR review for a handball by Battat.

But Everton's spot-kick thudded against the bar as Hong Kong headed home, beaten but proud. Winning coach Makram Daboub said his team "knew this match was decisive... especially concerning the current circumstances that Palestine is going through".

Looking ahead to the next round he said he was realistic about the challenge, but that his team was "very confident in our ability and everything is possible in the second round". Hong Kong coach Jorn Andersen rued his team's inability to get a goal in the game's opening stages, which might have changed the complexion of the contest.

"That's the difference between us and the better teams before us, because they have the quality to make a goal out of nothing," he said. "We can try and get better. We need it for the future." — AFP

But he said his regular yoga workouts had helped him achieve the mental and physical strength necessary to keep competing at the top level. "Every single morning I do a lot of yoga, a lot of meditation," he said. "My mind doesn't feel rushed."

Bopanna's only Grand Slam win so far has been at the 2017 French Open in mixed doubles, with Canada's Gabriela Dabrowski. The previous oldest men's doubles number one was US player Mike Bryan, who was 41.

Roger Federer holds the record for the oldest men's singles number one, at the age of 36, but Novak Djokovic can beat his mark this year. — AFP

Chelsea thrash Middlesbrough to reach League final

LONDON: Chelsea stormed into the League Cup final with a 6-1 thrashing of second-tier Middlesbrough to easily overturn a 1-0 first leg deficit at Stamford Bridge on Tuesday. The Blues struck four times before half-time as Jonny Howson's own goal, Enzo Fernandez, Axel Disasi and Cole Palmer put Mauricio Pochettino's men on the road to Wembley next month.

Palmer and Noni Madueke piled the pain on Middlesbrough in the closing stages on a night that could prove the turning point in Pochettino's early reign in charge. A much tougher test awaits against either Premier League leaders Liverpool or local rivals Fulham on February 25, but there are promising signs for the Argentine that an expensively-assembled yet still raw squad is beginning to come together.

"Today we were very clinical in front of goal. We missed that in the first leg and we were disappointed. Today we were really good and I think that is the difference," said Pochettino. The former Tottenham boss now has the chance to win his first trophy in England football and Chelsea's first since the club's owners took over in 2022 and stared splashing out over £1 billion (\$1.3 billion) in transfer fees.

Boro are 11th in the Championship and the gulf in class between the sides eventually told over 180 minutes. The first blow of the night for Michael Carrick's men was a self-inflicted one as veteran midfielder Howson turned into his own net as he tried to prevent Armando Broja from tapping in Raheem Sterling's cross. — AFP



LONDON: Chelsea's English midfielder #07 Raheem Sterling (L) fights for the ball with Middlesbrough's Dutch defender #03 Rav van den Berg during the English League Cup semi-final second leg football match between Chelsea and Middlesbrough at Stamford Bridge, in London. — AFP

Classifieds

Clinics & Hospitals

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804

Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

Hospitals

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity 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, holder of Indian Passport No U0200951 having permanent address 2-2-111, Ranjal Base, Bodhan, Nizamabad 503185, Telangana state residing in Kuwait at present here by declare that henceforth my name will be read as given name Azher Ahmed and surname Shaik.
(#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

Japan into Asian Cup last 16 as Iraq win five-goal thriller

Pre-tournament favourites Japan finish runners-up in Group D behind Iraq



DOHA: Japan's defender #15 Koki Machida falls in a challenge for the ball against Indonesia's midfielder #08 Witan Sulaeman during the Qatar 2023 AFC Asian Cup Group D football match between Japan and Indonesia at al-Thumama Stadium in Doha on January 24, 2024. — AFP

DOHA: Japan cruised into the Asian Cup last 16 on Wednesday and a possible date with South Korea, as already qualified Iraq came out on top in a five-goal thriller. Ayase Ueda struck in each half to go with a late Indonesia own goal as pre-tournament favourites Japan won 3-1 to finish runners-up in Group D behind Iraq.

