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## Talk of truce amid Gaza genocide

Zionists kill scores daily • Strip rendered 'unlivable' with Zionist 'war crime' buffer



GAZA: The body of Alia Abu-Takia, killed in overnight Zionist bombardment, is carried by her uncle at the Najjar Hospital in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on Feb 4, 2024. — AFP

GAZA: Zionist strikes across Gaza killed scores overnight and battles raged Sunday in the besieged territory's south as Hamas was reviewing a proposal for a halt in the nearly four-month-long war. French Foreign Minister Stephane Sejourne was in Egypt and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken is expected in the region in the coming days to push for a ceasefire and hostage release.

The health ministry in Gaza said at least 127 people were killed in Zionist strikes in the past 24 hours in the Gaza Strip, more than 90 of them overnight. The Hamas government media office said a kindergarten where families were sheltering was hit in the southern border city of Rafah, which is teeming with Palestinians displaced by the war. "There is no safe place in the Gaza Strip, from north to south," displaced man Mohammed Kloub told AFP in Rafah, which according to UN figures now hosts more than half of Gaza's population.

The Zionist entity has warned its ground forces could advance on Rafah as part of its campaign to eliminate Hamas. An AFP journalist reported strikes and tank fire on Khan Yunis, southern Gaza's main city, with some air raids also hitting nearby Rafah.

With the war set to enter a fifth month on Wednesday, international mediators were pressing to seal a proposed truce deal thrashed out in a Paris meeting of top US, Zionist, Egyptian and Qatari officials. Sejourne, at the start of his first Middle East tour as foreign min-

ister, said on social media that he had told Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi of France's desire "for a humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza and restarting talks for a... two-state solution".

A top Hamas official in Lebanon, Osama Hamdan, said Saturday the group needed more time to "announce our position" on the truce deal. Hamdan added that Hamas wanted "to put an end as quickly as possible to the aggression that our people suffer". A Hamas source has said the proposal involves an initial six-week pause that would see more aid delivered into Gaza and the phased release of Zionist hostages in exchange for Palestinian prisoners held by the Zionist entity.

Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu hit back over criticism within his own cabinet that Washington has not fully backed the Zionist entity's war against Hamas in Gaza. "We greatly appreciate the support that we have received from the Biden administration since the outbreak of the war," the premier insisted. National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir had told the Wall Street Journal that US President Joe Biden was "busy with giving humanitarian aid and fuel (to Gaza), which goes to Hamas".

The United States is the Zionist entity's main international ally, providing billions of dollars each year in military support. But in recent weeks it has insisted on greater protection of civilians in the Gaza Strip

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### NEWS IN BRIEF

#### Public holidays on Feb 25, 26

KUWAIT: The National and Liberation Days holidays in the public sector will be on Sunday, February 25 and Monday, February 26, the Civil Service Commission announced on Sunday, adding that work resumes on Tuesday, February 27. — KUNA

#### Report potholes on MPW app

KUWAIT: Minister of State for Municipal Affairs and Minister of Public Works Noura Al-Mashaan announced a plan to address the poor road conditions in the country. The plan involves residents using an app to submit pictures of potholes for quick repairs. During her visit to Abdullah Al-Salem, Mashaan acknowledged the unpleasant state of the streets and emphasized urgent solutions, including the immediate filling of potholes.

#### Biometrics collection continues

KUWAIT: The interior ministry announced its ongoing collection of biometrics of citizens, residents and GCC citizens at various entry points, including border crossings and Kuwait International Airport. The biometrics can be taken at specified centers and commercial complexes, with exemptions for departing travelers, as it is done upon their return. — KUNA The ministry highlighted

#### CITRA urges updating data

KUWAIT: The Communications and Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA) has urged mobile and fixed subscribers to update their data to ensure uninterrupted access to services. Khaled Al-Qarawi from CITRA said licensed companies are required to prompt customers to update their expired personal data. He stressed the significance of public awareness and advised caution against fraud. — KUNA

## Veteran Namibia President Hage Geingob dies at 82

WINDHOEK: Namibia's President Hage Geingob, a veteran of the country's liberation struggle and its first post-independence prime minister, died on Sunday. Tributes to the 82-year-old statesman poured in from African leaders who saw him as a hero of the anti-apartheid struggle. And Germany's Chancellor Olaf Scholz expressed regret that his country had

lost "a partner who was committed to the process of coming to terms with Germany's colonial history".

Recently, Geingob supported South Africa's complaint against the Zionist entity under the Genocide Convention and condemned Namibia's former colonial ruler Germany for opposing the case. Serving his second term as president, he revealed last month that he was being treated for cancer. Former vice-president Nangolo Mbumba was inaugurated as Geingob's successor as president on Sunday, along with new vice-president Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah. The pair will serve until presidential and national assembly elections towards the end of the year. Earlier, Mbumba had announced the death, saying

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Hage Geingob

## Brain implant treats epilepsy, OCD in patient

PORTLAND: American Amber Pearson used to wash her hands until they bled, terrified by the idea of contamination from everyday items, a debilitating result of her obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD). But the repetitive rituals of her condition are largely consigned to memory, thanks to a revolutionary brain implant that is being used to treat both her epilepsy and her OCD. "I'm actually present in my daily

life and that's incredible," the 34-year-old told AFP. "Before, I was just constantly in my head worrying about my compulsions." Brain implants have hit the headlines recently with Elon Musk's announcement that his Neuralink company had placed a chip in a patient's head, which scientists hope will ultimately allow people to control a smartphone just by thinking about it. But the idea of inserting a device into the brain is not new, and for decades doctors have known that precisely applied electrical stimulation can affect the way the brain operates.

Such deep-brain stimulation is used in the treatment of Parkinson's disease and other conditions affecting

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PORTLAND: Dr Ahmed Raslan, professor of neurological surgery, talks about the placement of a brain implant with patient Amber Pearson at the Oregon Health and Science University hospital on Jan 23, 2024. — AFP

## Biden sweeps S Carolina, labels Trump a 'loser'

CHARLESTON: US President Joe Biden set his sights Sunday on the Nevada primary, a day after his overwhelming victory in South Carolina brought a tense rematch with Donald Trump another step closer. The 81-year-old Democrat was to speak at two campaign events in the gambling city of Las Vegas, where he is odds-on favorite in Tuesday's vote to continue his march towards the party's nomination.

Nevada is a battleground state which has largely voted for the White House winner in recent decades and which backed Biden in 2020 by a narrow margin — less than 35,000 votes separated him from then-president Trump. In South Carolina, Biden

scored 96.2 percent in his expected win in the country's first official primary, where Democrats were watching whether he could woo black voters who helped propel him to the White House in 2020.

His campaign said that in Las Vegas Biden would "speak directly to voters about the stakes of this election", which he has framed as a battle for US democracy against twice-impeached Republican frontrunner Trump. Biden returned to the theme in his victory statement after South Carolina, where his rivals, self-help author Marianne Williamson and congressman Dean Phillips, scored two percent or less.

Addressing the southern US state's voters, he said: "I have no doubt that you have set us on the path to winning the Presidency again — and making Donald Trump a loser — again. The stakes in this election could not be higher. There are extreme and dangerous voices at work in the country — led by Donald Trump — who are determined to divide our nation and take us backward. We cannot let that happen."



Joe Biden

The US presidential election in November promises to be tight, with polls showing Biden largely even or slightly trailing Trump, and suffering from the lowest approval ratings of any president for decades. A poll by US broadcaster NBC published

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## Local

# Expats struggling to make ends meet as expenses rise

## Rent taking up the largest portion of income

By Ghadeer Ghloom & Passant Hisham

**KUWAIT:** When it comes to take-home salaries, there's a clear income disparity between expatriates and citizens in Kuwait. But, with high unemployment and inflation rates affecting some countries, many expats consider Kuwait as a haven to enjoy a better quality of life. "I am grateful that at least in Kuwait, I have a job and a stable source of income, even if it's barely fulfilling my family's needs. Yet, I only hope that there would be more support from the government or employers to reduce our suffering from the heavy burden of expenses," Sanaa, a 33-year-old expat, told Kuwait Times.

A recently published report revealed the average monthly wage of citizens employed in the government sector reached KD 1,555 by the end of June 2023, while for citizens working in the private sector, it reached KD 1,297. On the other hand, the average monthly wage for expatriates reached around KD 343. Considering the high cost of living and the global increase in prices, coupled with the expensive lifestyle in Kuwait, incomes of both citizens and expats have been affected, with the latter being the most impacted group.

Sanaa, a working mother living with her working spouse and two children, spoke of their struggles coping with their salaries amid the expenses they are required to pay regularly each month.

Sanaa highlighted rent takes up the largest portion of their income, almost 50 percent of it, while household expenses, mostly on food, eat up the rest. "Even with me and my husband's salaries combined, we barely cover our costs until the end of the month," she stressed.

She complained about the very slow rate of salary raises for expats — her husband has been working for more than 10 years in Kuwait, yet his monthly wage hasn't reached KD 600. Since expats don't have the right to free schooling or obtain a driving license except under specific conditions, expenses on private education and transportation make things even more challenging for them, according to Sanaa.

"The total expenditure on all of these needs is making it very difficult for us to save even a penny," she said. Riding to work by bus every day, having their children go to school on foot and taking bank loans are some decisions that Sanaa and her family took to better manage their finances and cope with their situation.

The problem of fulfilling basic necessities is common among expats. Another expat single mother, who preferred not to reveal her name, echoed the same concerns to Kuwait Times: "I mainly suffer from expenses that are essential, such as rent, health insurance in both public and private sector, children's education, residency

fees, transportation and other necessary matters," she said. She emphasized on transportation costs, as due to not having a driving license, she resorts to taxis for being safer. However, they can be expensive compared to her monthly salary.

"Not to mention the other things that people need to enjoy from time to time, which also require money, such as visiting malls, coffeshops and so on. The problem increases during the summer, because even if we decide to save up rather than travel to our home country, malls and other activities can still affect our budget," she rued.

Abdulaziz Al-Osaimi, professor of economics and public policy, explained the factors behind the disparity of salaries between expatriates and citizens. He pointed out that hiring foreign workers is a big advantage that many countries use, as they are known for their lower labor costs. Therefore, providing lower salaries to expatriates has become a global phenomenon and not just in Kuwait, as most companies around the world look to hire cheap labor to optimize costs. "In this case, if equal ranges of salaries were paid to both citizens and expats, then it would make no sense to hire expats anymore," he said.

Another factor, Osaimi said, is that salaries in Kuwait are not just decided based on the kind of jobs performed or the amount of work by employees — it's based on the political sys-

tem of wealth distribution. Wealthy countries, Osaimi explained, show their commitment to social spending and individual support through equal wealth distribution among citizens, which sometimes takes different forms such as issuing direct payments to individuals.

"It's the same as when the US provided direct cash to its citizens during COVID-19 pandemic to help them through the crisis," he said. Since politicians are the ones who distribute wealth through imposed salary ranges, it is no doubt that they are only concerned with the welfare of citizens and not expats, he highlighted.

However, Osaimi voiced his personal opinion that he's totally against companies' internal policies that offer lower salaries to expats based on racial discrimination. He supports calls for providing extra benefits to them to bridge the wage gap, such as easier access to health insurance, driving licenses and accommodation.



Abdulaziz Al-Osaimi

## FM, US ambassador discuss bilateral ties



**KUWAIT:** Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya met Sunday with US Ambassador to Kuwait, Karen Sasahara. They touched on bilateral ties between the two friendly countries. The latest regional and global developments were also discussed during the talks. — KUNA

## Speaker Al-Saadoun receives ministers

**KUWAIT:** National Assembly Speaker Ahmad Al-Saadoun received in his office on Sunday Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet

Affairs Sharida Al-Maousherji. The meeting also included Minister of Social Affairs, Family and Childhood Affairs Sheikh Feras Al-Sabah and Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs, Minister of State for Youth Affairs and Minister of State for Communications, Dawood Maarafi. — KUNA

## British Council and academicians discuss artificial intelligence

By Khaled Al-Abdulhadi

**KUWAIT:** The British Council recently organized a discussion on the topic of artificial intelligence in education, inviting representatives from the education sector in Kuwait. The event showcased the potential benefits of AI in education, emphasizing collaborative decision-making, ethical considerations and the need for practical training for educators. The discussion was presented by UCL Artificial Intelligence and was led by Dr Manolis Mavrikis, who is a professor of artificial intelligence in education at University College London Knowledge Lab. During the discussion, Dr Mavrikis spoke about how AI can be used to shape the pedagogy in teaching and learning. He also explained how students can use Generative AI and discussed the different types of generative AI available, as well as the most beneficial ways to use them. However, he emphasized that the decision to use AI in teaching should be made by individual courses in cooperation with the students.

Dr Mavrikis explained Generative AI, including tools like ChatGPT and InDesign for image generation, while also stressing the importance of raising awareness about potential security issues. One of the aims of the discussion was to raise awareness among students about the unintended consequences of using AI, such as security risks. "We are trying to leverage previous content and data to be able to make decisions in teaching and learning, using approaches that aren't just about Generative AI but also other types of AI," he said.

Acting General Supervisor of ELT at the Education Ministry Huda Al-Ammar expressed her enthusiasm about the potential impact of AI on learners, saying that it will add more excitement and interest to the learning process. She also highlighted how AI can reduce the burden on educators and help them better follow up on student performances throughout the course.

Bernie Babkirk, Administrative Director at Kuwait National English School, noted that



**KUWAIT:** Academicians attend a discussion session on artificial intelligence. The British Council recently organized a discussion on the topic of artificial intelligence in education. The event showcased the potential benefits of AI in education.

the discussion was valuable for its different perspectives. He emphasized the importance of developing AI and its pedagogy, as well as access to its data. He also stressed the need for more training for teachers to better understand how to implement AI in education. "We are here because there is a lack of training. Kids already have the ability to use AI but we as teachers need more training to know more about how to implement it," he said adding the next event will include more of what local educators need.

Dr Iyad Abu Doush, Director of the Office of Research and Grants Professor in the Computer Science College at the American University of Kuwait (AUK), praised Dr Mavrikis' presentation, saying that it provided many ideas that can benefit students. He also stressed the importance of using AI in real-life contexts and teaching students complex concepts, while ensuring that they use these tools in an ethical way. "In today's event, Professor Manolis has presented many ideas that we can benefit from, showing that there are different aspects related to AI and education," he said.



