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US reprisals anger Iraq, Syria

Tehran, Hamas, Hezbollah also slam strikes on Iran-backed groups



DOVER, Delaware: US President Joe Biden attends the transfer of the remains of three US servicemembers killed in a drone attack on a US military outpost in Jordan at Dover Air Force Base on Feb 2, 2024. — AFP

DAMASCUS: The United States struck overnight Iran-backed groups in Iraq and Syria in retaliation for a deadly attack on US troops, drawing condemnation Saturday from government and groups in the region. The United States, which promised more strikes, blamed Sunday's drone attack on a US base in Jordan on forces backed by Iran. US forces however did not strike inside Iranian territory, with both Washington and Tehran seemingly keen to avoid all-out war.

But with tensions already running high in the face of the Zionist-Hamas war in Gaza, both the Syrian and Iraqi governments joined Tehran in accusing Washington of undermining regional stability. National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said US warplanes struck "more than 85 targets at seven facilities", four in Syria and three in Iraq. "These targets were carefully selected to avoid civilian casualties," he added.

But the Iraqi government said civilians were among at least 16 people killed in the country's west, and Damascus also reported civilian deaths, but a war monitor said all 29 killed in the US strikes on Syria were fighters. "This aggressive air strike will push the security situation in Iraq and the region to the brink of the abyss," said Iraqi government spokesman Bassem Al-Awadi. Iraqi Prime Minister Mohamed Shia Al-Sudani declared three days of mourning.

Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Nasser

Kanani said the overnight operation was "another strategic mistake by the US government, which will have no result other than intensifying tension and instability". Hamas, whose unprecedented Oct 7 attack on the Zionist entity sparked the current spiral of violence in the region, accused Washington of pouring "oil on the fire".

Meanwhile, Russia called for a UN Security Council meeting "over the threat to peace and safety created by US strikes on Syria and Iraq". The Syrian foreign ministry said the strikes served to "inflare the conflict in the Middle East in an extremely dangerous way". The Syrian army said "a number of civilians and soldiers" were killed in eastern Syria, but the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitor reported no civilian deaths.

The Britain-based Observatory said the strikes killed 29 pro-Iran fighters, including at least six from Lebanese Hezbollah, which in a statement "strongly condemned" the US offensive. The operation "contributes to heightening conflict, tensions and escalation" across the region, Hezbollah said. The Observatory earlier said some militant groups had begun evacuating their positions and civilians in the towns of Deir Ezzor and Mayadeen had fled their homes in fear of more US strikes.

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NEWS IN BRIEF

43 expats deported in 50 days

KUWAIT: In the last 50 days, the interior ministry has deported 43 expatriates, with 27 more awaiting deportation this month. All 70 were arrested for serious traffic violations or for renting unlicensed camps. The traffic department mandates immediate deportation for expats involved in driving under the influence, driving without a license, running red lights or speeding. Among expats at camps, 67 violations were reported, leading to fines (11), deportations (39) and ongoing reviews (17). Additionally, 31 individuals violating traffic laws were either deported or are undergoing procedures, with some awaiting travel documents from their embassies.

India navy rescues 19 crew

NEW DELHI: India's navy said Friday it had rescued 19 crewmembers aboard a fishing vessel hijacked off Somalia, the third such operation this week after a spate of attacks on shipping in the region. A distress call from the Iranian-flagged FV Omari was received on Wednesday and the Indian patrol boat INS Sharda intercepted the vessel in the "early hours" of Friday, a navy statement said. Eleven Iranian and eight Pakistani crewmembers were aboard the vessel. Seven Somali pirates had taken control of the ship, said the navy statement. — AFP

Jailbird no more: Avian 'spy' freed

NEW DELHI: A pigeon that spent eight months in Indian police custody has been released after it was finally cleared of being a suspected Chinese spy. The bird was caught at a port in the financial capital Mumbai with "messages written in a Chinese-like script" on its wings, the Times of India newspaper reported. "Initially, the police had registered a case of spying against the bird, but after completing their inquiry, they dropped the charge," the report added. — AFP

Kuwait keen on effective contacts with envoys: FM

KUWAIT: Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya said Friday Kuwait is keen on effective and continued communication with the ambassadors of the friendly and sisterly countries in a manner that contributes to serving mutual interests. Yahya made the remarks to reporters following the friendly annual gathering held by former Capital governor Sheikh Ali Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah for foreign and Arab diplomatic missions' members and their families in Abdaly.

The minister thanked Sheikh Ali for this great invitation, saying this annual meeting held for over 28 years is an opportunity for further communication among all diplomats accredited in Kuwait. Yahya said that the opportunity helped him meet most heads of diplomatic missions in Kuwait after assuming office. He elaborated he looks forward to meeting them at the ministry's HQ to discuss means of enhancing relations. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya (center), Deputy Foreign Minister Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Sabah (right) and former Capital governor Sheikh Ali Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah are seen during the gathering. — KUNA

Zionists pound Gaza amid fears of Rafah carnage

GAZA: The Zionist entity pressed its blistering assault in the Gaza Strip on Saturday as fears grew over a push into Rafah, the southern city teeming with civilians uprooted by the nearly four-month war. A barrage of air strikes and tank fire rocked Khan Yunis overnight and through the day, an AFP journalist said of the main city in southern Gaza that has been the focus of the Zionist entity's offensive.

The health ministry in Gaza said more than 100 people were killed across the Palestinian territory overnight, mostly women and children. Hundreds of thousands of Gaza's 2.4 million people displaced by the fierce fighting have fled south to Rafah since the outbreak of the war, with their tents crammed along streets and in parks.

The city that had been home to 200,000 people now hosts more than half of Gaza's population, the United Nations said. Civilians who fled to Rafah have been pushed up against the border with Egypt, trying to avoid parts of the city exposed to the fighting in nearby Khan Yunis.

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GAZA: Men pray over the bodies of people killed in Zionist bombardment at Najjar Hospital in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on Feb 3, 2024. — AFP

Khan's marriage ruled illegal, duo jailed for 7 years

ISLAMABAD: A Pakistani court on Saturday ruled former prime minister Imran Khan's marriage to his third wife illegal under Islamic law and sentenced the pair to seven years each in jail, his party said. It is the third verdict in a week to attack the former international cricket star's reputation, after he was given concurrent prison sentences of 10 years for leaking state secrets and 14 years for graft alongside his wife Bushra Bibi. Khan, who was booted from office by a vote of no

confidence in April 2022, insists nearly 200 offences he has since been charged with have been fabricated by the military-led establishment to stop him from contesting elections on Feb 8. The latest conviction centers on an Islamic law known as "iddat", which dictates that a widowed or divorced woman must wait three months before remarrying, to leave no doubt about who the father is in the instance of a pregnancy.

"A court has declared the marriage of former prime minister Imran Khan & Bushra Bibi illegal with 7 years imprisonment each," his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party said in a statement. "This shameful case is illogical. All of this is happening for political goals," said Khan's lawyer Gohar Ali Khan, adding that the conviction and jail terms would be challenged in court. Khan has been imprisoned in Rawalpindi

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LAHORE: Former Pakistani prime minister Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi arrive at a high court in this May 15, 2023 photo. — AFP



Local

Young Ambassadors explore solutions to tackle climate change, protect biodiversity

British, Canadian Embassies organize trip to Jahra Nature Reserve



KUWAIT: British and Canadian Embassies, in collaboration with the Environment Public Authority (EPA), organized a field trip for Young Ambassadors to Jahra Nature Reserve. The trip was sponsored by BNK Automotive.

By Chidi Emmanuel

KUWAIT: As part of their efforts to create awareness and protect biodiversity and the environment, the British and Canadian Embassies, in collaboration with the Environment Public Authority (EPA), organized a field trip for Young Ambassadors to Jahra Nature Reserve. The trip was sponsored by BNK Automotive.

"This event is a mentorship program that teaches students about climate action and ways to protect biodiversity. The focus of the excursion is to explore nature-based solutions for combating and adapting to climate change," Samia Alduaij from Reefs & Beyond (the implementing partner of the Young Ambassador's program) told Kuwait Times.

Participants had the opportunity to learn about the crucial role of mangroves as a carbon sink and their effectiveness in absorbing CO2. The Young Ambassadors were able to see the migratory birds that inhabit the reserve during the winter. The program is aimed at empowering young people to bridge divides, build consensus, hold decision-makers accountable and ensure that the global community takes bold, urgent action to combat climate change.

EPA's deputy director general of technical affairs Abdullah Al-Zaidan explained the efforts the agency is making to protect biodiversity and the ecosystem. He said there are around 12-13 natural reserves in Kuwait, but only three are managed by the EPA. "In the face of a rapidly changing climate, young leaders must be equipped for the vital role they play in shaping the world's response to this existential challenge, making climate diplomacy an indispensable tool in their arsenal for a sustainable future. This is in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 13 (SDG 13), which focuses on climate action



and climate justice," he said, urging the youths to engage in climate diplomacy "so as to combat climate change and its impacts".

The trip helped in championing the climate leaders of tomorrow (the students) through a program that enables them to gain first-hand experience in climate diplomacy. Participants learned about the initiatives that provide them with invaluable hands-on experience in climate diplomacy, communications,

leadership and how to promote behavioral change, which is very integral to climate action.

Young ambassadors

The Embassies of Canada and the UK and the United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office invited interested embassies to join the Young Ambassador initiative as a tangible contribution to highlight climate action and climate diplomacy in line with

SDG 13. The program opens doors for emerging leaders in Kuwait. It provides a select group of high school students (female and male, 15 to 18 years old) with mentoring and leadership development opportunities over a 5-month period through exposure to "real world" diplomacy, access to decision-makers, and a platform to share their ideas and initiatives to promote climate action in Kuwait and beyond.

During this period, each participant becomes a "Young Ambassador"; participates in bimonthly learning and networking activities with all participants by an embassy, UN agency or partner organization on a particular climate theme (climate impacts, mitigation, adaptation, climate negotiations, loss and damage, climate finance, etc); and develops leadership skills and gain support tools, confidence and a platform to enable them to be effective and collaborative champions of climate action.

Reacting to the event, some of the young ambassadors expressed their desire to help promote climate change awareness. "Today's event was interesting, interactive and informative. We need to join hands in the efforts to preserve the environment," Omar Saad, a Young Ambassador from the British School of Kuwait told Kuwait Times. "Persevering the natural environment and the ecosystem has become very necessary. The earlier, the better," Yusuf Fawzie, another Young Ambassador from American International School added.

"We had a great experience today. We hope to contribute to the fight against global warming and promote awareness of the need to protect the ecosystem," Lashata from the Indian Community School of Kuwait said as Grace and Hana, also from ICSK, concurred. The Young are selected on the basis of their submissions and criteria that ensure a diverse and inclusive group of participants.



KUWAIT: Al-Salam Palace Museum showcases the works of art by local artists.— KUNA photos

Al-Salam Palace Museum hosts art exhibition

KUWAIT: Visitors of Al-Salam Palace Museum have had a chance to see aspects of Kuwait in the past and in the present through the works of art by local artists at the "Kuwait: history, culture, and nature" exhibition. The seven-day exhibition, which opened on Thursday, provides an exceptional platform for artists to showcase collections of their paintings that enrich in visual form the past

and present of their country.

The opening ceremony gathered a galaxy of artistic celebrities, intelligentsia, and diplomats besides the 12 male and female exhibitors, namely Husam Al-Rashid, Jaseem Al-Nasrallah, Mai Al-Saad, Maysam Qasem, Ahmad Moqim, Sarah Al-Shair, Isa Jodah, Hiba Al-Sabah, Sohaila AlAtiyah, Nawaf Al-Armaly, Walid Al-Nashi, and Yasin Zaidan. "The artists used various materials, such as colors, cloth, metal, paper, and recycled material, to produce the works of art on display," Ahmad Moqim pointed out.

He said his painting, named the anniversary of the coronation of Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, was in memory of the late Amir. The painting took two years to

complete, Moqim told KUNA, noting that he delved into historical research to make it a uniquely documentary work of art. In similar statements, Sarah Al-Shair said her four paintings on display portray several aspects of the life of a Kuwaiti woman in the past.

Sohaila Al-Atiyah, who has a similar number of exhibits, said she used patches of cloth in the paintings to focus on marine life and shed light on famous traditional anglers in an original style. On his part, Walid Al-Nashi said his works follow the collage technique, where pieces of paper, photographs, and fabric are arranged and stuck down onto a supporting surface. "This technique, though inexpensive, needs a lot of talent and effort to produce a creative work of art," he added.— KUNA



Kuwait, Republic of Suriname establish diplomatic relations

NEW YORK: Kuwait and the Republic of Suriname announced the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. The announcement was made in a joint statement issued in New York

and signed by Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Tariq Al-Bannai and Permanent Representative of the Republic of Suriname to the United Nations Ambassador Sunil Sitaldin.— KUNA



Local

'Women's Wellness Event' first-of-its-kind in Kuwait

More women are realizing the importance of prioritizing their health

By Passant Hisham

KUWAIT: A day just for her, for fostering change, growth and empowerment for every woman out there. "Women's Wellness Event", the first-of-its-kind in Kuwait, took place on Saturday to shed light on the underestimated aspects of women's mental and physical health concerns that inevitably impact the health of society as a whole.

"Well-being comes from finding ways to make yourself feel better, so find your own way." This is how the event started, marked by an inspiring keynote speech by Sheikhha Intisar Al-Sabah. Sheikhha Intisar is an entrepreneur, philanthropist and visionary leader with previous significant initiatives in influencing women's health worldwide. She said all previous scientific studies have stated that women are two to three times more likely to develop post-traumatic stress disorder than men, which raises a serious issue that deserves to come to light.

According to Sheikhha Intisar's expertise in women's wellness sector, depression negatively reflects on a woman's cognition, emotions and body altogether. Therefore, she emphasized the need for dealing with the three aspects for an effective healing approach, which aligns with the core aspects addressed in the event. This unique initiative covers a diverse range of sessions and workshops that go beyond mental health to encompass mental health as well, including the mind and body connection, silencing the inner critic and implementing different strategies for holistic well-being.

The community, which is mostly shaped by women, be it a mother, sister



A picture shows attendees of the event. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Aliya Mawani, Canadian Ambassador to Kuwait and Sheikhha Intisar Al-Sabah are pictured in this photo.



Sheikha Intisar Al-Sabah



Dr Ayesha Kamal



Tamar Dertavitian



or wife, shows a great need for holding such awareness initiatives, especially because the area of women's health is mostly overlooked by the society, said Tamar Dertavitian, director of Fawzia Sultan Healthcare Network (FSHN), the host organization of the event.

Clinical psychologist Dr Ayesha Kamal noted the main objective of this day is to identify and understand the large impact that social and political aspects of soci-

ety can have on women's health overall. "When we take into consideration the general stigma against seeking mental healthcare, or the emphasis that sometimes is put on family privacy, or going for physical checkups, we can see how this can affect women," she said.

She referred to a common example that mostly reflects this stigma. "When women show persistent low mood, which might be a sign of depression or other se-

rious mental health concerns, it is mostly brushed off to hormonal changes. Subsequently, this prevents women from seeking further care or getting the help they need," she added.

Yet, events like these can change the narrative. Dr Kamal expressed to Kuwait Times her excitement for hosting this day, particularly because it is organized by women for women. "We are now moving beyond the hashtag of 'Women support

women' as we are actually implementing it on the ground," she said. She added she is feeling proud of having all these guests showing up, because this proves that more women are realizing the importance of prioritizing their health by wanting to learn more about how to take better care of themselves. It's as if they're acknowledging it out loud: "I am worth taking the time; I am worth investing in."



KUWAIT: Medical experts attend the 16th Conference of the Islamic Organization for Medical Sciences. — KUNA photos



Conference recommends panels to set criteria for AI in medicine

KUWAIT: The 16th Conference of the Islamic Organization for Medical Sciences, themed "the artificial intelligence... boosting health and attaining goals of the Islamic Shariaa," has recommended forming committees grouping medicine, Shariaa professors, high-tech

producers, and patients' representatives to set criteria for employing the artificial intelligence in medicine.

The organization's chairperson, Dr. Mohammad Al-Jarallah, said in a press release on Saturday that the conference recommended that basic treatment re-

main for humans and not equipment, conforming AI programs with the Shariaa, medical, and social norms, and prohibiting it from altering genes. It also advised that accords should be worked out with local and international institutions to back up digital transformation, establishing official authorities to exclusively represent the state locally and externally for devising and managing plans, policies, and strategies concerning IT, data, statistics, and digital transformation.

However, the conference called for conducting research and studies, examining top practices and methods in the digital transformation realm, following up on the latest innovations and conventions, and conducting sufficient studies about the benefits of AI. AI employment must be aimed at attaining human race interests, observing religious beliefs, human dignity, Islamic and humanitarian values, attaining justice, and ensuring humans' control over machines.

Dr. Al-Jarallah added that the AI emergence is a new phase where "digital health" predominates the realm, noting that His Almighty's creation cannot be compared with human technologies. The conference that started on Tuesday with an Amiri sponsorship focused on the pivotal role of public health, preventive medicine, upgrading health policies, rational governance, and the AI role in preserving the Shariaa objectives. — KUNA



Obstetrics and Gynecology conf to explore AI

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The Obstetrics and Gynecology conference's 26th edition will take place from February 8-10 under the patronage of Health Minister Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi, according to Dr Hanan Al-Huseini, head of the obstetrics and gynecology department at Jahra Hospital. Dr Huseini, who will chair the conference, stated that this edition of the conference will be the largest scientific and training event in this field and will be attended by 20 experts from 20 countries, including the United Kingdom, Spain, Russia, Cyprus, India, Slovenia,

Saudi Arabia and Egypt, as well as local experts who are renowned for their experience and outstanding performance.

The conference will cover topics related to pregnancy, obstetrics, maternal and fetal medicine, infertility problems in women and men and the use of artificial intelligence (AI) to improve the quality and results of IVF babies. Dr Huseini added the conference will provide insight into the latest scientific discoveries to enhance medical services for patients and the future of embryology, genetics, robotic surgeries, AI in fetal ultrasounds and fetal treatment interventions during pregnancy.

Moreover, the conference will discuss recent developments in pre-pregnancy genetics and sharia and religious views on AI in medicine, particularly in obstetrics and gynecology. Three workshops will be held before the conference — the advanced detailed ultrasound in obstetrics and gynecology on Feb 6-7, male fertility surgeries on Feb 5, 6 and 7 and hysteroscopy on Feb 6-7.

Medical experts, societies mark Cancer Day

KUWAIT: Activists, medical experts, and doctors mark World Cancer Day on February 4, against the backdrop of national efforts at various levels to combat the disease and enhance public awareness of the serious health hazard. Kuwaiti authorities and concerned quarters have been offering all possible aid for the cases, materially and morally, in coordination with the Ministry of Health, represented by the Kuwait Cancer Control Center, and hospitals.

