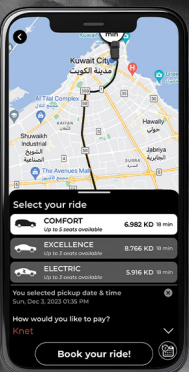



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Kuwait reopens family visas

Cabinet holds consultative meeting on priorities



KUWAIT: HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah chairs a consultative Cabinet meeting at Seif Palace on Jan 25, 2024. — KUNA

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The interior ministry announced on Thursday that it will resume issuing family visas for expatriates starting from Jan 28, as per orders issued by Deputy Prime Minister, Defense Minister and Acting Interior Minister Sheikh Fahad Al-You-suf Al-Sabah. The resumption comes after a sus-pension of close to two years.

Under the new rules, expats who qualify to ap-ply for dependent visas for wives and children must draw a monthly salary of at least KD 800, up from KD 600 previously. Applicants must be university graduates and their jobs in the country should be identical to their university specializations, the min-istry said in a statement.

Kuwait had suspended the issuance of family

visas almost two years ago with the aim to regu-late the visas as part of the country's plans to cut the number of expats, who form over two-thirds of the country's population of 4.5 million. A few months ago, the interior ministry eased the total ban on dependent visas by allowing expat cou-ples employed in Kuwait to sponsor their children aged five and below.

Meanwhile, HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah chaired Thursday a consultative Cabinet meeting at Seif Palace in the presence of heads of the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Plan-ning and Development. The meeting aimed to determine priorities and review initiatives of the government's action program in light of the con-tent of the decree of HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal

Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

The meeting was in line with the government's keenness to follow up on preparing its action pro-gram and submit it to the National Assembly in a manner that meets the aspirations of the Kuwaiti people, Minister of Social Affairs, Family and Child-hood Affairs and Acting Minister of State for Cab-inet Affairs Sheikh Feras Saud Al-Sabah said.

HH the Prime Minister extolled efforts and keen-ness of the ministers and those tasked with prepar-ing the program, Sheikh Feras noted. HH Sheikh Dr Mohammad underlined the necessity of construc-tive cooperation and coordination between the leg-islative and executive branches to achieve national goals and aspirations of the country and its people amid a sincere desire for positive work and fruitful cooperation between the two sides.

NEWS IN BRIEF



Kuwait hails UN partnership

NEW YORK: Deputy Foreign Minister Am-bassador Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Sabah hailed the strategic partnership, cooperation and co-ordination between Kuwait and the United Na-tions in a meeting with UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres on the sidelines of the UN Se-curity Council's open debate on the Middle East and Palestine. Sheikh Jarrah affirmed Kuwait's support of UN efforts, asserting its commitment to the stipulations in its charter. The two also discussed latest developments on regional and international fronts. — KUNA

Flags return to full mast

KUWAIT: State institutions raised the flag of Kuwait to full mast on Thursday after the end of the 40-day official mourning period for the de-mise of His Highness the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

KOTC monitoring situation

KUWAIT: Kuwait Oil Tanker Company (KOTC) said on Thursday it is monitoring and assessing daily the current situation in Bab Al-Mandeb Strait and the Red Sea. It underlined in a press statement that it is following globally applied precautionary measures for the protection and safety of its fleet.

Ex-MP jailed for vote-buying

KUWAIT: The criminal county on Thursday sentenced former MP Salman Al-Azemi to two years in jail after convicting him of buying votes during the parliamentary elections. A female citizen was also handed a similar jail term for assisting the former lawmaker.

Palestinian surgeon recounts Zionist war horrors in Gaza

By Passant Hisham

KUWAIT: Dr Ghassan Abu Sitta, a plastic surgeon specializing in conflict injuries, recounted the over-whelming terror he witnessed during his volunteer work in Gaza hospitals since the beginning of the Zionist aggression at a symposium hosted by the

Kuwait Committee for Je-rusalem on Wednesday.

Abu Sitta, based in London and born in Ku-wait, began describing his days spent trying to save the people of Gaza, primarily in Al-Ahli Baptist Hospital and the Al-Shifa Medical Com-plex. He emphasized that the Zionist entity's ruth-less Gaza bombing not only involved killing peo-ple and destroying buildings, but completely erad-icating entire neighborhoods. "Since the victory of



Dr Ghassan Abu Sitta

October 7, I already sensed a cruel war coming, but I never expected it to turn into a genocidal war," he said, expressing his shock at the mag-nitude of the conflict.

He vividly detailed the massive bombings, result-ing in severe injuries that overwhelmed hospitals. Countless ambulances arrived at the hospital every one to two minutes, carrying more than six patients each, surpassing the 600-bed capacity of Gaza's largest hospital, Al-Shifa. Abu Sitta noted that the highest casualties were among children, many of whom lost their parents in the conflict, revealing the unprecedented nature of this war compared to his experiences in other war zones like Syria, Yemen, Iraq, and Lebanon. (See Page 2)

Gazans waiting for aid martyred in Zionist strikes

GAZA: Authorities in the Gaza Strip said Thursday that Zionist forces had killed 20 people waiting for humanitarian aid to be distributed, as the Zionist en-tity pressed its blistering assault in the territory. The health ministry in Gaza said the attack occurred on the outskirts of Gaza City, in the north of the terri-tory, with 150 people also wounded. Hamas said the incident amounted to a "horrific war crime".

Palestinian militant group Islamic Jihad said they were killed by "artillery shells and missiles". Wit-nesses interviewed by AFP said they had been tar-geted by Zionist forces. "People were going to get food and flour as they had nothing to eat," Abu Ata Basal, the uncle of one of the injured, told AFP. "Sud-denly, tanks appeared and started firing shells at the people, who were cut into pieces."

"We were heading to get flour, and they shelled us four times, and some people were martyred and injured," said Mohammed Al-Rifi, who was

Continued on Page 6



GAZA: Injured people receive treatment in Gaza City's Al-Shifa Hospital following a deadly Zionist strike on people waiting for humanitarian aid on Jan 25, 2024. — AFP

Gaza journo joins Al Jazeera bureau chief in Qatar

DOHA: Gaza photojournalist Motaz Azaiza joined Al Jazeera's bureau chief for the Palestinian territory, Wael Al-Dahdouh, for a photo in Qatar on Wednes-day following the pair's evacuation. He posted a pic-ture with Dahdouh writing: "Our smile is a kind of resilience." Azaiza, alongside a group of journalist-in-fluencers from Gaza, has amassed a huge social media following during the Zionist-Hamas war by combining unflinching coverage with personal stories.

The 24-year-old photojournalist has reached 18.5 million followers on Instagram and a further million on X, formerly Twitter, during more than 100 days of conflict in Gaza. On Tuesday Azaiza announced on

Instagram that he was departing the Palestinian ter-ritory — home to 2.4 million — and posted footage of himself boarding a Qatari military aircraft at an airport in Egypt.

"I left Gaza with a broken heart and eyes filled with tears. There was no other option after 108 days of continuous massacres against us," he later posted on X. "It's time to move somewhere else so I can do more work and I pray that I can be a reason to stop this war and help rebuild Gaza again. I've arrived, Qatar. Thank you," the influencer added alongside pictures of Al Jazeera's Doha studio.

Azaiza has produced content for the UN's ag-en-cy for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) and the Paris-based medical charity Medecins du Monde (Doctors of the World). Dahdouh, whose mourning of his wife and children's killings in Zionist strikes has been broadcast globally, was evacuated from Gaza to Qatar last week. At least 83 journalists have been killed since the Zionist-Hamas war broke out, according to a tally from the Committee to Protect Journalists. — AFP



DOHA: Gaza photojournalist Motaz Azaiza meets Al Jazeera's bureau chief for the Palestinian territory Wael Al-Dahdouh on Jan 24, 2024.

Local

Palestinian surgeon recounts Zionist war horrors after returning from Gaza

Ruthless Gaza bombing wiping out entire neighborhoods



Ghassan Abu Sitta sits next to the head of Kuwait Committee for Jerusalem



Audience attending the symposium.

By Passant Hisham

KUWAIT: Ghassan Abu Sitta, a plastic surgeon specializing in conflict injuries, recalled the overwhelming terror that he witnessed while volunteering in Gaza hospitals since the beginning of the Zionist aggression, at a symposium hosted by the Kuwait Committee for Jerusalem on Wednesday. Abu Sitta, who was born in Kuwait and is based in London, started recounting how he spent his days trying to save the people of Gaza, mostly at Al-Ahli Baptist Hospital and Al-Shifa Medical Complex. According to him, the Zionist entity's ruthless Gaza bombing not only started by killing people and destroying buildings, but completely wiping out entire neighborhoods.

"Since the victory of October 7, I saw a cruel war coming, but I never expected it to become a genocidal war," he said, lamenting how people's lives were very easily lost. "We could smell the decomposing dead bodies trapped under the buildings," Abu Sitta said. He vividly described how the massive bombings resulted in severe injuries in victims who were transferred by countless numbers of ambulances arriving at the hospital every one to two minutes, carrying more than six patients in each, exceeding the 600-bed capacity of Al-Shifa, the largest hospital in Gaza. Abu Sitta noted the highest rate of casualties was among children, most of whom also lost their parents in the conflict. "This was the moment I realized that this war was unlike any war that I have ever witnessed before," he said, referring to multiple war zones he has worked in, including Syria, Yemen, Iraq and Lebanon.

Abu Sitta spoke of the deadly weapons the Zionists used against Palestinians, resulting in injuries that were beyond their expectations, referring to Hellfire missiles, which "disintegrate into shards of metal that cause the largest possible number of injuries and amputations". The use of deadly weapons extended to the phosphorus shells, which he explained cause deep chemical burns from the surface of the body until the internal organs.

"Just like a drill, the phosphorus substance keeps penetrating to the deepest parts of the body, reaching tissues, bones and even the intestines," he said. Dealing with these types of wounds was very challenging during operations, as whenever the wound got exposed to air, the phosphorus ignited spontaneously as it reacted with oxygen.



Abu Sitta addresses the media in the rubble of Al-Ahli Baptist Hospital.

During the operation, the surgeon's assistant had to keep pouring water to stop the fire," Abu Sitta said.

Day by day, with the constant bombing of hospitals, increasing number of casualties and scarcity of medical resources, the situation got worse. "Only two operation rooms were functioning, and we were just two surgeons there in front of more than 500 cases," Abu Sitta recalled. Unfortunately, many of these cases were left untreated for more than four days, which resulted in infections in their wounds, causing blood poisoning and eventually leading to death, he said.

Even the cases that were treated under very harsh conditions, as when the wound healing material ran out, the doctors replaced it with vinegar and used dishwashing detergents to clean the wounds. Not only this, but they also ran out of drugs and painkillers. "It was the toughest moment in my career history, as I was left with no choice but to conduct surgical operations on children and adults without giving them anesthesia, because the other option was to leave them to die."

Even after the surgery, their pain was never relieved, as the only painkiller available was paracetamol, which was not effective enough. Following intense bombing of hospitals of Gaza, Al-Ahli Baptist Hospital and Al-Shifa Medical Complex stopped functioning completely and turned into mass graves, Abu Sitta noted.

With the lack of basic resources, including food and water, malnutrition took over. So, if people didn't die from the bombings or the ineffective medical treatment, they



GAZA: Palestinians use a donkey-pulled cart to transport some of their belongings as they flee Khan Yunis toward Rafah further south in the Gaza Strip, on January 25, 2024. — AFP

were going to die from malnutrition, especially during the cold weather conditions that resulted in the spread of diseases, Abu Sitta said. This is when it dawned on him that the point of the war was not for the sake of any political victory, but to transform Gaza into an uninhabitable place during and after the war.

"Basically, the Zionists' plan is to achieve with a ceasefire what they failed to achieve in war. They only use it as a chance to continue the slow killing," he said. Over time, the situation escalated to entire families being wiped out of the civil registry, Abu Sitta said. With that being said, and despite all attempts by the Zionist entity to defeat the resistance of Palestinian people, he was impressed by how they stood together in solidarity against death and helped one another amid the despair

and lack of resources. He referred to moments where people didn't hesitate to share with others the last piece of bread or even the last medication pill.

Abu Sitta recalled being touched by a painful memory of a three-year-old boy who lost both his parents and was too young to recognize his own name. "I saw him sleeping in the arms of a woman who was feeding him just like her other kids. I learned later she adopted him without even knowing his name." After 43 days of enduring these conditions, Abu Sitta made the decision to return to his family in the UK, as he could no longer bear conducting such ineffective operations. "When I got out of the boundaries of the Palestinian health system for the first time, I could clearly see that the life that I knew in this place has ceased to exist," he said.

Kuwait building bridges of cultural cooperation

CAIRO: An official at the Kuwait Ministry of Information confirmed on Thursday the ministry's keenness to build bridges of cooperation and cultural communication with the Gulf and Arab countries. This came in a statement made by Asrar Al-Dosari to the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) during the Cairo International Book Fair in its 55th session, which launched its activities on Wednesday under the slogan "We create knowledge. We are reading the word" at the Egypt Center for international exhibitions in Cairo.

Al-Dosari said that the Ministry of Information is proactive in supporting Arab culture and is keen to participate in various international exhibitions, especially the Cairo International Book Fair, which is one of the largest exhibitions in the Arab world. The Ministry, represented by the press, publishing, and publications sectors, is participating in the exhibition with a set of distinguished old and modern publications, as well as books by Kuwaiti authors that were distributed to the public to support culture and intellectual awareness at the Arab world level.

In this regard, she explained that the most prominent of these issues are the stories of the constitution of Kuwait, men from the history of Kuwait, and birds in the Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad nature reserve, in addition to books in Arabic and English that tell the history of Kuwait and tourist and entertainment places in the country. She praised the wide participation in the exhibition and the outstanding turnout for the Kuwait Pavilion, stressing the keenness of the Egyptian public to acquire valuable Kuwaiti books and publications.

On Wednesday, Egyptian Prime Minister Dr. Mustafa Madbouly opened the 55th edition of the Cairo International Book Fair, which kicked off on January 25 and will continue until February 6 with the participation of 1,200 publishing houses from 70 countries. Kuwait participates in the Cairo International Book Fair with distinctive pavilions of the Ministry of Information, the National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters, and the research center. And Kuwaiti studies, in addition to a large number of publishing houses. — KUNA



Kuwaiti-Turkish Friendship Group holds talks

ANKARA: The delegation of the Parliamentary Friendship Group (Kuwaiti-Turkish) headed by MP Mohammed Al-Mutairi met on Thursday with its counterpart friendship group in Ankara at the building of the Turkish Grand National Assembly with the participation of MPs Abdullah Al-Enezi, Dr. Falah Al-Hajri, and the Ambassador of Kuwait to Turkey, Wael Al-Enezi.

Al-Mutairi said in a statement to the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) after the meeting that the two sides stressed the need to raise the level of trade exchange and the volume of mutual investments, economic and defense cooperation, especially as the two countries celebrate the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between them and their association with about 62 agreements covering all areas of cooperation.

Al-Mutairi emphasized the depth of relationships. He pointed to the appreciation of the Turkish side and recalled the solidarity of Kuwait's leadership and people with Turkey following the devastating earthquake that struck the city of Gaziantep in February last year and the launch of an urgent relief



ANKARA: Kuwaiti and Turkish delegations hold a meeting on Thursday in Ankara to raise the level of trade exchange and the volume of mutual investments.— KUNA photos

campaign by Kuwait (Kuwait is next to you) under the directives of His Highness the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

He said that the Kuwaiti delegation urges Turkish companies to invest directly in Kuwait. Al-Mutairi added that the Kuwaiti and Turkish sides stressed the importance of stopping the crimes of Zionist oc-

cupation in the Gaza Strip and in occupied Palestine and holding the Zionist entity accountable. The delegation of the Parliamentary Friendship Group also met with the head of the Investment Office of the Turkish presidency, where the delegation discussed economic relations, raising the level of trade exchange, and investment opportunities. — KUNA

Local

Jaber Hospital following latest protocols in internal medicine

Conference sheds light on the latest medical developments

KUWAIT: Dr Huda Al-Sahhaf, Consultant of Internal Medicine and Clinical Hematology at Jaber Al-Ahmad Hospital, confirmed the hospital's keenness to present the latest scientific findings in the fields of internal medicine treatment and its specialties according to the latest international protocols. Dr Al-Sahhaf said in her speech during the opening of the first annual scientific conference of Jaber Al-Ahmad Hospital on Thursday that the two-day conference attracted a number of experts and shed light on the latest medical developments in internal medicine and its specialties that will improve the medical system in Kuwait.