Dr Manolis Mavrikis



**Ambassador Bader Al-Awadhi visits a student's booth at the Al-Mubarakiya Market event.**



**Kuwaiti students display traditional items and dishes to promote Arabic culture.**



**A painting of Arabic calligraphy created by a Kuwaiti student.**

## Model of Al-Mubarakiya Market established in UK

**MANCHESTER:** The Kuwaiti ambassador to the UK, Bader Al-Awadhi, said that the embassy would support Kuwait youth's and students' efforts in highlighting their country's culture and traditions abroad. This came in the opening speech at the Al-Mubarakiya Market event on Saturday, which was held in Manchester under the auspices of the Kuwaiti embassy in the United Kingdom and with the participation of Kuwaiti students. The event coincided with the celebration of Kuwait's national day and the 125th anniversary of the Kuwaiti-British partnership.

He praised the idea of establishing a model of Al-Mubarakiya Market in Britain in reflection of the market's 127 years of history. The ambassador stressed

that the Kuwaiti leadership, led by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, is keen to support Kuwaiti youth studying abroad, especially those majoring in technology and artificial intelligence, which would contribute to Kuwait's prosperity and progress.

He thanked the organizer of the youth event and its president, Abdulqader Al-Abduljader, for their efforts in a short time period and also expressed gratitude to the sponsors and the volunteering students for their contributions. The participating students displayed, during the event, traditional items and dishes in an effort to promote Kuwaiti and Arab cultures to the attendees.

The market included a model of the old Kuwaiti house, showing how traditional Kuwaiti families of old lived, which caught the attention of visitors. There was also a corner dedicated to Palestine to emphasize the importance of continuing to support the Palestinian cause. In a



**Kuwaiti students display traditional clothing items. — KUNA photos**

statement to KUNA, a number of Kuwaiti students expressed their delight in this event because it "transports them to Kuwait." They expressed their gratitude to the

Ministry of Education in Kuwait for their support and to the officials for facilitating the housing procedures for the students. — KUNA



# Zain invites its customers to update Civil ID on database

## Never visit unidentified links, always double check URLs to avoid scams

KUWAIT: Zain invites customers to update their Civil ID and personal information on its database as soon as possible to continue enjoying uninterrupted services, following directives and regulations from the Communication and Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA). This step helps protect customer privacy, limit fraud attempts, and ensure the validity of customer data in Zain's database, enabling the company to offer them the best services.

To avoid service interruption, customers should complete this process by 03 March 2024. Customers

can easily update their information via Zain's digital channels, including the official website (kw.zain.com) and the Zain KW app available from official app stores. In addition, customers can complete this process by visiting any of Zain's nationwide branches or by calling the contact center at 107.

Zain asks customers to be vigilant and not click any unidentified links or visit any unknown URLs that claim to be official sites. Customers should also be careful not to engage in suspicious phone calls, nor engage with any unsecure external links. Zain will never

ask customers to submit any information or documents through any channels other than the official ones mentioned above.

To update via the Zain KW app or website (kw.zain.com), customers can simply tap on their profile page, choose "update Civil ID", then enter the Civil ID number in the designated area. Afterwards, the customer will be prompted to continue the authentication process via the Kuwait Mobile ID app. After authenticating, the update process will be successfully completed. Customers can also visit any of Zain's nationwide branches

or call 107 to complete the update process with the help of the customer care team.

Zain ensures the compliance of its systems with all regulatory requirements and standards to protect customer data. The company continues to introduce strict security procedures and implement core-level changes to its systems to assure the highest levels of security when customers complete transactions or payments on its channels, including the official website, smartphone app, and the biggest network of branches in Kuwait.



## World Bank ready to offer expertise on Kuwait Vision

KUWAIT: The World Bank is ready to offer its expertise to support Kuwait's Vision 2035, Ziad Nakat, the World Bank Resident Representative in Kuwait, said on Sunday. In an interview with KUNA, Nakat affirmed that, as a World Bank representative, he would be focusing on bolstering ties with Kuwait by providing proposals to boost development in Kuwait in the public and private sectors.

He indicated that such development must go through investing in human capital, bolstering governance, developing public administration, improving services, and reinforcing sustainable de-



World Bank Resident Representative in Kuwait Ziad Nakat

velopment of infrastructure. Nakat affirmed that the World Bank would seek a strong partnership with Kuwait to transform the country into an in-

ternational hub for commerce and financing in line with Vision 2035.

The World Bank's vast global experience throughout the decades enabled it to offer sound advice and consultancy tailored to each country's needs, Nakat pointed out, adding that any entity in Kuwait could seek knowledge collaboration with the World Bank in line with agreements signed between the bank and Kuwait. Due to Kuwait being a member of the bank since 1961, the World Bank is eager to boost cooperation between the two sides on all possible levels, Nakat affirmed.

The Washington, DC-based World Bank was founded in 1944, and it has some 189 members. The bank provides development consultancy services through its international experts as well as solutions, crisis management, and response to regional and international challenges. It also offers loans to countries to battle poverty and achieve development. — KUNA

## Kuwait urges single IMCTC approach in tackling extremism

KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and Acting Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Al-Sabah said that Kuwait believes in the importance of collective action towards forming a single approach to empowering the armed forces to counter all forms of extremism and terrorism. He urged upgrading the operating system and capabilities of the armed forces of the members of the Islamic Military Counter-Terrorism Coalition (IMCTC) to make them better able to face any security challenges in the future.

Sheikh Fahad was addressing the second meeting of the IMCTC's Council of Defense Ministers being held in Riyadh under the chairmanship of Saudi Minister of Defense Prince Khaled bin Salman, according to a statement from the Kuwaiti Ministry of Defense. He called on IMCTC's member countries to capitalize on the fraternity and joint destiny among them in promoting military coordination with a view to ensuring their territorial unity and safety.

"The exceptional conditions on regional and international scales require ensuring the maximum degree of preparedness for any emergency through modernization of the military cooperation system of the Islamic Coalition," Sheikh



Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Acting Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Al-Sabah arrives for the meeting. — KUNA

Fahad stressed. He expressed confidence that the armed forces of the IMCTC are able to discharge their duties and tasks based on their huge resources and capabilities. On behalf of Kuwait, Sheikh Fahad appreciated the great efforts being made by the coalition partners to promote cooperation and coordination among their forces.

He thanked the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, under

the leadership of King Salman bin Abdulaziz and Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman, for their efforts to protect international peace and security and support the main causes of the Arab and Muslim nations. Sheikh Fahad also thanked Prince Khaled bin Salman for hosting the IMCTC second meeting and for the warm reception and hospitality given to the Kuwaiti delegation at the meeting. — KUNA



KUWAIT: People walk along a boardwalk that stretches into the sea as the sun sets over the Kuwait capital. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## Cold continues as third season of winter enters

KUWAIT: Al-Ojairi Scientific Center said on Sunday that starting on February 10, the last season of winter—usually extremely cold—would commence for a period of 26 days. In a statement to KUNA, the Center said that this season would be a transitional period between winter and spring, characterized by being cold starting February 10 in open areas. At the end of the season, the temperature would range between cold and relatively warm, according to the center. Al-Ojairi Scientific Center pointed out that the upcoming season would be synchronized with a rare phenomenon that occurs when a full moon is at perigee, its closest distance in its orbit to Earth, making it appear larger than usual. — KUNA

## Silent struggle: Language barrier between non-Arab expatriates and Arab speakers

By Passant Hisham

KUWAIT: Even with Arabic being the most common spoken language in Kuwait, it remains a great hindrance for non-Arab expats, who can barely understand it. While the struggle might arise in daily communication including work or social interactions, it almost becomes inevitable in critical situations such as accessing essential services of healthcare or legal procedures. Fatima Shamoan, an Indian Muslim expat who has taught spoken Arabic for almost 25 years to over hundreds of students, addressed the communication challenges that she has witnessed non-native Arab speakers encounter while living in Kuwait.

"Many of my relatives and friends have asked me: 'Can you please come with me to my doctor's appointment today, since the doctor speaks very poor English and all the nurses there are Arabs,'" Shamoan recounted, as she recalled witnessing another situation of a person asking an Asian worker at a government institution: "Can you please take my documents and finish this legal procedure for me? I don't know how to speak to anyone there."

She noted that even though these people might have been living in the country for years, they still lack the proper understanding of the language, which might get them in trouble like being defrauded or cheated, as she has seen people signing official contracts without even understanding the Arabic words written in them.

Shamoan pointed out there are many reasons for a lack of Arabic understanding among expats, starting with an absolute scarcity of sufficient learning resources. She echoed her students' struggles, saying the problem begins very early, since they start studying Ar-



Fatima Shamoan

abic in school. It continues at university and also exists at educational institutes providing Arabic courses that they decide to join.

All these institutes, she said, teach classical Arabic that is only used in Google translate, in books or newspapers, which works for people who want to professionally master reading or writing the language, but it never works in daily communication. Classical Arabic is very complicated and doesn't align with the Arabic dialects spoken in Kuwait, mostly include Levantine, Gulf and Egyptian, she said. "So, even after spending years of learning Arabic as part of their curriculum, non-Arab expats end up not being able to speak it, as everywhere they go to learn it, they feel lost even more," Shamoan said.

Another leading factor behind the issue, she emphasized, is that communities are now more isolated than ever, unlike in the past when people used to smoothly integrate and communicate with different nationalities and cultures. "Everyone's doors are now shut," she rued.



Shamoan referred to places such as Salmiya, which is mostly populated by Indians, and how all its residents prefer to enroll in Indian schools, visit Indian supermarkets and frequent Indian restaurants to avoid interactions with Arabs, out of fear of not being able to properly communicate with them. "It has become very easy to find your own people around you, which makes people stick to their comfort zone," she said. Even when they incidentally interact with Arabs, they often respond in English, or speak to them in broken sentences that fail to accurately reflect the actual Arabic language.

What made the situation even worse was the death of cable TV that used to only feature Kuwaiti shows. With platforms such as Netflix and YouTube taking over, it became easier for everyone to be selective in the language of shows that suit their understanding, Shamoan said.

Living her entire childhood around Arabs in Kuwait, in addition to spending most of her free time avidly reading every Arabic newspaper or book that came along her way, Shamoan

strongly mastered the Arabic language, which she aims to pass now to every non-Arab expat here. She has created a full syllabus, including the vocabulary and basic grammar rules that people need to initially learn to confidently use the language in all aspects of their lives.

"I really love this country and I want more people to enjoy their life here. So, I want them to be able to comfortably communicate without hesitation," she told Kuwait Times. She highlighted some basic tips and tricks that she always gives to her students. She advised people to always pay attention to Arabic signs in the streets, always tune to Arabic radio or watch Arabic TV shows, even if they will just have them playing in the background.

"There's Arabic all around us; sometimes we just need a guide to tell us how to pick it," Shamoan said. To develop self-confidence, she advised people to look in the mirror while practicing the language. "Always think in your own language, but speak your thoughts out loud in Arabic, and imagine yourself speaking to an Arab person," she explained.

## GCC targets strategic plan for food security

RIYADH: Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Jassem Al-Budaiwi, affirmed on Sunday the importance of including all sectors in the Gulf community to establish a futuristic plan for food security for the GCC countries.

In a press release, Al-Budaiwi said that this came during an exceptional meeting via video call with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Committee on Agricultural Cooperation and Food Security, headed by the Qatari minister of the municipality Abdullah Al-Attaiyah and GCC ministers.

The meeting discussed future strategies for food security and called for forming a special team from the GCC countries to draft a resolution for this strategy, the statement added. Al-Budaiwi reiterated that food security holds significant importance to the GCC countries' heads of state, who are following this matter with great concern. — KUNA



Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Jassem Al-Budaiwi



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## Gold prices stabilize at \$2,039 per ounce

KUWAIT: Gold prices stabilized at \$2,039 per ounce in last week's trading, following the rise of the US dollar and Treasury bond yields, Dar Al-Sabaek said on Sunday. The Kuwaiti company said gold prices were low in the last few weeks, amid the increase in US employment markets, as 353,000 jobs were added in January, compared to more than 333,000 jobs in December 2023.

The US employment markets reached 180,000 jobs, bringing the unemployment rate to stabilize at 3.7 percent compared with the past percentage of 3.8 percent, confirming that an increase in the employment rate means an increase in the US economy rate; therefore, there will be a decrease in safe-haven assets, the report added. World Gold Council data showed that gold was demanded in 2023, which reached 4,899 tons by central banks and the world's markets.

It showed that the key factor behind the gold demands is the US interest rate cut, despite its constant increase in the last two and a half years, due to the geopolitical tensions in the ongoing Ukraine war, the Zionist occupations in the Gaza Strip, and the events in the Red Sea and Strait of Bab Al-Mandab. On the local markets, the report stated the price of a gram of 24K reached KD 20.46 (around \$61.40), whereas 20K reached KD 18.66 (around \$56.9), and silver closed at KD 269 (around \$820) per kilogram.

### The US dollar rises

Meanwhile, the exchange rate of the US dollar on Sunday rose to KD 0.307, while the euro dropped to KD 0.331, compared to Thursday's prices, said the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK). The CBK added in its daily bulletin that the Pound Sterling dropped to KD 0.388, the Swiss Franc to KD 0.355, and the Japanese Yen to KD 0.002. — KUNA

### Photo of the day



KUWAIT: This aerial photo shows the skyscraper skyline in the centre of Kuwait City. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

# Emergency medicine playing a key role in effective response



KUWAIT: Emergency departments at hospitals are considered the backbone of an effective response to urgent cases, a Kuwaiti official said. Speaking at the 2nd Kuwait Emergency Medicine Conference, Dr. Hisham Kelendar, Undersecretary for External



Health Services Affairs at the Ministry of Health (MoH), said the ministry's policy is based on improving and developing medical services in varied fields. The ministry also works on enhancing and developing this vital system and upgrading the skills of doctors in a way that contributes to providing excellent healthcare, he added.

The last ten years witnessed an increased number of health facilities aligned with the government's action program and the state's development plan, he noted. Kelendar stressed the importance of creating an educational environment for medical cadres to ensure that they follow up on state-of-the-art medical techniques and practices in accordance with the latest global protocols.