Moreover, specialized societies play a pivotal role in supporting the cases financially and morally. Al-Sidra Association, since its establishment on January 23, 2012, has hosted more than 16,000 Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti patients, providing them with psychological support by specialists and volunteers, helping them cope with their condition, and accepting the treatment, said Sheikhha Azza Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah, the founder and chairwoman of the association, in an interview with KUNA.

The society holds individual and group support sessions, enabling patients to learn from survivors' experiences and how to cope with psychological challenges. The treatment aims to encourage patients to remain good-looking and maintain self-confidence. It includes massage, yoga, deep breathing sessions, educational lectures, and workshops for enlightening the public on means of coping with cancer.

Sheikha Azza added that the association financially aids limited-income patients and offers free transport for them and their families for examinations at the center and the affiliated ones. Altaf Al-Issa, a psychological therapist, told KUNA that some of the major problems in combating the dis-



Activists and medical experts mark World Cancer Day on February 4.

ease are the lack of a sufficient number of cadres, affirming that society is ready to coordinate with volunteers and specialists. Meanwhile, Director General of the Patients Helping Fund Jamal Al-Fozan said the number of patients who benefit financially from society per year amounts to 350-550, and the cost stands at KD 5,412,000 (last year).

The Patients Helping Fund Society has continued to launch annual campaigns in support of cancer patients since its establishment in 1979, affirming its readiness to offer financial help to the limited-income residents of Kuwait. Dr. Iman Al-Shemmari, the secretary of the Cancer Awareness National Campaign (CAN), affirmed that the MoH cadres contribute to combating cancer via the centers and the awareness campaigns.

Thyroid cancer is one of the most widely spread cancers in the country; however, it is largely treatable due to the availability of needed devices, drugs, and qualified cadres, she said. The CAN campaign, since its launch in 2006, has sought to enhance public awareness of various kinds of cancer, namely breast cancer and thyroid cancer, noting that awareness has become wider and many people in Kuwait have become aware of the necessity of early detection and the best treatments. — KUNA

Local

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Camel race kicks off

KUWAIT: The annual Kuwait camel race, the 22nd edition, kicked off on Saturday with broad participation of competitors from Kuwait, Arab and Gulf countries. The 82-course tournament is due to proceed for six days at the Sheikh Fahad Al-Ahmad track at the Kuwait Club for Camel Race, the organizer of the championship said.

The first day will witness 21 courses: 17 in the morning and four in the afternoon. Rabie' Al-Ajmi, the club secretary, said in a statement on Friday that the tournament has become one of the most significant sports events, attracting fans of the genuine Arab sport. He affirmed that a large number of competitors had already registered their names to partake in

the race. Awards include cash money, cups, idols, daggers, and swords engraved with gold and silver. Up to 22 courses will be exclusive to princes, sheikhs, and amirs, with the rest for ordinary citizens. — KUNA



Rabie' Al-Ajmi

'Made in Kuwait' campaign begins

KUWAIT: The Public Authority for Industry is due to launch a "made in Kuwait" campaign on Sunday aimed at promoting national products with the participation of many Kuwaiti factories. Speaking about the 18-day campaign, Mohammad Al-Adwani, the authority's acting director general, told KUNA that the campaign aims at promoting and marketing national food, electrical, and industrial products.



Mohammad Al-Adwani

Al-Adwani said the campaign is also designed to urge the people of Kuwait to purchase locally made products, considering their high quality that conforms to

international standards. Seeking to attract the largest number of people, the authority is holding the activity at some of the most frequented facilities, namely the Avenues Mall and Al-Assima Mall. The activity is part of the authority's strategy, spanning until 2035. — KUNA

Photo of the day



KUWAIT: This aerial view shows winter tents set up for family leisure in the desert area near Sulaibiya, about 30 km north of Kuwait City, on February 2, 2024. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Kuwait participates in UAE SWAT Challenge



Group photo of the National Guard team participating in UAE SWAT Challenge 2024. — KUNA photos



ABU DHABI: The fifth edition of the UAE SWAT Challenge 2024 kicked off in Dubai on Saturday, attracting Kuwait, represented by

its National Guard, along with 87 teams from 48 Arab and foreign countries. Arab representation in the competition is significant, with 11 teams from the UAE, four from the Kingdom of Bahrain, and two each from Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the State of Kuwait, and Iraq, along with a single team from Morocco.

Speaking to KUNA, the Kuwaiti team's chief, Col. Fahad Ibrahim, said that it is the third time for the Kuwait National Guard to partake in this five-day championship, hailing the backing of His Highness Chairman of the National Guard, Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah, and his deputy, Sheikh Faisal Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. Kuwait's involvement

in the event is part of a strategy to share expertise with brotherly and friendly countries, he said, adding that the championship is mainly based on physical fitness, tactics, and shooting.

The organizing committee of the UAE SWAT Challenge said that 87 teams from 48 countries are participating in the event, up from 55 last year, including five female and two mixed teams. All participating Arab teams have affirmed their preparedness for the challenge, showcasing early readiness and a high level of physical and tactical readiness, it said. The challenge encompasses five competitions: tactical, obstacle course, officer rescue, tower challenge, and assault. — KUNA

Bishop Cheriyan visits Kuwait

KUWAIT: The Bishop of CSI Madhya Kerala Diocese, Rt Rev Dr Malayil Sabu Koshy Cheriyan, arrived in Kuwait on February 1, 2024. The Bishop was welcomed with great honor at Kuwait International Airport by Rev Binoy P Joseph (Vicar) and church members of St Paul's CSI Malayalam Congregation, Ahmadi. There was a confirmation service on February 2, 2024 with prodigious blessing for all the church members especially for the children who received the Sacrament of Confirmation.



KRCS delivers winter clothes to Gaza kids

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Red Crescent Society has distributed winter clothes to children in Gaza as part of its projects to aid the Palestinian people. KRCS

Secretary General Maha Al-Barjas said in a statement to KUNA on Saturday that the society handed over a large amount of clothes to the children in the strip, amid the hard winter conditions. She indicated at the "air bridge" that it had transported ambulance vehicles, relief, and medical supplies to the Gazans. Al-Barjas urged the international community to pressure for an instant cease-fire in Gaza, ending the siege and ensuring the delivery of humanitarian aid to the people in the enclave. — KUNA

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Grieving father relives Turkish quake

Huge 'ball of fire' kills 3, injures 280 in Kenya

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People who fled fighting in the Gaza Strip gather along an overcrowded street in Rafah. — AFP photos

Rafah overwhelmed with fleeing Palestinians

Overcrowding in central, western Rafah strains resources, makes it impossible to move

RAFAH: Tens of thousands of people crammed into a street in Rafah, the southern Gaza city where vast numbers have sought refuge from advancing Zionist ground troops. "These are the worst months of our lives," said Noha al-Madhun, who fled from the Beit Lahia area of northern Gaza and was taken in by relatives along with some of her children.

"My husband and eldest sons sleep in a tent. There's no space for everyone. We sleep on the floor and we feel the cold" without enough blankets to go round, she said. "There aren't enough apartments or even places to set up extra tents," added Madhun. More than half of Gaza's population of 2.4 million is in Rafah, on the border with Egypt, according to the United Nations. Those without relatives to host them or the means to rent apartments have found themselves in tents wherever there is space: along streets, in public squares, sports stadiums or parks.

Abdulkarim Misbah, 32, said he left his home in the northern Jabalia refugee camp and reached Khan Yunis, only to be uprooted once more. "We escaped last week from death in Khan Yunis, without bringing anything with us. We didn't find a place to stay. We slept on the streets the first two nights. The women and children slept in a mosque," he said. Then they received a donated tent, setting it up right beside the Egyptian border. "My four children are shivering from the cold. They feel sick and unwell all the time," said Misbah.

Forced to flee south

Most people are concentrated in the city center or west, trying to avoid the eastern edges towards the Zionist border or the north which is dangerously close to fighting in nearby Khan Yunis. The Zionist military ordered Gazans to leave their homes in the north after it launched an attack on the territory last October. The Zionist attack has killed at least 27,131 people in Gaza so far. The Zionist entity says its military offensive is aimed at destroying Hamas, whose armed wing attacked the Zionist entity on Oct 7. According to an AFP tally, 1,160 people have died as a result of the attack.

Those instructions have since expanded, forcing many Palestinians to flee time and again. Gaza City resident Amjad Abdel Aal, who fled to a school shelter in Rafah, said it took her two hours to be driven a distance which before the war would take just 15 minutes. "The congestion was awful," she said, waiting in a wheelchair in a long line for donations of blankets and mattresses. "There aren't a lot of cars because of the fuel shortage. Everyone walks, rides a truck or donkey cart," added the barefoot 28-year-old. The United Nations estimates 1.7 million have been forced from their homes by the war since October 7.

'Getting worse by the day'

With Egypt's border firmly shut to most Gazans throughout the war, the streets of Rafah have become

packed with displaced people. Mehran Dabbabish, 41, a taxi driver from Khan Yunis, said the situation was "getting worse by the day". "The road between Khan Yunis and Rafah used to take 20 to 30 minutes at worst. Today, the shortest trip within Rafah takes an hour and a half to two hours," he told AFP.

The overcrowding is putting a massive strain on everyone and means moving anywhere, by any means, is incredibly difficult. Another Gazan, Naima Al-Bayuda, lamented how tired she was just halfway through a four-hour journey by foot to visit her relative in hospital. "I rode a donkey cart a few times and fell off because of the intense scramble," she told AFP. Bayumi started crying as she recounted the bombardment which hit her home, killing her baby twins. "I gave birth to them in the first week of the war, after 13 years of marriage," said the 38-year-old, who lives in a tent with her husband. "I don't want to live anymore," she said.—AFP

host communities now to rely largely on humanitarian organizations for aid.

"We are unable to provide basic necessities," said Mortada Mhanna, who heads Tyre's disaster management unit, standing in a workroom abuzz with volunteers and civil servants. Families "have lost their properties and their jobs — they can't fend for themselves", he said, expressing regret his team had been unable even to secure regular food aid.

In Srafa, less than 15 kilometers (nine miles) from the border with the Zionist entity, farmer Abbas Fakhir is staying in a house rent-free thanks to the generosity of residents. The 40-year-old fled the violence in his village of Rab Tlatin further east with his extended family. Although he managed to move his cattle to safer land, he said the war had put his livelihood on hold.

"I had 250 goats. I've had to sell 50 or 60 ... just to put food on the table and feed the remaining cattle," he said, surrounded by his four children and their cousins. Most of his youngest goats died in their poorly heated new barnyard, he said, and the family was unable to plant lentils and wheat, meaning no income during the next harvest. "All we do is wait impatiently for the news, hoping we will hear about a truce," he said. — AFP

Awaiting a truce

The Tyre district hosts more than 27,000 people displaced by the conflict, more than 700 of them living in makeshift shelters, according to the IOM. The Lebanese state has been cash-strapped for years, leaving



TYRE: A child who fled her village near the border with the Zionist entity stands along a corridor at a school turned into a shelter in Tyre on January 31, 2024. — AFP

Displaced Lebanese lament bombed homes, destroyed livelihoods

TYRE, Lebanon: When Ines Tehini and her family fled their south Lebanon village after Hezbollah and the Zionist entity began exchanging fire in October, she thought they would be home in a matter of days. But nearly four months later in a school turned shelter, her hopes for a swift return to normality have faded after Zionist strikes badly damaged the family home in Aita al-Shaab on the border, said the mother of three.

"My brother's apartment on the floor above me was completely burnt down, and the floor where I live also sustained damage," she told AFP from a classroom in the south Lebanon city of Tyre. "If I could, I would rent an apartment in Tyre, but I can't afford it," said Tehini, 37, as her toddler played on mattresses strewn on the floor. "I don't know what will become of us," she added.

Since the Zionist offensive on Gaza began in October 2023, the Lebanese-Zionist border has witnessed near-daily exchanges of fire, mainly between the Zionist army and Hezbollah. At least 218 people have been killed in Lebanon, mostly Hezbollah fighters but also at least 26 civilians, according to an AFP tally.

In the Zionist entity, nine soldiers and six civilians have been killed, Zionist officials have said. The violence has displaced more than 86,000 Lebanese, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM). People in south Lebanon told AFP their homes and livelihoods had been destroyed in the fighting, which has heaped misery on a population already battered by a four-year economic crisis.

'Rebuild from scratch'

Tehini's husband, a soldier, earns \$150 per month — barely enough to support the family even before they fled. Fighting back tears, she said her family home had been destroyed in 2006, when the Zionist entity and Hezbollah fought a full-blown war. Recent Zionist strikes also damaged many of her neighbors' property and livestock, Tehini said. "All those people will have



RAFAH: Palestinians receive food rations at a donation point at a camp for internally displaced people in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on February 2, 2024.

After outcry, Egypt orders review of pyramid restoration

CAIRO: Egypt's antiquities ministry said Saturday it was setting up a committee to review the restoration of Giza's Menkaure Pyramid after a public outcry over the project. A week ago, the head of Egypt's Supreme Council of Antiquities, Mostafa Waziri, posted a Facebook video showing workers setting blocks of granite on the base of the shortest of the three Giza pyramids.

The footage sparked a storm of criticism from Egyptologists who voiced fears that a wholesale reconstruction of the famed monument was under way, to the detriment of the preservation of its historic fabric. Trying to calm the debate, in a country where tourism accounts for 10 percent of GDP, the ministry announced that it has set up a "scientific committee chaired by ... Zahi Hawass", a well-known Egyptian archaeologist, to review the project. The committee is made up of "experts in engineering and archaeology" from the Czech Republic, Germany and the United States, as well as Egypt.

The committee's final report will include "the necessary procedures and steps to coordinate with (the UN heritage agency) UNESCO". "A decision will be made on whether to proceed with the project or not," the ministry said.

At the foot of the Menkaure Pyramid, however, AFP journalists reported that work was already underway last week. In its original construction, the base of the pyramid was covered with granite, but over time lost part of this covering. The renovation aims to restore the structure's original style by reconstructing the granite base. The issue of heritage preservation in Egypt — home to the Great Pyramid of Giza, the last of the seven wonders of the ancient world that is still visible — is often the focus of heated debate. The recent demolition of swathes of Cairo's historic heart drew public campaigns against it, a rarity in a country where political opposition is largely banned. — AFP

International

Huge 'ball of fire' kills 3, injures 280 in Kenya

Kenyan president slams 'incompetence', 'corruption' after deadly blast

NAIROBI: Kenyan President William Ruto on Saturday blamed incompetent and corrupt government officials for a deadly gas blast in Nairobi that killed three people and injured 280. A truck laden with gas canisters exploded just before midnight Thursday in Embakasi, a densely populated Nairobi district, unleashing a trail of destruction and sending people running for their lives.

The Petroleum Institute of East Africa said on Friday that the explosion occurred at an "illegal LPG refilling and storage site" whose owner and some customers had been convicted and sentenced in May 2023.

But Kenya's National Environment Authority (NEMA) on Saturday said Maxxis Nairobi Energy had obtained permission on February 2 last year to operate the site. "Preliminary investigations have revealed that four NEMA officers unprocedurally processed the license and are therefore culpable," NEMA Board Chairman Emilio Mugo said in a statement. "The board therefore, directs that the implicated officers step aside immediately pending further investigation by the relevant government agencies," he said.

'Incompetence and corruption'

President Ruto, without mentioning NEMA, said: "Government officials issued licenses for gas installations in residential areas when it was very clear that it was the wrong thing to do, but because of incompetence and corruption they issued licenses," he said.

Ruto said they should be sacked and "prosecuted for the crimes they have committed". A joint statement by the interior and energy ministers said that according to preliminary findings, "the refilling of LPG cylinders was done using direct manifold connections to LPG tanker increasing the risk of leakage and explosion".

"Twice in March 2020 and January 2021, the plant that was illegally constructed at the said location was demolished ... the operators charged in court," it added. "As we call for caution and adherence to the rule of law, those culpable in this unacceptable occurrence will be held accountable," Kenya's Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua said in a statement on X, formerly Twitter.

Government spokesman Isaac Maigua Mwaura said three Kenyans died and 280 others were taken to

hospital after the explosion ignited a "huge ball of fire that spread widely". The inferno damaged vehicles and many businesses, with a garment and textile factory burned to the ground.

Douglas Kanja, Deputy Inspector of Police, said a guard at the gas site had been arrested and investigations were ongoing. Residents said they had long feared such a disaster, accusing the government of being "irresponsible" by allowing inflammable products to be stored near their homes.

"Why do we have gas plants in the middle of es-



People stand on the walls of a damaged building to see the wreckage of burnt trucks and tankers, the day after the explosion.

tates? This is a residential area and that is a gas plant right there. And it is not one, there are several." Magdalene Kerubo, 34, told AFP. Kenya's Energy and Petroleum Regulatory Authority (EPRA) also said it had denied permission three times last year for the construction of an LPG storage and filling plant at the site.

"The main reason for the rejection was failure of the designs to meet the safety distances stipulated," it said, noting "the high population density around the proposed site". Embakasi is a residential and industrial area with a population of about one million according to the 2019 census and lies 10 kilometers (six miles) from Kenya's main international airport. — AFP



NAIROBI: People run for cover following a series of explosions in the Embakasi area of Nairobi on February 2, 2024. — AFP photos

US reprisals anger Iraq...

Continued from Page 1

Syria's culture ministry condemned a "barbaric" strike on Deir Ezzor province that local media said had damaged a ninth-century citadel. US President Joe Biden said the overnight strikes were only a beginning. "Our response... will continue at times and places of our choosing," he said. Washington said it had informed Baghdad "prior to the strikes", drawing an angry denial from the Iraqi government spokesman who called it an "unfounded claim crafted to mislead international public opinion".

The Iraqi foreign ministry said it would call in the US charge d'affaires in Baghdad to deliver a formal protest. Tensions between the two governments have deepened in recent months after Washington carried out previous air strikes in response to a flurry of attacks on US-led troops since the Gaza war began in October. Washington and Baghdad opened talks on the future of the US-led troop presence late last month after repeated demands from Sudani for a timetable for their withdrawal.

Khan's marriage ruled illegal, duo...

Continued from Page 1

for months, while Bibi surrendered this week and is being held at her home, declared a "sub-jail", on the outskirts of the capital Islamabad. "The charges of corruption and now these ones are an attempt to raise moral questions on his character," lawyer Sabahat Rizvi, who was not involved in the case, told AFP Saturday. "They are targeting him because they could not diminish his aura."

Khan rose to power in 2018 with the backing of the military, but has been sidelined after losing their favor and waging a campaign of defiance against them. The PTI has been severely hamstrung ahead of the vote, with scores of leaders jailed, supporters barred from holding rallies, and the party stripped of its talisman cricket bat symbol. Few journalists have been given access to the court, but The Nation said Saturday the couple insisted they had waited the proper time before marrying.

The United States has some 900 troops in Syria and 2,500 in Iraq as part of an international coalition against the Islamic State group. Its troops in Iraq are deployed at the invitation of Baghdad, but those in Syria are deployed in areas outside government control. The Syrian military demanded on Saturday that Washington withdraw its troops. "The occupation of parts of Syrian territory by US forces cannot continue," it said.