The conference includes 11 workshops dealing with practical clinical aspects to help doctors practice their jobs and refine their skills through direct discussion with other experts. The conference is the culmination of dedication, experience, and a joint commitment to advancing the boundaries of internal medicine. She pointed out the importance of the conference and its role in raising medical awareness about the latest developments in internal medicine.

Participants discussed the latest developments in internal medicine and exchanged experience through scientific sessions and medical lectures on the importance of early treatment and diagnosis. They also discussed the latest developments in the treatment of internal diseases and reviewed the opinions of a number of consultants to raise awareness among health practitioners.

The conference sheds light on a number of themes on various diseases and presents the latest developments in techniques and methods of treatment in internal medicine, addressing the comprehensive care model and health transformation plans for treatment programs. Dr. Al-Sahhaf talked about the role of Jaber Hospital in treating many cases of internal diseases through international treatment protocols

at the highest level, especially since the hospital is the largest in the Middle East and covers all internal diseases, surgery, and most specialties.

For his part, Consultant Endocrinologist and Diabetes and Head of the Endocrinology Unit at Jaber Al-Ahmad Hospital, Dr. Thamer Al-Issa, said that the conference includes many medical specialties, including respiratory diseases, asthma, chronic diseases, diabetes, and endocrinology. Dr. Al-Issa added that diabetes is one of the diseases prevalent in Kuwait. In addition to the associated diseases, complications, and treatment methods, the conference witnessed specialized lectures that highlighted medical recommendations, specifically in the specialty of endocrinology.

Specialist in diabetes and endocrinology at Jaber Hospital, Dr. Nawal Al-Otaibi, said in her speech that Kuwait has recently witnessed the spread of the use of injections and their excellent effectiveness in reducing sugar levels and weight, but medical advice must be obtained before the usage due to the side effects. Al-Otaibi explained that this drug is useful for patients with diabetes and overweight.

She pointed to the development of cholesterol treatments to include a needle taken every two weeks instead of pills, which were provided by the Ministry of Health, pointing to their positive effects in reducing cholesterol levels as well as the lack of side effects.

The head of the educational committee at Jaber Al-Ahmad Hospital, Dr. Huda Al-Baloul, said that a committee was established in 2022 to provide medical lectures to doctors in various specialties. Al-Baloul pointed out that the committee is the first of its kind in Kuwait and aims primarily to shed light on post-COVID developments and associated diseases, including clinical ulcers, surgeries, bleeding, and strokes.—KUNA



Participants arrive for the conference. — KUNA photos



Dr Huda Al-Baloul



Dr Huda Al-Sahhaf



Dr Nawal Al-Otaibi



Dr Thamer Al-Issa

Kuwait, Britain mark 125 years of diplomatic ties

KUWAIT: This week marks 125 years since establishment of the 1899 Anglo-Kuwaiti agreement, a protectorate agreement launching decades of diplomatic relations, cooperation and strategic partnership. In honor of the momentous event, the two governments dubbed 2024 the year of Kuwaiti-British Partnership, as per an agreement signed on the sidelines of an official visit by HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, then Crown Prince, to the United Kingdom in August 2023.

A joint statement issued by both countries' foreign ministries on Thursday highlighted the exponential growth of the deeply-rooted relations over the course of 125 years: years marked with support and cooperation in the face of regional and global challenges, and in defense of common values. This year is an opportunity to reflect on achievements, including investment relationships, embodied in the establishment of the Kuwait Investment Office 70 years ago, as well as the defense of the territorial integrity of Kuwait in the First Gulf War.

The two nations are setting out to augment current and future cooperation through high-level visits, events, initiatives and promotion of cultural and educational exchange. "Key areas of focus for cooperation will include trade and investment, defense, cyber security, education, cul-



British Minister of State for the Middle East Lord Tariq Ahmad

ture and international development ... key foreign policy issues which underpin mutual security and prosperity, as well as shared challenges and opportunities that are emerging in our ever-changing world," read the statement.

Furthermore, the statement expressed eagerness of both countries for the soon-to-be-launched Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA) to replace its visa waiver predecessor and make travel to the UK more accessible than ever. Cyber security and defense is another field the two are looking forward to amplifying cooperation on with the UK's help in establishing the National Cyber Security Center in Kuwait.

Deputy Foreign Minister Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah spoke of Kuwait's pride in the steadfast relations between the two nations, underlining their intent on bolstering these ties. He also



Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah

took note of the upcoming events to take place this year, indicating that this has been brought forth by HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's last visit to the UK.

Similarly, British Minister of State for the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia, Commonwealth and United Nations, Lord Tariq Ahmad of Wimbledon, voiced the UK's pride in these durable relations, saying that this year is a thrilling opportunity to reflect on the past 125 years and to look forward to stimulating future cooperation. On a personal level, Lord Ahmad stated that he is looking forward to visiting Kuwait next month as part of the UK-Kuwait Joint Steering Group meetings alongside Sheikh Jarrah. The British minister also expressed his complete confidence that the exceptional relations between the two nations will continue to expand over the next 125 years and beyond. — KUNA

Armed forces to carry out shooting training

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti armed forces announced that the ground force will carry out coastal shooting training with live ammunition in Sabiya and Boubyan from January 28 to 30, from six in the morning until six in the evening. The Directorate of Moral Guidance and Public Relations of the Army urged citizens and residents not to approach the area during the announced period in order to ensure the safety of everyone. — KUNA



Center recycles waste to preserve environment

KUWAIT: The Director General of the Scientific Center, Musaed Al-Yassin, said on Thursday that the center is keen on sorting and recycling waste products like electronic, paper, and other containers so as to preserve the environment. Al-Yassin stated that the recycling program at the center is one of the basic programs to reduce the problem of plastic pollution and educate the community about its dangers, especially for marine organisms.

He stressed that the center works with various authorities in the country to preserve the environment and implement sustainable devel-

opment goals by spreading environmental culture through recycling programs and waste investment to achieve an economic return for the country. Al-Yassin explained that the center (established in 2020) is a model entitled "The Last Catch"—just like the famous Kuwaiti Zubaidi fish—to collect plastic bottles and then recycle them, in a step to protect the environment from the danger of plastic pollution.

He pointed out that this model was carried out in cooperation with Kuwaiti artist Jassim Al-Nashmi as part of the center's sustainability program, which includes community initiatives that promote environmental preservation and raise awareness about the effects of pollution. Plastic bottles are collected inside the fish model and are regularly removed in partnership between the scientific center and a local recycling company, Al-Yassin said. After collecting the bottles, the specialized company sorts, cuts, washes, and divides them into plastic granules

ready for use in other industries such as bags, pipes, and others, as well as exporting some of them outside the country, he said.

Al-Yassin stressed that the cleanliness of the environment and the seas and their freedom from plastics is a global goal, pointing out that "recycling waste and combating pollution has become an international requirement because of the great danger these materials pose to the seas and oceans." He stressed the need to spread environmental culture and community awareness about the importance of preserving the environment from pollution and combating it through various means. — KUNA



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KRCS underlines the importance of media

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) has stressed the importance of the media in supporting the society's humanitarian and voluntary efforts, delivering its message to the public, and mobilizing support for its various activities. Vice Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Society, Anwar Al-Hassawi, said on Thursday, on the sidelines of the visit of the delegation of the Department of Foreign Media at the Ministry of Information to the Society, that the Kuwait Red Crescent realized the importance of media in humanitarian work by conveying and communicating the suffering of the afflicted.

Al-Hassawi also pointed to the importance of the media in conveying a bright image of humanitarian work in Kuwait and focusing attention on the follow-up of humanitarian and charitable activities. He added that the association also contributed to broadcasting media messages that convey a true image of Kuwaiti charitable work through the issuance of publications and also through social media engines.

He stressed the importance of media work and its impact on raising the level of awareness of members of society, especially in the modern era, pointing out that the media enlighten and transfer correct information. He explained that the media did not fail to cover the activities of the association and its humanitarian and relief efforts, extending his deep thanks and appreciation to them. Al-Hassawi indicated that the media delegation was briefed on the mechanisms of work in the various departments of the association and the humanitarian work it carries out.

For her part, Director of Foreign Media Affairs at the Ministry of Information, Aisha Al-Asousi, praised the humanitarian and relief role played by the Kuwait Red Crescent Society at all local and international levels. Al-Asousi said that the media plays an important role in voluntary and charitable work in raising awareness, mobilizing support and donations, disseminating information, and creating a sense of community belonging around the issue. She stressed the keenness of the Ministry of Information to consolidate bilateral relations with the Kuwait Red Crescent and the importance of the humanitarian work it carries out to help those affected by natural or man-made disasters.

Photo of the day



KUWAIT: Aerial photo shows Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium. Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium is a multi-purpose stadium. Completed in 2009, it is used mostly for football matches and athletics. The stadium has a capacity of 60,000 seated spectators, the building is constructed in 4 levels, with 54 corporate boxes and a parking lot with a 6,001-car capacity. The stadium was named after late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Charity work: Bright face of Kuwait

A history of distinguished initiatives



Minister of Social Affairs, Family Affairs, and Childhood Sheikh Feras Saud Al-Malik Al-Sabah

KUWAIT: Minister of Social Affairs, Family Affairs, and Childhood Sheikh Feras Saud Al-Malik Al-Sabah said on Thursday that the history of Kuwaiti charitable work has expanded the hori-



zons through its performance, ideas, proposals, and distinguished initiatives, describing it as "the bright face of the country." This came in a statement by Sheikh Feras Al-Sabah on the sidelines of the closing ceremony of the Khalid Al-Issa Al-Saleh Award for Excellence in Charitable Work in its fourth session, organized by the Federation of Kuwaiti Charitable Societies and Institutions, and in the presence of a number of humanitarian bodies from inside and outside the country.

"The award seeks to promote charitable work in the country. It contributes to the advancement and development of works in associations as an incentive and path to excellence," the minister added, calling, at the same time, to work to overcome obstacles and promote charitable work. The minister expressed his happiness with the participation of humanitarian charitable organizations from the Gulf Cooperation Council countries and the sponsorship of the General Secretariat of the Gulf Cooperation Council, represented by the Executive Office of the Council of Ministers of Affairs and Ministers of Labor, in order to achieve leadership and universality of the award.

He also extended his thanks and appreciation to the sponsor of the ceremony, Khaled Issa Al-Saleh, for his sponsorship and support for this award, and to the Union of Associations and Institutions for the distinguished preparation and organization of the award. For his part, the President of the Union of Kuwaiti Charitable Societies and Institutions, Secretary-General of the Award, Nasser Al-Ajmi, said that the award witnessed the participation of all GCC countries. The categories were divided evenly in order to provide transparency and equal opportunities.

Al-Ajmi explained that the number of participants in the fourth edition increased, reaching 48 charities from inside and outside Kuwait, pointing out that this is an indication of the keenness of charitable organizations to improve their performance. The award is



Khaled Issa Al-Saleh

divided into two parts: the first (the performance of distinguished institutions) and the second (e-leadership) because of their great impact on the level of humanitarian work.

The Director of the Department of Social Affairs in the Executive Office of the Council of Ministers of Social Affairs in the Gulf Cooperation Council (General Secretariat), Dr. Saleh Al-Ghadhour, confirmed to KUNA that Kuwait enjoys a distinguished role and position in humanitarian work. Al-Ghadhour added that the participation of the executive office comes from "the lofty humanitarian idea of the award, which is at the heart of our goals."

He revealed a future idea initiated by Kuwait and Bahrain concerning coordinating charitable work at the level of the GCC countries in a legal and organized manner under the auspices of the Ministers of Development and Social Affairs in the GCC countries. He pointed out that the Ministry has taken it upon itself to present a clear strategy for the future charitable project. — KUNA



Participants take a group photo after the event. — KUNA photos



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Statue toppled as Australians reckon with bloody past

Suspect in deadly South African fire in court

India rolls out red carpet for Macron as France eyes lucrative trade deals

Trip will consolidate and deepen diplomatic and economic relations: Macron

JAIPUR: President Emmanuel Macron was given a red carpet reception in India on Thursday with a welcome parade of elephants, as France eyes lucrative deals with the world's fifth-largest economy. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is to host Macron for a banquet in a 19th-century maharaja's palace on Thursday evening, and on Friday he will be the chief guest at a colourful military march-past with massed ranks of tanks, camel cavalry and a fighter jet fly-past.

India's foreign ministry says New Delhi and Paris are "strategic partners", while the French presidency says the trip will "consolidate and deepen diplomatic and economic relations". Western democracies have concerns about human rights in India, their differences over the war in Ukraine and New Delhi's close ties with Moscow—its key military supplier. But the United States and its European allies are courting India as a military and economic counterweight to China.

France hopes to build on its military contracts after the Indian defence ministry purchased French-made Rafale fighter jets and Scorpene-class submarines in multibillion-dollar deals. Macron—who, according to Indian media, is coming after US President Joe Biden was unable to take up an invite—is also hoping France can sell six EPR nuclear reactors.

With a red flower garland around his neck, Macron shook hands with cheering schoolchildren waving flags of both nations after landing in Jaipur, in Rajasthan state. "We want to have more Indian students in France," he said.

'Peace and security'

Modi was guest of honour at France's annual Bastille Day celebrations last July, and Macron is to receive a similar welcome. Paris and New Delhi

collaborate on space and satellite technology, and the French delegation includes astronaut Thomas Pesquet. The visit included a stop at Jaipur's 18th-century Jantar Mantar astronomical observation site.

On Friday, Macron will watch a military parade in New Delhi for Republic Day, the 75th anniversary of India's constitution. Just as Indian soldiers marched down the streets of Paris in 2023, a French contingent will join the military spectacle, as French-built jets roar overhead.

India is "a key partner in contributing to international peace and security", the French presidency said ahead of the visit. Last year, Macron visited neighbouring Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, and also took a Pacific trip aimed at "recommitting" France to the wider Asia-Pacific region. The French president was last in India for the G20 summit in September.

'No taboo subjects'

Rights issues will also be discussed. Journalists, activists and religious minorities have complained of harassment since Modi's Hindu nationalist government took power in 2014, with accusations of rising religious intolerance towards the country's Muslim minority.

Modi's government has been accused of stifling independent media, with India falling 21 places to 161 out of 180 countries in Reporters Without Borders' press freedom index since Modi took office a decade ago. French journalist Vanessa Dougnac was told this month that she is facing expulsion after more than two decades in India for what authorities have termed "malicious and critical" reporting.

The visit also comes days after Modi opened a Hindu temple, built on grounds where a mosque



JAIPUR: India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi (R) and France's President Emmanuel Macron embrace during a visit at the Janta Mantar observatory in Jaipur on January 25, 2024. — AFP

stood for centuries before it was torn down in 1992 by Hindu zealots incited by members of his party. Modi said the temple heralded a "new era" for India after a ceremony that embodied the triumph of his muscular Hindu nationalist politics, galvanising loyalists ahead of elections this year.

Macron is slated to visit a Muslim Sufi shrine in New Delhi's Nizamuddin West neighbourhood during his visit. "There are no taboo subjects", a French presidential adviser said ahead of the trip. "But the goal is to discuss them with respect and with the aim of achieving concrete results". — AFP

Russia jails nationalist critic Girkin for 4 years

MOSCOW: Russian nationalist and ex-rebel commander Igor Girkin, whose pro-Moscow militants sparked a decade-long armed conflict in east Ukraine, was jailed for four years Thursday after repeatedly criticising the Kremlin.