Meanwhile, Dr Hanan Al-Razuqi, head of the conference, said the three-day event features 60 speakers and trainers from inside and outside Kuwait. She added that the conference constitutes an opportunity to share knowledge and develop



Dr Hanan Al-Razuqi



Dr Hisham Kelendar

"our skills" in emergency medicine. Al-Razuqi referred to the fact that the conference also contains some workshops, including "US Pocus and Rush," and about 30 varied research papers in emergency medicine. — KUNA



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## KEPS youth team on environmental awareness trips

KUWAIT: Eng Abdul Aziz Al-Muhanna, member of the Board of Directors of the Kuwait Environment Protection Society (KEPS), said the society's environmental spring program for field training include a series of field visits organized in cooperation with many parties to introduce the Friends of the Environment youth team to environmental issues and projects. Most recently, the society organized a field visit to the Abdaliya Reserve of the Kuwait Oil Company (KOC).

The visit comes as part of many scientific awareness trips, including field training and field workshops, which the society began with a trip to the Jahra Reserve. Muhanna stressed that the visit of the Friends of the Environment team to the Abdaliya Reserve enhances awareness of Kuwait's fungal life and educates the group about protecting and preserving the organisms.



Abdul Aziz Al-Muhanna

The team also participated in planting seedlings of the Arfaj plant, which is the national plant of Kuwait. The activity was accompanied by an introductory lecture on the importance of the plant and its medicinal uses. Muhanna praised the efforts of KOC and Abdaliya Reserve officials for helping the KEPS in raising awareness and educating its young team members.

He said the society has launched the Friends of the Environment team, which is made up of Kuwaiti youth of both genders aged 8-18 years old, "out of its social responsibility towards promoting voluntary environmental work and spreading the correct environmental knowledge among society groups, especially young people." "The association instills in them the value of environmental citizenship, as they are qualified and prepared to engage in voluntary environmental work," he said.





Chile wildfires kill at least 51 in 'unprecedented catastrophe'

## Senegal faces backlash over postponed election

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SANAA: Armed supporters of Yemen's Houthi rebels attend a rally in solidarity with Palestine on January 29, 2024. (Inset) A handout picture released by the British Ministry of Defence on February 3, 2024 shows a RAF Typhoon FGR4 aircraft preparing to take off to conduct further strikes against targets in Yemen. — AFP photos

# Houthis vow response to US, UK strikes

## Spokesperson says attacks won't deter Houthis from supporting Palestinians in Gaza

SANAA: Yemen's Houthis said Sunday US and British air strikes "will not deter us" and vowed a response after dozens of targets were hit in retaliation for the Iran-backed rebels' repeated Red Sea attacks. The joint air raids in Yemen late Saturday, denounced by Iran, followed a separate wave of unilateral American strikes against Iran-linked targets in Iraq and Syria in response to a drone attack that killed three US soldiers in Jordan.

It was the third time that British and American forces have jointly targeted the Houthis, whose attacks in solidarity with Palestinians in war-battered Gaza have disrupted global trade.

The United States has also carried out a series of air raids against the Yemeni rebels on its own, but their attacks on the vital Red Sea trade route have persisted. Saturday's strikes hit "36 Houthi targets across 13 locations", the United States, Britain and other countries that provided support for the operation said in a statement.

US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said the strikes "are intended to further disrupt and degrade the capabilities of the Iranian-backed Houthi militia to conduct their reckless and destabilizing attacks".

Neither Austin nor the joint statement identified the specific places that were hit, but Houthi military

spokesman Yahya Saree said the capital Sanaa and other rebel-held areas were targeted.

Saree reported a total of 48 air strikes and said on social media platform X that "these attacks will not deter us from our ... stance in support of the steadfast Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip," where the Zionist entity has been killing thousands of Palestinians since October 2023. The latest strikes "will not pass without response and punishment", Saree said.

### Dashed hopes

Britain's defense ministry said Royal Air Force Typhoon warplanes struck two ground control stations used to operate attack and reconnaissance drones. Austin said targets included "locations associated with the Houthis' deeply buried weapons storage facilities, missile systems and launchers, air defense systems, and radars". There were no immediate reports of casualties.

In rebel-held Sanaa, 35-year-old resident Hamed Ghanem said his family was "scared when we heard the strikes". "We had hope that the war would end, and now God knows how long" it might go on for, the father of five told AFP.

Analysts have said rising tensions could derail efforts to broker a ceasefire between the Houthis

and a Saudi-backed military coalition which mobilized to topple them in 2015. A UN-brokered truce in April 2022 brought a sharp reduction in hostilities, and while it had long expired, Yemen's war has since largely remained on hold. The Houthis began targeting Red Sea shipping in November, saying they were hitting Zionist-linked vessels in support of Palestinians in Gaza. US and UK forces responded with strikes against the Houthis, who have since declared American and British interests to be legitimate targets as well.

Separately, US Central Command (CENTCOM) said its forces carried out a strike against a Houthi anti-ship missile that "prepared to launch against ships in the Red Sea" early Sunday. CENTCOM had earlier launched strikes against six other Houthi anti-ship missiles, and on Friday the US military said its forces had shot down eight drones in and near Yemen.

### 'Unacceptable'

Anger over the Zionist entity's devastating campaign in Gaza has grown across the Middle East, stoking violence involving Iran-backed groups in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria and Yemen. On January 28, a drone slammed into a base in Jordan, killing three US

soldiers and wounding more than 40 — an attack Washington blamed on Tehran-aligned forces.

US and allied troops in the region have been attacked more than 165 times since mid-October, mostly in Iraq and Syria, but the Jordan deaths were the first from hostile fire during that period. The United States responded Friday with strikes against dozens of targets at seven Iran-linked facilities in Iraq and Syria but did not hit Iranian territory.

Diplomatic sources have said the UN Security Council would convene Monday, after Russia called for a meeting "over the threat to peace and safety created by US strikes on Syria and Iraq". Iran denounced the Saturday strikes on Yemen, saying they "contradict" declared intentions by Washington and London to avoid a "wider conflict" in the Middle East. Hamas called the US and British attacks "an escalation that will drag the region into further turmoil". British Foreign Secretary David Cameron said "Tehran is ultimately responsible for the violence, telling the Sunday Times "what they're doing through their proxies is unacceptable".

"You created them, you backed them, you financed them, you provided them with weapons, and you will ultimately be held accountable for what they do," Cameron said. — AFP

## Zionist entity forges buffer zone in Gaza at risk to civilians

GAZA: Zionist forces in Gaza have systematically destroyed buildings in an attempt to create a buffer zone inside the Palestinian territory, experts and rights groups told AFP, raising fears over the civilian cost. The plan, not publicly confirmed by the Zionist entity, appears to entail taking a significant chunk of territory out of the already tiny Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip, something experts as well as the Zionist entity's foreign allies have warned against.

Since Hamas fighters stormed across the Zionist border with the besieged Gaza strip on October 7, Zionist forces have targeted structures in the territory within a kilometer (0.6 miles) of the border, said Adi Ben Nun, a professor at Hebrew University of Jerusalem who has carried out an analysis of satellite imagery.

More than 30 percent of all buildings in that area have been damaged or destroyed during the war, he said. Last month, the Zionist army's deadliest day since the ground invasion began in late October offered a glimpse of the tactics being used to clear the border area. Zionist army chief Herzi Halevi said at the time that 21 reservists were killed "during a defensive operation in the area separating the Zionist communities from Gaza" to allow for residents' "safe return". The troops had laid out explosives to blow up buildings when they were fired upon by militants, the army said.

Displacement of Gazans including from the border area could breach the laws of war, experts said. "We are seeing mounting evidence that the Zionist entity appears to be rendering large parts of Gaza unlivable," said Nadia Hardman, a refugee rights expert at Human Rights Watch. "One very clear example of that may be the buffer zone — this may amount to a war crime." When contacted by AFP, the military declined to comment on the buffer zone.



GAZA: People walk past destroyed buildings in the Maghazi camp for Palestinian refugees, which was severely damaged by Zionist bombardment. — AFP

### 'No right'

Cecilie Hellestveit, of the Norwegian Academy of International Law, warned of "the prospect of ethnic cleansing, transfer, or lack of rebuilding, so that the Palestinians will eventually be forced out of the area entirely".

Scrutiny of the Zionist entity's actions in Gaza is likely to be heightened by last month's International Court of Justice ruling asking the entity to prevent any acts of genocide. The United States, the entity's top ally and provider of military aid, has repeatedly said Gaza's territory should not change and that a buffer zone would breach that principle.

"When it comes to the permanent status of Gaza ... we remain clear about not encroaching on its territory," said US Secretary of State Antony Blinken. Rights experts said the Zionist entity could use parts of its own territory to create a security zone.

"If the (Zionist) government wants a buffer zone,

it has every right to create one in (the) far larger (Zionist entity), but it has no right to seize land in Gaza," human rights expert Ken Roth, a professor at Princeton University, said on social media.

Border security has become a priority for many Zionists, experts said, and the return to communities near the Gaza border would be seen as a sign that Hamas no longer posed a threat. In Nahal Oz, a kibbutz barely a kilometer from Gaza that was targeted in the October 7 attack, artillery fire rang out and smoke billowed over the Palestinian territory in the distance.

Like many Zionists who lived along the border before the attack, nearly all of the kibbutz's 400 residents were evacuated and have yet to return. "It is still not a place to go back to with children, not yet unfortunately," Eran Braverman, a 63-year-old farmer, told AFP. "If there really would be such a (buffer) zone ... it could help a lot. I hope it happens." — AFP

## 'Not the end' of US strikes on Iraq, Syria: White House

WASHINGTON: The United States will press on with its retaliation against Iran-backed groups in Iraq and Syria, White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said Sunday, declining to say if he ruled out strikes against Iran itself.

The United States and Britain on Saturday struck dozens of targets in Yemen in response to repeated attacks on shipping in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden by Iran-backed Houthi rebels. Those strikes came the day after a separate wave of unilateral American strikes against Iran-linked targets in Iraq and Syria that were carried out in response to the killing of three US soldiers in Jordan on January 28.

"That is not the end of it. We intend to take additional strikes and additional action to continue to send a clear message that the United States will respond when our forces are attacked," Sullivan told NBC news Sunday morning.

He also told ABC that the strikes had had a "good effect" in "reducing" and "degrading" such groups' abilities to carry out further attacks. The United States has carried out a total of 85 strikes on seven separate sites in Iraq and Syria, including on command and training centers and on weapons stocks, according to the Pentagon.

Sullivan said Sunday he was unable to confirm whether the strikes had left any civilian casualties, but said the targets were "absolutely valid." Asked whether the United States would rule out the possibility of striking Iran directly, Sullivan told NBC, "Sitting here on television, it would not be wise for me to talk about what we're ruling in and ruling out." "If (Iran) chose to respond directly to the United States, they would be met with a swift and forceful response from us," he told ABC. — AFP



## International

# Senegal faces backlash over postponed election

**'This is not a delay ..., but a cancellation pure and simple': Opposition leader**

**DAKAR, Senegal:** Opposition parties prepared to demonstrate on Sunday after President Macky Sall announced the indefinite postponement of a presidential election set for February 25, sparking a wave of international concern.

Just a day before official campaigning was due to start, Sall plunged the nation into the unknown saying he intervened because of a dispute between the National Assembly and the Constitutional Court over the rejection of candidates. Lawmakers are investigating two Constitutional Council judges whose integrity in the election process has been questioned.

"I will begin an open national dialogue to bring together the conditions for a free, transparent and inclusive election," Sall said, without providing a new date. Under Senegal's election code, at least 80 days must pass between publication of the decree setting the date and the election, so the earliest a vote could now be held is late April.

Presidential candidates said they would launch their campaigns on Sunday in defiance of the official postponement. The RFM opposition party said it "systematically" rejects the postponement. "We will see all Senegalese people this Sunday for a march," said party spokesperson Cheikh Tidiane Youm.

Habib Sy, one of the 20 candidates, said opposition parties had met and agreed to launch their election campaigns together. Another opposition figure, former mayor of Dakar Khalifa Sall, called for pro-democratic forces to unite. "All of Senegal must stand up," he told journalists.

Sall, who is not related to the president, denounced "a constitutional coup" by a leader who "dreams of eternity". The United States, the European Union and former colonial master France led appeals for the vote to be rescheduled at the earliest date.

The EU called for a transparent, inclusive and

credible election as soon as possible, with spokesperson Nabila Massrali noting the delay "opens a period of uncertainty". In Paris, the foreign ministry said: "We call on authorities to end the uncertainty about the electoral calendar so the vote can be held as soon as possible, under the rules of Senegalese democracy."

The US State Department also urged Senegal to "swiftly" set a date for a "timely, free and fair election" in a post on X, formerly Twitter. The West African bloc ECOWAS expressed "concern" and called on social media platform X for dialogue and an expedited process to set a new date.

## 'High treason'

Senegal has traditionally been seen as a rare example of democratic stability in West Africa, which has been hit by a series of coups in recent years including in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. It was the first time a Senegalese presidential election has been postponed and added to the growing tension.

A November 2023 decree signed by Sall had set the election for February 25, with 20 candidates in the running but two major opposition figures excluded. Sall on Saturday reiterated that he would not be a candidate.

But one opposition leader, Thierno Alassane Sall, denounced what he called "high treason towards the Republic" in a post on X, and called on "patriots and republicans" to oppose it. El Malick Ndiaye, former spokesman of a disbanded opposition party once led by the now-jailed Ousmane Sonko, also denounced the decision. "This is not a delay of the election, but a cancellation pure and simple," he wrote on Facebook.

## Excluded candidates

President Sall had designated Prime Minister

women and one child among the dead. They did not give the child's age.

Russia released images of an almost completely destroyed building, with rescuers combing the rubble in the dark, where they found a corpse and a wounded woman who was evacuated on a stretcher. The one-storey building had a large sign on it that read "Restaurant Adriatic".

Russia alleged Saturday that Ukraine had used Western weapons in the strike and said it expected swift and "unconditional condemnation" from the international community. On Saturday, the Ukrainian army's daily report said aviation "struck 12 areas where enemy personnel were concentrated". It also said its forces "struck one area of enemy concentration".

Rescuers have so far saved 10 people from the wreckage, according to the Russian emergency ministry. The Russian-installed health minister of the occupational Lugansk government, Natalia Pashchenko, said they were brought to medical facilities in the main city of Lugansk.

She said four of them are in "the most critical state" while two others are in a "severe state". The city of Lugansk has been under pro-Russian separatist control since 2014. The Moscow-installed head of Lugansk, Leonid Pasechnik, declared a day of mourning in the Russian-held region and vowed retaliation against Ukraine. — AFP

crime". "We are seeing mounting evidence that (the Zionist entity) appears to be rendering large parts of Gaza unlivable," she said.