Analysts said the US strikes were unlikely to stem the flurry of attacks on US targets sparked by American support for the Zionist entity in its war on Hamas. The strikes represent a "significant escalation," said Allison McManus, of the Center for American Progress think tank, but "we have not seen that similar tit-for-tat strikes have had a deterrent effect."

Al-Nujaba, an Iraqi group part of a pro-Iran alliance blamed by Washington for numerous attacks on its forces, vowed a response. In a statement, the group warned "the US occupation... that the Islamic resistance will respond in the manner it deems appropriate, at the time and place of its choosing, and that this is not the end". US and coalition troops have been attacked more than 165 times in Iraq, Syria and Jordan since mid-October. The soldiers killed Sunday were the first American military deaths from hostile fire in the upsurge of violence. — AFP

The complaint against the marriage was raised in November last year by Khawar Maneka, Bibi's ex-husband. "The divorce deed presented by Khawar Maneka is a fabricated document," The Nation newspaper reported Bibi as saying in a statement Friday to a special court session at Adiala jail, where Khan is being held. "Khawar Maneka gave me a triple divorce in April 2017," it quoted Bibi's statement as saying. "Imran Khan and I solemnized our marriage on January 1, 2018."

The newspaper said the couple questioned why Maneka had waited so long to make his complaint, arguing he only raised the issue last year after being detained in a graft case. Oxford-educated Khan earned a reputation as a playboy during his cricket-playing bachelor days, frequently photographed alongside society beauties and models.

His first marriage to Jemima Goldsmith — the daughter of a British multimillionaire — ended in divorce. He then married Reham Nayyar, a television journalist who published a kiss-and-tell memoir after they divorced within a year. Bibi, his third wife, rarely appears in public and wears a face-covering niqab when she does. — AFP

Creeping war threatens Sudan's eastern border

GEDAREF, Sudan: Sudan's nine-month-old war has so far largely spared the country's east. But with the frontline inching ever closer, and reports of military training camps across the border in Eritrea, the fragile peace there is in jeopardy.

Sudan's war has already killed thousands, including between 10,000 and 15,000 in a single city in the western Darfur region, according to UN experts. The war pits Sudan's army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan against his former deputy, Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, known as Hemeti, who commands the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

Analysts have said the RSF is backed by the United Arab Emirates, which denies supporting the paramilitaries who have conquered large swathes of Sudan during fierce battles in central, western and southern regions.

In recent months, the RSF's push into Al-Jazira state, southeast of the embattled capital Khartoum, has given it access to roads leading further east, towards the Ethiopian and Eritrean borders, and beyond to Port Sudan where officials of the government, loyal to the army, have relocated from Khartoum.

The port city is Sudan's lifeline for crucial aid during the war that, according to the United Nations, has uprooted around 7.6 million people and left more than half the population in need of humanitarian assistance.

As the RSF has gained territory, growing numbers of civilians have heeded calls — supported by the army — for "armed popular resistance". This has raised fears the conflict will escalate between the rival forces, both of whom the United States has accused of war crimes.

Witnesses, speaking on condition of anonymity because of security concerns, said Sudanese fighters were being trained in at least five camps in Eritrea, including three in the Gash Barka border region. They say the camps are linked to Burhan's army or to figures from the former Islamist-backed regime of ousted strongman Omar al-Bashir with whom, experts say, Burhan has built a symbiotic relationship.

Fears of 'regional war'

Eritrea, one of the world's most isolated states, has not commented on the allegations. It has maintained since the start of the war that it is advocating for peace. However, multiple sources suggest Eritrea is backing Burhan's war effort with the camps.

Burhan's deputy Malik Agar in January visited the Eritrean capital Asmara, where he met President Isaias Afwerki and "discussed the security and stability of (Sudan's) eastern states". On social media platform X, Agar said they talked about

"strategies to prevent the war from spreading".

According to a government source, who asked not to be named because they are not authorized to speak to the media, Agar also expressed the government's concern over the training camps. One rebel group from the east, the United People's Front for Liberation and Justice, which agreed to peace with Khartoum in 2020, has directly accused Eritrea of training fighters and warned this could escalate the conflict. "Supporting (these camps) and making it the official policy of the Eritrean government will only lengthen the war in Sudan and turn it into a regional war," the group said in a statement.

The Eritrean National Council for Democratic Change, an umbrella group of Eritrean opposition groups based abroad, said in January that Sudanese fighters are "being trained by Eritrean soldiers" in "five camps established by the regime". In a report last June, the Rift Valley Institute research group said Eritrean leader "Afwerki is wary of Hemeti" and is concerned support for him could "empower the UAE" in eastern Sudan.

According to analysts, the UAE has supplied the RSF with munitions, which the Gulf state denies. "In the short term, Asmara is likely to work to increase its own influence among eastern Sudan's communities," Rift Valley said.

'Supporting the army'

According to witnesses, one of the camps in Eritrea is run by Sudanese rebel leader Ibrahim Dounia from the city of Kassala near the Eritrean border. Dounia posted a video online on January 15, calling on the youth to join his "Eastern Sudan Liberation Forces" in "a camp", though he did not specify its location.

The group has since posted videos on Facebook showing men in civilian clothes lined up in what appears to be a training regimen, as well as singing in Tigre, the language of the Bani Amer tribe who live in both Sudan and Eritrea.

Though Dounia has been careful not to declare his fighters as backing either side, the movement's Facebook page clearly supports army chief Burhan. The same witnesses said that two other camps are run by key figures from Bashir's regime, which was overthrown by the military in 2019.

In one, 150 to 200 men are being trained by Ali Sukar, a former security figure for Bashir who remained in his hometown of Agig near the Eritrean border. The other trains men on behalf of Mussa Mohamed Ahmed, who was named Bashir's "assistant" in 2007 when he had his rebels lay down their weapons.

Witnesses say another camp holds the forces of Mini Minawi, the long-time governor of Darfur, who is close to both the army and to Eritrea. One witness reported being "offered a small sum to join" a 300-person camp by the Eastern Sudan Front for Justice, which is led by al-Amin Daoud. "Those groups are known for supporting the army in the current war", Abu Fatima Onor, a specialist in eastern Sudan based in the region said. — AFP

Zionists pound Gaza amid fears...

Continued from Page 1

AFP TV images showed Palestinians gathered around a row of body bags at the Najjar hospital in Rafah after Zionist strikes.

"The children were just sleeping and suddenly the bombardment happened. God took one of my children and three escaped death," said Ahmad Bassam Al-Jamal, who also lost his father. Hamas remained defiant, with an official from the Palestinian Islamist group that has ruled Gaza since 2007 saying it was "holding its ground" in Khan Yunis. "The resistance is still steadfast in Khan Yunis... it is inflicting losses on the occupation," said Mahmud Mardawi. "The enemy will not achieve anything by targeting Khan Yunis."

The United Nations humanitarian agency OCHA said it was deeply concerned about the escalation of hostilities in Khan Yunis, which has pushed more and more people south. "Rafah is a pressure cooker of despair, and we fear for what comes next," said OCHA spokesman Jens Laerke.

The Zionist entity's massive military offensive has killed at least 27,238 people in Gaza, mostly women and children. The Zionist entity has lost 224 soldiers since

starting its Gaza ground operations in late October, according to the army. The fighting has devastated the narrow coastal strip, while a Zionist siege has resulted in dire shortages of food, water, fuel and medicines.

Image analysis released Friday by the UN satellite center UNITAR based on footage collected on Jan 6 and 7 showed "approximately 30 percent" of Gaza's structures had been affected by the war. The soaring civilian death toll in Gaza, as well as fears among Zionists over the fate of captives, have fueled calls for a ceasefire.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will travel to the Middle East yet again in the coming days to press a new proposal involving the release of Zionist captives in return for a pause in the fighting, the State Department said. Blinken will visit Qatar and Egypt — the mediators of the proposal — as well as the Zionist entity, the occupied West Bank and Saudi Arabia starting Sunday, it added. The trip — his fifth since the war broke out — comes after Qatar's foreign ministry spokesman Majed Al-Ansari said there were hopes of "good news" about a fresh pause to the fighting "in the next couple of weeks".

Ansari said a truce proposal thrashed out in Paris had "been approved by the (Zionist) side" and received a "positive" initial response from Hamas as well. But a source close to Hamas told AFP: "There is no agreement on the framework of the agreement yet — the factions have important observations — and the Qatari statement is rushed and not true." — AFP



PARIS: A protester holds up a placard during a demonstration at the Place de la Republique in support of Palestinians on Feb 3, 2024. — AFP

International

Grieving father relives Turkish quake

'A year has passed but time has stopped for us. This pain does not go away'

ANKARA: The photo of Mesut Hancer holding his dead daughter's hand protruding from the debris, her body crushed and his gaze lost, epitomized the anguish of Turkey's devastating earthquake. In the year since the February 6, 2023 disaster claimed more than 50,000 lives, the bereaved father and his family have left their partially ruined southeastern city of Kahramanmaraş and are trying to rebuild their lives in Ankara.



KAHRAMANMARAS: In this file photo, Mesut Hancer holds the hand of his 15-year-old daughter Irmak, who died in the 7.8-magnitude earthquake.

They will return to the quake zone to commemorate the anniversary and visit the grave of Irmak, who was killed in her sleep at the age of 15. "A year has passed but time has stopped for us. This pain does not go away," Hancer said, sitting in a living room whose walls are covered with photographs

and drawings of his daughter. "I don't stop thinking about her for a minute," added her mother, Gulseren. The day before the disaster, Irmak had gone to her grandmother's house to see her cousins, who had come over from Istanbul and Hatay. She insisted on staying overnight, never imagining that nearly all the 22 high-rise buildings in her grandmother's Ebrar housing complex would topple like a house of cards, killing 1,400 people.

By the time Mesut and his son Berkay, 23, were able to reach the scene, only piles of rubble remained. They had to wait until daybreak to start looking for Irmak, clearing the debris with their bare hands. Mesut only spotted his daughter's lifeless body — still lying on her mattress between two heavy slabs of concrete — the next day. "Seeing her like that hurt me so much," he said.

'Take photos of my child'

Petrified with grief, he sat next to her in the ruins, holding her cold, pale, protruding hand. Irmak was the youngest of his four children. Mesut did not know how long he sat there before seeing AFP photographer Adem Altan pointing the camera his way. "Take photos of my child," Mesut whispered to Altan.

The image struck a nerve. It was picked up by world media, went viral online and was shared hundreds of thousands of times. Moved by the story, Nejat Gulseven, an Ankara businessman who owns Turkey's TV 100 channel, offered accommodations and a job to Mesut, who worked as a baker in Kahramanmaraş.

Since the disaster, Berkay has become a police officer, hoping to join one of the special search and rescue units that were deployed during the quake. "We are trying to get used to Ankara," Mesut said. "I also lost my mother, brother, sister-in-law and my



ANKARA: Mesut Hancer (right) and his wife Gulseren Hancer (left) sit next to a painting of their 15-year-old daughter Irmak. — AFP photos

nieces in the earthquake. But there is nothing like losing your child."

No hope for justice

The Ebrar housing complex was built on unstable ground, using poor quality material and concrete that could be crumbled into little pieces by hand, according to the conclusions of a report by legal experts. Two of the contractors involved in its construction rejected charges of willful negligence when they appeared in court for the first time earlier this month.

Mesut said he does not believe that justice will ever be served. "A year has passed and one of the

developers is still on the run. They build it on a former riverbed. Those who authorized the construction are also responsible," he said.

The family did not file a civil suit, thinking the effort would be in vain. "It's not going to bring my daughter back," her mother Gulseren said. The trials launched since the quake only target developers and contractors, sparing politicians and civil servants who authorized the building permits.

Instead, the Hancer family will be at Irmak's grave, grieving on February 6. "The cemetery where she rests is now my second home," Gulseren said. "I feel like she's waiting for me there." — AFP

Rohingya hate in Indonesia fueled by online fake news

JAKARTA: Arriving on a rickety boat in western Indonesia from squalid Bangladesh camps after weeks at sea late last year, hundreds of Rohingya refugees came to shore only to be turned around and pushed back. The persecuted Myanmar minority were previously welcomed in the ultra-conservative Aceh province, with many locals sympathetic because of their own long history of war. But a wave of more than 1,500 refugees in recent months has been treated differently.

A spate of online misinformation in the world's most populous Muslim-majority nation has stoked what experts say is rising anti-Rohingya sentiment culminating in pushback, hate speech and attacks. In December, hundreds of university students entered a government function hall in Banda Aceh city hosting 137 Rohingya, chanting, kicking refugees' belongings and demanding they be deported. The refugees were relocated.

"The attack is not an isolated act but the result of a coordinated online campaign of misinformation, disinformation and hate speech," the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) said. On social media, anti-Rohingya videos have been spreading since late last year, racking up more than 90 million views on TikTok alone in November, according to Hokky Situngkir, TikTok analyst at Bandung Fe Institute.

It began after some local media outlets reported the Rohingya's arrival with sensational headlines, said Situngkir. The reports have framed the mostly Muslim Rohingya as criminals with bad attitudes and Indonesian community leaders have reinforced this narrative. Some TikTok users have reshared the sensational articles and videos, which would help generate more views and money. "Sometimes when the sensation is too big, it turns out to be misinformation," Situngkir told AFP.

'Seems coordinated'

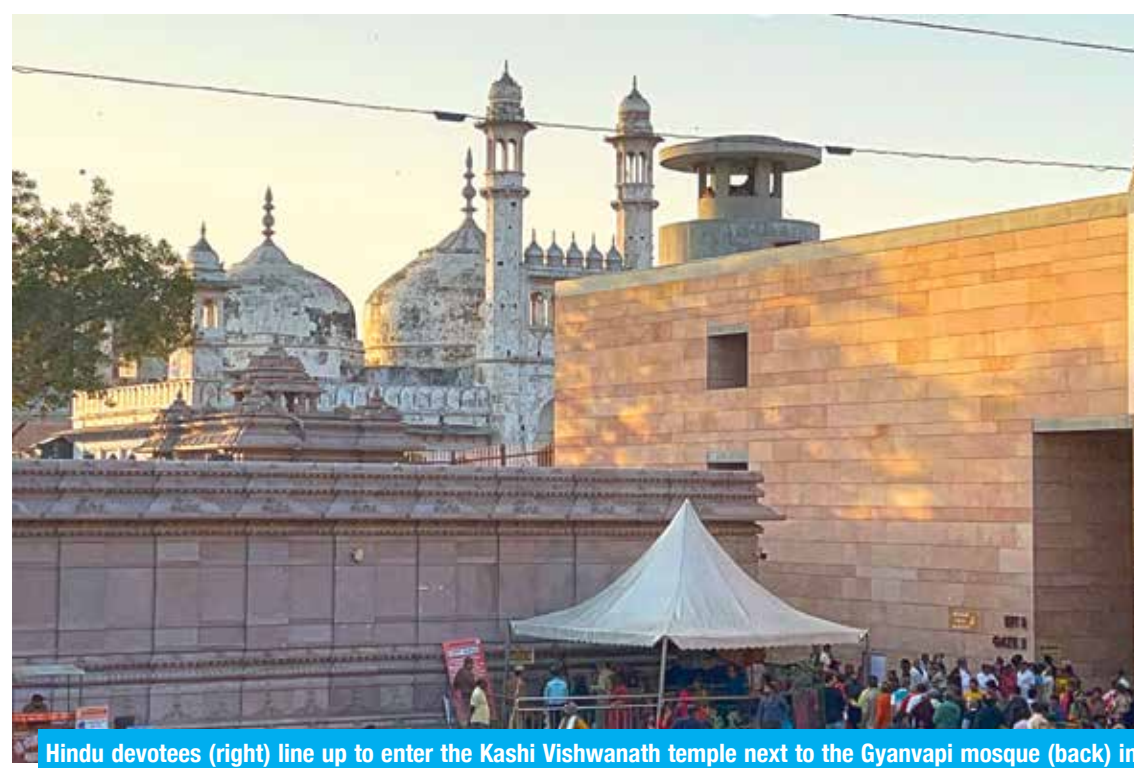
President Joko Widodo has called for action against human traffickers responsible for smuggling Rohingya and said "temporary humanitarian assistance will be provided" to refugees while prioritizing local communities.

But a few days after the attack on a refugee shelter, the Indonesian navy pushed away a Rohingya boat approaching the Aceh coast. Jakarta — not a signatory of the UN refugee convention — has appealed to neighboring countries to do more to take in the Rohingya.

On TikTok, dozens of fake UNHCR accounts have flooded Rohingya videos with comments. "If you don't want to help, just give them one empty island so they can live there," one read, presented as if it was written by a real UNHCR account. A post sharing a report that Indonesia's Vice President Ma'ruf Amin was considering moving the refugees to an island was viewed three million times. A verified account wrote underneath: "Big no! It is better to expel them, no use in sheltering them." — AFP



PINEUNG: Newly arrived Rohingya refugees react after reaching the beach by swimming after the nearby community decided not to allow them to land but gave them water in this file photo. — AFP



Hindu devotees (right) line up to enter the Kashi Vishwanath temple next to the Gyanvapi mosque (back) in Varanasi on February 3, 2024.

Fear, triumph as Indian mosque dispute heats up

VARANASI, India: As Hindus began prayers at a mosque in one of India's holiest cities, the building's elderly custodian Syed Mohammad Yaseen wondered how much longer he would be permitted to worship there.

Varanasi, where Hindus travel to cremate their dead by the Ganges river, is the latest flashpoint in a running battle to claim centuries-old Islamic monuments for the country's majority faith. Campaigners have found an ideological patron in Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who last month inaugurated a grand new temple on the site of a mosque notoriously demolished by Hindu zealots decades earlier. "We are witnessing repression and cruelty," Yaseen, 78, told AFP. "This is not just the issue of one mosque. Their slogan says that ... 'not even one tomb or mosque will be spared.'"

Yaseen is joint secretary of the Gyanvapi mosque, one of the largest Muslim congregations in the heart of Varanasi. Hindus in the city have long maintained that the structure was built over a shrine to the Hindu deity Shiva during the Mughal empire that ruled over much of India centuries ago.

Muslim worshippers have been attending the mosque under police guard for years in an effort to prevent the simmering dispute from boiling over. But this week marked a major escalation with a local court ordering the mosque's basement thrown open to Hindu worshippers within seven days of its ruling.

A Hindu prayer ceremony was held there the following morning and India's top court has refused to hear a request by Muslim petitioners to invalidate the order. Yaseen said the ruling and subsequent rush of worshippers to the site — unimpeded by authorities — had demonstrated official backing for the Hindu claim, leaving him deeply distressed. "They are coming through the courts, through the system," he said. "Whatever hurt I could feel as a Muslim, I felt it. I was restless the entire night."

Tensions outside the mosque on Friday were palpable, with a bolstered police presence and around 2,500 Muslims — nearly double the usual congregation — arriving for afternoon prayers. Dozens of Hindu faithful milled about the street outside the police barricades shouting devotional slogans to Shiva, the patron god of both creation and destruction.