Girkin, who also goes by the pseudonym "Strelkov", was instrumental in fomenting the conflict between Kremlin-backed separatists and Kyiv's armed forces in Ukraine's Donbas region in 2014. The Moscow City Court said it had found the 53-year-old guilty of "public calls to carry out extremist activities", and that he would serve his sentence in a general regime colony.

"I serve the Fatherland!" Girkin yelled out after the verdict was read out. His followers had gathered outside the court earlier. He was arrested last year on "extremism" charges after months of public attacks on Russia's military leaders and President Vladimir Putin, whom he chided for not pushing a more aggressive offensive against Ukraine.

Girkin had called Putin an "old idiot" and said "the country will not survive another six years of this cowardly mediocrity in power" in some of his final social media posts before his arrest. His sharp criticism, published daily in hours-long video blogs on his social media channels, was tolerated

by the authorities for months, even as the Kremlin's liberal opponents were handed severe jail sentences for going against the campaign.

But the mood in Moscow changed after Wagner commander Yevgeny Prigozhin and hundreds of his troops launched an aborted mutiny last June to oust Russia's military leadership. Girkin's arrest was a high-profile demonstration that Russia was reining in the nationalist critics.

'Dubious' extremist

Behind bars in pre-trial detention, he mounted a doomed campaign to run against Putin in March's presidential elections, doubling down on his anti-Kremlin position. In an interview with Russian media from jail, he said the country had "entered a period of acute instability" and faced "imminent catastrophe". Girkin had cultivated an image as the key figure behind Moscow's initial military foray into Ukraine in 2014. Moscow annexed the Crimean peninsula that year following a pro-European revolution in Kyiv that toppled the country's Moscow-friendly president.

Girkin, a former FSB officer, formed and commanded Moscow-backed forces in Donbas, marshalling troops out of a base in the captured city of Sloviansk. There, he reportedly or-



MOSCOW: Miroslava Reginskaya, wife of Igor Girkin (Strelkov), the former top military commander of the self-proclaimed "Donetsk People's Republic" and nationalist blogger, appears outside the Moscow City Court building after Girkin's verdict hearing in Moscow on January 25, 2024. — AFP

dered executions for minor crimes such as petty theft.

Convicted over Flight MH17

He was one of three men sentenced by a court in the Netherlands last year to life imprisonment in absentia for the shooting down of Malaysian Airlines plane MH17 over eastern Ukraine in July 2014. Some 298 people were killed when a missile fired from rebel-held territory hit the jet. The Kremlin has always denied its involvement and refused to extradite Girkin to the Netherlands.

"In the West, I have already been recognised as a terrorist... and in my homeland, I have the dubious notoriety as an extremist," he said after his

arrest. He left eastern Ukraine shortly after MH17 was downed, becoming a ultra-nationalist blogger and backer of the hardline "Novorossiia" ideology that called for Russia to subsume vast swathes of Ukraine.

When Russia sent troops into Ukraine on February 24, 2022 he said the entire country needed to be captured in a "swift and decisive victory". But within days he had become disillusioned at what he called Russia's "major mistakes", turning into an unflinching critic of how Moscow was prosecuting the offensive. He wanted Russia's entire political system to be put on a hardened military footing and for significantly more men and resources to be thrown at the campaign. — AFP

Blinken sees growing partner in Angola on African democracies

LUANDA: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken sought to reinforce a growing partnership with Angola on Thursday, promoting a major infrastructure project and coordinating on conflict mediation, as he capped a tour of African democracies.

Blinken had also visited Nigeria, Ivory Coast and Cape Verde on a week-long trip meant to demonstrate a sustained US interest in the continent, as China and Russia gain influence and the Zionist-Hamas war consumes Washington's attention.

Once a Marxist state battling US-backed rebels in the Cold War, Angola has transitioned into an oil-rich democracy and works increasingly closely with the United States. In the capital Luanda, Blinken reviewed what he called faster-than-expected work on the Lobito Corridor, the most ambitious US infrastructure project on a continent where China has gone on a building blitz in its search for resources.

"This project has genuinely transformative potential for this nation, for this region and, I would argue, for the world," Blinken said. The corridor aims to connect landlocked Zambia, which has been held up by Washington as a model of democracy, as well as the resource-rich but underdeveloped Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), to Angola's Atlantic port of Lobito. The United States has committed to fund 1,300 kilometres (800 miles) of rail and is working with partners including multinational lenders to expand the project eventually to Tanzania, connecting the Atlantic and Indian Oceans.

The route will transport resources critical to the global economy including copper and cobalt, a vital component of smartphones. Blinken also toured a gleaming new science museum where he promoted another US initiative that will bring resilient seeds, including potentially genetically modified ones, to developing countries.

Standing in front of a table of yams and cassava, Blinken—who two days earlier visited a rice project in Ivory Coast—said that traditional African seeds are "incredibly nutritious, and they can now be made even more resistant to the ravages of climate change". "Then we get to the point where Africa is feeding itself and, indeed, probably feeding other parts of the world," he said.

President Joe Biden has vowed to prioritise Africa but failed to live up to a promise to visit last year. Blinken told reporters that Biden still wanted to come, but acknowledged the tight schedule with US elections later this year. Contact with African leaders remains robust. Blinken held an extended meeting in Luanda with Angolan President Joao Lourenco, who met Biden at the White House just two months ago.

In contrast with China's approach, Blinken gently raised internal politics in Angola, saying he discussed the importance of holding local-level elections, which remain absent in Angola and for which the opposition has pressed. He also called for a greater opening to independent media and welcomed the opening of a second journalism school in Angola as "an important and positive trajectory". Many Africans have voiced unease about the West devoting billions of dollars in weapons to Ukraine to defend against Russian invasion, fearing that development is being taken off the agenda. — AFP

S Korean ruling party MP attacked in street: Yonhap

SEOUL: A South Korean ruling party lawmaker was struck on the head with a rock by an unidentified assailant on a street in Seoul's upscale Gangnam district on Thursday, Yonhap news agency reported. Bae Hyun-jin, 40, was hospitalised at Soon Chun Hyang University Hospital in Seoul and her condition was not life-threatening, the medical institution said.

The lawmaker was bleeding before being transferred to the hospital in the South Korean capital, Yonhap said, adding she was struck on the back of her head. The attack comes just weeks after opposition party leader Lee Jae-myung was stabbed in the neck while talking to reporters in the port city of Busan.

Park Seok-gyu, a doctor at the Seoul hospital where Bae was being treated, said medical staff used a stapler to perform two sutures to treat a one-centimetre scalp injury. "Currently, it's not a situation where there is a great deal of concern, but still, it is a situation that requires some monitoring," Park told reporters, adding the lawmaker was experiencing swelling of the head and anxiety.

The male assailant, who allegedly asked Bae her



SEOUL: A man watches a television screen showing a news broadcast with a file footage of South Korean ruling People Power Party's lawmaker Bae Hyun-jin, at a railway station in Seoul on January 25, 2024. Bae was struck on the head with a rock on a street in Seoul's upscale Gangnam district, by an unidentified assailant. — AFP

name before assaulting her, was arrested by police at the scene of the attack, said Yonhap. He reportedly claimed he was 15 years old. Local broadcaster YTN aired an image that showed what appeared to be blood stains on the ground.

Bae, a former news anchor, was President Yoon Suk Yeol's spokeswoman when he was the president-elect. The ruling People Power Party's interim

chief Han Dong-hoon visited Bae at the hospital on Thursday night and told reporters that the incident should "never have happened". Bae Hyun-jin asked him to "tell the public not to worry too much" as she was "overcoming the situation well", Han said.

'Political terrorism'

Opposition leader Lee underwent surgery after he was stabbed on January 2 and returned to work around two weeks later. In a statement, ruling party spokesman Park Jung-ha expressed "serious concern about the renewed violence and political terrorism in this chaotic era filled with extreme politics and politics of hatred".

"Extremist acts of violence are never acceptable under any circumstances." The opposition Democratic Party condemned Thursday's attack against Bae as "political terrorism that threatens democracy". "It is an attack on democracy," the party said in a statement.

South Korea is generally a safe country, with a murder rate of 1.3 per 100,000 people in 2021, according to official statistics. The global average is six homicide deaths per 100,000 people, according to the World Health Organization. Several high-profile South Korean politicians have been attacked in public in recent years. Song Young-gil, who led the Democratic Party before Lee, was struck in the head with a blunt object in 2022. In 2006, politician Park Geun-hye, who later became president in 2013, was attacked with a knife at a rally. — AFP

International

Muslim shopfronts torn down in Mumbai after religious clashes

Authorities aim at clearing illegal encroachments and easing pedestrian traffic

MUMBAI: Authorities in India's financial capital Mumbai have torn down several Muslim-owned makeshift shopfronts after religious clashes sparked by a divisive Hindu temple opened this week by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Minor clashes broke out Sunday in parts of Mumbai, including one incident where Hindus chanting religious slogans passed through a Muslim neighbourhood on the megacity's outskirts. No serious injuries were reported in the melee but by Tuesday, authorities had called in excavators to knock down more than a dozen shopfronts belonging to Muslims in that locality, according to local media reports.

The following evening another 40 shopfronts were knocked down on Mohammed Ali Road, a major downtown thoroughfare and centre of local Muslim commerce that had also seen weekend clashes. "We were undertaking deep clearing of the road in which some temporary hawkers and so forth were removed," a local municipal officer, who declined to be named, told AFP on Thursday.

Numerous traders of all faiths often build makeshift shopfronts out of canvas and wood to shield their businesses and patrons from the city's scorching sun and pounding monsoon rains. "I cannot fathom why this was done," Abdul Haseeb Khan, owner of a restaurant hit in the clearance drive, told AFP.

"If they didn't want these structures here, they should have informed us and we would have removed it. This is no way to take action." Municipal officials

told local media that the campaign was "routine" and planned before Sunday's clashes, and that it was aimed at clearing illegal encroachments and easing pedestrian traffic.

'Bulldozer justice'

So-called "bulldozer justice" has been an increasingly common tool of local officials in India to punish suspected criminals by demolishing their property. Rights groups have condemned the practice as an unlawful exercise in collective punishment that disproportionately targets the country's Muslim minority. Aaker Patel of Amnesty International said in a statement that this week's drive in Mumbai represented a "policy of arbitrarily and punitively demolishing Muslim properties following episodes of communal violence".

Demolition drives have been employed in numerous Indian states ruled by Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in recent years against the homes of people accused of participating in anti-government protests. Muslims make up the bulk of those targeted in the campaigns. Officials elsewhere in India customarily say that the demolitions are lawful as they only target buildings constructed without official approval. That is disputed by victims, who say they are not given the legally required notice period to dispute demolition orders.

Sunday's clashes happened on the eve of Modi's inauguration of a new Hindu temple to the deity



MUMBAI: This photograph taken on Jan 24, 2024 shows municipal authorities demolishing structures on the facade of a shop near Minara Masjid. — AFP

Ram in the northern city of Ayodhya. Processions in Mumbai had been celebrating the opening of the shrine, which was built atop a centuries-old mosque torn down by Hindu zealots in 1992 -- an incident

that sparked India's most deadly sectarian riots since independence. Local media outlets said at least 13 people had been arrested for participating in the weekend clashes. — AFP

French court to rule on controversial immigration bill

PARIS: France's highest constitutional authority is on Thursday to issue a keenly awaited verdict on whether an immigration bill adopted under pressure from the far right is in line with the country's basic law.

The bill is a flagship reform of President Emmanuel Macron's second term but its text, hardened under pressure from the right, caused a revolt among lawmakers from the ruling party. The proposed legislation makes access to family reunification and social benefits tougher, introduces immigration quotas determined by parliament and includes measures for dual-national convicts being stripped of their French nationality.

Trade unions and associations called for fresh protests on Thursday, after tens of thousands of people took to the streets across France at the weekend. Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin, a champion of the bill, has acknowledged that certain "measures are manifestly and clearly contrary to the constitution."

In an effort to calm tensions and find a solution, Macron submitted the legislation to the Constitutional Council for review. But he also defended the bill, saying it was needed to reduce illegal immigration and to facilitate the integration of documented arrivals.

The council has the power to strike out some or all of the legislation if deemed out of step with the constitution. French daily Le Monde said: "While a censure of the entire law is considered unlikely, many experts expect a partial censure."

Dozens of NGOs have slammed what they described as potentially the "most regressive" immigration law in decades. The bill comes as Macron seeks to



PARIS: Demonstrators hold banners reading "Paul Eluard highschool against racist laws and for human rights of all" (L) and "no student is illegal, retreat of the immigration law" as they take part in a rally against France's recently adopted law on immigration, in Paris. -- AFP

curb the rapid rise of the far right, expected to make considerable gains in European elections in June.

Some political observers have accused Macron of seeking to pass the buck onto the Constitutional Council, by submitting legislation he believes to be unconstitutional. "It's a dangerous game because you can never prejudice the Constitutional Council's decision, and because it dishonours the council and the constitution," said Jean-Philippe Derosier, a constitutional law expert. The Constitutional Council has already registered its displeasure, saying it is not "a chamber of appeal against the choices made by parliament." While the council is a legal body, it takes into account political and social contexts.

The council consists of nine members known as "les sages" ("the wise ones"). Its president is Socialist Party grandee and former prime minister Laurent Fabius. It

is a rare situation in the history of the council, which was established by the 1958 constitution that instituted France's Fifth Republic.

"Referring to the Constitutional Council is not a shocking solution in itself," said Anne Levaide, an expert in public law. But it is "of course, a little more shocking" when members of the government are convinced of "the unconstitutionality of certain provisions", she added. Serge Slama, a public law professor at the University of Grenoble-Alpes and critic of the legislation, said the council had been "instrumentalised, trapped by the government". Bruno Retailleau, who presides over the Republicans group in the Senate, said Thursday that in making its decision the Constitutional Council should stick to the law. "That's the only way to avoid criticism," he said on France Inter radio. — AFP

Hubble finds water vapor in small planet's atmosphere

WASHINGTON: The Hubble Space Telescope has observed the smallest planet outside our solar system to contain water vapor in its atmosphere, a "landmark discovery" that brings astronomy a step closer to characterizing Earth-like worlds.

At around twice Earth's diameter, planet GJ 9827d orbits a red dwarf star 97 light-years away in the constellation Pisces, NASA and the European Space Agency (ESA) said in statements on Thursday. The team behind the finding are examining two scenarios: either the planet is a "mini-Neptune" with a hydrogen-rich atmosphere laced with water, or it's a warmer version of Jupiter's moon Europa, which contains twice as much water as Earth under its crust. "The planet GJ 9827d could be half water, half rock," said Bjorn Benneke of the Universite de

Montreal, who co-led the research. "And there would be a lot of water vapor on top of some smaller rocky body. Until now, we had not been able to directly detect the atmosphere of such a small planet. And we're slowly getting in this regime now," he added.

Over a period of three years, Hubble observed the planet during 11 transients, or events in which it crossed in front of its star. During transients, starlight is filtered through the planet's atmosphere, allowing astronomers to use Hubble's instruments to analyze the patterns of colors (wavelengths), which revealed the telltale signature of water molecules.

Even if GJ 9827d has a water-rich atmosphere, its hot, Venus-like temperature of 800 degrees Fahrenheit (425 Celsius) would make it an uninhabitable steamy world. Nevertheless, the Hubble discovery paves the way to future study of GJ 9827d and similar planets, especially by the James Webb Space Telescope, which can use its high resolution infrared images to look for more atmospheric molecules including carbon dioxide, and methane.

"Water on a planet this small is a landmark discovery," added co-leader Laura Kreidberg of Max Planck Institute for Astronomy in Germany. "It pushes closer than ever to characterizing truly Earth-like worlds." — AFP

close to him. "I've taken nothing with me, no blankets, no sheets, no (tent) -- nothing at all."

The Zionist entity's relentless military offensive in Gaza has killed at least 25,900 people, about 70 percent of them women and children. Wednesday's deadly attack on a UN shelter saw two tank shells fired at a building sheltering 800 people in Khan Yunis, according to the United Nations.