France's Sejourne told his Egyptian counterpart Sameh Shoukry that he understood Cairo's concerns over "forced displacement" of Palestinians to Egypt from the Gaza Strip. "We condemn and will reject any action taken in this direction," he said.

The war has also sent regional tensions soaring, with a surge in attacks by Iran-backed groups in solidarity with Gaza triggering counterattacks by key Zionist ally the United States. The United States and its partner Britain said they struck dozens of targets in Yemen late Saturday in response to repeated attacks on shipping by Iran-backed Houthi rebels.

A Houthi spokesman said the latest wave of air strikes "will not pass without response and punishment". Iran said the attacks "contradicted" US and UK statements on preventing regional escalation, and Hamas warned the strikes would bring "further turmoil" to the Middle East. — AFP

brain activity associated with her OCD. They could then configure her implant so that it would react to that specific signal. The dual-program device now watches for brain activity associated both with epilepsy and with OCD. It is "the only device in the world that treats two conditions," says Raslan. "And it's programmed independently. So the program for epilepsy is different than the program for OCD."

It's a breakthrough he thinks only someone like Pearson could have come up with. "This is the first time in the world that's been done. Usually we think of devices either for OCD or for epilepsy. This idea sits outside of the box and would only come from a patient," he says. Raslan said a study is now underway at the University of Pennsylvania to see how this technique can be more widely applied, offering possible hope to some of the 2.5 million people in the United States who suffer from OCD.

For Pearson, there was an eight-month wait after the 2019 procedure to see any noticeable difference. But gradually, the all-consuming rituals that had taken up eight or nine hours every day since her teenage years began to ebb. The endless pre-bed checklists of window-shutting, and the constant handwashing diminished to a manageable 30 minutes a day. And the fear of contamination from eating with others is now gone. "I'm happy again and excited to go out and live and be with my friends and my family," she said. "That was something I was cut off from for years." — AFP



DAKAR, Senegal: Senegalese President Macky Sall (center) speaks during an event in this file photo. — AFP

Amadou Ba from his party as his would-be successor after announcing he would not run for a third term. But with his party split over his candidacy, Ba faced possible defeat in the ballot box.

Anti-establishment candidate Bassirou Diomaye Faye has emerged as a potential winner, despite being behind bars. His candidacy was approved by authorities, making him the first imprisoned candidate to contest a Senegalese election.

The Constitutional Council has excluded dozens of candidates from the vote, including Sonko, who has been jailed since July 2023, and Karim Wade, son of former president Abdoulaye Wade. Wade's supporters in the National Assembly called for a parliamentary inquiry into the partiality of two judges on the Constitutional Court. That motion was passed by the Assembly on January 31, with some members of Sall's party supporting it. — AFP

## Ukrainian strike kills 28 in Russia occupied city

**MOSCOW:** Russia said Sunday the death toll from a Ukrainian strike on a bakery in the occupied eastern city of Lysychansk climbed to 28 people, including a child. Moscow's occupation forces Saturday said Kyiv struck a building that housed a bakery popular with locals on weekends. Ukraine has not yet commented on the strike.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Sunday visited his embattled country's troops on the southern front, as Moscow's dragging offensive drags on for almost two years. Lysychansk is a city in the occupied Lugansk region that fell to Russian forces after one of the most brutal battles during Moscow's long offensive in summer 2022. Before the Russian army entered Ukraine, it had a population of around 110,000 people.

"Search operations continue on the site of the collapsed bakery ... 28 people, including a child, have died," the Russian emergency situations ministry posted on Telegram. Occupational authorities in Lugansk said there were 18 men, nine

## Parisians vote in anti-SUV parking, pollution referendum

**PARIS:** Parisians were voting on Sunday in a referendum on tripling parking costs for hefty SUV-style cars, a campaign that has drivers' groups up in arms against city hall. Some 1.3 million in the French capital are eligible to cast their ballot on the change, which would see cars weighing 1.6 tons or more charged 18 euros (\$19.50) per hour for parking in central areas, or 12 euros further out.

Fully electric cars would have to top two tons to be affected, while people living or working in Paris, taxi drivers, tradespeople, health workers and people with disabilities would all be exempt. "The bigger they are, the more they pollute," Paris's Socialist mayor Anne Hidalgo said in December to justify the step.

Most people at one polling station in the city's 10th district said they were voting in favor of the higher fees. Caroline, a 51-year-old teacher who asked not to give her family name, said she backed the move "for obvious environmental reasons", adding that "to be honest, no-one really needs an SUV in Paris".

On Hidalgo's watch, the city has pedestrian-

ized many streets, including the banks of the river Seine, and built a network of cycle lanes in an effort to discourage driving and reduce harmful transport emissions. Environmental group WWF has dubbed SUVs an "aberration", saying they burn 15 percent more fuel than a classic coupe and cost more to build and purchase. City hall has further pointed to safety concerns about taller, heavier SUVs, which it says are "twice as deadly for pedestrians as a standard car" in an accident. The vehicles are also singled out for taking up more public space — whether on the road or while parked — than others.

Paris authorities say the average car has put on 250 kilograms (550 pounds) since 1990. Hidalgo, whose city will this summer host the 2024 Olympics, rarely misses a chance to boast of the environmental credentials of the town hall and its drive to drastically reduce car use in the center.

But drivers' groups have attacked the scheme, with Yves Carra of Mobilite Club France saying the "SUV" classification is "a marketing term" that "means nothing". He argued that compact SUVs would not be covered by the measures, which would however hit family-sized coupes and estate cars. Conservative opposition figures on the Paris council say this imprecise targeting of the referendum "shows the extent of the manipulation by the city government". — AFP

## Talk of truce amid Gaza...

Continued from Page 1

as well as the eventual creation of a Palestinian state. The Zionist entity's massive military offensive has killed at least 27,365 people in Gaza, mostly women and children. Gazans have faced dire humanitarian conditions, and the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, said on social media platform X that "there is very limited access to clean water and sanitation amid relentless bombardment".

Experts and rights groups told AFP that Zionist forces have destroyed buildings near the border in an attempt to create a buffer zone inside the Palestinian territory. The Zionist entity has not publicly confirmed the plan, which Nadia Hardman, an expert on refugees at Human Rights Watch, said "may amount to a war

## Brain implant treats epilepsy...

Continued from Page 1

movement, including epilepsy. Pearson's doctors offered her the 32-mm device to treat her debilitating epileptic seizures, confident it would be able to detect the activity that causes the episodes and deliver a pulse to interfere with them.

It was then that Pearson herself had something of a lightbulb moment. "It was her idea to say: 'Well, you're going into my brain and putting this wire, and I have OCD, so can you just put a wire for OCD?'," recalls neurosurgeon Dr Ahmed Raslan, who carried out the procedure at Oregon Health and Science University in Portland on the US West Coast. "And you know, luckily, we took that suggestion seriously."

There had previously been some study of the use of deep brain stimulation for people suffering from OCD, but, says Raslan, it had never been combined with treatment for epilepsy. Doctors worked with Pearson to see exactly what happens in her brain when she gets trapped in an obsessive loop. The technique involved exposing her to known stressors — in this case, seafood — and recording the electrical markers.

In this way, they could effectively isolate the

## Veteran Namibia President Hage...

Continued from Page 1

"our beloved Dr Hage G Geingob, the President of the Republic of Namibia, has passed on today". "At his side, was his dear wife Madame Monica Geingos and his children." This triggered an outpouring of tributes from around the continent, including from leaders who worked alongside him in the struggle to free southern Africa from apartheid rule.

President Cyril Ramaphosa of South Africa said: "Today, South Africa joins the people of our sister state Namibia in mourning the passing of a leader, patriot and friend. President Geingob was a towering veteran of Namibia's liberation from colonialism and apartheid. He was also greatly influential in the solidarity that the people of Namibia extended to the people of South Africa so that we could be free today."

President William Ruto of Kenya, and several other African leaders, echoed this praise. "He was a believer of a unified Africa and strongly promoted the continent's voice and visibility at the global arena," Ruto said. World Health Organization director Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus hailed Geingob's work to improve healthcare for Namibians, dubbing him a "visionary leader". And Moussa Faki Mahamat, chair of the African Union Commission, lamented: "A baobab has fallen." Beyond Africa, Russian President Vladimir Putin said he would "forever fondly remember this wonderful man".

First elected president in 2014, Geingob was Namibia's longest-serving prime minister and third president. In 2013, Geingob underwent brain surgery, and last year he had an aortic operation in neighboring South Africa.

## Biden sweeps S Carolina, labels...

Continued from Page 1

Sunday showed Trump leading Biden by 47 percent to 42 percent, within the poll's margin of error but a shift from a Biden lead in mid-2023.

Trump held a 30-point lead on immigration, as Republicans and Democrats battle over a bill tying aid for Ukraine with measures to curb the crisis at the Mexican border, and a 20-point lead on the economy. Fewer than three in 10 people approved of Biden's handling of the Zionist-Hamas war, which

ca. He had been receiving treatment at Lady Pohamba Hospital in Windhoek. Last month, Geingob threw his weight behind South Africa's challenge against the Zionist entity's military campaign in Gaza, under the Genocide Convention in the UN's top court.

In particular, he singled out for criticism Germany, Namibia's former colonial ruler and an outspoken critic of South Africa's case alleging the Zionist entity has breached the convention. Lamenting "Germany's inability to draw lessons from its horrific history", the Namibian leader accused Berlin of defending "genocidal and gruesome acts".

Germany massacred more than 70,000 Indigenous Herero and Nama people in Namibia between 1904 and 1908, in what many historians consider the first genocide of the 20th century. In May 2021, after more than five years of negotiations, Germany recognized committing genocide in the territory it had colonized from 1884 to 1915.

Reacting to Geingob's death, Germany's Scholz did not refer to the Zionist controversy, but thanked the Namibian leader for his help in bringing Germany to terms with its own actions. "President Geingob was one of Namibia's founding fathers and rendered great services to the country's democratic development," he said. "Germany is losing a partner who was committed to the process of coming to terms with Germany's colonial history with great openness."

Born in a village in northern Namibia in 1941, Geingob was the southern African country's first president outside the Ovambo people, who make up more than half the population. In his early years he took up activism against South Africa's apartheid regime, which at the time ruled Namibia. In 1964 he was appointed representative for the SWAPO liberation movement at the United Nations. He spent almost three decades in Botswana and the United States, returning to Namibia in 1989 to lead SWAPO's election campaign in his now independent homeland. — AFP

has spiraled into a regional crisis with the United States launching air strikes on Iranian proxies in Iraq, Syria and Yemen.

Trump, 77, meanwhile has a lock on the Republican nomination in Nevada, despite not being on the ballot for the Republican state-mandated primary ballot this week. The rightwing populist, currently battling a string of criminal and civil legal cases, will pick up the state's delegates because Nevada's Republican Party has decided to ignore the primary and focus on its own caucus, in which he is the sole candidate. The political drama is more focused on the Republican primary in South Carolina on Feb 24 where Trump's last challenger, the state's former governor Nikki Haley, will fight to keep her campaign alive. — AFP



## International

# Chile wildfires kill at least 51 in 'unprecedented catastrophe'

## Thousands forced to evacuate as fires burn mountains, blocks of houses

VIÑA DEL MAR, Chile: Wildfires blazing across Chile have killed at least 51 people, leaving bodies in the street and homes gutted, with flames continuing to spread on Sunday and the toll expected to rise. President Gabriel Boric has decreed a state of emergency in the central and southern parts of the country "due to catastrophe," as dry conditions and temperatures soaring to 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit) exacerbated the crisis.

Dense gray smoke blanketed the city of Vina del Mar of the Valparaiso tourist region, along central Chile's coastline, forcing residents to flee. Rosana Avendano, a 63-year-old kitchen assistant, was away from home when the fire began to sweep through El Olivar, an area of Vina del Mar, where she lives with her husband. "It was terrible because I couldn't get (to my house). The fire came here ... we lost everything," Avendano told AFP.

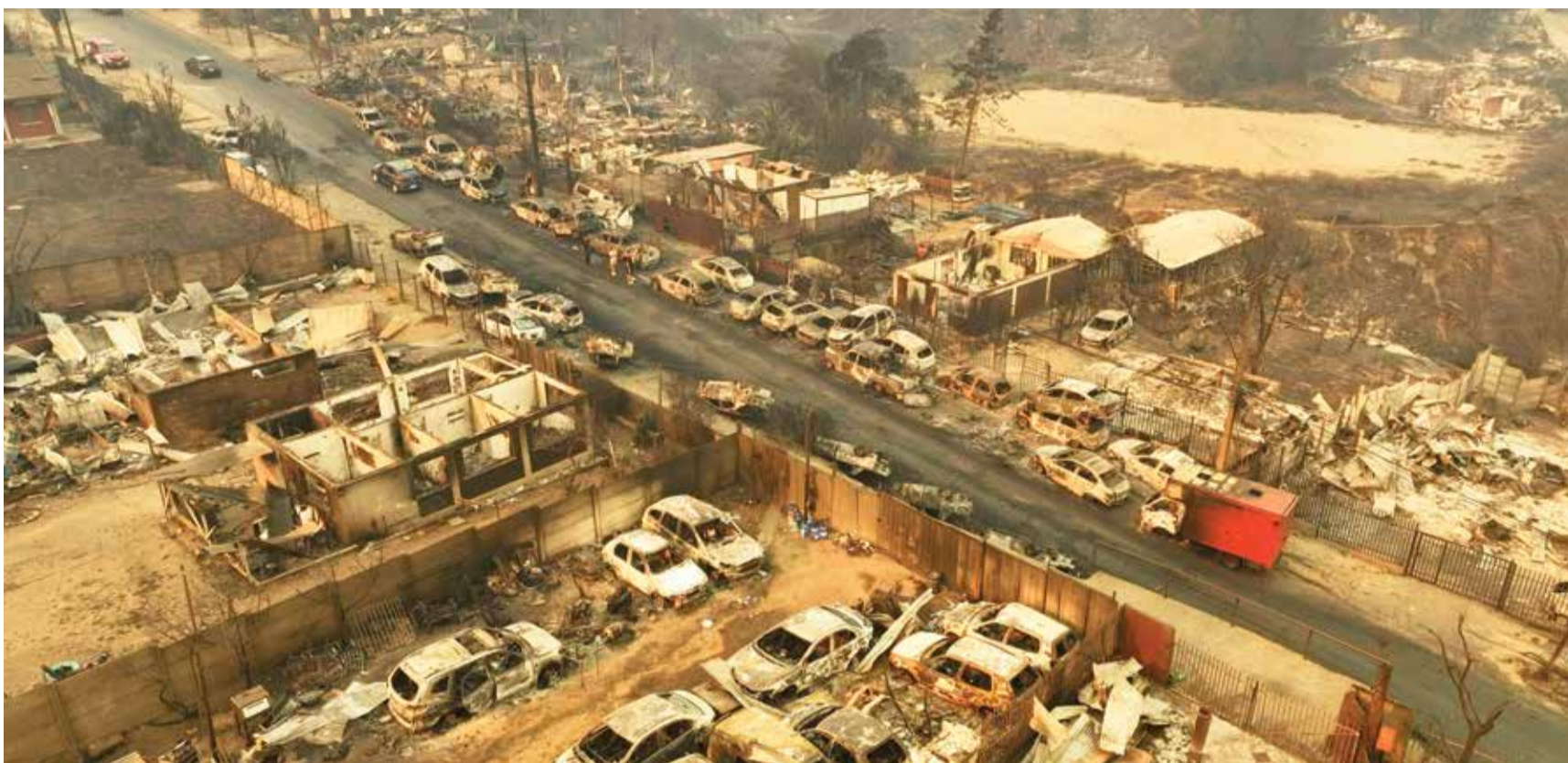
"My husband was lying down and began to feel the heat of the fire coming and he ran away." She feared the worst for hours, but eventually was able to contact her spouse. The death toll rose to 51 on Saturday as firefighters battled to control the flames. The forensic medical service had previously reported 45 deaths, but "there are six more people who died in health care facilities," according to interior under-secretary Manuel Monsalve. Boric said the number of victims would increase, pledging government support to help people get back on their feet.