'Shackles of slavery'

Calls for India to more closely align the country's officially secular political system with its majority faith have rapidly grown louder since Modi was swept to office in 2014. His government's champion-

ing of Hindu causes reached a new zenith last month when Modi presided over the inauguration of a new temple in Ayodhya, a once-sleepy town not far from Varanasi.

The opening of the immense complex, carrying an estimated cost of \$240 million, was a major event that saw public celebrations and weeks of breathless cable news coverage. Modi hailed the ceremony as a decisive moment in India's liberation from the "shackles of slavery."



VARANASI: Security personnel patrol along a street near the Gyanvapi mosque in Varanasi on February 2, 2024. — AFP photos

But many among India's 210-million-plus Muslim minority considered the gala event was another sign of their growing marginalization. The temple was opened on the site of what was once the 500-year-old Babri mosque, which was demolished in 1992 by a crowd of Hindu zealots in a campaign spearheaded by eminent leaders of Modi's ruling party. The sectarian riots that followed were the worst since India's independence and killed 2,000 people nationwide, most of them Muslims.

'One step forward'

As in Varanasi, Hindu activists had claimed the Babri mosque was built atop an earlier shrine to a Hindu deity during the Mughal empire, which they see as an era where their faith was oppressed. Sohanlal Arya, a long-time advocate for Hindu causes, said the court's decision to open the Varanasi house of worship to Hindus was "one step forward" in the campaign to right historical wrongs.

"This is a matter of pride for us," the 72-year-old told AFP. "They destroyed our holy place, they made a mosque. Our evidence is accurate. That is why we have full confidence in the courts."

He added that the struggle to "reclaim" the site had been ongoing since the Gyanvapi mosque was built more than three centuries ago and said that his co-religionists were becoming impatient. "We are devotees of Lord Shiva, the mightiest of all Gods," he said. "How much more time will it take? One generation, two generations, three generations?" he added. "We are waiting." — AFP

Biden seeks black vote for boost in presidential race

COLUMBIA: If there's one place US President Joe Biden can count on for support from black voters, it is Toliver's Mane Event barbershop in the South Carolina state capital Columbia. A framed photo on the wall pictures the moment a smiling Biden visited the shop before his turnaround Democratic primary win in 2020.

"We think that he's done a wonderful job," says co-owner Christopher Toliver, 53, a viewpoint echoed by customers arriving for early morning appointments at this veritable institution for the city's black community. Not everyone agrees. A number of polls have shown that Biden is losing ground with the black voters who propelled him to the White House. Biden has made it clear that South Carolina's first-in-the-nation Democratic primary on Saturday — which as the incumbent he is all but certain to win — is a proving ground to show he can still win over African Americans.

Biden's visit to the barbershop four years ago was no coincidence. Founded in 1976 by Christopher's father Herbert, the clients who come in for a regular trim include the powerful black Democratic congressman Jim Clyburn. It was Clyburn whose endorsement in 2020 saved Biden's flailing campaign by securing him the support of black voters in South Carolina, and ultimately nationwide. Biden returned the favor by moving South Carolina to the front of the primary calendar for 2024.

'Word not getting out'

And he has been attempting to recapture the 2020 magic, telling a largely black audience during one of his two South Carolina visits this year that "you're the reason Donald Trump is a defeated former president." But surveys suggest some black voters, especially the young, are frustrated by what they see as Biden's failure to tackle priorities on the economy and on voter rights. Others are just not excited by a second dose of the 81-year-old. A New York Times/Siena poll in November found 71 percent of black voters in six battleground states would back Biden — down drastically from 91 percent in 2020 — and 22 percent would back Trump despite his racially charged rhetoric.

Reclining in a barbers chair as 78-year-old Herbert Toliver trims his hair, pastor Charles Jackson says the Biden campaign may not be spreading the message about his achievements. "It's as if the word is not getting out as much as it should among the African American community," said Jackson, senior pastor at Brookland Baptist Church, where Biden spoke during a trip last week. The Biden campaign is now throwing everything it has at South Carolina — despite the fact that it's a Republican state no Democrat has won since Jimmy Carter in 1976. A marching band noisily heralded the arrival of Vice President Kamala Harris to a campaign event on Friday at South Carolina State University in Orangeburg, one of hundreds of historically black colleges in the United States.

"President Biden and I are counting on you to make your voices heard," she said to cheers, adding that Trump had "stoked the fires of hate and bigotry and racism." In January, Biden spoke at a church in Charleston where a white supremacist killer shot dead nine black parishioners. — AFP



NORTH CHARLESTON: Warren Simmons wears a "Black Voters Matter" T-shirt as he ushers voters, on February 3, 2024, during the democratic primary. — AFP

Business

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2024

Alaa Yousef Al-Mutairi wins KD 2 million from Gulf Bank

The youngest winner of the biggest prize in the world



A group photo of Gulf Bank employees in Al-Shaheed Park after announcing the winner.



Mohammad Al-Qattan delivers his speech before the draw.



A section of the audience led by Acting Deputy CEO Sami Mahfouz.



Mohammed Al-Qattan signs a cheque with the name of the winner.

KUWAIT: In a significant achievement for the renowned Al-Danah Millionaire Account, Gulf Bank has proudly announced the 21st millionaire in the history of Al-Danah Millionaire draws. The lucky winner, Alaa Yousef Adel Al-Mutairi, became the youngest winner of the world's largest prize, valued at an impressive KD 2 million.

Acknowledging that special events require exceptional locations, Gulf Bank selected Al-Shaheed Park for this momentous occasion. With its symbolic significance, and reputation as one of the largest public parks in Kuwait and the region, Al-Shaheed Park proved to be the perfect location for revealing the lucky winner of the world's largest bank account prize, aligning with Gulf Bank's dedication to promoting environmental sustainability.

In the presence of representatives from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and Ernst & Young, and amidst the palpable atmosphere of anticipation and excitement among eagerly awaiting Al-Danah Millionaire Account holders, Gulf Bank revealed the name of the winner. The event was live-streamed on the bank's social media platforms.

Digital services

Addressing the audience at the ceremony, Mohammad Al-Qattan, the General Manager of Consumer Banking at Gulf Bank, extended his congratulations to Alaa Al-Mutairi, who secured the annual grand prize, becoming the first and youngest winner of the KD 2 million prize.

He emphasized that the Al-Danah Millionaire Account consistently fulfills the dreams of customers and plays a role in creating millionaires, encouraging tens of thousands to embrace a savings-oriented mindset. Furthermore, he noted that individuals who were not fortunate enough to win the KD 2 million prize will have another chance in the semi-annual draw for a KD 1 million prize on July 18, 2024.

Al-Qattan highlighted the remarkable advancements in the bank's services, and the unprecedented progress in its digital transformation journey. This transformative process involved introducing a new version of Gulf Bank's mobile application, and the launch of high-quality products designed to align with customer aspirations.

Emphasizing the continuous success of the bank's digital transformation journey, Al-Qattan highlighted enhancements in electronic services, branches, ATMs, as well as the Call Center – all aimed at making Gulf Bank's services more accessible, faster, and superior in the banking sector. This endeavor aligns with the bank's 2025 strategy, to position itself as a forward-looking financial institution, harnessing state-of-the-art technology. He also mentioned that, in addition to service development and ongoing efforts to improve the customer experience, Gulf Bank has introduced a new identity for its branches; emphasizing the concept of self-service. This approach will be progressively rolled out across the current branch network, and the bank has launched its first environmentally friendly branch in the residential area of Sabah Al-Ahmad.

Al-Qattan concluded by affirming the bank's commitment to generous investments aimed at delivering an extraordinary customer experience. This entails concentrating on developing advanced digital capabilities and improving the skills of employees, to ensure banking services that are user-friendly.

Human resources

Salma Al-Hajjaj, the General Manager of Human Resources, highlighted Gulf Bank's exceptional workplace environment, positioning it as one of the most attractive talent destinations in the private sector, and underscoring its positive impact on the overall customer experience. She acknowledged the bank's substantial efforts in empowering women and youth, as well as its continuous commitment to developing and training its employees.

- **Mohammad Al-Qattan:** Al-Danah millionaire account consistently fulfills the dreams of customers and plays a role in creating millionaires, motivating customers to save.
- **Salma Al-Hajjaj:** The bank's success is based on a wealth of exceptional talents and distinguished human resources.
- **We are making significant efforts in empowering women and youth and are focused on developing and enhancing the skills of our employees.**
- **Najla Al-Eisa:** Our marketing campaigns in 2024 will focus on bringing about change in our services and in the lives of our customers.
- **Sattam Al-Marzouq:** The Wealth Management division offers quality services tailored to meet the needs and aspirations of our clients.



(From right) Mohammed Al-Qattan, Najla Al-Eisa, and Ahmad Al-Amir.

This is achieved through collaborations with prestigious international and local institutions, ensuring that staff members acquire the latest expertise and skills essential to keep pace with significant developments in the banking industry, both locally and internationally.

Al-Hajjaj stressed the economic imperative of empowering women and supporting their career development. She pointed out that companies offering equal opportunities for both genders, often witness increased levels of profitability, productivity, and innovation, leading to positive effects on their reputation and market value.

The year of change

Najla Al-Eisa, Deputy General Manager of Consumer Banking at Gulf Bank's Marketing Department, highlighted that the significant advancement observed in Gulf Bank has further enhanced the customer experience. This improvement is realized through the provision of services characterized by simplicity and innovation; meeting customer aspirations, simplifying their lives, and contributing to sustainable growth. She further stated, "We have declared 2024 as "Year of Change", building upon our success from the previous year, in raising awareness about the significance of saving through informative programs and campaigns that encourage customers to save. This resulted in the increase of the grand prize value of the Al-Danah Millionaire draw to KD 2 million."

Al-Eisa emphasized that Gulf Bank's campaigns this year will concentrate on instigating change within the bank and in the lives of their customers. She highlighted that the 2024 calendar, themed "Always with You in the Year of Change," has been structured to assign each month with a specific value related to change, including "Determination," "Self-challenge," "Ambition," "Acquiring New Skills," "Self-confidence," and more.

Wealth management

Sattam Al-Marzouq, Assistant General Manager of Consumer Banking at Gulf Bank - Wealth Manage-

ment, expressed, "Gulf Bank is committed to delivering top-notch services to its Wealth Management clients, tailored to their needs and lifestyle. This commitment aims to attract more high-net-worth individuals seeking distinguished banking services."

He emphasized that as part of the 2025 strategy, the bank is committed to improving and extending services tailored to the needs of its Wealth Management customers. The goal is to streamline their banking operations for greater ease and convenience. Additionally, the bank consistently strives to bolster its relationship with esteemed customers, by continuously exploring and understanding their evolving banking needs and requirements.

Mohammed Taqi: The fastest rewarding program in Kuwait

Gulf Bank consistently seeks to reward its customers with the best and fastest rewarding program in Kuwait. In line with the dedication, the bank has introduced the Gulf Bank Rewards Program with a new look and feel, enabling customers to instantly redeem their points through its mobile application.

Neo account for kids

As part of the newly-introduced offerings in the Year of Change, Taqi announced the introduction of the "Neo" kids bank account, designed to encourage savings among children. He explained that Gulf Bank is preparing for significant changes in 2024, with some initiatives already underway, and others in the preparation phase, set to be revealed soon.

Mahdi Sulaiman: Promoting awareness on the significance of saving

Mahdi Sulaiman, Senior Manager of the Marketing Department at Gulf Bank, highlighted the bank's ongoing initiatives to promote financial literacy by educating diverse segments of society about the importance of savings. He emphasized encouraging individuals to boost their savings through savings accounts, high-



Recycling the Al-Danah street advertisements and transforming them into reusable bags.



A KD 2 million cheque representing the grand prize for the Al-Danah Millionaire draw.

lighting Gulf Bank's notable involvement in supporting the Let's Be Aware "Diraya" campaign. This campaign is overseen by the Central Bank of Kuwait in collaboration with the Kuwait Banking Association.

Nabil Shuaib spotlights Gulf Bank's digital advancements

In a distinctive appearance, the renowned Kuwaiti singer Nabil Shuaib was featured in a promotional advertisement showcased during the Al-Danah Millionaire ceremony, emphasizing the noteworthy advancements observed in Gulf Bank's digital services.

Eman Al-Najm and Ahmed Al-Matari host Al-Danah Millionaire event

The Al-Danah Millionaire event was hosted by the well-known presenter and actress, Eman Al-Najm, alongside Ahmed Al-Matari, Assistant Manager of Human Resources at Gulf Bank.

Collaborating with calligrapher Shaima Al-Azmi

As part of its commitment to supporting Kuwaiti youth talents and empowering women, Gulf Bank collaborated with calligrapher Shaima Al-Azmi. She inscribed the name of the grand prize winner on the oversized check and wrote the names of attendees who desired a commemorative copy.

Promoting sustainability principles

As a part of its dedication to promoting sustainability principles in society, Gulf Bank is committed to using recyclable bags made from materials utilized in outdoor advertising campaigns, for the Al-Danah Millionaire account.

Archival exhibition of Al-Danah millionaires

During the Al-Danah ceremony, Gulf Bank organized an archival exhibition showcasing previous Al-Danah millionaires, spanning from when the grand prize was KD 1 million to its current value of KD 2 million.

Al-Danah millionaire earns a spot in the Guinness Book of Records

For second time, holding the title of the world's largest cash prize linked to a bank account

KUWAIT: For the second time in its history, the grand prize of the Al-Danah Millionaire Account has earned a place in the Guinness Book of Records. This recognition marks it as the largest cash prize linked to a bank account worldwide. During the ceremony, Mohammad Al-Qattan, Consumer Banking General Manager at Gulf Bank, received the award from the Guinness representative.

Expressing pride in this achievement, Al-Qattan stated, "We are honored to be featured in the Guinness Book of Records for the second time. The Al-Danah Millionaire draw's top prize was previously recognized in 2016 as the largest reward linked to



Mohammad Al-Qattan receives the certificate for entry into the Guinness World Records, accompanied by Najla Al-Eisa and Ahmad Al-Amir.



A group picture featuring several executives of Gulf Bank with the Deputy CEO in the center.

Mohammad Al-Qattan: We are proud to announce that the Al-Danah Millionaire account has entered the Guinness World Records for the second time, transforming the dreams of our customers into reality. Guinness: We are delighted to announce that Gulf Bank has broken the previous record by meeting all the necessary requirements.

The Al-Danah account is open to both Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti residents in Kuwait. A minimum of KD 200 is required to open an account, and the same amount must be maintained for customers to be eligible for the upcoming Al-Danah draws. If the customer's account balance falls below KD 200 at any given time, a KD 2 monthly fee will be charged to the account, until the minimum balance is met. Customers who open an account and/or deposit more will enter the daily draw within two days.

Gulf Bank encourages Al-Danah customers to raise their chances of winning by increasing their depositing amount, using the electronic payment service available through the bank's website and mobile application.

Criteria for Guinness World Records registration

Guinness World Records serves as the ultimate authority in recognizing record-breaking achievements. Established in the early 1950s, Guinness achieved record sales in the United Kingdom with its inaugural version. With a team of professional experts specially trained to manage records, Guinness World Records conducts thorough research and investigations to validate the authenticity of each record. The organization maintains the highest standards of accuracy and enforces strict policies governing the decision to grant the World Record Award.

All records must adhere to criteria such as measurement, achievement, standardization, verification,

uniqueness, and universality. Candidates are required to submit an application with the necessary evidence to demonstrate the accomplishment.

In October 2016, Gulf Bank submitted its application to Guinness World Records for the Al-Danah Millionaire Draw Prize. The Guinness Records Management team meticulously examined the application for acceptance. Following this, the Guinness team assessed the application against the specified criteria and confirmed that Gulf Bank's Al-Danah Millionaire Account holds the record for the largest prize associated with a bank account glob-

ally. This outstanding achievement was confirmed once again in 2024, for the second time.

Al-Danah Millionaire documentary

To mark the 25th anniversary of the introduction of the Al-Danah Millionaire Account, Gulf Bank has created a documentary chronicling the account's evolution from its inception. The documentary explores how the Al-Danah Millionaire Account has positively transformed the lives of numerous individuals and families, propelling them to join the esteemed list of millionaires.

a bank account globally. This year, it has once again achieved the same prestigious status, transforming the dreams of our customers into reality.

Annual draws

In celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Al-Danah millionaire account, Gulf Bank has raised the annual grand prize from KD 1 million to KD 2 million. This account is one of the oldest and most prestigious savings accounts in Kuwait and was designed to encourage a culture of savings in society, and reward customers for their commitment to saving on a regular basis.

Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account offers monthly opportunities to win KD 1,000 to ten lucky winners, in addition to two quarterly draws with KD 100,000 prizes each, a semi-annual draw prize of KD 1 million and a grand draw prize of KD 2 million.



The grand prize for the Al-Danah Millionaire draw.



A small exhibition featuring photographs of previous millionaires from the Al-Danah account.

AlDanah

Power Your Dreams

OFFICIAL ATTEMPT

AlDanah Millionaire Draws

KD One Winner

2,000,000

KD One Winner

1,000,000

Bi-annual Draws

KD 100,000

10 Monthly Winners

KD 1,000

Open an AlDanah Millionaire Account today

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Central banks should not rush into rate cuts: IMF

Fed's Powell pours cold water on interest rate cut idea in March

WASHINGTON: The IMF sees a greater risk to the global economy if central banks start cutting interest rates too soon than if they move "slightly" too late, Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said.

The US Federal Reserve, the European Central Bank (ECB) and others have held interest rates elevated in recent months in an attempt to bring inflation back down toward target, following a post-pandemic surge in prices. With inflation now falling in many of the world's advanced and emerging economies, attention has now turned to when they should start cutting rates to stimulate investment and economic growth.

"Our team has looked back in history, and the conclusion they drew is that the risk of premature easing is higher than the risk of being slightly behind," Georgieva told reporters during a briefing at the International Monetary Fund in Washington. "But don't keep it tight if you don't have to," she said. "So look at the data, act on the data." Georgieva's comments come a day after the US Fed's rate-setting committee voted to hold interest rates steady. At a press conference following the decision, Fed Chair Jerome Powell poured cold water

on the idea of an interest rate cut at its next meeting in March—sending stocks on Wall Street lower.

Earlier in the week, ECB President Christine Lagarde said policymakers were confident that a rate cut was coming, but would not commit to a specific date. Georgieva told reporters on Thursday that the United States was close to achieving a so-called "soft landing," when policymakers bring inflation back to target without triggering a recession. "If you carefully assess the Fed posture, it is one that recognizes the job is not quite yet done," she said, adding that the timeframe being discussed by policymakers for the first rate cut was only "a matter of months," and not much longer.

"We are poised for soft landing, it's not done," she said. "You're still 50 feet above ground and we know that until you land it's not over."