On Thursday, the UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) said the Zionist army had ordered people taking refuge at the site to leave by Friday afternoon. Thomas White, the Gaza director of UNRWA, denounced "persistent attacks on civilian sites" in Khan Yunis as "utterly unacceptable".

Asked about the operations, the Zionist army said "a thorough review of the shelling of the forces in the vicinity is underway". The Zionist military is the only force known to have tanks operating in the Gaza Strip.

Egypt and Qatar have acted as mediators in the conflict, including in November, when a brief truce agreement led to the release of 105 hostages. But Netanyahu was allegedly caught on tape telling hostages' families this week that Qatar's mediation was "problematic", blaming it for funding Hamas. The Gulf state said it was "appalled" at the remarks, which "if validated, are irresponsible and destructive to the efforts to save innocent lives". — AFP

Japan craft made successful pinpoint Moon landing: JAXA

TOKYO: Japan's "Moon Sniper" craft made a pinpoint lunar landing despite last-minute engine problems, the space agency said Thursday as it released the first images from the mission. A photo taken by a mini-rover showed the boxy yellow lander sitting intact at a slight angle on the rocky grey surface, lunar slopes rising in the distance. Saturday's touchdown made Japan only the fifth nation to achieve a soft lunar landing, after the United States, the Soviet Union, China and India.

The unmanned Smart Lander for Investigating Moon (SLIM) — dubbed the "Moon Sniper" for its precision technology — had the goal of touching down within 100 m of a specific landing spot on a crater. That is much more precise than the usual landing zone range that experts put at several kilometers. "SLIM succeeded in a pinpoint soft landing... the landing point is confirmed to be 55 meters away from the target point," space agency JAXA said on Thursday.

The lander suffered engine problems during its descent that may have knocked it off course, Shinichiro Sakai, SLIM's project manager, told reporters. Before that, the craft had been on track to land even closer to its target. Problems with the lightweight spacecraft's solar batteries also meant they were not generating power.

Nearly three hours after touchdown, JAXA decided to switch SLIM off with 12 percent power remaining to allow for a possible resumption when the sun's angle changes. That could be in just a week because the craft's solar cells are facing west, the agency said. "Based on current estimates, we are preparing for the resumption of the probe's operations by February 1," JAXA said.

Water resources

Mission control was able to download technical and image data from its descent and the lunar surface before powering down the craft. The mission was aiming for a crater where the Moon's mantle, the usually deep inner layer beneath its crust, is believed



This handout photo released on Jan 25, 2024 shows an image taken and transmitted by the transformable lunar surface robot installed on the lunar module of the SLIM mission after landing on the Moon on Jan 20. — AFP

to be exposed on the surface. By analyzing the rocks there, JAXA hopes to shed light on the mystery of the Moon's possible water resources — key to building bases there one day as possible stopovers on the way to Mars.

Two probes detached successfully from SLIM on Saturday: One with a transmitter and another designed to trundle around the lunar surface beaming images to Earth. This shape-shifting mini-rover, slightly bigger than a tennis ball, was co-developed by the firm behind the Transformer toys.

SLIM is one of several recent lunar missions by governments and private firms, 50 years after the first human Moon landing. But technical problems are rife and the United States faced two setbacks this month in its ambitious Moon programs. Two previous Japanese lunar missions — one public and one private — have also failed.

In 2022, the country unsuccessfully sent a lunar probe named Omotenashi as part of the United States' Artemis 1 mission. In April, Japanese startup ispace tried in vain to become the first private company to land on the Moon, losing communication with its craft after what it described as a "hard landing". — AFP

Gazans waiting for aid martyred...

Continued from Page 1

injured in his hand and leg. The casualties were brought to Al-Shifa hospital in Gaza City, where bodies were seen lying on the floor, an AFP journalist said.

The incident came a day after the United Nations said tank shelling at a UN shelter in the southern city of Khan Yunis, the current focus of the Zionist entity's military campaign, killed 12 people. Khan Yunis — the hometown of Hamas' Gaza chief Yahya Sinwar, the suspected mastermind of the Oct 7 attacks — faced relentless bombardments Thursday, an AFP journalist said.

Hamas, which has ruled Gaza since 2007, reported fierce clashes in the center and west of the city, where fighting has been inching closer to hospitals sheltering thousands of displaced people. Its health ministry said at least 50 people were killed in Khan Yunis over the past 24 hours. Palestinians were fleeing Khan Yunis any way they could, with belongings piled on cars, in donkey-drawn carts, on tractors and on foot. "I don't know where I'm heading," said Mousa Abu Youssef, explaining he decided to leave the city after tanks opened fire

International

Hamas eyes post-war role in Palestinian politics: Analysts

Hamas calls for rearrangement of Palestinian house and reform of PLO

DOHA: Hamas's release of a polished document justifying its devastating October 7 attacks shows the Islamist group is positioning itself for a post-war political role, a senior official and analysts say. Following the publication of "Our Narrative... Operation Al-Aqsa Flood" in measured, well-written English and later in French as well as Arabic, a senior Hamas official explained that the group, which Zionist entity has vowed to crush, seeks to retain a say.

Bassem Naim, Hamas's director of international relations, said the group's action at a national leadership level and its "resistance to the Zionist project... qualifies it to be in the leadership of the Palestinian people". "The movement does not demand, through this document or otherwise, the exclusivity of the leadership of the Palestinian people," said Naim, a former health minister in Gaza.

"Hamas calls for the rearrangement of the Palestinian house and the reform of the Palestine Liberation Organisation so that it is representative of all," he told AFP. "No party that wants to reach a solution to this conflict can ignore Hamas." Hamas posted a landslide victory in the last Palestinian parliamentary elections in 2006, but has never been part of the PLO, which remains the preserve of the rival Fatah movement of Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas and smaller factions.

The 16-page pamphlet bears on its cover a silhouette of a fighter with a motorised paraglider—the airborne troops for its shock, multi-pronged assault. While seeking to refute in often legal language what it calls "Zionist fabricated accusations and allegations", it also admits that "maybe some faults happened".

The Gaza war broke out with Hamas's unprecedented October 7 attacks, which resulted in the deaths of about 1,140 people in Zionist entity, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally of Zionist official figures. In response, Zionist entity launched a relentless offensive against Hamas which has killed at least 25,700 people in Gaza, around 70 percent of them women and children, according to the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory. Militants also seized 250 hostages, and Zionist entity says around 132 remain in Gaza. That number includes the bodies of at least 28 dead hostages, according to an AFP tally based on Zionist figures.



MELBOURNE: A council worker cleans the statue of Britain's Queen Victoria that was defaced in the Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria in Melbourne on January 25, 2024, ahead of Australia Day. -- AFP

Statue toppled as Australians reckon with bloody past

MELBOURNE: Statues of British colonial figures Captain James Cook and Queen Victoria were damaged in Melbourne on Thursday, as annual Australia Day celebrations were again marked by division and protest. On the eve of the country's national holiday, a now-traditional row over Australia's often brutal past re-erupted. In the southern city of Melbourne, a statue of the British explorer was felled—apparently cut off at the shins—and its plinth sprayed with the words "The colony will fall."

Meanwhile, a nearby likeness of British monarch Queen Victoria was daubed with red paint. "This sort of vandalism has no place in our community," said Victoria state premier Jacinta Allan. Australia Day is held every year on January 26. For most Australians, it is synonymous with a day off work, a barbecue, a trip to the beach and the end of the summer holidays. But the choice of date—celebrating the arrival of European settlers at Sydney Harbour in 1788 -- has become increasingly contentious.

A US-style culture war has developed, with activists demanding colonial figures be celebrated, or decrying "Invasion Day" as a celebration of cultural genocide. Polls show a majority of Australians have a more nuanced view, and are keen to keep the public holiday and the name, but are more split about changing the date. "Australians love their public holidays. I love my public holidays. If we want a public holiday let's just rebrand it, rebadge it, but let's move Australia Day to another date," 50-year-old Melbourne resident Michelle Slater told AFP.

With views on the date mostly split along party political lines—with the right against changes and the left in favour—politicians have at times appeared keen to fan the flames of division. Conservative opposition leader Peter Dutton recently denounced a "woke" grocery chain that stopped selling Australia Day branded paraphernalia. "For Woolworths to start taking political positions to oppose Australia Day is against the national interest" he claimed. A recent YouGov poll showed 20 percent of Australians agreed with Dutton's call for a boycott of the store, while 66 percent said they were more concerned with supermarkets' high prices.

Cricket captain Pat Cummins, perhaps the country's most prominent sports personality, has also weighed in, suggesting a more inclusive date could be found. "I absolutely love Australia. It is the best country in the world by a mile," he said. "We should have an Australia Day, but we can probably find a more appropriate day to celebrate it."—AFP

'Caveats and contradictions'

As well as setting out its version of events, the Hamas document urges an international investigation into Zionist entity's occupation, specifically calling on the United States and European countries to support a process at the International Criminal Court.



KHAN YUNIS: Palestinian families fleeing Khan Yunis on the coastal road leading to Rafah further south drive along the sea with their belongings on their cars on January 25, 2024, amid continuing battles between Zionist entity and the Palestinian militant group Hamas. -- AFP

Hugh Lovatt, a Middle East expert at the European Council on Foreign Relations, called the publication a "propaganda exercise" but said "it does show some of the internal conversation and dynamics within Hamas on the issue of civilian casualties".

He highlighted, however, that there were "caveats and maybe even contradictions in the document," as Hamas regards all Zionists of military age as combatants. Aymenn Al-Tamimi, an analyst from the Philadelphia-based Middle East Forum said by appealing to an international audience, Hamas was looking to refute comparisons, like those made by Zionist entity, with

the Islamic State. "They're trying to push back on the idea that they're like jihadist groups like Al-Qaeda or the Islamic State," he said. "Hamas (is) appealing to the wider global system in a way jihadists don't do. They're clearly distinguishing themselves from jihadists in the way they are talking," he added.

'Hard truth'

Andreas Kreig, a security expert at Kings College London said Hamas's power had shifted in the wake of October 7 and in the more than 100 days of war that have followed. "If the metric is social, political control of Gaza, Hamas has certainly lost that," he said, but "internationally speaking, they have very much been able to strengthen their position". "I think a case for a Palestinian state can be more easily made with more support... in the global south anyway, but also in the Western liberal north," he added. —AFP

US support for Taiwan 'firm', lawmakers tell president-elect Lai

TAIPEI: Two US lawmakers met Taiwanese president-elect Lai Ching-te on Thursday to reaffirm Washington's support for the self-ruled island, which China claims as part of its territory. Lai won the January 13 poll despite warnings from Beijing that he would bring "war and decline" to Taiwan, securing a third term for the Democratic Progressive Party that rejects China's claim to the island.

Democrat Ami Bera of California and Florida Republican Mario Diaz-Balart arrived in Taipei on Wednesday in their roles as co-chairs of the Congressional Taiwan Caucus. They are expected to stay until Friday. "Among the main messages we are bringing here today... is that the support of the United States for Taiwan is firm, it's real and it's 100 percent bipartisan," Diaz-Balart said in a meeting with Lai.

Lai, who is Taiwan's current vice president, thanked them for showing their support via "concrete action". "Your visit at this important juncture fully demonstrates the US' rock-solid support of Taiwan."

He said he hoped the US Congress would "continue to support Taiwan in bolstering our self-defence capabilities so that we can jointly safeguard regional peace, stability and prosperity". Bera and Diaz-Balart—who also met with President Tsai Ing-wen Thursday—represent the second US group to arrive since Taiwan's closely watched presidential election.

The first was an unofficial delegation sent by President Joe Biden to congratulate Lai two days after the vote. But that visit was overshadowed by Pacific nation Nauru abruptly announcing it was switching allegiance to Beijing, leaving Taipei with just 12 remaining diplomatic allies.

While the United States recognises Beijing over Taiwan, it is a key partner of the island and a major weapons provider—though delivery has been greatly

delayed due to Russia's war in Ukraine. Diaz-Balart said he was "optimistic (Taiwan will) see concrete improvements" though he did not provide a timeline.

"I think you're going to see now a pretty healthy increase in defence spending to make sure we have the ability to ramp up," he told reporters in a press conference. Reaffirming the United States' support for the status quo, Bera said the goal of building up Taiwan's defence capabilities was to deter conflict.

"We are not changing the status quo but we have to respond to external pressures... it's not about seeking conflict—it's about seeking peace, prosperity and the right to your own future," Bera said. He added that he hoped Taiwan would be able to have dialogue with Beijing—which had severed high-level communications with Tsai since her election in 2016 over her defence of Taiwan's sovereignty.

"We should keep lines of communications (with Beijing) open... but I think we need to do that from a place of strength, not a place of weakness," Bera said.

'Negative words and deeds'

China has never renounced the use of force to try and bring Taiwan under its control and has maintained a near-daily military presence around the island. On Wednesday, 18 Chinese warplanes, six naval vessels, and three Chinese balloons were detected around Taiwan, according to Taipei's defence ministry.

On the same day, a US warship sailed southward through the Taiwan Strait, a sensitive waterway separating the island from China, the US Navy said in a statement. "(The USS John Finn's) transit through the Taiwan Strait demonstrates the United States' commitment to upholding freedom of navigation for all nations as a principle," it said.

"No member of the international community should be intimidated or coerced into giving up their rights and freedoms." In Beijing, the foreign ministry complained Thursday that Washington had "carried out a series of negative words and deeds" since Lai's election. Spokesman Wang Wenbin urged the United States to "immediately stop infringing and provocative actions" and "stop causing trouble for peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait". —AFP

Ambassador of India's message on 75th Republic Day of India

By Dr Adarsh Swaika

On this momentous occasion of the 75th Republic Day of India, I extend my warm greetings to all Indian nationals and persons of Indian origin in the friendly State of Kuwait.



I also take this opportunity to express my profound gratitude to all well-wishers and friends of India in Kuwait, particularly the leadership, the Government and the people of the State of Kuwait, for their steadfast commitment to close and friendly relations between India and Kuwait. I would like to reiterate India's commitment to further strengthen and expand the long-standing and time-tested partnership with the State of Kuwait.

This year marks the 75th year of coming into force of India's Constitution. The Indian Constitution is the longest written constitution in the world and is a living document that has evolved over time to incorporate necessary changes. The Constitution declares India as a sovereign, socialist, secular and democratic republic and assures its citizens justice, equality and liberty of thought and action. This constitutional guarantee is an article of faith for all Indian citizens in India and abroad.

Today, as we celebrate our Republic Day, we feel proud of India's many achievements. Equitable development has been the corner stone of socio-economic policies of India. Democracy, pluralism and unity in diversity are the traditional ethos of Indian society. India believes in its ancient philosophy of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' (the world is one family). This belief guides our foreign policy as well.

India today is a land of billion opportunities. Our collective resolve has ensured that the Indian economy is today the 5th largest economy in the world. And it is going to be the 3rd largest 5 trillion dollar economy) in the next couple of years. India is moving ahead with the spirit of 'Make in India, Make for the World'. The massive business friendly reforms and policies have contributed in unleashing the true potential of the country.

The new India has made tremendous strides in science and technology; is one of the leading centers of innovation and Information Technology globally; is the 'Pharmacy of the World'; has world class production and manufacturing capabilities; is a leading global partner to address new age challenges facing the humanity, be it climate change or building resilient and reliable supply chains to ensure food and health security. Today, we are on the right track to build an Atmanirbhar Bharat (Self-Reliant India), which envisages a merger of the local with the global.

In the international arena, India has been playing a significant role in contributing to world peace, stability and prosperity. The past year is symbolic of India's global responsibilities as an emerging major power. Our successful and ambitious action-oriented G20 Presidency is a matter of immense pride. We were happy to welcome Kuwait in the SCO family as a Dialogue Partner during our SCO Presidency. India organized two editions of 'Voice of Global South Summit' in 2023, in which over 125 countries participated, with the aim of mainstreaming priorities of developing countries in the international agenda, particularly the G-20. India championed the increased use of millets through various awareness programmes on the use of millets across the globe as part of the International Year of Millets 2023.