Authorities imposed a curfew beginning at 9:00 pm Saturday (0000 GMT Sunday), to allow emergency supplies — especially fuel — into the affected areas. New evacuation orders were issued, though it remained unclear exactly how many people had been told to leave.

Earlier Saturday, Interior Minister Carolina Toha said there had been 92 fires as of noon, with 43,000 hectares (106,000 acres) burned across the country. Firefighters were still battling 29 of the blazes by the afternoon, while 40 had been brought under control.

In the hillsides around the coastal city of Vina del Mar, entire blocks of houses were burned out overnight, AFP reporters saw Saturday morning, as thousands of people who had previously evacuated returned to find their homes destroyed.

Some of the dead were seen lying on the road, covered by sheets. The area, about 1.5 hours northwest of the capital Santiago, is a popular tourist destination



VIÑA DEL MAR, Chile: Aerial view of burned vehicles in the El Olivar commune after a forest fire that affected the hills of Viña del Mar, Chile, taken on February 3, 2024. — AFP

during the summer months. The coastal region is also important for the country's wine, agricultural and logging industries.

In the towns of Estrella and Navidad, southwest of the capital, the fires burned nearly 30 homes, and forced evacuations near the surfing resort of Pichilemu. "It's very distressing, because we've evacuated the house but we can't move forward," said 63-year-old Yvonne Guzman, who fled her home in Quilpue with her elderly mother, only to be trapped in traffic for hours.

"There are all these people trying to get out and who can't move," she told AFP. Vina del Mar Mayor Macarena Ripamonti said, "We're facing an unprecedented catastrophe, a situation of this magnitude has never happened in the Valparaiso region."

### 'Extreme'

Several thousand hectares have burned in Valparaiso alone, according to CONAF, the Chilean national forest authority. Images from trapped motorists have gone viral online, showing mountains in flames at the end of the famous "Route 68," a road traveled by thousands of tourists to reach the Pacific coast.

In addition to Valparaiso, firefighters and emergency services personnel were battling blazes in the center and south of Chile, including O'Higgins, Maule, Biobio, La Araucania and Los Lagos. "This was an inferno," Rodrigo Pulgar, who lost his home in the inland town of El Olivar, told AFP. "I tried to help my neighbor ... my house was starting to burn behind us. It was raining ash."

On Friday, authorities closed the road linking Valparaiso to the capital Santiago, as a huge mushroom cloud of smoke "reduced visibility." The fires are being driven by a summer heatwave and drought affecting the southern part of South America caused by the El Nino weather phenomenon, as scientists warn that a warming planet has increased the risk of natural disasters such as intense heat and fires.

As Chile and Colombia battle rising temperatures, the heatwave is also threatening to sweep over Paraguay and Brazil. In Argentina, brigades from several provinces have been fighting a fire that has consumed more than 3,000 hectares in Los Alerces National Park, famed for its beauty and biodiversity, since January 25. — AFP



ISLAMABAD: A supporter of Aamir Mughal, member of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party and an independent election candidate for the national assembly, pastes his electoral symbol 'eggplant' on a glass door. — AFP photos

## Pakistan candidates reclaim eggplants, beds as symbols

ISLAMABAD: Aamir Mughal brandishes an eggplant before a gaggle of voters, rallying support behind the Pakistani staple during an election campaign he says is being undermined by bizarre symbols assigned to candidates. "The eggplant is now a famous symbol across all Pakistan," declares the candidate for the capital Islamabad, a follower of jailed ex-prime minister Imran Khan. "Now this has become the king of the vegetables." In Pakistan — where literacy rates hover at just 60 percent — political parties use icons to identify their candidates on the campaign trail and ballot papers. But as a military-backed crackdown puts the squeeze on opposition parties, some candidates say authorities are trying to hinder their campaigns by allotting them symbols that are either degrading or downright weird.



Aamir Mughal holds his electoral symbol 'eggplant'.

Khan has been barred from standing in Thursday's poll and his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party have been stripped of their long-time cricket bat emblem over failing to meet election commission rules. Dozens of his followers are also not allowed to stand, and some of those on the ticket — now running as independents — have reported harassment or been forced into hiding. Others have been assigned a random bric-a-brac of symbols and are scrambling to make an impression on the campaign trail. A spokesman for the Election Commission of Pakistan said the symbols are chosen from a list designed for independents and "are purely the prerogative of the returning officers".

### Bawdy 'baingan'

The humble eggplant — or "baingan" in Pakistan's Urdu language — is a key ingredient in Pakistani cuisine. It is also ripe with symbolic connotations, notably deployed as an emoji suggestive of male anatomy. "The election commission assigned us this symbol to make a mockery of us," said 46-year-old Mughal. "We

felt weird," he coyly admits. But Mughal's team have leaned into their fate. An aide trails him with a sack of the purple produce. He carries it like a mascot and makes speeches against a backdrop of festooned aubergines. When addressing voters he holds it aloft like Shakespeare's Hamlet contemplating a skull. Such is the popularity of their campaign, they claim the cost of eggplants has risen fourfold at grocers. "This symbol is giving me an extraordinary fame," said Mughal. "Everyone wants to look at it as they know the symbol belongs to Imran Khan's candidate."

### Slept-on symbol

Ejaz Gaddan romantically describes his constituency in the eastern Punjab province as his ancestral homeland — his people's "final resting place." Perhaps fittingly, he was assigned a symbol of a bed. "They tried to humiliate us with the symbols they are giving us. Some candidates feel embarrassed telling people what symbol they have gotten," the 50-year-old Bahawalpur candidate complained. "This is not an election, this is cruelty." His symbol is a "charpai" — a simple wooden frame bed with a sprung surface of woven rope, commonly used in lower-income homes. "It is a very useful household item. When we are alive, the charpai allows us to rest. When we die, it takes us on our final journey," said Gaddan.

"My symbol is already available in every household. I don't have to introduce it to my constituents." The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz party considered military-backed is canvassing with the symbol of a fearsome big cat. But Gaddan is unfazed. "The lion is a bloodthirsty beast," he says. "There is no place in our society for a beast."

### 'Empty vessel'

In northwestern Pakistan, Shehryar Afridi was incensed when he was issued the bottle symbol. In the local Pashto language, calling someone a bottle implies they are an "empty vessel" — vapid and thoughtless.

It also has connotations of alcohol consumption in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province where conservative Islam holds sway. "Most of the PTI candidates, including myself, were given symbols that were meant to create a negative bias," said the 45-year-old candidate for Kohat city. "We were deliberately given symbols that could be used to ridicule us." Afridi took his case to the high court in the provincial capital Peshawar, but won no relief. "When we entered the field during the election campaign, we received so much backlash regarding the bottle symbol that it sabotaged our campaign automatically," he said. But the canny operator has tweaked his symbol. —AFP

## El Salvador votes with gang-busting Bukele miles ahead

SAN SALVADOR, El Salvador: Polls opened in El Salvador Sunday with victory in the bag for incumbent President Nayib Bukele thanks to his no-holds-barred war on gangs that has slashed homicide rates in a violence-weary nation. For the first time since civil war ended in 1992, the Central American country will vote under a state of emergency imposed for 42-year-old Bukele's gang crackdown. Bukele, who polls as Latin America's most popular leader, is also expected to expand his hold over the legislative assembly in Sunday's vote. His government has rounded up more than 75,000 gangsters — real and suspected — since a state of emergency came into effect in March 2022. Thousands are held in a brand-new prison — plugged as the largest in the Americas — which the president built in a matter of months.

And last year, the country that was once one of the most dangerous in the world saw the murder rate plummet to its lowest level in three decades — far below the world average. As a result, Bukele enjoys approval ratings hovering around 90 percent despite concerns about rights violations, creeping authoritarianism, and grumblings about the economy.

"He has been effective. He cleaned up all those places (of gangs) where nobody thought it could be done," retired architect Claudia Del Velasco, 72, told AFP in the capital San Salvador, "excited" about casting her vote. "One feels safe now to visit places you haven't seen for years. Even to discover" new ones, she added, though the economy "can improve." El Salvador's fearsome gangs took some 120,000 civilian lives in three decades, according to the government.

With little need to campaign for himself, Bukele has instead focused on beating the drum for his party, Nuevas Ideas, which now holds 56 seats in the 84-member legislative assembly. The overall number of seats has been reduced to 60 under a Bukele-led reform, in a move critics say will make it much harder for smaller parties to get enough votes to get in. In 2022, the legislature also approved a law allowing Salvadorans to vote abroad. Under that reform, all foreign ballots — which tend to favor Bukele — will count towards the department of San Salvador, which has the most undecided seats, according to the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), an NGO promoting human rights. WOLA Central America director Ana Maria Mendez Dardon told AFP the political opposition could all but disappear in this election. "There is a risk of having a one-party system in El Salvador," she said. —AFP



SAN SALVADOR: People vote during the presidential and legislative elections at a polling station in San Salvador on February 4, 2024. — AFP

## Official arrest suggests India's justice system politicized: Critics

NEW DELHI: Critics are accusing the Indian government of using law enforcement agencies to selectively target its political foes following the arrest of an opposition politician minutes after his resignation as a state chief minister. Hemant Soren leads one of several opposition parties that have allied to challenge Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in national elections this year. He began Wednesday as the leader of Jharkhand, which with an estimated 40 million people has a bigger population than Canada. By the evening, he had stepped down and was in custody for allegedly facilitating an illegal land sale. Jagdeep Chhokar, cofounder of local transparency watchdog the Association for Democratic Reforms, said Soren's guilt or innocence was secondary to his status as an opponent of the ruling party.

"No politician is squeaky clean," he told AFP. "But it is evident from what is happening that opposition leaders are being threatened by law enforcement agencies." Soren's detention was the first arrest of a chief minister for more than a decade, but he is only the latest opposition politician to face criminal investigations and charges since Modi won power in 2014.

Opposition Congress party leader Rahul Gandhi, scion of the dynasty that dominated Indian politics for decades, was convicted of criminal libel last year after a complaint by a member of Modi's party.

His two-year prison sentence saw him disqualified from parliament for a time until the verdict was suspended by a higher court but raised concerns over democratic norms in the world's most populous country. Arvind Kejriwal, leader of the Aam Aadmi Party — another member of the opposition alliance, and also chief minister of the capital region Delhi, has repeatedly been summoned by investigators probing alleged corruption in the allocation of liquor licenses. But Mmhoneumo Kikon, a national spokesman for Modi's party, told AFP that India's national law enforcement agencies worked to their independent mandate. "BJP does not interfere in any way," he said.

Jharkhand's Soren was detained after a year-long probe during which he maintained his innocence and accused the BJP of using investigators to sideline him. "I will not bow down," he said in a Wednesday video message recorded before his arrest. "Truth will prevail". Local media reports said investigators had raided his official residence earlier this week and seized two luxury cars and more than \$40,000 in cash. India's main financial investigation agency, the Enforcement Directorate, has ongoing probes against at least four other chief ministers or their families, all of whom belong to the BJP's political opponents.

But other investigations have been dropped against erstwhile rivals who later switched their allegiance to the BJP. Himanta Biswa Sarma, the current chief minister of Assam in the northeast, was accused by investigators of participating in a lucrative pyramid scam but has not been interrogated since joining the BJP eight years ago. —AFP



# Business

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2024

## Global airlines practice patience in constrained Airbus-Boeing duopoly

### Airlines still grapple with supply chains to execute multiple orders

**NEW YORK:** With the latest Boeing crisis, airlines are staring down more delays, a familiar problem in a market in which both the US giant and rival Airbus face supply chain constraints. Over the past year Boeing has struggled with difficulties on its star plane, the 737 MAX, culminating with a major in-flight safety incident on Alaska Airlines in early January.

Boeing had been eyeing a ramp-up of MAX production through 2025, but that plan has now been frozen by the Federal Aviation Administration. The FAA's move likely will further slow Boeing's delivery timetable, which was already behind schedule. While the manufacturer's European rival Airbus has avoided comparable safety troubles, it also faces a major headache due to a problem with engines built by Pratt & Whitney, a unit of RTX.

Hundreds of Airbus 320neo jets must be inspected between 2023 and 2026 to check for microscopic "contamination" of metals used to make the engines. The inspections and any necessary engine fixes require 250 to 300 days per aircraft, another hurdle for airlines eager to take advantage of strong travel demand. Some of Boeing's customers have seemed to open the door to potentially moving orders elsewhere.