Japan will now face the winners of Group E—South Korea's group. Jurgen Klinsmann's South Korea are currently second on goal difference behind Jordan and face Malaysia in their final group match on Thursday. Following Japan's shock 2-1 defeat to Iraq, coach Hajime Moriyasu made eight changes to his starting line-up, bringing in an entirely new defence. He kept faith in goalkeeper Zion Suzu-

ki, who was at fault against Iraq and was racially abused online after the game. But there was still no place for Brighton winger Kaoru Mitoma, who was left out of the match-day squad for a third straight game as he struggles for full fitness.

Japan were awarded a penalty in the sixth minute after a VAR check ruled that Indonesia defender Jordi Amat had dragged down Ueda in the box. The Feyenoord striker dusted himself down and dispatched the spot-kick past goalkeeper Er-rando Ari.

Japan doubled their lead seven minutes after half-time when Ritsu Doan cut through the Indonesia defence down the wing and Ueda was on hand to tap home his low cross. Ueda went looking

for his hat-trick and his shot pressured Indonesia defender Justin Hubner into firing the ball into his own goal in the 88th minute.

Sandy Walsh volleyed home from close range in the 91st minute to give Indonesia a consolation. They finished third in the group and will have to wait until the first round concludes on Thursday to see if they go through as one of the four best third-placed teams.

Hussein double

The 2007 champions Iraq, who had already topped the group, scored in the 12th minute of injury time against 10-man Vietnam for a thrilling 3-2 win. Aymen Hussein scored twice, including the de-

cider at the death from the penalty spot, to take his tally to a tournament-leading five goals.

Vietnam led three minutes before the break when Bui Hoang Viet Anh poked home off a Khuat Van Khang free-kick. That would be Khuat's last major attacking involvement—he was sent off in first-half stoppage time for a second yellow card.

Rebin Sulaka equalised immediately after the restart and then Hussein, on as a substitute, made it 2-1. Hussein missed a penalty and it looked like he would be made to regret it when Nguyen Quang Hai got behind the Iraqi back line to score on the stroke of the 90th minute to make it 2-2. But Vietnam gave away another penalty deep in added time and on this occasion Hussein did not miss. — AFP

Zverev shocks Alcaraz to join Medvedev in Australian Open semis

MELBOURNE: Alexander Zverev snuffed out a thrilling Carlos Alcaraz comeback early Thursday to set up an Australian Open semi-final against Daniil Medvedev as Ukrainian qualifier Dayana Yastremska's dream run continued in Melbourne.

The big-serving German recovered from a major wobble to win 6-1, 6-3, 6-7 (2/7), 6-4 in just over three hours, crushing Alcaraz's hopes of a third Grand Slam title. Zverev broke at his first opportunity on Rod Laver Arena, dominating the charismatic Spaniard, who could find no answer to his opponent's power and precision.

The sixth seed served for victory at 5-3 in the third set but the Spaniard somehow broke his opponent and produced some outrageous shots in the tie-break as the crowd erupted. The pair swapped breaks at the beginning of the fourth set but Zverev earned a crucial breakthrough in the ninth game and served it out to reach the semis at Melbourne Park for the second time.

Former US Open runner-up Zverev, who reached the semi-finals in Melbourne in 2020, landed 85 percent of his first serves and won 73 percent of points behind his first delivery. "I was playing one of the best players in the world. Over the past two years he has been number one or number two constantly," said the 26-year-old.

"He's won two Grand Slams, and when you are up 6-1, 6-3, 5-2, you start thinking. 'We are all human. It is a great honour to play against guys like him. When you're so close to winning your brain starts going and it is not always helpful, but I'm happy that I got there in the end.'"

Alcaraz rued missed opportunities but said overall he was pleased with his performance in Melbourne. "In general, you know, I leave the tournament happy, forgetting about today's level," he said. "But in gen-



MELBOURNE: Germany's Alexander Zverev hits a return against Spain's Carlos Alcaraz during their men's singles quarter-final match on day 11 of the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne on January 25, 2024. — AFP

eral I think I did a pretty good tournament.

"I played great matches and obviously a quarter-final of a Grand Slam is good. It is not what I'm looking for, but is not bad, you know."

Earlier, former US Open champion Medvedev came through a gruelling five-setter against Hubert Hurkacz in sweaty conditions to win 7-6 (7/4), 2-6, 6-3, 5-7, 6-4. The Russian world number three was twice pegged back by the Polish ninth seed after going a set up but produced the crucial break in the decider to get over the line.