India believes that dialogue and diplomacy remains the only way to resolve disputes and conflicts. India places an undeterred faith and belief in multilateral approach and has always taken the lead on issues of global importance such as fight against cross-border terrorism, climate change, energy security, food security, and the reform of multilateral institutions, including the UN Security Council.

On the bilateral front, we continue to make steady progress in our multi-faceted engagement with the State of Kuwait. We look forward to greater engagement with both Government and at people-to-people level in the coming times. The vibrant Indian community in Kuwait continues to be the living bridge of our bilateral ties with Kuwait.

The Embassy places highest priority to the welfare and well-being of the large Indian Community in Kuwait. I thank all the community associations, professional bodies, cultural groups and members of the Indian community for joining hands with the Embassy for not only contributing to the welfare of the community but also undertaking activities that contribute to the strengthening of bilateral relations with the State of Kuwait.

Once again, on this special and proud occasion of the 75th Republic Day of India, I convey my best wishes to every Indian in Kuwait and all friends of India in Kuwait for their continued success, happiness and good-health.



TAIPEI: The US Representative Ami Bera shakes hands with Deputy Minister Wu-Chiao Hsieh while the US Representative Mario Diaz-Balart shakes hands with Representative to the US Alexander Yui after the news conference at Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in Taipei on January 25, 2024. -- AFP

FRIDAY, JANUARY 26, 2024

Business

Tesla sees slower growth Earnings miss estimates amid auto price cuts

NEW YORK: Tesla reported lower fourth-quarter operating profits despite higher revenues, following a series of auto price cuts as Elon Musk's electric vehicle giant warned of slower volume growth in 2024. Shares of Tesla fell after the company's earnings per share and revenues both missed analysts' expectations in the fourth quarter, and it offered a sobering outlook for 2024 auto volumes.

"Our company is currently between two major growth waves," said Tesla. It promised that an upcoming "next-generation" vehicle will serve as a worthy successor to the existing fleet that has built the company into a global titan. "In 2024, our vehicle volume growth rate may be notably lower than the growth rate achieved in 2023, as our teams work on the launch of the next-generation vehicle at Gigafactory Texas," the company said. Musk has touted the next-generation offering currently being developed as a game-changer, saying Wednesday that it will involve "revolutionary" manufacturing technology in addition to impressive features for drivers.

After initial production in Austin, "we will follow that up with locations around the world," including in Mexico and a location outside North America, Musk said. Tesla's fourth-quarter revenues came in at \$25.2 billion, up three percent from the year-ago level as auto deliveries rose 20 percent. The company's profits were boosted by a one-time non-cash provision of \$5.9 billion related to deferred tax assets, lifting earnings under official US accounting standards to \$7.9 billion. Without that boost, profits were \$2.5 billion, down nearly 40 percent from the 2022 quarter.

Macro challenges

Shares of the electric auto company have gotten

ten off to a rough start in 2024, falling more than 16 percent amid concerns about lackluster demand for the vehicles and EV oversupply and the hefty costs associated with ramping up the Cybertruck pickup vehicle. The futuristic Cybertruck, a passion project for the unpredictable billionaire, has generated plenty of buzz, but Musk has cautioned that the auto will not be commercially profitable until production can be boosted.

Investors have been keen for more details on a new Tesla vehicle, with the hopes of a more affordable EV. The vehicle is expected to commence production in the second half of 2025, said Musk, who avoided estimating initial volumes. "We are not going to make predictions on that front, but it does seem quite likely that we will start production next year," Musk said on a conference call with analysts and investors.

Bigger stake?

Musk, who has a penchant for surprising investors, added to worries earlier this month when he suggested he could look for alternatives to Tesla for artificial intelligence and robotics developments unless his Tesla stake were boosted to 25 percent from about 13 percent. "I am uncomfortable growing Tesla to be a leader in AI & robotics without having (around) 25 percent voting control," Musk said on January 15 on the X platform, formally Twitter.

Tesla watchers on Wall Street expressed surprise that Musk would take the demand public. Analysts at JPMorgan Chase characterized Musk's demands as negative for Tesla shares, citing the increased risk of a Musk departure and the risk of a dilution to existing shares. Tesla's lofty stock valuation compared with other automakers is due to



CHICAGO: A Tesla vehicle charges in a parking lot in Chicago, Illinois. — AFP

"side bets" associated with the name, such as the hoped-for autonomous robo-taxis, said the JPMorgan report.

"Without Mr Musk's vision and leadership, we estimate investors would assess Tesla's potential in AI and robotics to be much less promising—particularly if he might 'build [potentially competing?]

products outside of Tesla," said the JPMorgan note. Asked about the controversy, Musk said the change is needed to counter shareholder activists and shareholder advisory firms who "have strange ideas about what should be done." Musk said his goal is to go have "a strong influence without control." Shares of Tesla fell 5.8 percent in after-hours trading. — AFP

Boeing 737 MAX: US regulators approves inspection framework

NEW YORK: US regulators approved a detailed inspection framework that would allow the return to service of Boeing 737 MAX planes grounded after an emergency landing earlier this month, officials said. Shortly after the Federal Aviation Administration announced inspection protocols on the Boeing 737 MAX 9, United Airlines said it expects grounded aircraft to return to service starting Sunday. "We will only return each MAX 9 aircraft to service once this thorough inspection process is complete," said a statement from Toby Enqvist, United's chief operations officer. "We are preparing aircraft to return to scheduled service beginning on Sunday."

The FAA announcement is a major step after the agency grounded 171 MAX 9 planes following the January 5 incident on an Alaska Airlines plane. The grounded 737 MAX jets have the same configuration as the Alaska Airlines jet that suffered a blowout of a panel on the fuselage, exposing passengers to open air and necessitating an emergency landing.

No one was injured in the incident, but safety inspectors have said it could have been catastrophic. Under the FAA's "enhanced maintenance" process, airlines will undertake an inspection of specific bolts and fittings, detailed visual inspections of plugs and components and address "any damage or abnormal conditions" associated with the part, known as a door plug, the FAA said.

The inspection will ensure parts are "in compliance with the original design which is safe to operate," the FAA said. "This aircraft will not operate



EL SEGUNDO: The Boeing logo is displayed on Boeing buildings in El Segundo, California. — AFP

until the process is complete and compliance with the original design is confirmed." In a statement published later Wednesday, Boeing pledged "to co-operate fully and transparently with the FAA and follow their direction." It added: "We will also work closely with our airline customers as they complete the required inspection procedures to safely return their 737-9 airplanes to service."

Production hikes halted

The latest 737 MAX incident was the first major in-flight safety issue on a Boeing plane since two fatal 737 MAX crashes - one in 2018 and one in 2019 - led to a nearly two-year grounding of the aircraft. The FAA has described the January 5 near-miss as unacceptable, vowing a heavy program of oversight of Boeing and its operations. The US agency will not permit Boeing to boost output on the MAX until "we are satisfied that the quality control issues uncovered during this process are resolved," said FAA Adminis-

Turkey's central bank lifts key rate one last time to 45 percent

ISTANBUL: Turkey's central bank on Thursday delivered what it said was the final interest rate hike of a historic tightening cycle that more than quintupled borrowing costs to fight record inflation. The bank lifted its policy rate to 45 percent from 42.5 percent and said the level was sufficient to start fighting Turkey's dire cost of living crisis. "The monetary tightness required to establish the disinflation course is achieved and this level will be maintained as long as needed," the bank said in statement.

The central bank has now lifted borrowing costs from 8.5 percent in June to the highest level of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's 21-year rule in a bid to cure Turkey's worst bout of inflation since the 1990s. Turkey's final rate hike follows a turbulent week for central bank governor Hafize Gbye Erkan - a former Wall Street executive and Turkey's most senior female official.

The 44-year-old came under withering attack on social media and in some opposition publications for allegedly allowing her father to make unauthorised personnel decisions at

the bank. Erkan has reportedly also angered Erdogan by telling one major newspaper last month that she had to move in with her parents because inflation had made renting in Istanbul unaffordable. The attacks on Turkey's first female central bank governor alarmed investors and created uncertainty about Erdogan's long-term commitment to his team.

'Merchants of mischief'

The Turkish leader has been a life-long opponent of high interest rates - famously branding them the "mother and father of all evil" - and a proponent of unorthodox economics. Analysts blame Turkey's year-long economic meltdown on his decision to push the central bank to slash interest rates in the face of rising consumer prices. The annual inflation rate touched a two-decade high of 85 percent in 2022 and climbed back up to 65 percent last month.

The crisis forced Erdogan to perform a major policy reversal after being pushed into a presidential election runoff last year against a candidate who focused on Turkey's economic



ANKARA: A customer buys US dollars in exchange for Turkish lira at an exchange office in Ankara. — AFP

ills. Erkan and Finance Minister Mehmet Simsek - both highly respected by Western investors - have been credited with steering Turkey from the brink of disaster since joining Erdogan's team once he won last May's second round vote. They secured Erdogan's blessing to dramatically hike borrowing costs and take other steps aimed at untangling a complex web of regulations that stifled business and investment.

Investors appeared relieved when Erdogan stood by Erkan on Wednesday.

day. "Using irrational rumors, they are launching campaigns aimed at destroying the climate of trust and stability that we achieved with great difficulty in the economy," Erdogan said. "We don't care about these merchants of mischief." Erkan was attending an investor conference in the United States when rumors about her father began to spread. But she notably took her place next to other top ministers greeting Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi during his state visit to Ankara on Wednesday. — AFP

Microsoft joins Apple in the \$3 trillion club

NEW YORK: Microsoft joined Apple on Wednesday as a three trillion dollar company, as its big bet on artificial intelligence continued to impress Wall Street. Now second to Apple as the world's biggest company by market capitalization, Microsoft's shares were up 1.31 percent at \$404. Apple remains narrowly in first place at \$3.02 trillion after reaching the \$3 trillion market capitalization mark for the first time in January 2022. But it has fallen below the milestone, even briefly losing the pole position as biggest company on the markets when Microsoft briefly overtook the iPhone maker earlier this month. Microsoft more than any other tech giant is riding the wave of excitement over AI.

The Redmond, Washington-based group has a major partnership with OpenAI, creator of ChatGPT, that is reportedly worth \$13 billion. Since the arrival of ChatGPT, Microsoft has launched several products enabling companies and individuals to use the capabilities of generative AI, notably via its Bing search engine and Copilot virtual assistant. Since the launch of ChatGPT in early November 2022, Microsoft shares have gained some 67 percent, with Apple's up by about 40 percent. Microsoft publishes its results on January 30. — AFP

Norway central bank keeps rate steady on high inflation

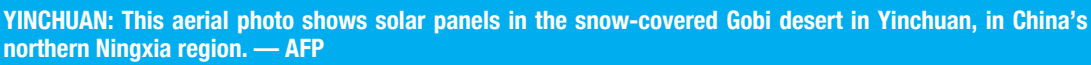
OSLO: Norway's central bank held its key interest rate at a 16-year high on Thursday and said it would hold it there "for some time" as inflation remains too high. In December, the central bank surprised the market when it hiked its key rate for the 14th time since September 2021 - taking it to 4.5 percent - with most economists believing the rate level had peaked. While inflation has cooled, it remains well above the bank's two-percent target. Norge Bank's monetary policymakers concluded Thursday that the interest rate was "now sufficiently high to return inflation to target within a reasonable time horizon," said governor Ida Wolden Bache.

In 2023, Norway's consumer prices rose by 5.5 percent. But underlying inflation, the central bank's preferred indicator as it excludes volatile energy prices and tax fluctuations, remains at 6.2 percent. The Norwegian currency, the krone, has strengthened somewhat since December, but remains weak against other currencies, making imports more expensive. While financial markets are eager to see interest rates start coming down, Norges Bank said they would have to wait a bit longer. "There will likely be a need to maintain a tight monetary policy stance for some time ahead," it said.

A new rate hike could even be in the offing if the krone were to depreciate further or if inflation were to remain high longer than previously projected, it warned. Most economists expect Norwegian rates to be cut by year-end, with some predicting a first cut in September and others saying it could come in December. The European Central Bank and the US Federal Reserve have also kept their rates steady after a series of hikes. Investors are now looking for clues as to when the banks will start to cut rates. — AFP

Beijing investing nearly as much in decarbonization infrastructure

HELSINKI: Finnish telecommunications equipment maker Nokia warned Thursday that it expects another tough economic environment in the first half of this year after its net profit sank in 2023. Nokia and



The overall regional economy was in "a terrible situation", Kim said, noting "severe imbalance and huge gaps" between the regions. He called for swift changes to close the gap between urban and rural areas, saying it was a "very important, responsible and timely option" under the party's regional development policy announced this month. "At present, it is a very urgent immediate task for leveling up the material and cultural living standards of the regional people," Kim said. "We should not sit by and wait till the situation and conditions turn favorable but find more jobs to be faithful to our duty for the sake of the people," he said. Experts say North Korea's dire economic situation has worsened since Pyongyang sealed its borders in 2020 as a COVID-19 pandemic precaution, with its trade deficit increasing and foreign currency reserves being run down. —AFP

The results were also affected by a slowdown in the deployment of 5G networks in India. In the last quarter of 2023, its adjusted operating profit fell 27 percent to 846 million, but this was still higher than the 763 million euros expected by a group of analysts polled by Bloomberg. Nokia said last year it could cut its workforce by up to 14,000 people, reducing costs by up to 1.2 billion euros by 2026. The company also lost a battle with Ericsson for a \$14 billion five-year contract with US company AT&T.—AFP

"In 2023 we saw a meaningful shift in customer behavior impacting our industry driven by the macro-economic environment and high interest rates along with customer inventory digestion," Nokia chief executive Pekka Lundmark said in an earnings statement. "We expect the challenging environment of 2023 to continue during the first half of 2024, particularly in the first quarter," he added. Nokia reported

KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON 25 JANUARY 2024

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* As of end of week closing

Business

EU chief urges dialogue to end farming ‘polarization’

China warns EU’s economic image ‘at stake’ after new trade curbs

BRUSSELS: The EU needs to overcome “polarization” in its agri-food sector through dialogue, European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen urged Thursday, as farmers in several countries stage protests over rising costs. “We all have the same sense of urgency that things have to improve,” von der Leyen said as she opened an EU strategic dialogue to balance farmers’ complaints with Europe’s green transition. “There is an increasing division and polarization” in the sector, she acknowledged. “I’m deeply convinced that we can only overcome this polarization that we all sense by dialogue.”

Farmers in France, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland and Romania are in revolt over a litany of complaints, including rising costs to meet carbon-cutting targets, fuel prices, inflation and Ukrainian grain imports diverted into the EU because of Russia’s war. Many farmers have taken to blocking roads, compounding transport blockages Europe is facing on top of Red Sea cargo woes caused by Yemen’s Huthi rebels firing missiles at passing ships.

Their unrest is being encouraged by far-right parties in several EU countries seeking advantage ahead of bloc-wide elections in June for the European Parliament. Europe and its agricultural sector is facing a “process of civilization change,” said the chair of the strategic dialogue, Peter Strohschneider, a professor who headed a German government commission on the future of farming. The upheaval was not only from the costs of fighting climate change but also technological innovation, for instance with genetically modified crops, “geopolitical conflicts of interest” and economic competitiveness, he said.

“Such conflicts can be seen, for example, in the protests by farmers in numerous European coun-

tries,” Strohschneider said. Von der Leyen suggested the strategic dialogue in September last year, as Polish farmers complained about Ukrainian grain imports and Spanish farmers grappled with crops parched by climate change. The initiative, which is to continue over coming weeks, brings together representatives from farmers’ groups, food supply companies and academics with the aim of finding a consensus by balancing competing interests.

It was unclear what policy impact the dialogue would have, given that a new European Commission will emerge from June’s EU elections. Strohschneider said the talks’ goal was a “sensible social and political balancing of conflicting economic, ecological and social interests” looking at a medium-term horizon of the next five to 15 years. “We want to listen and ask you to discuss and develop scenarios for the future. Basically, it is about describing the way forward,” von der Leyen said.