Alaska Airlines, which until now has been exclusively supplied by Boeing, had been considering orders of the Boeing 737 MAX 10 prior to the Jan 5 incident. But Alaska Chief Executive Officer Ben Minicucci suggested a possible shift given its pending acquisition of Hawaiian Airlines, which is supplied by Airbus.

"Everything is open at this point," Minicucci said in a recent broadcast interview. "We are going to do what is best for Alaska." American Airlines CEO Robert Isom last month said Boeing "needs to get their act together," while noting the carrier has large fleets of

Airbus and Boeing planes. Asked if he would consider Boeing for an upcoming order, Isom said, "we're going to make sure that whatever is purchased, whether it be from Airbus, Boeing, Embraer... is incredibly reliable, safe right from the get-go off the factory floor."

But changing plane suppliers is not so straightforward. Airlines must secure a spot in the order book of a manufacturer, which must ready supply chains to execute a multi-plane order over months and years; that is not so easy right now. The Airbus production infrastructure is completely booked through 2030 for single-aisle planes — the A320 line — and through 2028 for long-distance jets, the A350.

"We must deliver 8,600 planes on time and ready to fly," Christian Scherer, chief executive of Airbus's commercial aircraft business, said last month. The plan is for Airbus to boost A320 production to 75 per month in 2026 compared with 48 monthly in 2023. Even under that schedule, airlines are signing contracts for jets that won't be delivered for years.

Despite the yawning timeframe, "we are still getting more orders," Scherer said. Airbus in 2023 received net new orders of 2,094, smashing the previous record of 1,503 a decade earlier. The European giant has won myriad orders from airlines renewing their fleets to meet emission targets in 2050, a period when overall air travel is expected to have doubled.

Meanwhile across the Atlantic, Airbus's big US rival faces persistent scrutiny. Besides questions about quality control following the Alaska Airlines incident on the 737 MAX 9, Boeing has yet to receive certification on the 737 MAX 7 and the 737 MAX 10 — the smallest and largest versions of the single-aisle model. Boeing has received 391 orders for the MAX 7 and 1,180 for the MAX 10. The latter was supposed to have commenced deliveries in 2023. Given the un-



**NEW YORK:** A Boeing 737-900ER Alaska Airlines passenger aircraft taxis at John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York City on January 8, 2024. — AFP

certain timeframe, airlines are retooling their schedules. Like Airbus, Boeing's order book is robust, with more than 4,000 orders across the MAX program out of a total of 5,626 plane orders.

The next available order slots for 737s are "towards the end of the decade," Boeing said. Both companies face pressures that have persisted since the worst of the pandemic's logistics woes. "The supply

chain is constrained," said Christopher Raite, a senior analyst at Third Bridge. "It's simply not there to support that level of production ramp up," said Raite, who also points to a supply crunch of critical metals from Russia and Ukraine. What will airlines do if they can't get planes in time from Boeing and Airbus? One possibility is renting jets, said Michel Merluzeau, an aeronautics specialist with consulting firm AIR. — AFP

## Economists pilloried for getting forecasts wrong

**PARIS:** Economists are taking flak after missing the mark on inflation, failing to anticipate disruptions in global supply chains and forecasting a recession that has not materialized. The COVID-19 pandemic, Russia's war in Ukraine and more recently the Middle East conflict have made it tougher for experts to see clearly into their economic crystal balls. European Central Bank president Christine Lagarde joined the chorus of criticism at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, last month.

"Many economists are actually a tribal clique," she said, referring to a lack of openness to other scientific disciplines. "They quote each other — men more than women but that's another story," the former IMF chief and French finance minister said. "But they don't go beyond that world because they feel comfortable in that world."

Economists need to get out of their comfort zone of Excel spreadsheets and rigid models, some economists say about their own kind. The world "has changed a little bit", Peter Vanden Houtte, chief eurozone economist at ING bank, said sarcastically.

After years of low inflation, the post-COVID reopening of economies sent prices rising and they soared further after Russia's invasion of



**People walk past a reinforced shelter on a street of the Kramatorsk, Donetsk region on Feb 4, 2024, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine. — AFP**

Ukraine, belying assurances from Lagarde and US Federal Reserve chairman Jerome Powell that the increases would only be "transitory". The central banks had to launch into a series of interest rate hikes to combat inflation. While price rises have cooled in recent months, policymakers have kept the rates elevated as they wait to see whether they can be cut later this year.

Lagarde has admitted that the forecasts used as a basis for ECB policy decisions were not always right and that factors linked to the crises were not taken into account in its models.

"The models we currently use are less reliable because there are many factors that are difficult to integrate," Vanden Houtte said. He cited the supply chain bottlenecks following the pandemic, labor shortages and geopolitical tensions.

Economists dropped the ball by looking through the prism of the past. "It's not economic models that failed. It's the lack of imagination of economists," said Maxime Darmet, economist at Allianz Trade.

"They rested on their laurels" after 30 years of globalization during which "everything went well", Darmet said. — AFP

## Kuwaiti banks need to adopt modern trends: KIBS report

**KUWAIT:** The Kuwait Institute of Banking Studies (KIBS) underlined the importance of adopting modern trends in the banking sector, especially in the post-COVID-19 pandemic era, considering that the responsibility lies in this regard on the executive authorities. The institute said in a study it released Sunday entitled "The Impact of Competitiveness on the Size of Risk and Profitability in Kuwaiti Banks" that adopting these trends contributes to shaping the future of the banking industry, especially monetary policies, digital transformation, and economic growth.

The study addressed several major topics. The most important of which is the impact of competition on profitability and risks in the Kuwaiti banking sector and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the geopolitical environment on banking competition. It explained that the results of the study concluded that competition between Kuwaiti banks generally affects profitability and the size of risks and does not conflict with the concentration rate in the Kuwaiti banking sector. In addition, concentration in the sector has a positive impact on profitability and the size of risks. It stated that the results of the study confirmed that the average interest rates lead to an increase in the profitability of Kuwaiti banks, while it leads to a slight increase in credit risks, but it has no impact on liquidity and capital risks, in addition to income diversification.

To increase exposure to risks slightly due to the difficulty of dealing with the various risks related to each sector in which Kuwaiti banks participate. The Institute stated that banks need further development in training programs and the work environment to maintain the activity and productivity of their employees, in addition to giving them appropriate appreciation, providing growth opportunities, and providing them with a flexible workplace.

It is healthy to maintain their commitment and improve their performance to confront what is known as the talent war and attract it. He recommended establishing various partnerships with financial technology companies in order to further enable banks to enhance profits based on financial services fees and achieve the maximum possible benefit for both sides by taking advantage of the ability of financial technology companies to pump money.

To enhance new investments on the one hand and benefit from the public's confidence in Bank and its reputation on the other hand. The study stressed the need for banks to adopt digital transformation plans to contribute to maintaining their competitiveness in the face of digital service providers, improving customer well-being and providing distinguished digital solutions on an ongoing basis. — KUNA

## China's real estate sector managing slowdown: IMF

**WASHINGTON:** Real estate has long been important for China's economy, driving its rapid growth in recent decades and accounting for as much as 20 percent of activity. This reliance has, however, been accompanied by the buildup of significant risks, according to a report by International Monetary Fund.

Home prices became significantly stretched relative to household incomes in the decade before the pandemic, in part because consumers preferred to invest their considerable savings in real estate given the scarcity of attractive alternative savings options. Expectations of continued increases in home and land prices allowed property developers to borrow rapidly, with land sales providing crucial revenue for local governments. More recently, the authorities have appropriately focused on containing risks and helping the sector transition to a more appropriate and sustainable size. They took resolute action to rein in excessive developer borrowing and other property sector risks after the start of the pandemic. Real estate activity has since contracted sharply,

and most recently the authorities have aimed to boost rental housing, expand affordable housing, and upgrade under-developed urban neighborhoods.

With the property downturn in its third year, progress in downsizing the sector has been rapid in some respects. Housing starts have fallen by more than 60 percent relative to pre-pandemic levels, a historically rapid pace only seen in the largest housing busts in cross-country experience in the last three decades. Sales have fallen amid homebuyer concerns that developers lack sufficient financing to complete projects and that prices will decline in the future.

At the same time, key property sector vulnerabilities have yet to be addressed, pointing to ongoing risks to sustainability. Many developers have become non-viable but have avoided bankruptcy thanks in part to rules that allow lenders to delay recognizing their bad loans, which has helped mute spillovers to real estate prices and bank balance sheets. Home prices have also decreased only modestly in part because some cities have sought to limit price declines through rules and guidance on listing prices. China's housing



market faces additional pressures in coming years from structural factors, in particular demographic change. The need for additional new housing will diminish in coming years as the popu-

lation declines and urbanization slows. Large public subsidies in the previous decade helped millions of people move to newer housing from older buildings lacking modern amenities.



Business

NBK MONEY MARKETS REPORT

# Fed maintains rates as markets shift focus after strong US data

## Eurozone barely avoids a technical recession

**KUWAIT:** Consumer sentiment in the US continues to improve, with the latest Conference Board reading coming in at a two-year high of 114.8, considerably above the previous print of 108. The present situation index rose to 161.3 from 147.2, while the expectations index was also up to 83.8 from 81.9. This comes amid a time of declining inflation and robust employment, fueling consumer spending and growth across the economy. Finally, the one-year consumer inflation expectations fell to 5.2 percent, the lowest since March 2020.

In yet another sign of a strong and robust US labor market, the JOLTS reading showed an increase of job openings in December, coming in at 9.03 million from 8.93 million previously and surpassing expectations of 8.71 million openings. This represents a 3-month high as it was the first time openings rose above the 9 million mark since September. The Federal Reserve has signaled that they are hoping to see easing in the labor market to bring down inflationary pressures. Since consumer spending makes up 70 percent of US GDP, an imbalance between the supply and demand side of the labor market could see wages rise, continuing the trend of robust spending and remarkable growth. However, this will prompt companies to raise their prices as well, complicating the path to the Fed's desired 2 percent inflation goal.

### Fed maintains interest rates

The US Federal Reserve decided to keep interest rates unchanged between 5.25 percent--5.5 percent aligning with market expectations. Fed Chair Jerome Powell gave a speech following the decision, stating that despite inflation moving down the right direction towards the Fed's desired target, more data is needed to determine whether it's the right time to start cutting rates, insinuating to markets that a cut in March may be too early. Prior to the FOMC meeting, markets shifted

their expectations of a first rate cut from March to May following better than expected JOLTS job openings data.

### Unemployment claims rises

The number of Americans filing for unemployment benefits rose to the highest level in 11 weeks, coming in at 224,000, up from last week's 215,000 figure. Additionally, continuing claims were up by 70,000 to 1.9 million, the highest since mid-November. Despite the increase in initial and continuing claims, the US labor market remains historically tight on the back of a historical tightening cycle by the Fed.

Non-farm employment in the US saw a significant increase, soaring to 353,000 new jobs from the previous revised figure of 333,000. Forecasts were for 187,000 jobs to be added. The reading reinforced the narrative of a strong US labor market, especially with the unemployment rate at 3.7 percent. Moreover, average hourly earnings beat expectations, rising 4.5 percent annually and 0.6 percent on the month. Following the data release, treasury yields surged with the 10-year breaking past the 4 percent mark at one point. Meanwhile, the dollar strengthened and bets on a March pause surged to 80.5 percent from 64.5 percent a day ago. The Fed have mentioned that they are keeping an eye on labor markets when factoring the decision to cut rates, with a robust job market likely to add to inflationary pressures. The greenback strengthened in the week, closing at 103.96.

### Eurozone

GDP numbers out of the eurozone show that the bloc narrowly avoided a technical recession, with the print coming in flat versus the previous reading of a 0.1 percent contraction. This comes at a time when Europe's largest economy, Germany, continues to struggle as its economy shrank by 0.3 percent in the fourth quarter of 2023. The better than anticipated growth from Italy and Spain at 0.2 per-

cent and 0.6 percent respectively helped offset Germany's troubles and ensure the print was not in contraction. Furthermore, France's economy also recorded 0 percent growth, indicating that despite barely avoiding a recession, higher interest rates and weak consumer demand are plaguing the eurozone. ECB President Lagarde signaled that the central bank is not thinking about rate cuts until the summer, however continuous weak data coming out of Europe has the market

cut considerations in summer at the earliest. Despite this, economic growth in the block stagnated, just narrowly averting a technical recession. Consumers are also facing pressure from elevated inflation and a historic tightening cycle, making the ECB's job more complicated. The central bank, however, vowed to remain data dependent, making fighting inflation their priority. The euro is down to end the week, last trading at 1.0784.

In a widely expected move, the Bank

at 50.8 matching the previous month's number, and extending divergence with the official data as it marks the third straight month of expansion. The Caixin survey encompasses 650 private and state-owned companies located in China's coastal regions, while the official PMI survey includes 3,200 companies across the country. The slight rebound with regards to the official number and a third straight month of expansion in the Caixin reading did little to convince investors that there is a sustainable recovery path ahead without further support and easing measures from Chinese officials. Weak consumer demand, property sector slump, deflation, and risks of further currency devaluation are just some of the problems facing policymakers as they attempt to balance between easing measures to boost demand and preventing a further decline of the Yuan. The USD/CNY currency pair is up on the week, closing at 7.1920.

### Rates - February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2024

Currencies	Previous Week Levels				This Week's Expected Range		3-Month Forward
	Open	Low	High	Close	Minimum	Maximum	
EUR	1.0847	1.0778	1.0897	1.0784	1.0600	1.1000	1.0829
GBP	1.2693	1.2611	1.2772	1.2630	1.2400	1.2800	1.2642
JPY	148.11	145.88	148.58	148.37	146.00	150.00	146.33
CHF	0.8646	0.8549	0.8680	0.8664	0.8500	0.8800	0.8585

pricing in cuts as early as April.

### Stubborn inflation in eurozone

Headline CPI in the eurozone eased in January to 2.8 percent from 2.9 percent previously, in line with expectations. December's 2.9 percent figure represented an increase from November's 2.4 percent print, on the back of winding down on energy support policies. The volatility in the headline figure indicates the sensitivity of the eurozone to energy prices and measures. Despite this, it's the core numbers that represent a sticky predicament for policymakers, with January's reading coming in at 3.3 percent, above the forecasted figure of 3.2 percent. The stubborn nature of the core figure, and more specifically the services sector, represents a hurdle to the ECB's goal of bringing inflation down to their 2 percent target. While markets are pricing in rate cuts in April, some ECB speakers have pushed back on this expectation calling for rate

of England held interest rates steady at 5.25 percent. BoE Governor Andrew Bailey stated, "We have had good news on inflation over the past few months. It has fallen a long way, from 10 percent a year ago to 4 percent. But we need to see more evidence that inflation is set to fall all the way to the 2 percent target, and stay there, before we can lower interest rates." Markets are narrowly pricing in the central bank to hold rates all the way to May, with the first rate cut happening in June. The sterling slightly declined over the past week, last seen at 1.2630.