Georgieva also said the IMF had made the decision to extend its current mission to Egypt to give the team on the ground more time to finalize an expansion of its \$3 billion loan agreement. The country has been struggling with a severe economic shock due to the knock-on effect of the war in Ukraine on food and energy

prices—compounded by the war in Gaza and a related drop-off in revenues from maritime traffic traveling through the Suez Canal. "The problems Egypt is dealing with are complex, so it requires us to thoughtfully and thoroughly go through how best to address them," she told reporters.

"We're making very significant progress in that regard," Georgieva also confirmed that the IMF was "not discussing a new program" with Argentina, which is going through a severe economic crisis, with poverty rates of 40 percent, minimal foreign exchange reserves and annual inflation running at more than 200 percent. She praised Javier Milei, the Latin American country's new libertarian president, who took office in December on a plan to slash public spending and end decades of economic mismanagement.

She called Milei a "very pragmatic president," who was "not ideologically confined, but looking at ways in which the country can move out of this difficulty." "What we endorse wholeheartedly is the decisiveness to tackle these problems with more ambition than we have seen in prior years, and speak truth to people," she said. — AFP



Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva says the risk of premature easing is higher than the risk of being slightly behind.

Jon Rokk appointed MD of Egypt Kuwait Holding Company

KUWAIT: Egypt Kuwait Holding Company has announced the appointment of Jon Rokk as Managing Director, effective Feb 1, 2024. Rokk has extensive leadership experience spanning a 30-year career, his expertise in entrepreneurship and business development across various environments is exceptional. Loay Jassim Al-Kharafi, Chairman of the Board of Directors stated that Rokk was meticulously selected for this role due leading numerous multinational companies in diverse geographical regions including Europe, Middle East and North Africa. Furthermore, he has managed multiple sectors such as oil, gas, petrochemicals, infrastructure, and nuclear, aligning with the business areas of Egypt Kuwait Holding Company's subsidiaries.

Prior to joining Egypt Kuwait Holding Company, Rokk served as Chief Operating Officer at South



Tees Development Company in the UK, overseeing Europe's largest regeneration project in the energy transition and renewable energy sectors, with investments exceeding £2 billion.

In 2013, Rokk moved to the Middle East to become the General Manager at Interserve, a British firm operating in oil, gas, petrochemicals, utilities, engineering, and construction in Qatar, UAE and Oman. Then, in 2019, he assumed the role of President and CEO at Bilfinger Middle East and North Africa, overseeing the company's operations in util-



ities, oil and gas, petrochemicals, infrastructure, and nuclear sectors.

Jon's experience includes expertise in integration strategies, analyzing advanced growth methods, and implementing acquisitions in the United Kingdom, China and the Middle East. Al-Kharafi remarked that this strategic change in management follows the current Managing Director, Sherif El Zayat, expressing his desire to step down for personal reasons. His tenure will conclude on March 31, 2024. Al-Kharafi added we express sincere gratitude for his significant contributions over the years, positively impacting the holding company's business and financial performance. The company's net profit in 2015 was \$36 million, and due to the expansion of the business base, profits continued

to rise to a total of \$241 million of net profit in 2022. Despite global market challenges, the company managed to earn net profit of \$137 million in the first nine months of 2023.

Al-Kharafi also expressed his appreciation for the dedication and efforts of the employees of the Holding Company and its subsidiaries, who have played a key role in achieving this remarkable performance. Egypt Kuwait Holding Company is actively pursuing development opportunities in the region to enhance its foreign currencies earnings as part of a long-term strategy to sustainably increase shareholder returns. The company has invested over \$200 million in capital expenditures to support its expansion plan in 2023, demonstrating confidence in the growth potential of its subsidiaries and associates.

Founded in 1997, Egypt Kuwait Holding Company is listed on both the Kuwait and Egyptian stock markets. Over the past decades, it has emerged as one of the largest, leading, and fastest-growing investment companies in the Middle East. Its diverse portfolio spans five major sectors: fertilizers, petrochemicals, gas upstream and distribution, power production and distribution, insurance and non-bank financial services.

KIB appoints Al-Duwailah as new GM of Treasury Dept

KUWAIT: Kuwait International Bank (KIB) is pleased to announce the appointment of Mohammed Al-Duwailah as the General Manager of the Treasury Department. Al-Duwailah, a seasoned professional with over 19 years of experience in the treasury and investment field, brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise to KIB. His appointment is a testament to the Bank's commitment to bringing exceptional talent to its leadership team, furthering its mission of providing outstanding Islamic banking products and services to all segments

of society. Commenting on the new appointment, Feras Al-Darmi, General Manager of the Human Resources Department at KIB, said: "We are delighted to welcome Mohammad Al-Duwailah as a valuable addition to our team. His extensive experience and proven track record in managing complex treasury operations equip him with unique insights and strategic perspectives that will be instrumental in his new role at KIB."

Al-Darmi added: "Al-Duwailah's appointment is part of KIB's ongoing commitment to strengthening its leadership team and enhancing its operational capabilities in line with its general vision. We are confident that his leadership will greatly contribute to enhancing the treasury operations, driving innovation, and ensuring its continued success, as well as contributing to the Bank's strategic objectives to meet the evolving needs of our esteemed customers."

Al-Duwailah's career is marked by significant



achievements, including his most recent role as Deputy General Manager of Group Treasury at Kuwait Finance House (KFH). At KFH, he established the Capital Market Unit and was the Head of the Capital Market Desk. He also played a crucial role in establishing the Treasury's Asset and Liability Desk. His tenure also included strategic roles in Capital

and Money Market management, policy creation, and IT system implementation in the Treasury sector. Prior to joining KFH, Al-Duwailah worked as a senior dealer in the Treasury Department at Ahli United

Bank - Kuwait (AUB). Before that, he was a senior officer at Gulf Custody Company.

Furthermore, Al-Duwailah's educational credentials, with an MBA from Kuwait Maastricht Business School and a Bachelor's in Business Administration from Kuwait University, complement his professional expertise. He has also contributed to the field through teaching engagements and seminars, including at the Institute of Banking Studies (IBS), reflecting his commitment to nurturing the next generation of financial professionals.

It is worth noting that KIB is committed to empowering local talent through various initiatives, including vocational training programs, recognizing and promoting standout employees, and recruiting exceptional professionals. Aligning with its "Bank for Life" ethos, the Bank remains dedicated to fostering a prosperous future for its employees and the local community, thereby fulfilling its national, social, and banking responsibilities.

Burgan Bank announces Kanz account monthly draw winners

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank announced on Saturday the names of the Kanz account monthly draw winners, who will each take home a KD 2,000 cash-prize. All Kanz customers who maintain a minimum balance of KD 200 for at least one week before the draw date, are included in the draw, and their chances of winning increase with higher deposits.

The 20 lucky winners are:

- Ali Hasan Alawadh
- Anesa Ibrahim Dardab
- Aydhah Mazyad Al-Otaibi
- Fahad Abdulkareem Al-Qattan
- Sheikh Fahad Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah
- Fayedh Oudah Al-Shammari
- Habeeb Jaafar Ismaeil
- Mohammad Abdulmohsen Qarouni
- Mohammad Ghuloum Abdullah
- Mohammad Khazaal Al-Fadhli
- Sheikh Mubarak Faisal Al-Sabah
- Najeeba Saleh Al-Hamdan

- Noor Abdallah Al-Mhateeb
- Sayed Ali Al-Mousawi
- Shareefah Faisal Al-Qattan
- Sleh Abdullah Hamdi
- Talal Abdullah Al-Mutairi
- Tasawar Hussain Munawar
- Sheikh Aabah Al-Ahmad Hamad Al-Sabah donated to the good charity foundation projects
- Zohra Abass Gheewala

In addition to the monthly draw of Kanz account, Burgan Bank also offers a semi-annual KD 500,000 prize and a mega annual prize of KD 1,500,000. Kanz Account is accessible to any individual and can be opened in Kuwaiti Dinar or in major currencies (USD, EURO, GDP) with a minimum KD 200 requirement for account opening. More information on opening a Kanz account, the draws or any of the Bank's products and services, is available at any of Burgan Bank branches, through the Call Center at 1804080 and Burgan Bank website www.burgan.com.

Egypt Kuwait Holding

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- Expansion into new regional and global markets**
- Diversification of revenue and growing earnings in foreign currencies**
- Establishing strategic partnerships in value-added industries**
- Enhancing integration between the group's subsidiaries**
- Strengthening relationships with clients and investors**
- Adopting global sustainability standards**

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Burgan Bank announces Kanz account monthly draw winners

2,000

DKD

Ali Hasan Alawadh

Anesa Ibrahim Dardab

Aydhah Mazyad Al-Otaibi

Fahad Abdulkareem Alqattan

Sheikh Fahad Jaber Alahmad Alsabab

Fayedh Oudah Alshammari

Habeeb Jaafar Ismaeil

Mohammad Abdulmohsen Qarouni

Mohammad Ghuloum Abdullah

Mohammad Khazaal AlFadhli

Sheikh Mubarak Faisal Alsabab

Najeeba Saleh Alhamdan

Noor Abdallah Almhateeb

Sayed Ali Mousawi

Shareefah Faisal Alqattan

Sleh Abdullah Hamdi

Talal Abdullah Almutairi

Tasawar Hussain Munawar

Zohra Abass Gheewala

Sheikh Sabah Alahmad Alsabab

الشيخ مبارك فيصل الصباح

نجيبة صالح الحميدان

نور عبدالله المتهيب

سعيد علي الموسوي

شريفه فيصل القattan

صلاح حمدي

تلال عبد الله المتطيري

تساور حنين مناور

زهرة عباس جعولا

الشيخ صباح الاحمد الصباح

علي حسن العوضي

ليديه ابراهيم درباب

نايفه عزيز العتيوبي

فهد عبدالكريم القattan

الشيخ فهد جابر الاحمد الصباح

فايز عوده الشويبي

خديج جعفر السماعيل

محمد غلوم عبد الله

محمد خزعل الفضلي

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Markaz Monthly Market Review Report

Kuwait market off to a good start in 2024; All-Share Index increased 6.6% in January

S&P GCC composite index witnessed a marginal decline of 0.6% for the month

KUWAIT: Kuwait Financial Centre (Markaz) released its Monthly Market Review report for the month of January 2024. Kuwait equity index recorded a positive start to the year and was the top gainer among GCC markets in January 2024. GCC equity indices were mixed during the month as the possibility of early rate cuts by the US Fed reduced due to strong Q4 2023 real-GDP growth in the US.

Kuwait market has rebounded after a decline in 2023. The formation of a new Kuwaiti Cabinet, pickup of non-oil activity and projections of rate cuts by US Fed in 2024, mainly in the second half of the year buoyed investor sentiment. Kuwait All-Share index rose 6.6 percent in January, supported by broad based gains in all the sectors. Banking stocks recorded a 6.6 percent increase during the month. NBK and KFH, the two large banks in terms of market capitalization, registered monthly total returns of 9.6 percent and 6.3 percent respectively on anticipation of a positive earnings announcement. Among Premier Market stocks, Kuwait Investment Company and Boursa Kuwait Securities Company gained the most, recording total returns of 49.6 percent and 17.7 percent respectively. Kuwait Investment Company's stock price moved owing to some large block trades during the month without any material disclosures from the company. Kuwait's CPI accelerated to 3.37 percent y/y in December 2023, driven by 6.72 percent y/y increase in the cost of clothing and footwear.

Kuwait's consumer spending growth (measured by card transaction data) eased to 5.4 percent y/y (0.5 percent q/q) in Q4 2023 from 8.7 percent in Q3. Spending grew 8.6 percent y/y in 2023, normalizing from the post-pandemic surge of 21.7 percent in 2022. Kuwait's budget deficit in the fiscal year 2024/2025 is expected to hit KD 5.89 billion (\$19.15 billion), down 13.5 percent on y/y basis based on the oil price assumption of \$70/bbl. Kuwait real estate sales rose 13.6 percent q/q to KD 771 million in Q4 2023. Robust investment and commercial sector activity and a less marked

decline in residential sector sales supported the real estate performance. However, on a y/y basis real estate sales dropped by 22 percent in 2023 to KD 2.8 billion in 2023 owing to higher interest rates and residential valuations.

GCC markets posted a mixed performance during January despite a surge in oil prices. The S&P GCC composite index witnessed a marginal decline of 0.6 percent for the month. The S&P GCC composite index performance was weighed down by the negative performance of Saudi and Abu Dhabi equity indices, which fell 1.4 percent and 0.7 percent respectively. Qatar



equity index fell 6.8 percent triggered by the sharp fall in natural gas prices. However, positive economic growth expectations for Saudi boosted the performance of few stocks. Alinma Bank recorded a monthly total return of 7.2 percent following its announcement of doubling its stake in Arabian Shield (insurance company in KSA). Dubai equity index gained 2.7 percent supported by the strong earnings of blue-chip stocks. Emirates NBD recorded a total return of 2.3 percent after registering a net profit of about \$5.9 billion (AED 21.5 billion) in 2023, up 65 percent y/y from AED 13 billion in 2022. On the contrary, real estate stocks trended downwards during the month and dragged down the performance of the Dubai stock index. Emaar Properties and Emaar Developers fell 6.2 percent and 2.7 percent respectively during the month. UAE's real GDP is projected to grow by 5 percent in 2024, exceeding the 3 percent growth estimated for 2023, according to S&P

Global estimates. The rating agency projects continued strong momentum in Dubai's hospitality, wholesale and retail, and financial services sectors to drive growth in 2024/25.

According to the World Bank, Saudi's GDP is expected to grow by 4.1 percent in 2024, as the non-oil economy continues to get a boost from the Saudi Vision 2030 programs. Saudi Arabia is expected to tap the debt market in 2024 with estimated financing needs of \$22.93 billion under its borrowing plan for deficit financing and repay upcoming debt maturities.

Global and US markets were mildly positive despite stronger than expected US economic growth reducing the possibility of early rate cuts. The MSCI World index and S&P 500 indices rose 1.1 percent and 1.6 percent respectively in January. According to the data released by the US Commerce Department on January 25, US GDP grew by 3.3 percent y/y in Q4 2023, surpassing expectations of 2 percent y/y by Wall Street. Technology stocks rallied during the month driven by the continued momentum for generative AI. However, the market performance was stunted by geopolitical concerns due to the China-Taiwan conflict, weak US unemployment data and higher-than-expected inflation in the U.S. The MSCI EM index fell by 4.7 percent for the month led by the 6.3 percent fall in the Chinese stock index. Chinese equities were weighed down by rising geopolitical risks and persisting deflationary pressures in the economy.

US inflation hit 3.4 percent y/y in December 2023 compared to 3.1 percent y/y rise in November and dimming market expectations that rate cuts would be implemented as soon as March. The European Central Bank (ECB) left its policy rate unchanged at 4 percent in the January meeting, signaling a dovish stance. The yield on the 10-year US Treasury note crossed the 4 percent threshold in mid-January and closed at 3.99 percent during the month. The investor concerns over geopolitical risks coupled with comments from Fed Governor that the rate cuts priced in by

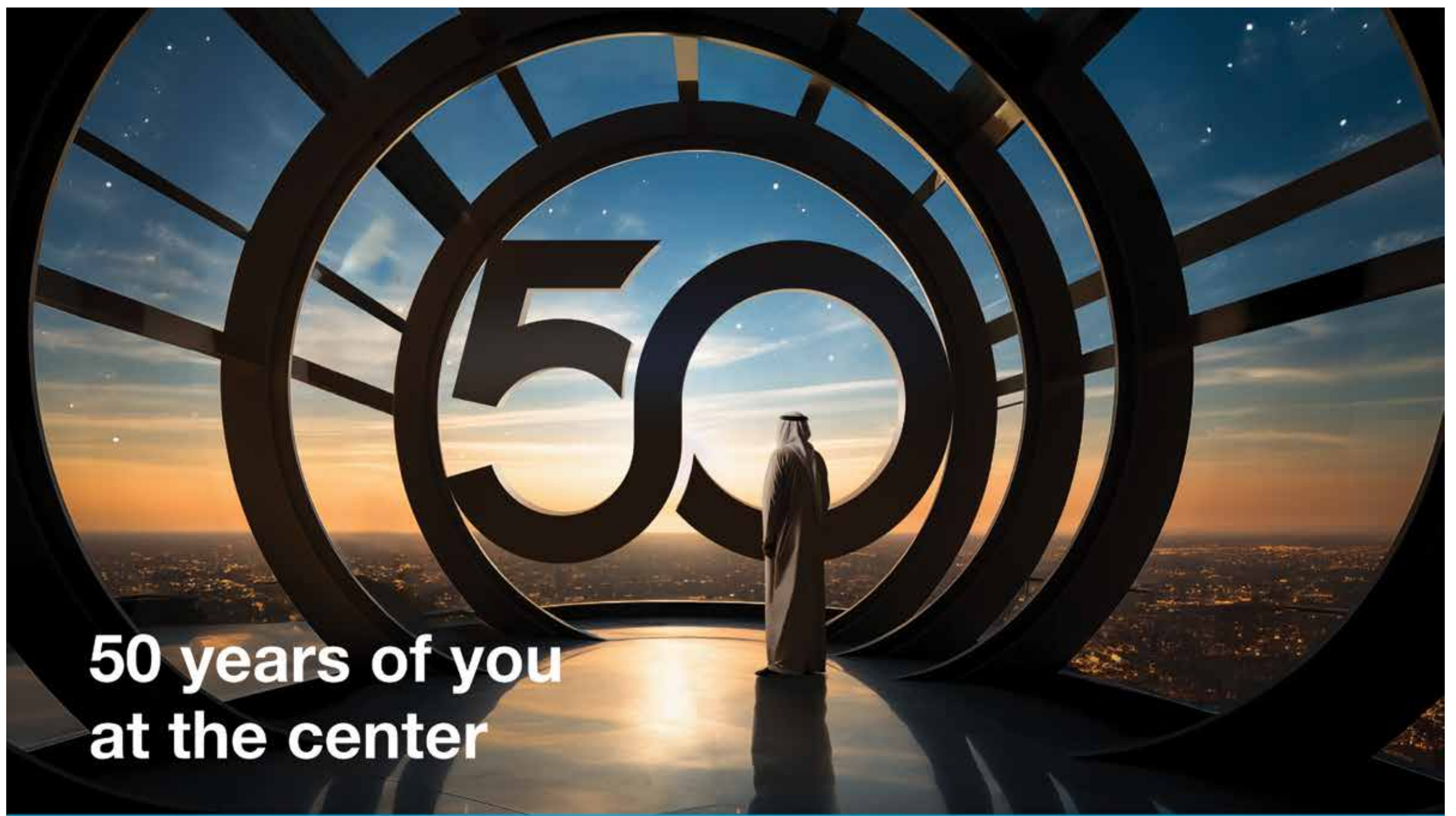
the markets for 2024 are unlikely, underpinned the rebound in yields.