Image ‘at stake’

Meanwhile, China on Thursday warned the European Union’s economic image was “at stake” after the bloc unveiled new measures to protect sensitive technology from falling into the hands of geopolitical rivals. “The EU’s image in the fields of economics and international trade is at stake,” foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said, urging the EU against “taking anti-globalization” steps.

Brussels has bolstered its armoury 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. And on Wednesday, EU officials outlined an economic security package containing five initiatives, including toughening rules on the screening of foreign direct investment



DUISBURG: A steelworker is seen at the blast furnace (Hochofen) Schmelzern at the steel works of Thyssen-Krupp Steel Europe AG in Duisburg, western Germany.— AFP

(FDI) and launching discussions on coordination in the area of export controls.

Asked about the new rules Thursday, Wang warned “the international community has been very concerned about the EU’s protectionist unilateralism in

the economic and trade spheres”. “Current trends will only intensify these concerns,” he said. “We hope that the EU will respect free trade, free competition and open cooperation, which are the fundamental norms of the market economy,” Wang said. — AFP



FRANKFURT: The headquarters of the European Central Bank (ECB) is seen behind a traffic sign in Frankfurt am Main, western Germany. — AFP

ECB urges patience on interest rate cuts

FRANKFURT: The European Central Bank call for patience in the ongoing battle against inflation, pushing back against market hopes of rapid interest rate cuts. The Frankfurt-based institution launched an unprecedented rate hiking cycle in mid-2022 after Russia’s war in Ukraine pushed food and energy costs higher, sending inflation soaring. With inflation steadily slowing after peaking at more than 10 percent last year, the ECB left rates unchanged for a third consecutive meeting, keeping the benchmark deposit rate at a record four percent.

The bank’s governing council repeated that it considered rates are currently at levels that “will make a substantial contribution” to returning inflation to the two-percent target. ECB watchers will be more interested in president Christine Lagarde’s press conference, hoping for clues on when the bank might start slashing borrowing costs given the progress on taming inflation. Lagarde has already pushed back against market bets of rate cuts starting as early as April, insisting last week it was too soon to “shout victory”. She told Bloomberg television that the first rate cut would “likely” only come this summer and only if the latest data supported such a move, citing economic uncertainties and concern about rising wages.

In no hurry

The US Federal Reserve is facing a similar debate across the Atlantic, where Fed officials have been tempering market expectations of rate cuts as early as March. While it was appropriate to “ask when would policy adjustments be necessary so we don’t put a stranglehold on the economy, it’s really premature to think that that’s around the corner,” San Francisco Fed President Mary Daly told Fox Business. “We think that neither the ECB nor the Fed are in a hurry to deliver rate cuts,” UniCredit said in an analyst note.

Elsewhere, Norway’s Norges Bank held its benchmark rate at 4.5 percent on Thursday and said it would likely remain there “for some time”. Like other central banks, the ECB has been walking a tightrope between raising borrowing costs enough to convincingly rein in inflation without squeezing demand so hard it crashes the economy. After months of decline, euro-zone inflation reaccelerated to 2.9 percent in December. The increase was mainly due to the comparison effect with a year earlier, when governments provided exceptional support to help households with energy bills.

Euro-zone contraction

More expensive borrowing costs have curbed demand for loans and mortgages, contributing to a weakening of the euro-zone economy. Output in the 20-nation currency club shrank by 0.1 percent in the third quarter of 2023, and analysts see another modest contraction in the fourth quarter. Lagarde last week said the battle against inflation was “on the right path” overall with the ECB forecasting a return to its two-percent goal in 2025.

But she said policymakers were closely monitoring several risk factors that could drive inflation up again, including tensions in the Middle East and the possible fallout on energy costs and supply chains. The ECB was also keeping a close eye on wage negotiations in the euro-zone as workers push for pay rises to compensate for higher living costs, Lagarde said.

Lagarde and other ECB officials have indicated they won’t have the necessary data on euro-zone wage agreements until April or May, bolstering the case for a rate cut at the June meeting at the earliest. — AFP

NBK wins ‘Fastest Growing Credit Card Rewards Program’ award

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait - Bahrain (NBK) has won “Fastest Growing Credit Card Rewards Program in Bahrain for the Year 2023”, for the NBK Rewards Program. The program is presented by blu AI™, the leading provider of customer loyalty and customer engagement solutions in Bahrain and Middle East. The NBK Rewards Program was nominated based on several principles and criteria, mainly the customer base growth rate to register and get activated in the Rewards Program upon receiving the NBK Credit Card and benefiting from the various categories available for redeeming points, such as cash back, travel packages, purchase vouchers, Falcon flyer travel miles from Gulf Air, and many more.

National Bank of Kuwait - Bahrain launched the NBK Rewards Program in 2021, which has contributed since to encouraging the use of NBK Credit Cards inside and outside Bahrain. It is a permanent free program that allows customers, when using their Credit

Cards while shopping, to earn points on every purchase starting at BHD 1. The points can later be redeemed for other purchases or cashback at participating outlets. Points are accrued and then redeemed through the NBK Rewards Program.

The General Manager of National Bank of Kuwait-Bahrain, Ali Fardan, expressed his great happiness to receive this award, which came as a confirmation of its success and the extent of customers’ satisfaction with the provided benefits. Fardan expressed his pride in the partnership with blu AI, which is witnessing rapid growth in the region and beyond along with a remarkable progress in the number of financial institutions and other commercial enterprises with international brands that have joined it.

For his part, CEO of blu AI, Tony Gougassian, expressed: We are pleased to grant National Bank of Kuwait - Bahrain this award and we are proud of this partnership with one of the largest credit card service provid-



ers in Bahrain, which has a pioneering vision for excellence and to continue cooperation to develop the features of this program to remain the leader in the field. Loyalty and rewards programs on global standards.

It is worth mentioning that the NBK Rewards Program includes two different categories of cards, and each category determines its own

exclusive offers that the customer receives, which are: the NBK Visa Signature Credit Card category and the NBK Visa Platinum Credit Card category. Customers who hold both categories can earn points through all local and international stores and all points of sale and electronic shopping, and they can also transfer points to any other member of the program.



STUTTGART: A hightech e-bike stands at a booth at the ‘Bicycle & Hiking Travel’ fair (Fahrrad- and WanderReisen), which is part of the Caravan, Motor and Tourism Fair CMT, at the fair grounds in Stuttgart, southwestern Germany. — AFP

German business morale sinks to start new year

BERLIN: German business morale sank further in January, a key survey showed Thursday, as the slump in Europe’s largest economy showed few signs of passing quickly. The Ifo institute’s closely watched confidence barometer, based on a survey of around 9,000 companies, slid to 85.2 points in the first month of the year, after falling to 86.3 points in December.

The New Year drop disappointed analysts surveyed by financial data firm FactSet, who had expected a gentle increase in the indicator. “The German economy is stuck in recession,” said Ifo president Clemens Fuest, with companies assessing the current situation and the outlook as worse than a month before. Germany has yet to string together two consecutive quarters of negative growth - the

measure for a technical recession - but the economy still only managed to muddle through the last 12 months. End-of-year figures for 2023 showed the German economy had shrunk by 0.3 percent over the course of the year amid high inflation, rising interest rates and a global slowdown. “The economic start to the new year was a disappointment,” said Fritz Koehler-Geib, chief economist at public lender KfW. The economic outlook, however, still had some glimmer of hope, Koehler-Geib said. “With inflationary pressure easing and real wages rising, key negative factors should ease over the course of this year and a recovery driven primarily by consumption should set in,” she said.

After a year in which Germany was at the back of the pack among the world’s major advanced economies, 2024 should see the traditional industrial powerhouse eke out “around half a percent” of growth, she predicted. Morale in manufacturing, the backbone of the German economy, was improved to start the year, although the overall mood “remained pessimistic”, according to Ifo. On the other side of the ledger, the mood in services as well as trade and construction clouded further. — AFP

UK annual car output highest since 2019

LONDON: Car production in Britain last year hit the highest level since 2019, or before the COVID pandemic, an industry body said Thursday as it warned of bumps in the road.

Output by the country’s mainly foreign-owned car producers, including Nissan and Jaguar Land Rover, reached just over 905,000 units in 2023, up nearly 17 percent from a year earlier, the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders (SMMT) said in a statement.

“The easing of pandemic-related challenges, from chip shortages to lockdowns, and increasing electrified model production, combined to drive annual output,” it added. SMMT, which reported record-high production of electric models last year, warned that “headwinds remain, most immediately with attacks on shipping in the Red Sea raising the spectre of delays and cost pressures”.

The bulk of vehicles made in the UK are for export, with the European Union by far the biggest market as London and Brussels overcome obstacles surrounding post-Brexit tariff rules. “We are in a much better position than a year ago, but the challenges are unrelenting,” SMMT chief executive Mike Hawes said in the statement.

“With global competition as fierce as it has ever been and amid escalating geopolitical tensions, both (the UK) government and industry must remain singularly focused on competitiveness, with all the jobs and growth this will bring,” he added. Car production in the UK in 2022 stood at roughly 775,000 units - the worst level since 1956. It came in at 1.3 million vehicles in 2019. Hawes told a press briefing ahead of the release that “the UK to a certain extent is playing catch up with other markets”.

He said post-Brexit negotiations coupled with recent economic and political instability meant it “has been very difficult to attract investment into the UK”. Returning to pre-pandemic output levels is “very, very difficult unless you add new entrants”, Hawes predicted. The SMMT forecasts UK car output to rise slightly this year, when a general election is expected. Other notable brands built in the UK are the Mini and Rolls-Royce, both owned by German car giant BMW. — AFP



Home gardening

A labor of love

Pumpkin harvest



Pak choi



Tomato mix



Walla Walla onion grown in the garden.

By Passant Hisham

With its vibrantly colorful fruits, blissfully scented flowers and mouthwatering fresh vegetables, the backyard garden at the house of Al-Zainah Al-Babtain, an organic gardener in Kuwait, has become a tiny world that turned her life into a lively experience. Babtain strongly believes in the popular quote that says, “to plant a garden is to believe in tomorrow”.

“Gardening became an additional motive for me to wake up every day,” she said passionately. Babtain fell in love with gardening by accident 14 years ago, when she started by sprinkling tomato seeds in her backyard without having the least expectation that they will ever sprout due to the severely dry and harsh weather conditions of Kuwait.

To her surprise, what started from a few seeds grew to a large garden with a variety and abundance of crops that she never anticipated would grow in Kuwait, from pumpkins and sunflowers

“To plant a garden is to believe in tomorrow”



Al-Zainah Al-Babtain holds freshly-picked leafy greens.

to carrots and sweet corn and almost all types of crops.

Babtain completely immersed herself in this world, investing all her passion and energy into studying and practicing it, until the garden became an integral part of her family’s life. She never felt so self-sufficient until she started this hobby, as almost everything she cooks for her children is made from the vegetables and fruits she has planted.

“It feels very rewarding to plant something from scratch until it reaches the plate of my children, which all comes out of love,” she said. By witnessing the daily growth of the plant, watering it and waiting patiently for to harvest it from one season to another, Babtain’s children gradually developed a healthy relationship with food, which taught them to appreciate the real value of it.

Gardening also changed the way Babtain spends her time with her family. It connected them with nature and with one another, which gave them the chance to find an escape from the stresses and strains of the outside world. “Taking a short pause from life to enjoy the pleasure of the green scenery has always helped in keeping us more balanced and grounded,” she noted, adding that the garden has turned many of their days into special events. “I don’t like to keep the produce just for myself; that’s why I try as much as I can to celebrate the days of harvest by inviting everyone — from my family members and children’s friends to join us.”

Gardening is an active step toward changing one’s perspective of life, as Babtain witnessed how it has the power to lift many people up, adding color and hope to their lives in their deepest moments of despair. She advises anyone with interest in this hobby to start gardening from any place that has exposure to the sun, whether it’s on a roof, balcony or garden, highlighting Kuwait’s harsh sun is the best thing for stimulating a crop’s growth. On the other hand, she warned that timing is the most challenging thing about gardening, as one

must learn more about the suitable time for each type of crop to grow to achieve the expected results.

According to Babtain, the most rewarding thing that she enjoys in gardening is the experience itself, not the outcome. “The season of gardening is a season of ups and downs that takes me through a constant adventure with small victories. At the end, it’s never about the harvest, it’s about how the process fulfills me from inside,” she said. Even with all the effort that gardening requires — mentally, financially and physically — from Babtain, the positive impact that it has on her is powerful enough to keep her going.



Italian large leaf parsley



Watermelon radishes from the garden.



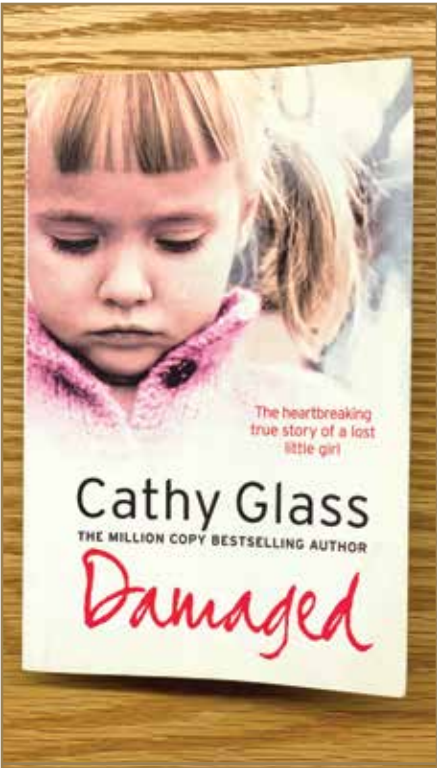
Carrot harvest



Corn harvest



Home harvest of spunta potatoes.



Book Review

Damaged by Cathy Glass

By Ghadeer Ghloom

“**D**amaged” by Cathy Glass is a must-read for anyone interested in the resilience of the human being and the profound impact that compassion and love can have on a deeply wounded soul. It is a gripping memoir that tells the heartbreaking true story of a young girl who enters Glass’ life as a foster child. Written in first person narration, the book takes its reader through the highs and lows of Glass’ experience with the foster child, who is given the name “Jodie” in the book.

The nine-year-old girl has a shocking history of sexual abuse and neglect by her own parents, leaving physical and emotional scars that Glass portrays

in the book, immediately captivating the reader’s attention and embarking on an emotional rollercoaster. The book unfolds the foster carer’s remarkable patience, compassion and dedication in helping Jodie heal from her traumas, while she faces a lot of obstacles such as Jodie’s aggressiveness, outbursts, self-harm, mistrust of everyone and refusal to open up, showcasing the deep damage in this child.

The book raises awareness about the importance of early intervention and the impact that a nurturing environment can have on a child’s recovery, even in the worst cases that may seem almost impossible to heal. Moreover, as the book progresses, Glass provides glimpses into her personal life and the challenges

she faces in finding a balance between her responsibilities as a foster carer and a mother of her own flesh and blood.

This brings Glass closer to the readers, as it makes her more relatable to them. One of the book’s most remarkable aspects is its ability to elicit anger, sadness, frustration and hope, making it an unforgettable read. The book is a powerful memoir that gives voice to the voiceless and the most vulnerable category — abused children.

“Damaged” is a work of non-fiction based on the recollections of Cathy Glass. The names of people, places, dates and the detail of events have been changed to protect the privacy of others.



Cathy Glass, foster carer and author

MALLING

KUWAIT'S NATIONAL PASTIME



Souq Sharq

By Antonio Coelho

Kuwait offers a range of recreational activities. Shopping is a popular pastime, and the country has numerous modern malls and markets. Kuwaitis and expats also enjoy outdoor activities such as beach outings, picnics in parks and sports like football and camel racing. Traditional music, dance and cultural events are celebrated during many festivals.



360 Mall

The weekends are a time for relaxation and recreation, and everyone heads to the malls. Kuwait Times spoke to mallgoers at various malls around the country; some were busy shopping, while others were relaxing in cafes with their friends and families.

Most people agree The Avenues in Rai is the best mall in Kuwait, with huge ample and free parking. It is the largest shopping mall in Kuwait

and home to over 1,100 stores featuring both popular international and local fashion brands, cafes and restaurants. At weekends, it is packed with shoppers and diners of all ages.