### Asia-Pacific

PMI figures coming out of China suggest a rebound in manufacturing despite a soft and struggling economy. China's official PMI reading came in at 49.2 compared to 49 in December. This marks the fourth straight month of contraction despite a slight rebound. Meanwhile, the Caixin manufacturing PMI print came in

### Australia inflation declines

Inflation in Australia fell more than expected, with annual inflation coming in at 4.1 percent from 5.4 percent previously, and below estimates of a 4.3 percent print. On a quarterly basis, this represents a 0.6 percent rise versus expectations of 0.8 percent and a previous increase of 1.2 percent. While the news is welcome, surpassing all forecasts, the figures are still below the Reserve Bank of Australia's target range of 2-3 percent. Treasurer of Australia Jim Chalmers hailed the "very encouraging" numbers but warned that "it's not mission accomplished yet." Markets are anticipating that the first rate cut will happen in June.

The Australian dollar is down, with AUD/USD declining to 0.6512.

### Kuwait

Kuwaiti dinar USD/KWD closed last week at 0.30755.



شركة الصفاة للاستثمار  
AL SAFAT INVESTMENT COMPANY

## KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON 01 FEBRUARY 2024

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Market	M. Cap (KD ml)	Last Close	WTD %	MTD %	YTD %	Quantity Traded	Value Traded	No. of Trades	P/E	P/B	% of Total M. Cap
Premier Market	34,071	7,918.19	-1.8%	-0.5%	5.9%	720,308,087	249,935,989	40,387	17.5	1.3	77.5%
Main Market	9,878	5,971.78	0.0%	0.0%	7.2%	426,462,859	91,584,227	29,534	12.5	0.8	22.5%
All Share	43,949	7,238.31	-1.4%	-0.4%	6.2%	1,146,770,946	341,520,217	69,921	13.9	0.9	100%

Sector	M. Cap (KD ml)	Last Close	WTD %	MTD %	YTD %	Quantity Traded	Value Traded	No. of Trades	P/E	P/B	% of Total M. Cap
Banking	26,210	1,750.63	-1.8%	-0.3%	6.3%	211,287,298	107,254,873	16,600	17.9	1.2	59.64%
Basic Materials	427	757.24	-1.7%	-0.3%	1.5%	4,591,821	2,704,195	1,302	10.4	2.3	0.97%
Consumer Discretionary	1,083	1,575.83	-4.4%	-0.4%	-1.8%	16,857,786	7,950,010	3,383	12.7	0.9	2.46%
Consumer Staples	215	707.60	2.0%	0.3%	7.4%	3,162,400	1,695,051	334	15.2	1.3	0.49%
Energy	208	992.71	-5.3%	-3.0%	4.6%	5,345,364	586,452	469	11.0	0.8	0.47%
Financial Services	4,767	1,349.10	-0.2%	-0.7%	11.3%	588,155,859	122,773,823	22,202	20.2	0.9	10.85%
Health Care	239	482.45	2.7%	0.0%	0.1%	638	299,860	1	13.0	1.0	0.54%
Industrials	3,383	977.58	-0.8%	-0.8%	7.7%	58,492,302	26,792,698	6,329	12.9	1.0	7.70%
Insurance	967	2,366.38	-1.2%	0.2%	3.2%	19,409,277	3,742,182	3,962	9.8	1.1	2.20%
Real Estate	2,626	1,223.07	-1.2%	0.0%	0.8%	195,669,432	49,481,231	9,791	17.5	0.6	5.98%
Technology	28	2,022.45	3.7%	0.4%	249.7%	12,075,928	3,320,100.12	1,101	NM	2.4	0.06%
Telecommunications	3,612	1,181.74	0.5%	-0.7%	6.9%	23,361,141	13,798,860	3,803	10.3	1.6	8.22%
Utilities	184	439.47	-3.5%	-1.8%	-3.5%	8,361,700	1,420,443	644	12.9	1.4	0.42%

### Top Gainers

Stock	Last Close	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
OOREDOO	1,554	14.94%	1,392,925	2,051,212	823
KINV	197	12.57%	63,869,232	11,852,357	1,962
KFOUC	529	10.21%	442,818	223,656	299
GFC	58.4	9.77%	27,561	1,471	10
TAMINV	520	6.12%	598	311	1

### Top Losers

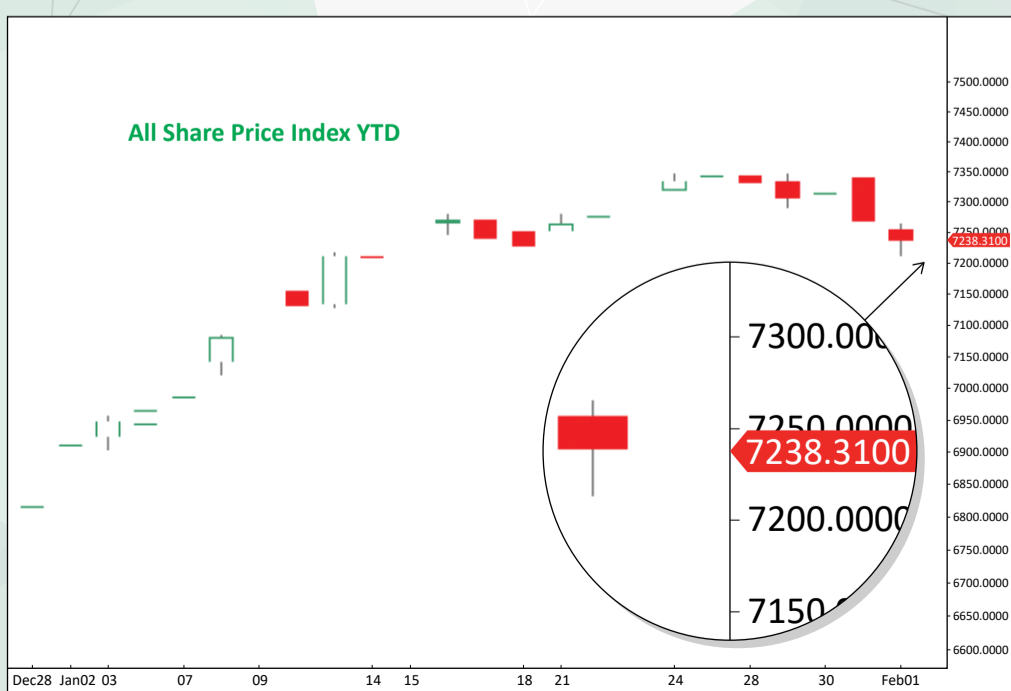
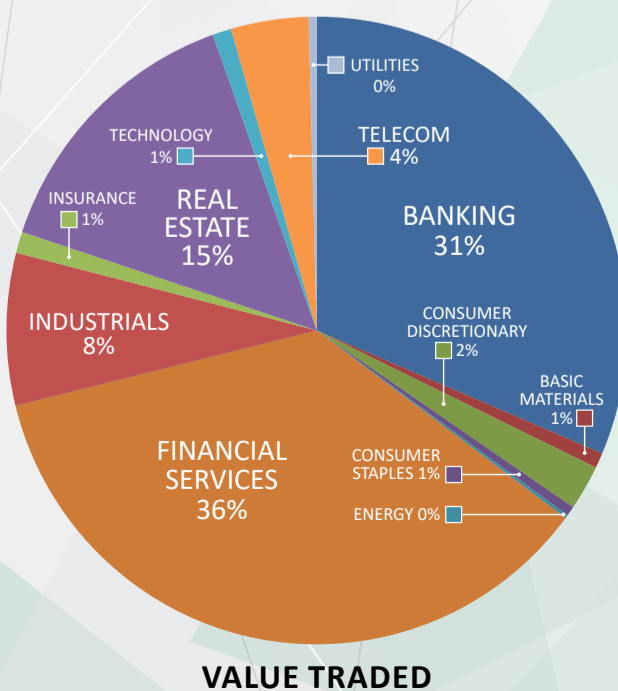
Stock	Last Close	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
UPAC	151	-19.25%	1,230,499	198,456	241
ALIMTIAZ	54.2	-12.58%	36,773,613	2,202,262	1,370
IFAHR	757	-11.36%	3,663,876	2,789,906	1,381
EMIRATES	35	-9.56%	470,425	16,163	42
PAPCO	68	-9.33%	145,244	9,569	45

### Top Volume

Stock	Last	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
IFA	405	4.92%	83,657,024	33,425,693	2,423
NIND	232	-0.85%	71,732,025	16,955,819	1,421
KINV	197	12.57%	63,869,232	11,852,357	1,962
KRE	242	0.00%	58,318,027	14,014,039	2,169
ARZAN	229	0.44%	56,573,967	12,851,673	1,823

### Top Value

Stock	Last	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
KFH	770	-2.04%	54,704,994	42,416,753	5,583
IFA	405	4.92%	83,657,024	33,425,693	2,423
NBK	973	-1.42%	32,807,061	32,270,678	3,566
MABANEE	770	-1.03%	29,439,432	22,750,417	1,844
NIND	232	-0.85%	71,732,025	16,955,819	1,421



### Market Summary:

- Premier volume dropped 3% while value increased 15%. Main market volume and value dropped 28% and 1%, respectively.
- Premier and Main indexes retreated due to lower-than-expected revenues and FED meeting negative results.
- Technically, the All Share index closed at 7238, with support levels at 7233, 7214, and 7178 and resistance at 7248. The Premier index closed at 7918, with support levels at 7916, 7899, and 7865, and resistance at 7945. The Main index closed at 5970, 5959, and 5925, and resistance at 5990.



## Business

# Gulf Bank deposits KD 2 million into Alaa Youssef Al-Mutairi's Account

Al-Qattan: We extend our congratulations to the winner and her family



Mohammad Al-Qattan receives the youngest millionaire who won the biggest prize.



Najla Al-Essa (right) and Ahmed Al-Amir (left) pose for a group photo with the winner and her father.

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank extended a warm welcome to Alaa Youssef Adel Al-Mutairi and her father, after she secured the grand prize in the yearly draw for the Al-Danah Millionaire account. The prize, valued at KD 2 million, was awarded on Feb 1, 2024, with oversight and attendance from representatives of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and Ernst & Young.

Upon concluding the prize handover formalities and transferring KD 2 million to the winner's personal account through her father, he conveyed his delight and happiness for this extraordinary moment in his family's life. He extended gratitude to Gulf Bank for its ongoing commitment to rewarding its customers.

The father of the winner, noting that his 4-year-old daughter secured the grand prize, expressed that, while searching for a savings account with exceptional rewards, he discovered no better option

than the Al-Danah Millionaire account. He created Al-Danah accounts for all his children, with his daughter Alaa, emerging as the lucky winner of the grand prize.

Mohammad Al-Qattan, Gulf Bank's General Manager of Consumer Banking, extended congratulations to the winner for becoming the youngest recipient of the world's largest prize linked to a bank account. He reaffirmed Gulf Bank's dedication to delivering an outstanding banking experience for customers, emphasizing its commitment to rewarding savers and fostering a culture of savings within society.

Al-Qattan highlighted that Gulf Bank's prize giveaways continue, with numerous opportunities for monthly, quarterly, semi-annual, and annual draws. He further noted that in two months, Al-Danah customers will be able to participate in the upcoming KD 1 million draw sched-

uled for July 18, 2024.

He stated, "We are excited to keep rewarding our customers for their savings in the Al-Danah Millionaire account. We urge everyone to continue saving in their accounts, enhancing their opportunities to win in the upcoming draws. These encompass the annual grand draw of KD 2 million and a semi-annual draw of KD 1 million. Furthermore, there are two draws offering a prize of KD 100,000 each, in addition to 10 winners in the monthly draws receiving KD 1,000 each."

The Al-Danah account welcomes both Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti residents in Kuwait. They have the option to open an account either by visiting the branch or using the mobile application. 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 custom-

er'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.

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. The grand prize in the annual draw of the Al-Danah Millionaire account has once again, secured a place in the Guinness World Records as the largest cash prize linked to a bank account globally. This notable achievement was recognized during the winner's announcement ceremony last Thursday, February 1, 2024. Mohammad Al-Qattan, the General Manager of Consumer Banking at Gulf Bank, was presented with a certificate of registration for Gulf Bank in the Guinness World Records.

Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the Future. The Bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience.

Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining robust developments in sustainability at environmental, social and governance levels through diverse sustainability initiatives, strategically selected to benefit the Bank both internally and externally. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with various parties to achieve it.

## KIB: Al-Rubaian among '500 Influential Women in Islamic Business and Finance'

KUWAIT: Kuwait International Bank (KIB) congratulated its General Internal Auditor Manal Adnan Al-Rubaian for being awarded a distinguished ranking in the list of the top "500 Most Influential Women in Islamic Business and Finance" for the year 2023, a recognition by the global institution Cambridge IFA. Al-Rubaian was ranked for four consecutive years (2020-2023) in this list.

The ranking was unveiled as part of the WOMANI Report 2023, where Al-Rubaian secured a prominent position on the top 500 list, distinguishing herself among some of the leading female figures and entrepreneurs in the Islamic financial sector. Additionally, Al-Rubaian holds the distinction of being the first woman to hold the position of a board member of the Kuwait Internal Auditors Association.

Expressing her delight, Al-Rubaian said: "Receiving this honorable ranking for four consecutive years and being the only Kuwaiti woman to enter the list of the most influential businesswomen in the Islamic financial industry is a badge of honor, attained thanks to the continuous support of KIB's management and the effort the Bank devotes to developing its competencies and cadres to raise the level of their performance." She affirmed that KIB regards its employees as an important investment and a top priority, contributing to its path toward a more prosperous future.

It serves to note that the WOMANI Awards, organized by Cambridge IFA, is an annual congregation of influential women, igniting vital dialogues concerning challenges and prospects that impact women within and beyond the professional sphere. Meanwhile, Cambridge IFA is an Islamic financial services intelligence house specializing in Islamic finance advocacy, intelligence, consultancy, and advisory services. It is also worth noting that KIB is continually committed to supporting its employees and investing in enhancing their skills and capabilities, especially women. The Bank focuses on empowering its female staff and providing opportunities to help them reach leadership positions.