Oil price settled at \$81.7 per barrel, recording a monthly gain of 6.1 percent supported by the ongoing geopolitical conflicts in the Middle East and projections for strong oil demand in 2024. The disruption of oil supply from two major oil fields in Libya and attack in the Red Sea drove up oil prices. IEA expects oil demand to grow by 1.24 million barrels per day (bpd) in 2024, up 180,000 bpd from previous estimates. Production outages in the US from cold weather also supported oil prices. Gold prices marked a fall of 1.2 percent closing \$2,037.2/oz. The strong US dollar following waning expectations of an early interest rate cut in the US and rise in US treasury yields were behind the fall in gold prices. Natural gas prices witnessed a steep decline of 16.5 percent during the month amidst warmer temperatures expected in late January leading to reduced demand for heating.

The global and GCC markets performance for February 2024 hinges on two major factors – i) indications from the US Fed on the onset of the rate cuts and ii) earnings announcement from the blue-chip companies.

Established in 1974, Kuwait Financial Centre KPSC 'Markaz' is one of the leading asset management and investment banking institutions in the MENA region with total assets under management of over KD 1.16 billion (\$3.75 billion) as of Sept 30, 2023. Markaz was listed on the Boursa Kuwait in 1997. Over the years, Markaz has pioneered innovation through the creation of new investment channels. These channels enjoy unique characteristics and helped Markaz widen investors' horizons.

Examples include Muntaz (the first domestic mutual fund), MREF (the first real estate investment fund in Kuwait), Forsa Financial Fund (the first and only options market maker in the GCC since 2005), and the GCC Momentum Fund (the first passive fund of its kind in Kuwait and across GCC that follows the momentum methodology), all conceptualized, established, and managed by Markaz.



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Business



Zaid Isam Al-Sager speaks during the TAMAKAN program.



Participants listen to Zaid Isam Al-Sager.

NBK holds a strategic presence in major financial hubs worldwide: Zaid Al-Sager

Panel discussion during 'TAMAKAN' program

KUWAIT: The "TAMAKAN" Program organized a panel discussion featuring Zaid Isam Al-Sager, General Manager - Deputy Head of International Banking Group at National Bank of Kuwait. During this event, Al-Sager engaged with the participants, outlining the key milestones of his professional journey, and offering advice on how to forge a successful career path. He also participated in an open dialogue, sharing his banking experiences with the attendees.

This event signifies the fifth successive edition of the "TAMAKAN" Program, aimed at training young Kuwaiti graduates. Continuing for its fifth year in a row, the program receives sponsorship and strategic support from National Bank of Kuwait (NBK), with organization by Creative Confidence.

The professional journey of Zaid Al-Sager

At the start of his speech, Zaid Al-Sager began by stating, "I pursued finance and earned my degree from Bentley University in Boston, USA. Following my graduation, I joined NBK Capital in 2005. At that time, it was a newly established company with a modest workforce. Over the years, it has grown to become a leading firm in asset management and investment operations within the region. Today, it operates under a new brand, NBK Wealth, offering extensive wealth management services."

Al-Sager continued: "During the 14 years I dedicated to the company, I was able to develop a diversity of technical and financial skills, starting as a junior analyst and progressing to become the head of the Debt Capital Markets unit within the Investment Banking Department, before eventually transitioning to NBK."

He elaborated that his tenure at NBK Capital endowed him with comprehensive expertise in corporate finance, fixed income, and capital markets. He highlighted his established history of successfully managing both conventional and Islamic debt securities transactions, alongside public offerings, and private placements for a diverse portfolio of local, regional, and multinational clients.

Al-Sager also emphasized to the young audience that mentorship plays a crucial and essential role at the start of one's professional journey. He pointed out that this stage often presents significant challenges for many young individuals. Overcoming these hurdles, he advised, requires persistent inquiry, research, and learning. He encouraged the youth to actively engage with numbers and data, analyzing them to refine their skills and expand their knowledge base. Al-Sager highlighted the importance of utilizing databases and information, noting that they significantly facilitate making informed

decisions especially in challenging situations and when making strategic decisions.

"After accumulating experience at NBK Capital for 14 years, I felt a strong urge to seek out a new challenge. I realized that overseeing NBK's international branches offered the kind of dynamism that matched my passion and ambition. Consequently, I decided to transition to managing NBK's International Banking Group. I climbed the corporate ladder, and today, I have reached the position of Deputy Head of International Banking Group.

Inspiring career path

Al-Sager imparted wisdom to the newly graduated youth, drawing from his own career path. He emphasized that securing a job position or a promotion and

Therefore, it's essential that you are prepared to shoulder those responsibilities and possess the capability to tackle work challenges and solve problems," he advised.

International Banking Group

In response to a participant's inquiry regarding the operations of the bank's international branches, Al-Sager explained, "The bank's primary focus is on financing projects carried out by institutions, governments, and international companies across various markets."

"NBK provides a diverse array of services and products, including capital markets, short and medium-term loans, corporate financing, trade financing and letter of credits, as well as commercial real estate financing, mortgage and real estate services on an international scale," Al-Sager added.

Zaid Al-Sager

- Since the 1980s, we have led the way in international expansion, facilitating the flow of capital and trade.
- We consistently strive to broaden our financing services for prominent companies and top institutions around the world.
- NBK provides innovative solutions to clients from Kuwait and the GCC in various European and international locations.

achieving a certain rank is merely the beginning. He stressed the importance of continual development to handle the responsibilities and workload that each level entails. Each job grade, he noted, comes with its own set of duties and challenges, urging the youth to always be prepared and equipped with the requisite skills and experience to fulfill their roles effectively and sustainably.

He encouraged "TAMAKAN" Program participants on the importance of self-improvement, stating: "The best investment you can make is in yourself, through honing your skills, engaging in ongoing learning, and acquiring experience by continuously asking questions and drawing from the expertise and experiences of those around you."

"Do not fear making mistakes and asking questions, as they are one of the learning paths, particularly at the start of your professional journey. Always exercise patience and don't expect to or focus on simply climbing the career ladder without putting in the effort that qualifies you for that advancement. With each step upward in your job level, the responsibilities increase.

Erdogan picks former Amazon economist to head Turkey CB

ISTANBUL: President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Friday picked a former senior economist at the US online retail giant Amazon as the new head of Turkey's central bank. Fatih Karahan's appointment follows the resignation of Hafize Gaye Erkan after less than a year in office over a media scandal involving her family. The reshuffle appears to keep in place Erdogan's newfound commitment to market economics following years of financial turmoil.

Erkan won major plaudits from Western investors for spearheading a rapid series of interest rate hikes that helped stabilize the slumping lira and tame Turkey's dire cost of living crisis. But the 44-year-old came under withering attack on social media and in some opposition publications for allegedly allowing her father to make unauthorized personnel decisions at the bank.

Erkan reportedly also angered Erdogan by telling one major newspaper that she had to move in with her parents because inflation had made renting unaffordable. The attacks on Turkey's first woman central bank governor alarmed investors and created uncertainty about Erdogan's long-term commitment to his team. "A major reputation assassination campaign has recently been organized against me," Erkan said in a social media statement announcing her resignation.

Karahan started his career as an economist at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York in 2012. His official biography states that he also lectured at Columbia University and New York University. He joined Amazon in 2022 and was appointed as Erkan's deputy at the central bank last July.

Erdogan selected Erkan for one of Turkey's toughest assignments after winning a tough May re-election in which his main opponent focused on Turkey's economic ills. She joined a team led by Finance Minister Mehmet Simsek and other market-friendly technocrats that Western analysts saw as Turkey's best bet at pulling itself back from the brink of economic doom.

Their reforms have helped Turkey start winning back foreign investments and save the country from a potential banking crisis. Erkan resigned just a week after completing a historic series of interest rate hikes

NBK additionally offers real estate financing services that assist customers in purchasing and selling residential and commercial properties across various locations, including the UAE, the UK, USA, and France. The bank additionally facilitates connections for its clients with top professional advisors such as lawyers, real estate appraisers, and accountants. Furthermore, it provides guidance on real estate financing deals and collaborates with international companies specializing in real estate management located in the UK, France, and the USA.

In response to another inquiry regarding employment at IBG, Al-Sager stated, "NBK is consistently committed to recruiting young skilled national talents, and endeavors to nurture them with the latest programs that align with the most recent global standards."

Forging the future: A proactive vision for excellence

Al-Sager highlighted the significance of international branches to the operations of NBK Group,

that have pushed the baseline rate from 8.5 percent to 45 percent.

The bank said last week that it intends to keep rates high for the immediate future to make sure inflation is brought under control. Simsek called Erkan's decision "completely personal" and in no way reflective of Turkey's future economic policies.

"Our economic program, carried out under the leadership of our President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, continues decisively and without interruption," he said in a statement. "We will continue to take firm steps towards our price stability target," Simsek said.



Turkish Central Bank Governor Hafize Gaye Erkan addresses a presentation and answers questions in Ankara. — AFP

Some analysts said Erkan's resignation could actually help Simsek and his team pursue their program by removing a distracting scandal. "I do not think that the resignation of the central bank governor will have a negative impact," Ankara's TOBB University of Economics and Technology professor Fatih Ozatay said. "Moreover, this is a development that will take the pressure off the central bank."

Veteran emerging market analyst Timothy Ash called Karahan a "respected ex-NY Fed economist". "Crisis over," Ash said in a social media statement. "The departure of Erkan has nothing to do with policy - just personal HR related." Analysts view Erkan and Simsek's ability to convince Erdogan to perform an economic U-turn as one of Turkey's biggest success stories of recent years. The central bank lost much of its independence during the second decade of Erdogan's rule. The Turkish leader had parted ways with past central bankers who resisted his pressure to lower interest rates and achieve economic growth at all costs. Karahan becomes Erdogan's sixth central bank governor since 2019. — AFP

stating, "Historically, banks in Kuwait concentrated on the local market and the expansion of domestic branches. However, shifts in the geopolitical landscape of Kuwait and the surrounding region, coupled with the saturation of the local market, have precipitated a pressing need for income diversification and the generation of new, geographically diversified revenue streams. This led to our strategic expansion and the development of our business activities beyond Kuwait's borders. As a result, we have achieved a regional and international presence, now spanning the MENA region, Europe, America, and Asia."

"NBK has consistently embraced a forward-thinking approach towards international expansion, evidenced by our international branches, some of which have been operational for over 40 years. We offer our services in some of the world's most prominent cities and financial hubs, including New York, Paris, London, China, and Singapore," Al-Sager added.

"Initially, our overseas branches offered basic services, reflecting our primary focus on Kuwait as the central hub of our business operations. However, as time progressed and our ambition for regional and international growth intensified, we have evolved to deliver cutting-edge banking services and sophisticated investment solutions tailored to our customers' demands. NBK - France serves as a pivotal center through which we extend our services to a broad clientele across Europe, including Germany, Italy, and Spain, among others. This includes catering to clients from Kuwait and the GCC who conduct business across various European capitals as well as top-tier European clientele and corporations," Al-Sager explained.

"We remain committed to actively engaging and broadening our financing operations with major corporations and leading institutions on a global scale," Al-Sager confirmed. "Five years ago, the assets of our international branches accounted for 27 percent of the Group's total assets. This figure has since increased to approximately 40 percent. Looking ahead, we aim to further elevate the proportion of our foreign branches' assets relative to the Group's total assets over the next five years," Al-Sager stated. Al-Sager concluded by emphasizing that NBK is tirelessly striving to maintain its leading position in the local market while developing its regional presence through an overseas expansion strategy. This approach aims to diversify income sources, accelerate growth, and generate maximum added value for shareholders and stakeholders alike.

US stocks rally on tech earnings, solid jobs report

NEW YORK: The S&P 500 hit fresh heights Friday as US indices rallied on tech earnings, even as red-hot US jobs data sent the dollar and bond yields up as chances of an early interest rate cut faded. The US labor market smashed expectations last month in a surprise hiring pick-up, adding 353,000 jobs in January while the Department of Labor revised December's figure sharply higher. The unemployment rate held steady at 3.7 percent for a third straight month. "If March wasn't off the table as far as rate cuts were concerned before today's payroll numbers, it's not even in the same room now," said CMC Markets analyst Michael Hewson.

US Federal Reserve boss Jerome Powell earlier this week dampened expectations of a March cut to interest rates, and strong job creation figures and wage gains are likely to give policymakers additional pause.

"The data exemplifies the concerns about inflation that we heard from the Fed," said Kathleen Brooks, research director at XTB. "This data is too strong for the Fed, and it could lead to a further recalibration of market-based interest rate expectations," she added.

The prospect of higher interest rates for longer sent US bond yields and the dollar climbing. But a robust labor market is positive in another sense. "That said this wasn't bad news for US markets given that the prospect of a recession looks even further away than ever," added CMC Markets' Hewson. A resilient US economy should also mean that company earnings hold up, he said. Meanwhile, Wall Street indices closed firmly in the green, with the Dow climbing 0.4 percent while the tech-heavy Nasdaq surged 1.7 percent. Their performance was buoyed by tech stocks and the silver lining of hiring data pointing to the US economy avoiding a recession.

Investors are focused on "good earnings out of Meta, Amazon and just the excitement around the artificial intelligence and technology companies," said Tom Cahill of Ventura Wealth Management. On Thursday, Meta and Amazon blew through expectations in their latest quarterly results. Shares in Meta closed more than 20 percent up after the tech titan behind Facebook and Instagram reported a profit of \$14 billion in the final three months of last year, beating analyst forecasts as revenue climbed to \$40.1 billion. —AFP

Kuwait sovereign ratings affirmed; outlook stable

KUWAIT: Capital Intelligence Ratings (CI Ratings or CI) on Friday announced that it has affirmed Kuwait's Long-Term Foreign Currency Rating (LT FCR) and LT Local Currency Rating (LT LCR) at 'A+'. At the same time, CI Ratings has affirmed the sovereign's Short-Term (ST) FCR and ST LCR at 'A1'. The outlook on the ratings remains stable.

US jobs market defies slowdown expectations

WASHINGTON: The US labor market smashed expectations last month in a surprise hiring pick-up, government data showed Friday, with a resilient jobs market likely good news for President Joe Biden in election year. The world's biggest economy added 353,000 jobs in January, after December's figure was significantly revised upwards to 333,000, said the Department of Labor. The unemployment rate held steady at 3.7 percent for a third straight month—hovering under 4.0 percent for two years now—even though analysts cautioned the report also contained signs of weakness.

"It's great news for working families that wages, wealth, and jobs are higher now than before the pandemic, and I won't stop fighting to lower costs," Biden said in a statement. Despite positive data in recent months, the president has struggled to persuade voters over his handling of the economy as he campaigns for a second term in the White House. Over the past year, a solid jobs market has helped to support consumer spending and in turn economic growth even as borrowing costs rose. The strong start this year signals that the labor market is set to continue bolstering the economy. —AFP



Ivory Coast's 'sacred' crocs pull in the crowds

A scrawny chicken squawks loudly as it flies through the air to be snapped up by the "president's caiman crocodiles" in one of the Ivory Coast capital's most popular and traditional attractions. Cleopatra is said to have collected holy crocodiles and the Ivorian nation's capital Yamoussoukro boasts some 300 from the days of president and father of the nation Felix Houphouet-Boigny.

Coast is staging the Africa Cup of Nations at the moment, plenty of visitors turn up to see the daily feeding frenzy.

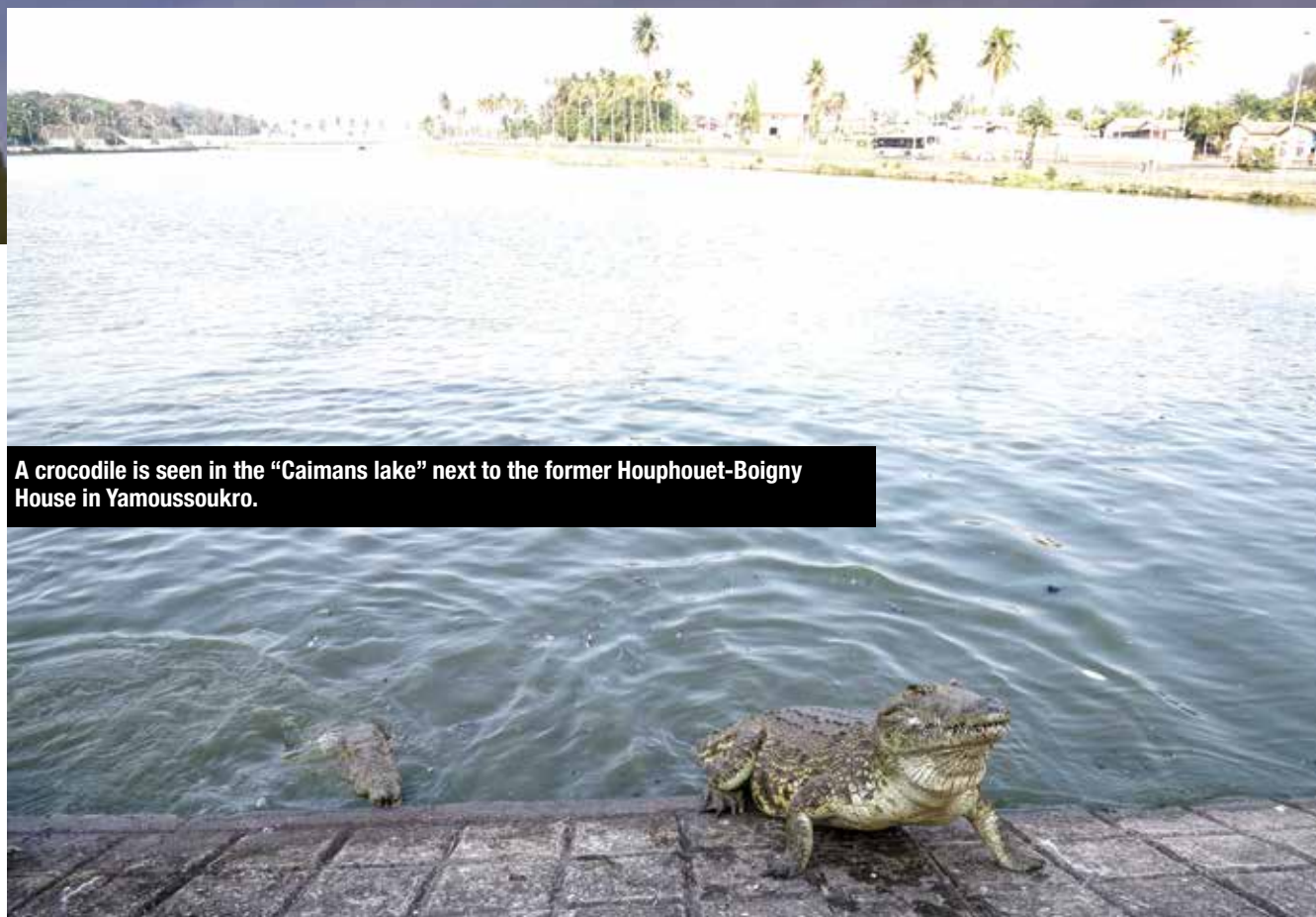
Ousmane Ka, who has travelled from Senegal to support the Lions, says he's "taking the opportunity for a bit of tourism, especially to come to see the famous caiman lake" next to the presidential palace. "It's a chance for me to see them come out and be fed with chickens people threw in," he tells AFP.