Rachael was chilling out with her school friends at The Avenues. They had entered the mall at around 10 in the morning, and planned to leave around 6 pm, with lunch at an Italian restaurant and then focusing on shopping. They were also looking forward to visiting their favorite entertainment zone to play arcade games.

Mariam said she comes to The Avenues when there are big sales on clothes. All her beauty products are purchased there too, as many shops offer exclusive discounts on their products. “I can trust these products as they are genuine,” she pointed out. 360 and Assima malls are also a destination for high-end shopping.

Jacob, who works in Ahmadi, goes every week with his wife and two children to Al Kout Mall in Fahaheel. They mostly do their shopping, while the children have fun go-karting and at the rides. Lunch is a leisurely affair at nearby Indian restaurants.

Many citizens and expatriates also visit malls for their morning walks, especially during the scorching summer, exercising in airconditioned comfort. Many stores also offer great discounts with bumper prizes like cars, household items and furnishings, attracting shoppers to get their money’s worth at these places.



Marina Mall



Assima Mall



The Avenues



A vendor tastes an uncooked locust.

By Faten Omar

In Kuwait, locusts have unexpectedly become a widely embraced culinary choice, not only as a viable source of nutrition, but also as a delicacy. Preferences among Kuwaitis vary when it comes to consuming locusts, with some favoring them boiled until soft, while others prefer them crispy.

In an interview with Kuwait Times, Bu Abbas, a locust vendor, shared that locusts, once considered an unconventional choice, have evolved from a niche curiosity to a thriving aspect of local gastronomy, challenging preconceived notions about what can be considered a palatable and sustainable source of nutrition.

Flying food?
Locusts
an unusual
culinary delight

for a bag, whose weight ranges from 150 grams to half a kilo. "We sell hundreds of bags of locusts during the season that extends from January until the beginning of summer, as the locust season ends when temperatures rise," he explained.

Locusts can be stored for up to five years, whether in refrigerators or by drying them, Bu Abbas said. He stressed that eating locusts has many benefits, as they may serve as an alternative to traditional protein sources. "Locusts are a medicinal food for humans. There are positive effects of consuming locusts. Locusts are eaten whole, and even when soaked, the soaking water can be used as medicine for many diseases," he noted.

Preparing locusts for consumption involves a meticulous process that requires attention to detail. According to one



"Locusts are imported during the winter from Madinah, Saudi Arabia. We order 100 to 150 bags from Saudi Arabia to sell them at the truffle and locust market located in Al-Rai," Bu Abbas explained. According to him, this insect "resembles a shrimp, and its meat is very delicious, especially the female. However, he noted that it can be salty, revealing that Kuwaitis prefer to eat "almkn", the female locust, due to its large size, rather than "alasfor", the smaller male locust.

Bu Abbas sells dozens of bags daily, and there is great demand from Kuwaiti citizens. He mentioned that locust prices fluctuate, but generally range between KD 5 and 10

practitioner of this unique culinary tradition, it takes approximately half an hour to cook locusts thoroughly. After draining them of water and removing any unwanted parts, Kuwaitis typically consume them immediately. Alternatively, for those who prefer a crunchier texture, locusts can be roasted in the oven. "You have to wash them properly, then boil them until they die and stop moving. You will know when they are ready from the smell," he told Kuwait Times.



Bags of locusts are displayed for sale.



A vendor shows bags of locusts as he waits for customers at the locust market in Al-Rai. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



A customer buys bags of locusts.

WHAT'S ON
IN KUWAIT

- **Event: Bugsha Market**
Place: Al-Shuwaikh Park, Al-Sadaqah and Al-Salam Park
Date: January 25 to 27, 2024
Time: 12 pm to 10 pm
- **Event: Ikea fun day**
Place: Boulevard - cricket field
Date: January 27, 2024
Time: 10 am to 8 pm
- **Event: Quantum Con**
Place: Kuwait International Fairground, Hall 6
Date: January 25 to 27, 2024
Time: 9 am to 10 pm
- **Event: Mirzaamiyat**
Place: The Arena- 360 Mall
Date: January 24 to 27, 2024
Time: 10 am to 10 pm
- **Event: Cowgirl**
Place: Freerein
Date: January 26- 27, 2024
- **Event: KIB - The Stadium**
Place: Marina Crescent
Date: January 26- 27, 2024
Time: 4 pm to 10 pm
- **Event: Sports Square**
Place: Sulaibikhat
Date: January 26- 27, 2024
- **Event: Mshro3e Expo**
Place: Qortuba Garden
Date: January 25- 27, 2024
- **Event: Tours in Sadu House**
Place: Sadu House
Date: From Saturday to Thursday
Time: 6:30-7 pm, 7:30-8 pm
- **Event: Creative Printmaking Conference**
Place: Abdullah Al-Salem Cultural Center
Date: January 6 to 27, 2024
Time: 6 pm
- **Event: Al-Mikshat**
Place: North Island on Jaber Causeway
Date: January 12 to April 12, 2024

Jaiswal leads India's reply after attacking 70 from Stokes

Hosts were 119-1 at stumps trailing England by 127 runs

HYDERABAD: Opener Yashasvi Jaiswal led India's charging reply to England's 246, which had been driven by captain Ben Stokes's half-century on an all-attacking opening day of the first Test on Thursday. The hosts were 119-1 at stumps in Hyderabad and trailing England by 127 runs, with skipper Rohit Sharma (24) the sole wicket. Jaiswal, on 76 off 70 balls, and Shubman Gill, on 14, were batting at the close of play.

Left-hander Jaiswal reached his fifty in 47 balls with a boundary off debutant Tom Hartley, whose bruising introduction to Test cricket saw him leak 63 runs from nine overs. Rohit walked back dejected after mistiming a shot off left-arm spinner Jack Leach, with Stokes completing the catch in the deep. Stokes top-scored with 70 after the visitors opted to bat first, sticking to their ultra-attacking "Bazball" strategy to counter India's renowned home-turf spin prowess. "Stokesy's knock, to get us to where we were, was fantastic," opener Ben Duckett told reporters.

He added that the visitors had finished their innings "over par" on a difficult pitch that was likely to get more unruly. "Come day three, day four that could be a match-winning knock if the pitch keeps getting harder to bat on," he said. England had lost regular wickets until Stokes took charge and lifted the total, smashing six fours and three sixes. The skipper put together key lower-order stands with Hartley (23) and Mark Wood (11) before he was finally bowled by pace-

man Jasprit Bumrah after tea in the final wicket.

'A bit challenging'

India spinner Axar Patel said his side were happy to hold the tourists to their total, adding that the pitch had yet to turn in favor of bowlers. "It's a bit challenging for the batsman, but if you play well, you can score runs," he said. "For bowlers it's a challenge," he added. "If you miss your line and length then runs will come easy." England had started the day briskly, with Duckett (35) and Zak Crawley (20) putting on an opening stand of 55, with regular boundaries off Bumrah and Mohammed Siraj. England reached 41-0 in eight overs before spin was introduced, with Ravindra Jadeja and Ravichandran Ashwin eventually taking three apiece. Duckett fell lbw to Ashwin, who broke the tourists' breezy opening stand.

Crawley gifted Ashwin a second wicket when the tall opener hit the ball to mid-off and Siraj took a low catch. Jonny Bairstow hit 37 in a partnership of 61 with Joe Root, who made 29. Axar, a left-arm spinner, bowled Bairstow with a delivery that spun away from the batsman soon after lunch, to elicit roaring cheers from the home crowd. Jadeja got Root caught at short fine-leg after the veteran batsman mistimed a sweep and trudged back to the pavilion. The start of India's innings witnessed a security breach when a fan barged onto the pitch to touch Rohit's feet before being hauled away by security. — AFP



HYDERABAD: India's Yashasvi Jaiswal (left) plays a shot during the first day of the first Test cricket match between India and England at the Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium in Hyderabad on January 25, 2024. — AFP

Inexperienced SA galvanized for NZ Tests

WELLINGTON: South Africa head coach Shukri Conrad insisted Thursday that a lack of Test experience was "galvanizing" his Proteas side for the two-match series in New Zealand. The Proteas have brought a weakened side to play the Black Caps, with many first-choice South African players committed to their domestic Twenty20 competition. Eight of the 15-man squad have yet to play Test cricket, including captain Neil Brand.

Fast bowler Duanne Olivier has the most experience with 15 Test appearances. The 31-year-old is looking to restart a Test career stalled by injuries. "We are all aware of why the side is what it is," Conrad told reporters in Christchurch before the two-Test series, which starts next week. "We have made peace with it a long time ago. It's a conversation which has been well ventilated and discussed. If anything, it's been used as a galvanizing agent."

He said his new-look South African team is desperate to defend their record of having never lost a Test series to New Zealand, dating back to the 1931/32 season. "We have guys here who are out to prove both to themselves and show the strength of the Proteas lies not only in the top 11 (players). "We are here as a Proteas side - not a second- or third-rate side. "The fact New Zealand have never beaten us in a series, that looms large. It's a proud feat that we don't easily want to surrender." He said jet lag after the long flight from Johannesburg had been "a bit of a struggle" but his side had enjoyed a "really good build-up" so far in New Zealand. "We are looking forward to a really good battle on the field," he said.

Conrad said his squad has a lot of first-class experience, insisting they are not underdogs. "I don't think any South African likes to be regarded as an underdog, we are certainly not adopting that tag," he added. "I speak for every one of the guys - they are itching to get going against a top side." Conrad said his team had already proven themselves in a recent home series win over a second-string West Indies team. "Confidence is very high. We have quality cricketers," he said. South Africa have a warm-up match against a New Zealand XI starting Monday in Lincoln, near Christchurch. — AFP

Taiwan's Yu grabs one-stroke lead at Torrey Pines

LOS ANGELES: Taiwan's Kevin Yu, chasing a first US PGA Tour title, carded eight birdies in his eight-under par-64 to take a one-shot lead after the first round of the Farmers Insurance Open at Torrey Pines on Wednesday. Yu, a former world amateur number one who missed four months after suffering a torn meniscus in his left knee last February, edged a stroke clear of world number six Patrick Cantlay and Japanese rookie Ryo Hisatsune with his bogey-free effort at Torrey Pines North Course, one of two in use for the tournament.

Both Cantlay and Hisatsune had eight birdies with one bogey on the North Course. "I was just trying to play my best today, just trying to hit a lot of fairways, trying to make as many putts as I can," Yu said. "Greens a little bumpy, but I'm just trying to hit the best stroke I can out there, which I did today." On a day when staying out of the dense rough still wet from rain early in the week was key, Yu hit 12 of 14 fairways in regulation and 17 of 18 greens.

He said keeping it in the fairway was a priority, and after finishing tied for third after a final-round 63 at La Quinta on Sunday he was confident he could do so. "I've been hitting very good," he said. "I don't have to try to hit like my maximum distance out there, I just have to hit a lot of fairways. That was just the plan today, and if I hit a fairway, like ball-striking's been pretty decent for me, too." — AFP

Hodge, Da Silva lead W Indies fightback in second Test

BRISBANE: Kavem Hodge and Joshua Da Silva put on 149 runs for the sixth wicket to lead a West Indies fightback against Australia on the first day of the second Test on Thursday as the visitors reached 266-8 at stumps. Hodge and wicketkeeper Da Silva were together at the start of the second session with the West Indies in huge trouble at 64-5.

The pair dug in and batted for over a session and a half before Da Silva was finally dismissed for 79, trapped lbw by off-spinner Nathan Lyon with the score on 213. Hodge, playing only his second Test, then fell to the second new ball 12 runs later when he edged Mitchell Starc (4-68) to Steve Smith at second slip for an impressive 71. Debutant Kevin Sinclair was not out 16 at the close, with Alzarri Joseph dismissed for an entertaining 32 off 22 balls from the last ball of the day.

Hodge and Da Silva mixed resolute defense with some exciting shot-making throughout their partnership to give their side some hope after a disappointing start to the innings. After winning the toss and deciding to bat first on a hot day under clear skies, West Indies skipper Kraigg Brathwaite would have been hoping to get the visitors off to a good start at the top of the order. However, he looked unsettled and fell for four in the eighth over when he played at a Josh Hazlewood delivery outside off stump and got an edge to keeper Alex Carey.

Fellow opener Tagenarine Chanderpaul had looked more comfortable at the other end and he and an aggressive Kirk McKenzie started to move the score along. But McKenzie, who scored 21 from



BRISBANE: Joshua Da Silva of the West Indies bats during day one of the second cricket Test match between Australia and West Indies at the Gabba in Brisbane on January 25, 2024. — AFP

25 balls, tried one big shot too many and got a thick edge off Pat Cummins to first slip, where Usman Khawaja took a sharp chance high to his right. Chanderpaul (21) was next to go when he edged Starc to Smith at second slip to leave the West Indies struggling at 54-3. That was soon 57-3 when Alick Athanaze became Starc's 350th Test wicket, caught behind by Carey for eight.

Khawaja got his second catch when Greaves edged Starc to first slip with the dinner break just

four balls away. But the second session belonged to the West Indies, with Hodge and Da Silva resolute in the face of the Australian attack. The two took the West Indies almost to the second new ball, but once Da Silva fell the batting became more difficult under the lights. When Hodge fell there was some chance the West Indies could have collapsed once again. However, Sinclair batted sensibly and Joseph swung his bat freely before edging Hazlewood to give Smith his third catch at second slip. — AFP



Salwa Women's Club handball team win championship

KUWAIT: Salwa Women's Club handball team won the friendly Salwa Club Championship, that concluded on Wednesday under the patronage of Sheikha Naeema Al-Ahmad. The final match was with Iraq's Irbil Club which ended in third place with the score of 27-18. Meanwhile, Bahrain's Al-Muharraq team was the second spot. Sheikha Naeema congratulated Salwa Club for winning the title and congratulated Muharraq and Irbil for their efforts. She said such tournaments are in preparation for the new season to start next month, and will improve the level of the players.

Iraq's head of delegation Mousa Mohsen thanked Sheikha Naeema for the good reception and hospitality, adding that his team benefitted from this participation and hoped it continues in the coming years and have more teams to participate. Salwa Club coach Mohammad Mirza said the tournament was excellent and the players gained a lot from it and wished the team good luck in the coming league tournament.



Sports

Holders Senegal remain team to beat after spectacular AFCON group stage

Morocco, continent’s top-ranked team, eased through with seven points

ABIDJAN: The Africa Cup of Nations moves onto the knockout phase after a remarkable group stage packed with goals, drama, shock results and a huge scare for hosts Ivory Coast, but holders Senegal remain the team to beat. The tournament is on course to be far more prolific than either of the two previous editions to feature 24 teams, after 89 goals were scored in the group stage. That average of 2.5 per game marks a huge increase after 68 were scored in the first round in Cameroon two years ago, and in the first expanded AFCON in Egypt in 2019.

Senegal got to the final of both of those tournaments, and won the title for the first time in 2022. They have so far lived up to their billing in Ivory Coast, with Aliou Cisse's side alone in finishing the group stage with a 100 percent record. Led by Sadio Mane, they swept aside Gambia, Cameroon and Guinea and can be confident going into a last-16 tie with the Ivorians in Yamoussoukro. Meanwhile Morocco, the continent's top-ranked team, eased through with seven points and the sense is there must be more to come from a side led by Paris Saint-Germain full-back Achraf Hakimi, as they face South Africa next.

Solid Nigeria

Three-time champions Nigeria have looked remarkably sound defensively, with coach Jose Peseiro openly admitting keeping clean sheets is his number one priority. That is despite the Super Eagles' impressive array of attacking options around superstar Victor Osimhen, the African player of the year. "My responsibility is to choose the best way to win this competition," Peseiro said when asked about his decision to put the focus on the defence. "I chose an-

other strategy, and the players believe in it -- don't concede goals because we will score at least one."

He astutely pointed out that Senegal only scored one goal in their first three games at the last AFCON before going on to lift the trophy. Nigeria's meeting with Cameroon is a mouthwatering repeat of the 2000 final, when Rigobert Song's Indomitable Lions won on penalties in Lagos—he is now the Cameroon coach.