The 27-year-old, who lost to Novak Djokovic in the 2021 final and Rafael Nadal the following year, said he felt "destroyed" after the contest, which lasted nearly four hours. "I honestly was feeling it physically at the end of the second set already and I said to stay tough," he said.

"Fourth set I had no more concentration and I had to try my best to do whatever I can." In the opening match on centre court, 93rd-ranked Yastremska cruised past unseeded Czech Linda Noskova to become just the second women's qualifier in the Open Era to get so far at the Australian Open. — AFP

Clippers down Lakers in 'Battle of LA', Nuggets sink Pacers

LOS ANGELES: The Los Angeles Clippers took full advantage of the injury absence of LeBron James on Tuesday to score a 127-116 victory over the Los Angeles Lakers. Kawhi Leonard scored 25 points and James Harden added 23 as the Clippers' impressive recent form continued with a third straight victory.

Former Lakers point guard Russell Westbrook was among six Clippers players to reach double figures in a balanced offensive performance by Tyronn Lue's side. The Lakers, missing James due to a sore ankle, were led by D'Angelo Russell with 27 points while Anthony Davis finished with 26.

After briefly trailing early in the first quarter, the Clippers maintained control, leading by 16 points just before half-time and successfully keeping the Lakers at arm's length for most of the game. Although the Lakers got to within two points midway through the fourth quarter, the Clippers tightened their defense and pulled away late in the game.

"For us we're taking it day by day," Westbrook said afterwards. "We've got so much talent, so many great Hall-of-Famers in this locker room and our job is to make sure that every night we keep chipping away." Tuesday's victory leaves the Clippers in fourth place in the Western Conference standings with 28 wins against 14 losses, behind the Oklahoma City Thunder, Minnesota Timberwolves and Denver Nuggets.

In other games on Tuesday, Oklahoma City Thunder moved to top spot in the West with a nail-biting 111-109 win over the Portland Trail Blazers. Jalen Williams' pull-up jump shot with two seconds remaining sealed the win for the Thunder, who trailed by nine points in the third quarter. "It's a shot I work on a lot," Williams said afterwards. "Coach drew the play up for me to shoot it. He had a lot of faith in me to get to the spot I needed to be in and to make the shot."

Nuggets rally past Pacers

Elsewhere Tuesday, Nikola Jokic scored a 31-point triple-double as Denver held off a late rally to defeat the Indiana Pacers 114-109. A wild game in Indianapolis saw the lead change hands 12 times before the Nuggets finally edged clear late in the fourth quarter.

Both teams led by double digits at different stages of the game, with the Pacers opening up a 13-point advantage in the second quarter before a devastating third quarter from Denver—outscored Indiana 39-19 — wrestled back the initiative for the reigning NBA champions.

Even then, there was still time for the Pacers to fight back, wiping out the Nuggets' 13-point fourth quarter advantage to lead briefly before a late burst of scoring sealed Denver's victory. "The whole first half was bad, but the second half was good for us," Jokic said.

"We had a really good third quarter. We controlled the pace. We just need to do that in more of the game." Jokic finished with 31 points, 13 rebounds and 10 assists to lead the Denver scoring alongside Jamal Murray, who had 31 points with eight rebounds and seven assists.

With the Pacers still missing the injured Tyrese Haliburton, Indiana's scoring was led by Myles Turner with 22 points while new recruit Pascal Siakam finished with 16 points. The Pacers meanwhile had head coach Rick Carlisle ejected for questioning a no-foul call on Siakam in the third quarter.

"I got run out because I didn't like what I was seeing out there at all. Not one bit," Carlisle explained after the game. "I'll leave it at that." Also on Tuesday, the New York Knicks won their local derby with the Brooklyn Nets 108-103 after a remarkable late rally.

The Nets looked to be on course for victory after taking a 10-point lead late in the third quarter, only for the Knicks to outscore them 32-18 in the fourth quarter to snatch the win. Julius Randle and Jalen Brunson each scored 30 points apiece for the Knicks to set up a battling victory. Mikal Bridges was the pick of Brooklyn's scorers with 36 points, including seven three-pointers. — AFP