A bang on the railing rouses the reptiles who advance up the banks of the lake to gobble up the chickens. "It's quite a story," says Guy Michel Goumezo, an Ivorian visiting the capital, where the celebrated Houphouet-Boigny was born. "Just behind" there, he points. "It was his village (N'Gokro) and at the same time his house, where he built the presidential palace."

The estate where "The Old Man" as the former president is affectionately known, lived is today surrounded by an imposing wall and guarded by the caiman and crocodile filled lake. The elderly recall how occasionally the president himself would feed the animals.

Warden eaten by crocs

For Marie Akou, who lives in the capital, the caiman lake has "real significance" for the Baoule community, one of the nation's leading ethnic groups. "By Baoule tradition, you can



A crocodile is seen in the "Caimans lake" next to the former Houphouet-Boigny House in Yamoussoukro.



A crocodile is seen in the "Caimans lake" next to the former Houphouet-Boigny House in Yamoussoukro.

He died in 1993 and the beasts today rival on the tourist trail with the city's monumental basilica of Our Lady of Peace, a replica, but even bigger, than Saint Peter's in Rome. As Ivory

come and stop by the lake and explain your problems, your wishes, and the lake can sort them out for you," she says. Augustin Thiam, a great-nephew of Houphouet-Boigny, also speaks of the site's "mystical" quality.

"Sometimes I sacrifice animals to them, chickens, bullocks, sheep. Other members of my family do it as well," says Thiam, the governor of Yamoussoukro. The crocodiles "have bathed in

this water which for the Baoule of Yamoussoukro is sacred," he adds. And when one of the crocs dies, "we give it a human burial".

From the Great Hall of the Houphouet Foundation, the governor recalls the history of the place. It was Mali's president Modibo Keita who offered the first crocodiles as a gift in 1961, a year after independence. The governor warns: "The town's lakes are linked to

each other, the crocodiles get through when they are small and they are in all the lakes." No one risks taking a dip in Yamoussoukro's lakes. And since "old Diko", who used to feed the crocodiles, was tragically eaten by one in 2012, "the other wardens no longer come," the governor admits.—AFP



A man offers a chicken to the animals in the "Caimans lake" next to the former Houphouet-Boigny House in Yamoussoukro.



Crocodiles fight to eat a chicken in the "Caimans lake" next to the former Houphouet-Boigny House in Yamoussoukro.



A crocodile eats a chicken in the "Caimans lake" next to the former Houphouet-Boigny House in Yamoussoukro.



A crocodile is seen in the "Caimans lake" next to the former Houphouet-Boigny House in Yamoussoukro.

Berlin film fest demands 'freedom' for two Iranian directors

The Berlin film festival, which has long championed Iran's embattled directors, urged Tehran Thursday to allow two filmmakers who have reportedly been slapped with a travel ban to attend this month's event. The Berlinale has invited Maryam Moghaddam and Behtash Sanaeeha to present their new movie "My Favorite Cake" in competition for the Golden Bear top prize.

nizers Carlo Chatrion und Mariette Risenbeek said they were "shocked and dismayed" by the reports and called on Iranian authorities "to return the passports and to end all restrictions preventing" the two from attending.

"The Berlinale is a festival fundamentally committed to freedom of speech, freedom of expression and freedom of the arts, for all people

iting the country by airport police and had their passports confiscated.

"My Favorite Cake" is billed as a drama about an ageing woman who breaks out of her routine and the strictures imposed on her by a deeply conservative society. It was partially funded by the Berlinale as part of a program assisting directors around the globe. Moghaddam and Sanaeeha's previous film "Ballad of a White Cow", a drama about the death penalty, premiered at the 2021 Berlinale.

"Maryam Moghaddam and Behtash Sanaeeha share a long and rich history with the Berlinale, and must be allowed to return to Berlin this February," the festival said. The Berlinale, the most politically minded of the top European cinema showcases, has long backed dissident directors from Iran.

It has awarded the Golden Bear to many of the leading lights of Iranian cinema including Asghar Farhadi ("A Separation"), Jafar Panahi ("Taxi") and Mohammad Rasoulof ("There Is No Evil"). Panahi and Rasoulof have both served prison time and faced travel bans at home. The festival will open on February 15 with "Small Things Like This", a drama starring Cillian Murphy about the systematic abuse of "fallen" women at Irish laundries run by the Catholic Church.—AFP



Maryam Moghaddam and Behtash Sanaeeha

However it said in a statement that it had learned Moghaddam and Sanaeeha have been "banned from travelling, have had their passports confiscated, and face a court trial in relation to their work as artists and filmmakers". Orga-

around the world," the organizers said. There was no official confirmation of the reports. But in October, reformist paper Arman Melli wrote that Moghaddam and Sanaeeha, who wanted to leave Iran for France, were blocked from ex-

Alec Baldwin pleads not guilty to 'Rust' killing

Actor Alec Baldwin has pleaded not guilty to manslaughter charges over the death of a young woman who was fatally shot on the set of a budget Western, US court documents showed. Baldwin, a producer and star of the film, was charged in January for his role in the 2021 death of Halyna Hutchins during the filming of period piece "Rust" in New Mexico. He was holding a Colt .45 when it discharged, killing Hutchins and wounding director Joel Souza.

Baldwin has repeatedly denied responsibility, insisting he did not pull the trigger on the gun, which should not have been loaded with a live round. The incident sent shockwaves through Hollywood and led to calls for a tightening of the rules around the use of firearms on movie sets. But it also led to accusations of sloppy management, with some in the industry saying regulations were already tight, and that they had simply not been properly followed during the making of "Rust."

Baldwin's lawyers Luke Nikas and Alex Spiro have filed a request for a quick trial in order to "minimize public vilification and suspicion and to avoid the hazards of proving his innocence that often arise after a lengthy delay in prosecution." Baldwin had been due to appear virtually at the state district court in Santa Fe, New Mexico for an arraignment on Thursday, but his lawyers submitted a waiver that also contained his plea of not guilty.

Initial manslaughter charges against 65-year-old Baldwin were dropped in April last year, due to what prosecutors called "new facts" that demanded "further investigation and forensic analysis." That led to the empanelling of a grand jury, which ultimately handed down the indictment he is now facing—and could see him jailed for up to 18 months, if convicted.



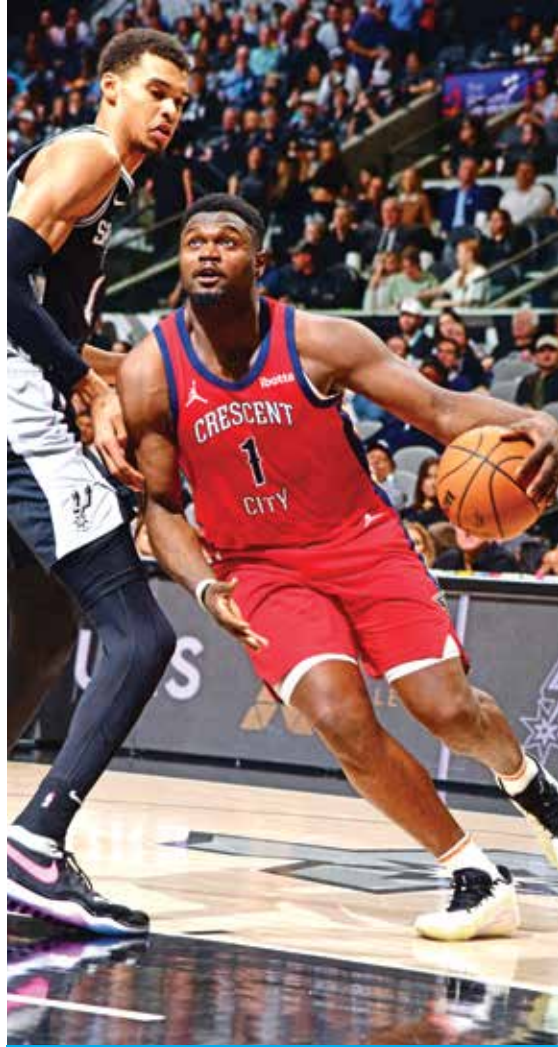
This handout image shows actor Alec Baldwin being processed after the death of cinematographer Halyna Hutchins at the Bonanza Creek Ranch in Santa Fe, New Mexico.—AFP

Baldwin faces two alternative counts of involuntary manslaughter—one involving "negligent use of a firearm" and one of acting "without due caution or circumspection." It will be up to the jury to decide whether to convict him on one or the other, or neither (but not both).

The charges relate to the action, not to the oversight of the movie, meaning he is being held culpable as an actor, not in his capacity as producer. Actors' union SAG-AFTRA criticized the charges, which it said were based on "an incorrect assessment of the actual duties of an actor." "An actor's job is not to be a firearms or weapons expert," the union said.—AFP

Williamson lifts Pelicans over Spurs, Magic shock Timberwolves

Westbrook reaches milestone with 25,000 career points



SAN ANTONIO: Zion Williamson of the New Orleans Pelicans drives to the basket during the game against the San Antonio Spurs on February 2, 2024 at the Frost Bank Center in San Antonio, Texas. — AFP

LOS ANGELES: Zion Williamson drove for the game-winning layup in the waning seconds Friday, lifting the New Orleans Pelicans to a 114-113 NBA victory over the San Antonio Spurs. Williamson finished with 33 points and eight rebounds, connecting on 12 of his 21 shots from the field. His dunk with 28.5 seconds remaining pulled the Pelicans within one and with 3.8 seconds left, he powered through the Spurs defense for the game-winner.

Devin Vassell scored 28 points for San Antonio but missed a three-pointer at the final buzzer. Sensational Spurs rookie Victor Wembanyama added 16 points and 14 rebounds for San Antonio, whose 18 turnovers were twice as many as the Pelicans'.

"I live for stuff like this," Williamson, the top pick in the 2019 draft, said after the teams traded the lead five times in the fourth quarter. "Playing in games like this is a lot of fun." The dominant performance from the two-time All-Star came a day after he failed to gain a nod for this year's All-Star game when the 14 reserves for the mid-season showcase were announced on Thursday.

Atlanta's Trae Young, also snubbed in the All-Star selections, scored 32 points and handed out 15 assists to lead the Hawks in a 129-120 victory over the Phoenix Suns. Young came into the contest averaging 27 points and 10.9 assists per game but didn't get an All-Star nod.

His response was his 76th career game with at least 30 points and 10 assists -- tied for the fifth-most such games in NBA history. He connected on seven of 11 from three-point range and came up with three steals for good measure as the Hawks notched their third straight win.

Kevin Durant scored 35 with eight rebounds and eight assists to lead the Suns, who had won nine of their previous 11 games. Devin Booker added 24, but after twice taking the lead in the third quarter, Phoenix coughed up eight of their 17 turnovers in the fourth and the Hawks held on.

Hawks coach Quin Snyder said that Young, like any NBA player, would relish an All-Star Game ap-

pearance, but he didn't think that drove the 23-year-old. "Trae, one of the things that's been great about what he's doing is he's not playing for accolades," Snyder said. "He's playing to win."

Westbrook milestone

It was a milestone night for Los Angeles Clippers guard Russell Westbrook, who became just the 25th NBA player to reach 25,000 career points. Westbrook scored 23 off the bench to help the Clippers beat the Pistons 136-125 in Detroit. Kawhi Leonard scored 33 points to lead the Clippers, who rallied from an early 14-point deficit and never trailed in the second half.

Westbrook hit the 25,000-point milestone with a running layup late in the fourth quarter that pushed the Clippers' lead to 134-115. He was congratulated at the bench by James Harden -- another 25,000-point club member -- and other teammates. "It's a fun group," Westbrook said of a Clippers squad that has won 10 of their last 12 games. "Just to see all the love and support here from the coaches, from my teammates -- I'm truly, truly grateful for that."

Elsewhere, the Orlando Magic stunned Western Conference contenders Minnesota 108-106. The defeat coupled with Oklahoma City's 126-106 victory over the Charlotte Hornets left the Timberwolves and Thunder tied atop the Western Conference at 34-15.

Orlando's Paolo Banchero scored 23 points, and the Magic overcame an early 17-point deficit to shock the Timberwolves. Rudy Gobert and Anthony Edwards scored 22 points each and Gobert added 16 rebounds for the Timberwolves, who scored just 18 points on 25 percent shooting in the fourth quarter.

In Oklahoma City, Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 31 points with five rebounds and nine assists to lead the Thunder. In the last game of the night, two-time NBA Most Valuable Player Nikola Jokic delivered his 15th triple-double of the season, scoring 27 points with 22 rebounds and 12 assists to lead the defending champion Denver Nuggets to a 120-108 victory over the Portland Trail Blazers. — AFP



ATLANTA: LeBron James of the Los Angeles Lakers reacts against the Atlanta Hawks during the third quarter at State Farm Arena on January 30, 2024 in Atlanta, Georgia. — AFP

LeBron won't ask to leave Lakers: Agent

LOS ANGELES: LeBron James will not seek a trade from the Los Angeles Lakers, his agent has said after speculation over the 39-year-old superstar's future. "LeBron won't be traded, and we aren't asking to be," the player's agent Rich Paul told ESPN on Friday. Four-time NBA Most Valuable Player James signed a two-year contract extension with the Lakers in August 2022 that would keep him at the club through the 2024-2025 season, if he takes up a player option for the final year of that deal. The Lakers are 25-25 this season and in ninth place in the Western Conference. James, 39 and in his 21st NBA campaign, is averaging 24.9 points, 7.7 assists and 7.5 rebounds in 44 games this season. He helped the Lakers claim the inaugural NBA Cup in-season tournament crown, but they have struggled to find consistency amid a stream of injuries.

James won a pair of NBA titles with Miami in 2012 and 2013 before returning to Cleveland where he clinched a championship in 2016. His fourth NBA title came in 2020 with the Lakers and last year he led the team to the Western Conference finals where they lost 4-0 to eventual NBA champions the Denver Nuggets. After that defeat, amid speculation that he might retire, James said that he was not ready to step back from the sport yet. His eldest son Bronny James, who is playing college basketball for the University of Southern California, could conceivably enter the NBA in time for the 2024-2025 campaign. — AFP

'Superstar' Jaiswal: From homeless to Test hero

VISAKHAPATNAM: From being homeless and selling snacks on the streets to finance his cricketing ambitions, opener Yashasvi Jaiswal has now become the toast of India with a Test double century against England. The 22-year-old turned an overnight 179 into his first double ton with 209 on Saturday in the second match of the high-profile series.

Jaiswal, an attacking left-hand batsman, burst into the consciousness of his cricket-mad country with a stellar showing in the Indian Premier League. He was snapped up by Rajasthan Royals in the 2019 IPL auction and last season made one half of a fearsome opening pair with England's white-ball captain Jos Buttler, amassing 625 runs with a strike-rate of more than 163.

His 171 on his Test debut against the West Indies last year turned heads with a grueling 387 deliveries in Dominica over more than eight hours at the crease. His latest knock has left the cricketing world in awe of the youngster. Former England batsman Kevin Pietersen called Jaiswal "a superstar" on commentary. "You beauty, your bat has become a magic wand," India opener Shikhar Dhawan wrote on social media platform X. "Rewriting cricket history, one milestone at a time!" he added.

Commentator Aakash Chopra said Friday that Jaiswal's stats on converting fifties into hundreds had for the time being put him "even above Sir Don Bradman". Jaiswal struck his 11th first-class ton over 21 matches to single-handedly drive the innings for India, where the next best knock was 34. He had always harbored ambitions to play for India and moved to the financial capital Mumbai to chase his dream at just 11 years old, and without his parents. "I used to sleep in a dairy and then stayed at my uncle's place but it wasn't big enough and he asked me to find a different place," Jaiswal told AFP in an interview in 2020. "I then started to stay in a tent near Azad Maidan" -- a field considered the birthplace of cricket in India -- "and would play cricket there during the day". —AFP



VISAKHAPATNAM: India's Yashasvi Jaiswal celebrates after scoring a double century (200 runs) during the second day of the second Test cricket match between India and England at the Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy cricket stadium in Visakhapatnam on February 3, 2024. — AFP

NHL to return to Olympics for 2026, 2030 Winter Games

MIAMI: Players from the National Hockey League will compete in the 2026 Milan-Cortina Winter Games after a deal was reached between players, the league and the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the NHL said on Friday. The deal, which has also been backed by the International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF), will see NHL players on ice at the Olympics for the first time since Sochi in 2014.

"The international composition of National Hockey League rosters is unparalleled, and NHL players take great pride in representing their countries," NHL commissioner Gary Bettman said in a statement. "We are pleased that, after intense collaborative efforts with the NHL Players' Association and the International Ice Hockey Federation, we can formally announce that NHL players will participate in both the 2026 and 2030 Olympic hockey tournaments."

The IOC said that the French Alps are their preferred hosts for the 2030 Winter Games. The NHL has previously had players compete between 1998 and 2014 but no deal was put in place for Pyeongchang in 2018 or the COVID-impacted Beijing Games in 2022.

The competition in Milan will take place on NHL-sized courts rather than international specifications. NHLPA executive director Marty Walsh said that

fans of the game would welcome the chance to see the world's best battle for a gold medal.

"We know that hockey fans worldwide have long been anticipating the next best-on-best international competition, and now they can finally see some of their favorite players represent their countries and line up together," he said.

IIHF President Luc Tardif said that the agreement, which comes ahead of a possible bid from Salt Lake City to host the 2034 Winter Games, was a major boost for the sport.

"This decision represents a turning point for Ice Hockey at the global level and marks the great return of the NHL Players to the Olympic Games," he said. "The IIHF was able to gather all related stakeholders at the same table to find a long-lasting and sustainable consensus," added Tardif.

Nine countries have already qualified for the men's tournament -- Canada, Finland, Russia, United States, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, Czech Republic and hosts Italy. The final three spots will be secured through qualification this year.

The NHL also announced that a four-nation tournament featuring Canada, Finland, Sweden and the United States, featuring only NHL players will be held in February 2025. The in-season tournament, called the "4 Nations Face-off" will be held instead of an All-Star Game.

Bettman said the NHL was looking to participate every other year in an international tournament with the World Cup of Hockey held in between Olympics. "That's the cycle we're trying to get on but we figured we'd try a little bit of an appetizer between now and then," said Bettman. — AFP



Pyeongchang: Latvia's Amelija Kotane competes in the women's monobob heat 2 bobsleigh during the Gangwon 2024 Winter Youth Olympic Games at Alpensia Sliding Centre in Pyeongchang on January 22, 2024. — AFP

Winter Olympics bobsleigh track row deepens

ROME: The row over the bobsleigh track for the 2026 Winter Olympics has gone up a notch after the IOC reacted angrily to the announcement that organizers had signed a deal for construction to begin in Italy. "The bobsleigh, skeleton and luge track for the 2026 Milano Cortina Olympics and Paralympics will be in the town of Cortina," Italy's Transport Minister and deputy prime minister Matteo Salvini and Sports Minister Andrea Aboodi announced on Friday. "This choice puts an end (to the discussions) and shows the steely determination of this government to complete the construction work in order to have the best possible Games in Italy."