Egypt have been the opposite of Nigeria—a team that conceded only six goals across the last three tournaments combined have let in six in three group games here. "Obviously this is something that worries me," said their coach Rui Vitoria, although the fitness of talisman Mohamed Salah is their biggest concern before facing the Democratic Republic of Congo.

He has returned to his club Liverpool for treatment on a hamstring injury amid suggestions he might not be fit to come back for Egypt unless they reach the February 11 final. Not all the heavyweights survived the group stage, with Tunisia and Algeria the biggest names to be eliminated. In contrast, Namibia and Mauritania have made it beyond the group stage for the first time, while Cape Verde and Angola's impressive showings so far give them reason to believe they can win knockout ties for the first time. "In our first team meeting I said to the players the objective was to get to the semi-finals," declared Cape Verde coach Pedro 'Bubista' Brito.

Ivorian hopes still alive

Few in Ivory Coast could have contemplated that their team, one of the traditional powerhouses of the African game and two-time continental champions,



SAN-PEDRO: Morocco's midfielder #16 Abdessamad Ezzalzouli (R) kicks the ball during the Africa Cup of Nations (CAN) 2024 group F football match between Zambia and Morocco at the Stade Laurent Pokou in San Pedro. — AFP

could be eliminated in the group stage. Yet they came within a whisker of becoming the first AFCON hosts to go out in the first round since Gabon in 2017, and just the second since Tunisia in 1994.

That was after a shocking 4-0 defeat by Equatorial Guinea, their heaviest ever home loss. However, they squeezed through as the last of the four best third-placed sides and now face Senegal. The Ele-

phants became the second team to sack their coach during the tournament, following in the footsteps of Tanzania by dismissing Jean-Louis Gasset. Emerse Fae is their new interim boss and he takes over a team that is not as strong as past Ivorian sides but still boasts quality, particularly in midfield. It remains to be seen if they can compete with the defending champions, however. — AFP



MADRID: Almeria's Spanish defender #03 Edgar Gonzalez eyes the ball during the Spanish League football match between Real Madrid CF and UD Almeria at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium in Madrid. — AFP

Real Madrid take top spot in football ‘Money League’

LONDON: Real Madrid have climbed to the top of football's 'Money League' as the Spanish side surpassed Manchester City to become the highest revenue-generating club in 2022-23. For the first time since 2017-18, Real are in pole position in Deloitte's financial rankings with a reported record revenue of 831 million euros (\$905 million), an increase of 118 million euros over the previous year.

Although they failed to win La Liga last season—finishing 10 points behind champions Barcelona—and lost in the Champions League semi-finals to Manchester City, Real's growth is largely attributable to strong retail performance, higher stadium attendance and recovery of sponsorship income following the easing of Covid-19 restrictions.

Manchester City, who won the Premier League, Champions League and FA Cup last season, fall to second place in the 2024 rankings. The club reported its highest ever revenue for a season, 826 million euros, and bolstered both broadcast and commercial revenues by 50 million euros and 26 million euros respectively. French champions Paris Saint-Germain broke into the top three for the first time, with revenues of 802 million euros. Barcelona are in fourth position as their 800 million euros revenue lifted them from seventh place, with club record licensing and merchandis-

ing revenues and fans returning to stadiums.

Commercial revenue represented the largest income stream for 'Money League' clubs for the first time since the 2015-16 season, excluding the COVID-19 impacted 2019-20 season. Seventeen of the top 20 clubs reported a year-on-year increase in commercial revenue, with growth largely attributable to improved retail sales, revenue from non-matchday events and recovery of sponsorship income which had been impacted by the pandemic.

Tim Bridge, lead partner in financial experts Deloitte's Sports Business Group, said: "Another record-breaking year for Money League clubs represents the ongoing financial might of the football industry. "A high demand for live sport is pointing towards further growth for commercial and matchday revenues, in particular. "As clubs appear to no longer be able to rely on exponential broadcast revenue growth, creating a more commercially focused business model will support them to achieve greater control over their financial stability."

Liverpool have had the biggest fall of any club in the top 20, from third place down to seventh, after Deloitte found their revenue had dropped slightly from 694.7 million euros to 694.2 million euros. Deloitte attributed that fall to the Reds' on-field performance, with the club finishing fifth in the Premier League last season and bowing out in the Champions League last 16. Manchester United dropped one place to fifth despite a healthier revenue figure than the season before. Tottenham and Chelsea switched places compared to last year, with Spurs up one place to eighth, partly thanks to revenue earned from

their stadium which hosts several NFL games a season. Arsenal held on to 10th position.

Men's team rankings	
Note: Last year's position in brackets, revenue in millions of euros and second figure is last year's revenue:	
1 (2)	Real Madrid 831.4 euros (713.7 euros)
2 (1)	Manchester City 825.9 (731)
3 (5)	Paris Saint-Germain 801.8 (654.2)
4 (7)	Barcelona 800.1 (638.2)
5 (4)	Manchester United 745.8 (688.6)
6 (6)	Bayern Munich 744.0 (653.6)
7 (3)	Liverpool 682.9 (701.8)
8 (9)	Tottenham Hotspur 631.5 (522.9)
9 (8)	Chelsea 589.4 (568.3)
10 (10)	Arsenal 532.6 (433.5)
11 (11)	Juventus 432.4 (400.7)
12 (13)	Borussia Dortmund 420.0 (357)
13 (16)	AC Milan 385.3 (257.4)
14 (14)	Inter Milan 378.9 (308.4)
15 (12)	Atletico Madrid 364.1 (393.9)
16 (n/a)	Eintracht Frankfurt 293.5 (208.3)
17 (20)	Newcastle United 287.8 (212.2) 250.3 (179.7)
18 (15)	West Ham United 275.1 (301.3) 239.2 (255.1)
19 (n/a)	Napoli 267.7 (156.5) 232.8 (132.5)
20 (n/a)	Marseille 258.4 (237.5) 224.7 (201.2)
Women's club rankings	
1	Barcelona 13.4 (11.6)
2	Manchester United 8.0 (7.0)
3	Real Madrid 7.4 (6.5)
4	Manchester City 5.3 (4.6)
5	Arsenal 5.3 (4.6). —AFP

Rubiales to face trial over World Cup kiss

MADRID: A Spanish judge on Thursday proposed that disgraced former Spanish football chief Luis Rubiales be tried over the kiss he forced on Women's World Cup star Jenni Hermoso. In a ruling following his preliminary investigation, judge Francisco de Jorge of Spain's Audiencia Nacional top criminal court concluded that the kiss "was not consensual and was a unilateral and unexpected move" by Rubiales, who is facing charges of sexual assault and coercion.

He also proposed putting three others on trial for subsequently exerting pressure on Hermoso, 33, "to make a public statement confirming the kiss was consensual": former women's coach Jorge Vilda, men's team director Albert Luque and RFEF marketing boss Ruben Rivera. All three have also been investigated by the judge. During the incident on August 20, which took place live in front of the cameras after Spain beat England to win the Women's World Cup final in Australia, Rubiales held Hermoso's head in both hands and forcibly kissed her on the lips.

He has described the act as "a consensual peck" but Hermoso has insisted it was not. In his ruling, De Jorge said questions about "whether the aim was erotic or not and about the excitement stemming from the extraordinary sporting triumph are elements whose legal consequences will have to be examined" before the court. But he also said that a kiss on the lips "affects the sphere of intimacy reserved for sexual relations, in particular when it involved two adults".

'A concerted effort'

He also said he had found evidence of "a concerted effort" by Vilda, Luque and Rivera, in agreement with Rubiales, "to persuade Jennifer Hermoso and get her to agree to make a video saying the kiss was consensual". Such actions "could constitute a criminal offence linked to the main offence" attributed to Rubiales, regardless of the fact that on its own, it could appear to be a minor offence. The kiss provoked widespread outrage and prompted his suspension by world football governing body FIFA. Under Spanish law, a non-consensual kiss can be considered sexual assault—a criminal category that groups all types of sexual violence.

Penalties for such a kiss range from a fine to four years in prison. Hermoso filed a lawsuit against Rubiales, 46, in September and testified before the judge earlier this month saying she had come under pressure to defend him both on the flight back from Australia and on a subsequent team holiday to Ibiza in the Balearic Islands. In her testimony, she said she had faced "constant harassment by the parties under investigation, which disrupted her normal life, causing her anxiety and distress". Numerous other witnesses have testified before the judge about the pressure faced by Hermoso, among them two-time Ballon d'Or winner Alexia Putellas and two other Spanish teammates. — AFP

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Change of Name

I, **LEO SEQUEIRA STEPHEN MELWYN**, holder of passport no. R8112751do hereby change my name to **STEPHEN MELWYN LEO** (as given name) **SEQUEIRA** (as Surname) for all purposes. I will hence forth be known in the name **STEPHEN MELWYN LEO SEQUEIRA** and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. **(#4599 26/01/2024)**

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**

VILLA FOR RENT

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- Preferably Diplomats

Mr. Mansour

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Rashaa_b@hotmail.com

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

S Korea struggle into Asian Cup last 16 with Malaysia draw



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 favorites 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 Suzuki, 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 Ernando Ari. Ja-

pan doubled their lead seven minutes after half-time when Ritsu Doan cut through the Indonesia defense 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 decider 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 immediate-

ly 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.

Son Heung-min's South Korea toiled into the Asian Cup knockout rounds on Thursday after conceding a last-minute equalizer in a madcap 3-3 draw with minnows Malaysia. The result in Doha meant the Koreans advanced as Group E runners-up and avoided a last-16 showdown with pre-tournament favorites Japan. Instead they will play the winner of Group F, which Saudi Arabia currently lead ahead of Thailand. Bahrain topped Group E and will face Japan after a 1-0 win over Jordan, who also went through to the last 16. Malaysia were eliminated despite a heroic effort that saw the world's 130th-ranked team score a 105th-minute equalizer from Romel Morales.

Jurgen Klinsmann's South Korea thought they had won it after Lee Kang-in equalised with an 83rd-minute free-kick and then Tottenham Hotspur's Son scored from the penalty spot in the 94th minute. Jeong

Woo-yeong gave the Koreans the lead in the 21st minute, only for Malaysia to come roaring back with two goals early in the second half from Faisal Halim and Arif Aiman, the latter from the spot.

Klinsmann named Wolverhampton Wanderers forward Hwang Hee-chan among the substitutes for the first time at the Asian Cup. Hwang, who has scored 10 goals in the Premier League this season, has been struggling with a hip injury. South Korea had VAR to thank for their opening goal. Jeong thumped a header towards goal that Malaysia goalkeeper Syihan Hazmi initially looked to have clawed away with a fantastic save. But the replay showed that the ball had crossed the line before Hazmi got a hand to it.

It was a rare moment of ruthlessness from a Korean side that dominated possession but could not turn it into goals in the first half. Malaysia made them pay with a stunning equalizer six minutes after the restart. Darren Lok robbed a sleeping Hwang In-beom on the edge of the box, and Halim turned Bayern Munich defender Kim Min-jae inside out before slotting the ball home from a tight angle. And more was to come when a VAR check gave Malaysia a penalty after Seol Young-woo was ruled to have kicked Aiman. — AFP

Sabalenka, Zheng march into Open final showdown

MELBOURNE: Defending champion Aryna Sabalenka will clash with Chinese 12th seed Zheng Qinwen in the Australian Open final after both women powered to straight-sets victories in the last four on Thursday. World number two Sabalenka kept her title defence on track by blasting past American fourth seed Coco Gauff 7-6 (7/2), 6-4 with the roof closed on Rod Laver Arena. Zheng then stormed into a debut championship match with a stirring 6-4, 6-4 victory over gallant Ukrainian qualifier Dayana Yastremska.

In doing so, the 21-year-old became the first Chinese finalist in Melbourne since her idol Li Na won the title in 2014. Zheng's previous best Slam showing was the quarter-finals at the US Open last year, when she was easily beaten by Sabalenka in their only previous meeting. The Belarusian will be favorite again to claim her second major crown on Saturday in what promises to be a bruising showdown between two hard-hitters who sometimes train together.

"I was able to focus on myself," said Sabalenka of beating Gauff and avenging her defeat in last year's US Open final. "I was prepared that she was going to move well and put all the balls back and I was just ready for anything. That was the key, and the support here." The win ensured she became the first player since Serena Williams in 2016 and 2017 to reach back-to-back Australian Open finals.

No one since Victoria Azarenka in 2013 has mounted a successful women's title defence at Melbourne Park. Sabalenka said before her match that she was motivated by revenge after 19-year-old Gauff's breakthrough three-set triumph at Flushing Meadows. But it proved to be her toughest assignment at the tournament so far, having dropped just 16 games leading into the clash. "It's always a great fight (against Gauff). She's a great player and I enjoy playing her," she said. "I really hope that in the future we are going to play many more finals." — AFP

Williams brothers fire Athletic Bilbao into Copa semis

BILBAO: Inaki Williams raced back from Africa to face Barcelona in the Copa del Rey and sent Athletic Bilbao into the semi-finals by scoring a crucial goal in their 4-2 extra-time triumph on Wednesday. The Ghana forward played on Monday for his country but made it home to help Athletic vanquish the Spanish champions and pile more pressure on their coach Xavi Hernandez. Athletic struck inside the first minute through Gorka Guruzeta, but Barcelona turned the game around with goals from Robert Lewandowski and 16-year-old starlet Lamine Yamal.

Oihan Sancet netted early in the second half to take the game to extra-time and then teed up substitute Inaki Williams to put the Basques ahead. His brother Nico Williams added the finishing touch late on to complete a superb night for the hosts, and a miserable one for Barca, despite a battling performance. "There was a lack of concentration, individual errors," admitted Xavi. "It's a game of errors and we are not minimizing them."

The coach said he was calm despite the defeat and had bigger fish to fry. "We'll go for La Liga and the



BILBAO: Athletic Bilbao's Spanish midfielder #24 Benat Prados and Barcelona's Uruguayan defender #04 Ronald Araujo vie for a header next to Barcelona's Dutch midfielder #21 Frenkie de Jong during the Spanish Copa del Rey (King's Cup) quarter final football match. — AFP

Champions League, the most important trophies remain, and we'll fight for them like we did today," he added. After Barcelona's recent humbling by Real Madrid in the Spanish Super Cup final Xavi admitted the team needs to win a trophy this season. Eight points off the top in La Liga, the record 31-time Copa del Rey winners saw the cup as an accessible route to silverware.

In their way were former Barca coach Ernesto Valverde and his Athletic side, 23-time cup champions, behind only the Catalans, featuring the inspired Williams brothers. "The fact Inaki was here was a huge morale boost," Valverde told TVE. "He's a player who is always decisive for us and who instills fear in opponents." Roared on at a raucous San Mames, Athletic took the lead after just 36 seconds, with Guruzeta capitalizing on Barca's disorganized defense and turning home.

Conceding early goals has been a big problem for Barcelona this season—remarkably this was only the third fastest. Xavi's side have shown good grit to fight back in matches though and they did it again, after defender Alejandro Balde went off with a hamstring injury. Lewandowski charged down Yuri Berchiche's clearance and deflected it into the net, before the electric Yamal cut in from the right and flashed a shot into the bottom corner from the edge of the box.

Athletic goalkeeper Julien Agirrezabala tipped Ferran Torres' strike narrowly wide before half-time and his team pulled level early in the second half through Sancet's header. Guruzeta should have put Los Leones ahead but headed off-target, with Inaki Williams falling to the floor in frustration on the sidelines. The Ghana international, who raced back from the Africa Cup of Nations in the Ivory Coast to participate, soon entered the fray. His brother, Nico Williams, the architect of Sancet's leveler, bent a shot narrowly past the post as the match lurched back and forth, while Yamal dinked wide when through on goal. — AFP



MELBOURNE: China's Zheng Qinwen hits a return against Ukraine's Dayana Yastremska during their women's singles semi-final match on day 12 of the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne on January 25, 2024. — AFP