But the announcement sparked an angry response from the International Olympic Committee, which is opposed to an 82-million-euro (\$88.6-million) project that it says risks not being ready in time to be properly tested before the Games and will have little long-term benefit to local residents. "The IOC has strong concerns about the delivery of this project by the required deadline of March 2025, which is necessary to validate and homologate the track, as no sliding track has ever been completed in such a short timeframe," the IOC said in a statement.

"This concern is shared by the International Bobsleigh and Skeleton Federation and the International Luge Federation. Therefore, the IOC has asked the Milano Cortina 2026 Organizing Committee to prepare a plan B as contingency in case of any delays, to ensure bobsleigh, skeleton and luge competitions can be held during the Olympic Winter Games Milano Cortina 2026."

A political football

When contacted by AFP, the local organizing committee said it had no further comment. Italian construction company Pizzarotti, the sole bidder for the contract, now has 13 months to build a 1,445m-long (4,740-foot) track which includes 16 bends and requires complex refrigeration systems, all of which need extensive testing before the Games begin on February 6, 2026.

The issue has become a political football in the hands of the hard-right Italian government of Giorgia Meloni. In October last year, the organizers agreed that bobsleigh, luge and skeleton competitions at the 2026 Games would be held outside of Italy, meaning that a key venue would not be located in the host country -- almost unprecedented in the history of the Winter Olympics. But Meloni's government has been determined that the Games have the "Made in Italy" label and relaunched the idea of building a track in Cortina, as was originally set out when the Italian bid won in June 2019. —AFP



TORONTO: Sidney Crosby of the Pittsburgh Penguins talks with William Nylander of the Toronto Maple Leafs during 2024 NHL All-Star Skills Competition at Scotiabank Arena on February 02, 2024 in Toronto, Ontario. — AFP

Sports

Nigeria, DR Congo book semis

Masuaku free-kick clinches AFCON semi-finals place

ABIDJAN: A solitary Ademola Lookman goal was enough for Nigeria to beat Angola on Friday and qualify for the Africa Cup of Nations semi-finals, while the Democratic Republic of Congo joined them by coming from behind to defeat Guinea. Atalanta forward Lookman, the former England Under-21 international, had scored both goals in Nigeria's defeat of Cameroon in the last 16 and he made it three in two games as the Super Eagles claimed their third 1-0 victory of the tournament.

The goal came four minutes before half-time at the Felix Houphouët Boigny Stadium, with Moses Simon collecting a pass on the left, accelerating away from Kialonda Gaspar and driving into the area before cutting the ball back for Lookman to finish. That was enough for Nigeria to win through to their 15th Cup of Nations semi-final, which is more appearances than any other country.

Reigning African footballer of the year Victor Osim-

hen found the net with a quarter of an hour remaining but his effort was disallowed for offside and the Napoli striker is therefore still without a goal since Nigeria's opening 1-1 draw with Equatorial Guinea. Meanwhile Angola had one golden chance to equalise just before the hour mark, when substitute Zini was sent through on goal but his shot came back off the post.

Nigeria have now kept four consecutive clean sheets, validating coach Jose Peseiro's approach which has been based around making sure they do not concede goals first and foremost. "They are a good team, but once again we didn't concede. Once again we scored once," Peseiro said. "I would have liked to score more. With better finishing we could have scored another one or two goals, but I am happy. My players deserved it." Nigeria advance to a last-four tie next Wednesday against Cape Verde or South Africa in the central Ivorian city of Bouake - those sides met in the quarter-finals on Saturday.

Angola, meanwhile, go home but this AFCON will be remembered as a success for the Black Antelopes, after they won a knockout tie at the tournament for the first time ever. "We said among ourselves that if we got to the quarter-finals we would then try to win the tournament. Any team that comes this far has that ambition," said Angola's Portuguese coach Pedro Goncalves. "We like to dream, but you also need to be realistic. The reality is that we were up against a very powerful side with players who play at the very highest level."

Masuaku stunner

Friday's second match saw DR Congo see off Guinea 3-1 across Abidjan at the Ebimpe Olympic Stadium. Guinea had reached the last eight after winning a Cup of Nations knockout tie for the first time, and they went in front midway through the first half. Mohamed Bayo was pushed over in the box and converted the result-

ing penalty for his third goal of the competition. However, Leopards captain Chancel Mbemba produced a fine finish to equalise before the half-hour mark, and the Congolese took the lead with a penalty of their own in the 65th minute. Silas Katomba Mvumpa was tripped in the box by Julian Jeannier, and Yoane Wissa of Brentford made no mistake from the spot.

DR Congo then clinched their place in a first semi-final since 2015 thanks to a stunning late free-kick by Besiktas full-back Arthur Masuaku from way out on the left flank. They had qualified for the knockout phase despite drawing all three matches, and then overcame Egypt on penalties in the last 16. "We are extremely happy because we had drawn all our games up to now and we picked a good moment to get a win," said their French coach Sebastien Desabre. DR Congo now stay in Abidjan for a semi-final against either Mali or hosts Ivory Coast, who meet in the last eight on Saturday. — AFP

Footballer Alves faces rape trial

BARCELONA: Former Brazil football star Dani Alves will go on trial Monday in Barcelona for allegedly raping a woman at an upscale nightclub, with prosecutors seeking a nine-year jail sentence. The high-profile trial is scheduled to start at 10 am (0900 GMT) at a court in Spain's second city where the 40-year-old former Barcelona and Paris Saint-Germain player has been in jail since his arrest in January 2023.

A young woman accuses Alves of raping her in a bathroom of the VIP area of the upscale Sutton nightclub in Barcelona in the early hours of December 31, 2022. Alves has said he had consensual sex with his accuser after initially denying knowing the woman during a television interview. Public prosecutors have demanded Alves receive a prison term of nine years and pay his alleged victim 150,000 euros (\$162,000) in compensation.

Since the court rejected a request from the prosecution for the trial to be held behind closed doors, the media will be able to follow the proceedings, except for when Alves' accuser takes the stand. Her identity will not be revealed, and she will not have to be "visually confronted with the accused". According to the prosecution, Alves knew the layout of the nightclub well and was there that night with a friend. He was on holiday in Barcelona at the time after playing for Brazil at the World Cup in Qatar.

After offering champagne to the young woman and her friend, Alves allegedly invited the woman to enter a small enclosure at the nightclub, which she says she did not know was a lavatory. Once inside the footballer showed a "violent attitude" towards the woman, whom he forced to have intercourse despite her resistance, prosecutors say according to the indictment. "The victim asked him several times... to let her go, saying she wanted to leave but the defendant prevented her from doing so," according to the indictment, which describes a "situation of anguish and terror" for the young woman.

'Clear conscience'

The woman, who received medical treatment after leaving the nightclub, is being treated for "post-traumatic stress of overall high intensity", according to prosecutors. Alves told Barcelona-based daily La Vanguardia in June that he had lied at first about knowing his accuser because he was afraid his wife would leave him if he admitted being with another woman.

"I have a really clear conscience regarding what happened that night in the bathroom of the VIP area of the Sutton nightclub," he told the newspaper. "What happened and what didn't happen. And what didn't happen is that I forced this woman to do anything that we did." Spanish courts have repeatedly rejected requests that Alves be released pending his trial, arguing there was a risk he could flee to his native Brazil which generally does not extradite its citizens. In Spain a plea deal remains possible right until the start of the trial, meaning Alves could still admit guilt in exchange for a softer penalty.

The accuser's lawyer in November denied she had reached such an agreement, but she admitted "talks" had been held at the request of the player's legal team which had not led to a deal. The trial is expected to wrap up on Wednesday. — AFP



Red Bull Car Park Drift Kuwait ignites the streets

KUWAIT: After an electrifying return following a three-year hiatus, the Red Bull Car Park Drift Kuwait once again set the streets ablaze with screeching tires, breathtaking maneuvers, and adrenaline-charged excitement. Held at the Kuwait Motor Town on February 2, 2024, this year's event witnessed the most skilled drifters in the region battling it out for a chance to secure their spot in the finals in Oman this December.

This year's event brought forth a unique twist,

as participants faced a set of challenges across two rounds, pushing the boundaries of skill and daring. The qualifying criteria, comprising nine elements totaling 300 points, tested each drifter's ability to navigate a challenging course while avoiding treacherous obstacles. In a thrilling turn of events, Ali Makhseed emerged the victor of the Red Bull Car Park Drift Kuwait, earning a total of 285 points. He will now move on to the finals in Oman, scheduled for December of this year.

Audiences were also treated to a special show by Red Bull Athlete and drifting legend Abdo Feghali and the Red Bull Athlete Brian Capper, renowned for his extraordinary drifting skills. Capper showcased his talent on the track and left audiences in awe. Red Bull Car Park Drift was held in partnership with Red Bull MOBILE, Nissan, Acqua Eva, Kuwait Motor Town, Al Baktain Auto, and Dunlop.



Messi mania hits Hong Kong, thousands flock to Miami training

HONG KONG: Tens of thousands of football fans turned out to see Lionel Messi train with his Inter Miami teammates in Hong Kong on Saturday, as "Messi mania" took hold of the city. Police closed off streets around the Hong Kong Stadium as fans flocked to catch sight of the Argentina superstar, the greatest player of his generation, ahead of a match on Sunday. Hours before Inter Miami strode onto the pitch for an open training session, expectant fans were form-

ing long queues outside the 40,000-capacity venue, chanting the World Cup-winning captain's name.

The Major League Soccer club is co-owned by David Beckham, who also put in an appearance to huge roars from an almost full house. But the roof was nearly blown off a few minutes later by the ovation the 36-year-old Messi received as he emerged to join his teammates on the pitch for a gentle workout. The eight-time Ballon d'Or winner spent much of the hour-long session doing stretches as he protected a niggling hamstring injury, though he did join 80 lucky Hong Kong schoolchildren for a kickabout during a coaching clinic that followed.

Soon after, Beckham took charge of teaching the kids some skills. But it was Messi that the thousands of fans had mainly come to see, ahead of a friendly against a Hong Kong Select XI on Sunday. "It's the

first time in my life I see Messi," said 17-year-old Chinese student Li Weiyi, who had travelled from Shenzhen, across the border in mainland China. "I am feeling very excited. He means a lot to me. He brought me to the football world, he made me love football." Most fans wore blue-and-white-striped Argentina or pink Inter Miami shirts.

"He is very skilful, very enjoyable to watch him play," said Sally Liu, a 28-year-old student from Hong Kong who was sporting a T-shirt commemorating Messi and Argentina's 2022 World Cup win in Qatar. "He is playing now in Miami so I will not have many chances to watch him in the future. This is my last chance. He is the best ever. I cried when they became world champions." On Friday, hundreds had gathered outside the team hotel in the south of the city hoping to catch a glimpse of their hero. — AFP

Classifieds

Clinics

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Announcement

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Change of Name

I, MURTAZA ALI, holder of Indian passport no. Z5426575 having permanent address H No 78 Rasoolpura Po Bohra Wadi Dhan Mandi, Udaipur, Pin: 313001, Rajasthan, India residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as (given name) MURTAZA and (surname) AMAR. (#5153 2/02/2024)

I, Sakina Yunus Fida Husein holder of Indian passport no X5367581 residing in Kuwait on 07/05/2023 permanent address being Mohammedi Pura Temba, VPO Sagwara, Dungar-

pur-314025 and presently residing at Kuwait, do hereby by change my name from Sakina Yunus Fida Husein (given name) with immediate to Sakina Hatim (given name) Jabla (surname) vide Affidavit No.- 410/24, Dt, 22/01/2024 (#5152 2/02/2024)

Iran stun Japan, book semis

Jahanbakhsh scores a 96th-minute penalty



AL-RAYYAN: Japan's goalkeeper #23 Zion Suzuki concedes a penalty goal by Iran's midfielder #07 Alireza Jahanbakhsh during the Qatar 2023 AFC Asian Cup quarter-final football match between Iran and Japan at Education City Stadium on February 3, 2024. — AFP

DOHA: Alireza Jahanbakhsh scored a 96th-minute penalty to give Iran a dramatic 2-1 win over Japan on Saturday and set up an Asian Cup semi-final against holders Qatar or Uzbekistan. It capped a stunning comeback from Iran, who were behind at the break but roared back to dump out the pre-tournament favourites and keep alive their dream of a first Asian title since 1976.

Hidemasa Morita gave Japan, who were looking to lift the trophy for a record-extending fifth time, the lead midway through the first half in front of 36,000 at Education City Stadium in Doha. Mohammad Mohebi drew Iran—themselves champions three times—level 10 minutes after half time and they dominated the remainder of the game.

But just when it looked like extra time, Kou Itakura brought Hossein Kanaanizadegan down in the box and skipper Jahanbakhsh held his nerve to spark delirium on the pitch and in the stands. Coach Amir Ghalenoei said his players were “fantastic” in the second half. “They gave everything for the Iranian people,” he said. “This can be a turning

point for Iranian football.” Ghalenoei, whose side squeezed through on penalties over Syria in the last 16, took a potshot at critics of him and his side back home. “I am not saying criticism is not good, but some people in the last 11 months tried to ruin the national team,” he said.

Under pressure

Iran, missing the suspended Porto forward Mehdi Taremi, had the first sight of goal on 13 minutes when Feyenoord winger Jahanbakhsh fizzed the ball over goalkeeper Zion Suzuki's crossbar. Japan seemed flustered initially by their opponents' physical approach, but they were able to give as good as they got and Itakura picked up a yellow card for cynically stopping an Iran attack.

On 28 minutes Hajime Moriyasu's side went ahead when Morita bustled his way through a weak challenge and with Iran's defence AWOL, the midfielder was all alone with only Alireza Beiranvand to beat. He did not strike the ball convincingly but the goalkeeper tried to save with his legs instead

of his hands and the ball hit an outstretched limb before looping into the net. Japan, beaten by Qatar in the 2019 final, went to the break in the lead but there was little in it. In the 55th minute Iran pulled level when Sardar Azmoun slipped in Mohebi and he beat an exposed Suzuki with a smart first-time finish. It was all Iran now. Mohebi headed just wide at the far post and then an Azmoun header flashed narrowly past Suzuki's post with the goalkeeper beaten, before the drama at the death.

“They put us under a lot of pressure and we could not resist their pressure,” said Moriyasu, whose side were beaten 2-1 by Iraq in the group phase and conceded eight goals during the tournament. “Against strong opponents we cannot concede goals like we did today. “We should have scored a second, and if we had, the game would have been different.” Asked about the performance of defender Itakura, Moriyasu replied: “I will leave the criticism to the media.” Qatar face Uzbekistan later Saturday, with South Korea playing Jordan in the first semi-final, on Tuesday. — AFP

Kuwait participates in 7th Arab Women Sports Tournament

SHARJAH: Kuwait is participating in the 7th Arab Women Sports Tournament, which kicked off in Sharjah on Wednesday. The event features over 550 players representing 63 teams from 15 countries. Kuwait is represented by three national clubs: Salwa Club, Al-Fatah Club, and Kuwait Shooting Club, as reported to KUNA by Fatma Hayat, head of the delegation and member of the Kuwait Olympic Com-

mittee. The Kuwaiti clubs will participate in seven competitions throughout the tournament, which is scheduled to run until February 12. Hayat said. These include volleyball, basketball, table tennis, athletics, karate, and shooting. Hayat confirmed that the tournament is an excellent opportunity for women's clubs to compete against strong teams and to enhance the preparation of the national team for upcoming tournaments. — KUNA



Fatma Hayat



‘Zombie football’ keeps Son, South Korea alive

DOHA: South Korea's Asian Cup performances have been dubbed “zombie football” but Son Heung-min says the way they keep coming back to life shows the team have the spirit to go all the way. The Koreans rose from the dead again in Friday's 2-1 quarter-final victory over Australia, with Son winning a 96th-minute penalty that Hwang Hee-chan converted to take the game to extra time. Skipper Son then sealed the win with a sublime free-kick in the 104th minute to send South Korea into a semi-final against Jordan.

Jürgen Klinsmann's men have only won one game inside 90 minutes in Qatar, and Hwang's penalty was the fourth time in five games that they have scored in second-half injury time. Korean media have compared the team to undead movie monsters but Tottenham's Son said it was a testament to their resilience. “Whatever names people give it isn't important - one thing I can say for sure is that this is just helping us stick together even more,” he said. “Playing 120 minutes is painful, it's not easy. But the spirit the boys are showing is making us stick together. “I can say with confidence that our strength is that we are all together,” he added. South Korea are trying to win the Asian Cup for the first time in 64 years - and they seem intent on doing it the hard way. — AFP

News in Brief

Salmiya, Tadhamon book semis

KUWAIT: Salmiya and Tadhamon football teams qualified for the semi-finals of the Kuwait Amir's Football Cup after defeating Kazma SC and Kuwait SC, respectively, on Friday. At Ali Sabah Al-Salem Stadium, Salmiya witnessed a dramatic match against Kazma in the quarterfinals, but the match ended in a 4-3 penalty shootout for Salmiya. Salmiya clinched their qualification to the semi-finals of the tournament after scoring four penalty kicks, compared to three successful penalty kicks for Kazma. The second match also ended with Tadhamon winning in a penalty shootout 5-4. Qadisiya SC will face Arabi SC in the second leg of the semi-final. — KUNA

Al-Qadisiya wins first match

MUSCAT: Kuwait's Al-Qadisiya made their debut in the second edition of the West Asia Club Championship for volleyball with a 3-0 win against Saudi side Al-Ibtisam on Saturday. The tournament is taking place at the Sohar Sports Complex and is set to continue until February 12. The first group consists of Al-Qadisiya, Al-Ibtisam, Qatar's Arrayan, and Oman's Al-Seeb, while the second group includes Kuwait's Al-Kuwait and Qatar's Al-Arabi, who met yesterday, in addition to Shabab Al-Hussain of Jordan, Bahrain's Al-Ahli, and the host's Sohar. — KUNA

Injury-hit Dortmund held

BERLIN: Injury-hit Borussia Dortmund were held to a goalless draw at Heidenheim on Friday, dropping crucial points in their bid for Champions League football next season. Promoted Heidenheim sat deep and frustrated Dortmund into mistakes, with the visitors struggling to recapture the form which saw them win three from three to start 2024. Dortmund, missing eight first team players due to injury and illness, dominated possession but besides a first-half goal to Donyell Malen which was struck off by VAR, failed to break down a determined and energetic home side. “We didn't play well,” said Dortmund manager Edin Terzic after his side's first scoreless draw since October 2019. “With the performance we delivered today, we didn't deserve more than a point.” Terzic said his undermanned side had “no excuses -- we still had a good team on the pitch, but showed too little”. “It was of course not enough” said Dortmund striker Niclas Füllkrug. — AFP