Manal Adnan Al-Rubaian

## Burgan Bank appoints Meshari Shehab as GM of Private Banking and Wealth Management

KUWAIT: After obtaining all necessary approvals from the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK), Burgan Bank announced the appointment of Meshari Abduljalil Shehab as General Manager of Private Banking and Wealth Management. This comes as part of Burgan Bank's committed human capital development strategy, which centers on the Kuwaitization of its workforce and its continued investment in Kuwait's top national talents across all departments and levels of the organization.

Meshari's addition to Burgan Bank's management team follows a series of leadership-level appointments and promotions that have unfolded in the past few months – all of which were made in line with the Bank's new strategy and transformation roadmap; gearing

Burgan towards becoming the most modern and progressive bank in Kuwait, with a core focus on its human capital. With extensive experience in the Kuwaiti banking sector, Meshari is set to guide Burgan Bank's latest Private Banking and Wealth Management endeavors with finesse toward new frontiers of success whilst adhering to the Bank's elaborate roadmap and expansive strategy as well as the highest standards for conscious and inclusive banking practices.

Commenting on this announcement, Fadel Mahmoud Abdullah, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) – Kuwait, said: "On behalf of Burgan's Board and staff, I would like to congratulate Meshari on his new appointment. Considering his vast experience, I am confident that he will add a lot of value to his department and Burgan Bank as a whole and contribute greatly to our institutional success and accomplishment. Private Banking and Wealth Management marks a pivotal expansion for Burgan Bank's involvement in the Kuwaiti banking sector and the scope of services that we offer our premium clientele, and entrusting Mr. Meshari with leading such a vital department speaks volumes of our faith in his capabilities and acumen."

With a professional journey in banking that spans over 20 years, Meshari brings with him a wealth of knowledge and expertise in Private and Affluent Banking, Risk Management, and Investments. Prior to joining Burgan Bank, he worked in numerous prestigious banking institutions in Kuwait, including the National Bank of Kuwait (NBK), Gulf Bank, and Ahli United Bank (AUB), with his latest position being Deputy General Manager of Private Banking and Wealth Management at AUB.

Meshari holds an Executive Master of Business Administration degree from the American University of Beirut (AUB), Lebanon, and a Bachelor's degree in Finance from the University of Miami, USA. In addition, he completed the General Management Program (GMP) at Harvard Business School, USA.



Meshari Abduljalil Shehab



## LuLu Hypermarket awards prizes to promotion winners

KUWAIT: LuLu Hypermarket, the undisputed retail heavyweight in the region, held its much-awaited prize distribution ceremony for the "LuLu One-Year Free Shopping Promotion" at its Al-Rai Shopping Mall on Feb 3.

The exciting promotion, which ran from Oct 25

to Dec 31, 2023 at all outlets of LuLu Hypermarket in Kuwait, offered shoppers the chance to win amazing prizes with every KD 5 worth of purchase made through any LuLu outlet in the country.

The 'one-year free shopping' promotion included the opportunity for 10 winners to shop for products worth a total of KD 1,500, totally free over a one-year period. In addition, 100 lucky winners earned the right to shop for KD 100 worth of goods for free. The awards ceremony saw 110 lucky winners walk away with prizes worth a total of KD 25,000.

The official draw to pick the winners of the promotion was conducted in a fair and transparent manner on Jan 30, 2024, at the Ministry of Commerce

and Industry, in the presence of ministry officials and representatives of LuLu Hypermarket.

The prize distribution ceremony witnessed top officials from LuLu Hypermarket presenting the prizes to the winners in front of a large crowd of shoppers and well-wishers. All the winners conveyed their heartfelt gratitude and appreciation to LuLu Hypermarket for the incredible opportunity to enjoy a year of free shopping.

The event was a resounding success, showcasing LuLu Hypermarket's commitment to providing its valued customers with exciting promotions and an exceptional shopping experience throughout the year.

## US manufacturing activity shrinks but demand improving

WASHINGTON: US factory activity remained in contraction last month, an industry survey said Thursday, but performed better than expected – rising to the highest level since percent, up from 47.1 in December and better than analysts expected.

But this was still below the

50-point mark separating growth from contraction, meaning the sector has shrunk for a 15th straight month. "The US manufacturing sector continued to contract, though at a marginal rate compared to December," said ISM survey chief Timothy Fiore in a statement.

"Demand remains soft but shows signs of improvement, and production execution is stable compared to December," he added. The new orders index shifted into expansion territory in January, while produc-

tion was growing as well. While backlogs are contracting, the employment index declined, said ISM.

Its report added that two of the six biggest manufacturing industries, transportation equipment and chemical products, logged growth last month. A survey respondent in the textile mills industry noted that after a business slowdown in December, January failed to pick up to levels seen in earlier years.

But another respondent in the machinery sector said: "We expect

to see steady sales going forward, if the (US Federal Reserve) continues to hold rates and suggests a rate cut in the future."

Rubeela Farooqi, chief US economist at High Frequency Economics, noted an "uncertain" outlook ahead but as borrowing costs shift lower over time, this could provide support to the industry. "As well, an ongoing onshoring of supply networks and investment in domestic manufacturing capacity could be positive going forward," she added in a note. — AFP



# Al-Sager: NBK's profit for 2023 is highest ever in Group's history

## NBK Group Vice Chairman and CEO speaks on the sidelines of Analyst Conference for FY 2023

KUWAIT: Isam Al-Sager, the Vice Chairman and Group CEO of National Bank of Kuwait (NBK), said, "We have posted the highest annual profit ever in the Group's history, continuing to deliver solid performance supported by our diversified business model, strategic investments and flexibility in the face of various economic conditions."

On the sidelines of the analyst conference for the results of FY 2023, Al-Sager added, "We achieved a year-on-year growth of 15.6 percent in net operating income to reach KD 1.2 billion for the year. The increased momentum in the operational performance was achieved across key areas including most importantly international operations and wealth management."

"We remain committed to creating value to our shareholders as our performance ratios continued to improve with return on average assets reaching 1.53 percent while our return on average equity reached 15.0 percent for the year," he indicated. "In Ku-

wait, our strategy continues to focus on strengthening our position in key market segments, expanding our customer base through digital offerings and exceptional customer experience. While on the corporate side, we remain at the forefront of Kuwait's infrastructure agenda. Our diversification plans continue to benefit from our

Islamic banking arm, Boubyan Bank and our international operations, as both have continued to grow their contribution to the Group," Al-Sager emphasized. "Moreover, and in line with the Group's strategic plans to expand and offer a holistic investment and wealth management solution, NBK Wealth emerged to provide our high-net-worth clients base with tailored offerings that meet their evolving needs," he mentioned.

"The Group will continue executing its responsible growth strategy, investing in innovation and new technologies. Our digital investments are positioning the bank as a leader in advancing customer-centricity and prioritizing user experience," he explained.

### Housing law

On the updates of the housing law, Al-Sager said: "There is progress as there are some ongoing discussions involving all relevant stakeholders to improve the draft



wait, our strategy continues to focus on strengthening our position in key market segments, expanding our customer base through digital offerings and exceptional customer experience. While on the corporate side, we remain at the forefront of Kuwait's infrastructure agenda. Our diversification plans continue to benefit from our

law and address the residential housing challenges. There are a lot of positive signs with the appointment of the new prime minister and his newly appointed cabinet. Also, the recent engagement and cooperation between the parliament and the cabinet ministers is positive and will lead to improvement in executing so many things that have been



Isam Al-Sager

- We achieved increased momentum in the operational performance across key areas including international operations and wealth management
- Our strategy continues to focus on strengthening our position in key market segments and expanding our customer base
- We launched "NBK Wealth" to provide our high-net-worth clients with tailored offerings that meet their evolving needs

### Sujit Ronghe

- Our results stem from the Group's strong operating performance and demonstrate the continued growth in our business
- Higher interest rates and stable operating environment in Kuwait have benefitted the Bank during 2023

wait, our strategy continues to focus on strengthening our position in key market segments, expanding our customer base through digital offerings and exceptional customer experience. While on the corporate side, we remain at the forefront of Kuwait's infrastructure agenda. Our diversification plans continue to benefit from our

delayed mainly the mega projects that we feel will go ahead once there is better understanding between the two sides."

On a question about NBK's plans for branch expansion in KSA and the outlook of business growth, Al-Sager mentioned: "We continue with our successful execution of our strategy and expansion in growth markets including the Saudi market which is a key component of it. We operate currently in KSA through 3 branches, in Riyadh, Jeddah and Eastern Province and target to expand in the Saudi markets on the corporate banking front and wealth management; leveraging on the solid base we established in those areas of business in KSA, especially on the wealth management front."

"Globally, we are also implementing our strategy to be in key markets with more focus on GCC as well as other international locations," he added. On another question about his view for the project market in 2024, Al-Sager said: "The value of projects awards in 2023 reached more than KD 2.5 billion. In the meantime, because of the backlog of awards from pandemic time and the weakness in the project market in post pandemic years; last year represented a good rebound. The value of projects awards almost tripled year-on-year in 2023 to reach the levels before mentioned."

"There is optimism for this year that the value of project awards would be doubled in 2024 forecasts point to more than KD 5-6 billion worth of project awards, mainly

in the energy and oil sector. With the appointment of the new government, we are optimistic that it will remain committed towards accelerating the awards pipeline across various sectors."

On his part, Sujit Ronghe, Group CFO commented on the year-end financial results saying, "We have announced a net profit of KD 560.6m for 2023, the highest ever in the Group's history. This is a 10.1 percent increase in bottom line profit over the last year. These results stem from a strong operating performance by the Group and demonstrate the continued growth in our business."

"Higher interest rate regime and an overall stable operating environment in Kuwait have benefitted the Bank during 2023. Inflationary conditions in the USA and some other advanced economies have gradually improved, although the risk of a possible recession cannot be ruled out completely. Geo-political developments in the region and beyond have affected the global operating environment unfavorably, especially in the last quarter of 2023," he added.

"Looking forward, ongoing regional and international geo-politics, prospects of lower interest rates coupled with possibility of recessionary conditions, are likely to result in a macroeconomic environment which is less conducive to growth. We however remain cautiously optimistic that the overall operating environment, although challenging, will remain generally stable during 2024," he elaborated. On the out-

look for loan and deposit growth in 2024, Ronghe said, "The loan growth during the 2023 came mainly from corporate related activity in Kuwait and across our overseas locations. During the year we noted an increased demand credit in Kuwait, regionally and also in our locations in the western world. That said, considering the combination of geo-politics and macroeconomic factors both regionally and globally, we have given a guidance of a mid-single digit loan growth for the full year of 2024. The Group has a strong and well diversified pipeline of credit facilities."

With respect to the total capital ratio, Ronghe said that the bank targets to maintain a buffer of 1.5-2.0 percent at the year-end; over the minimum regulatory capital requirement of 15 percent; targeting a capital adequacy ratio of 16.5-17 percent. We expect some flexibility of lower thresholds for CET1 and Tier 1 ratios but expect to be in the range of 1.5 percent over the minimum at the year-end.

On the expectations for credit cost trends in 2024, he said: "On the background of 2022, 2023 was a much more normal year for the bank on the provisions front, with the cost of risk averaging 36 basis points comprising both specific and general provisions, including the precautionary provisions. We can expect 2023 to be a good base for guiding the cost of risk. With the overall operating environment remaining stable, we can expect cost of risk for 2024 to range between 40 and 50 basis points."

## China economic slowdown to persist through 2028: IMF

BEIJING: China's economic slowdown is likely to persist in the coming years as the Asian giant struggles with sagging productivity and a rapidly aging population, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said.

The world's second-largest economy last year saw some of its slowest growth in decades, as a debt crisis in the property sector added to geopolitical tensions and weakening global demand. And an IMF report on Friday forecast growth to decline further to 3.5 percent by 2028 "amid headwinds from weak productivity and population aging", adding that "uncertainty surrounding the outlook is high". It previously forecast growth of 4.6 percent for this year.

Driving the slowdown is a years-long crisis in the country's real estate market, once a key growth pillar but now mired in debts that may threaten China's fi-

ancial system. Property giant Evergrande has become a symbol of the sector's woes, racking up astronomical debts of more than \$300 billion. A court in Hong Kong this week issued an order that should kickstart the liquidation of Evergrande's overseas assets, though the company insisted the decision would not affect its domestic operations. And the IMF report warned a continued slowdown in the property market "could further weigh on private demand and worsen confidence". Sonali Jain-Chandra, Mission Chief for China at the IMF's Asia and Pacific Department, told a media briefing Friday that the sector was "in the midst of a multi-year transition to a smaller and more sustainable size".

"Some of this adjustment has happened, but we're still in the midst of it," she explained, adding that "more needs to be done" to prop up the ailing sector. China's economy grew by 5.2 percent last year, according to official statistics, beating a modest target of around five percent. Exports — long a key driver of growth — notched their first decline in seven years, dragged down by notable tensions with Western countries and a decline in global demand. Chinese officials are due to release their growth target for 2024 in March. — AFP

## World needs 'torrents' of cash for green transition: UN official

PARIS: The world needs to urgently start investing trillions of dollars in the green transition, the United Nations climate chief said on Friday, warning that finance was the "make-or-break" factor in the battle to curb global heating.

Countries at last year's COP28 UN climate negotiations in Dubai agreed to triple global renewables capacity this decade and "transition away" from polluting fossil fuels. But the deal lacked important details, including on funding. Now the world will need to come up with a clear plan to find "torrents — not trickles — of climate finance," UN climate chief Simon Stiell said in a speech in Baku, Azerbaijan, which will host this year's climate summit (COP29) in November.

"Whether on slashing emissions or building climate resilience, it's already blazingly obvious that finance is the make-or-break factor in the world's climate fight — in quantity, quality, and innovation," said Stiell, who is executive secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

"In fact, without far more finance, 2023's climate wins will quickly fizzle away into more empty promises." In a speech which traced backwards from a vision of success in 2050 to the actions of the next two years, he said the changes over the coming decades would be "comparable in scope to the industrial revolution" or the growth of the digital economy.

The world is currently far off track in delivering on its cornerstone climate deal, agreed in Paris in 2015.

Under the Paris Agreement, world leaders pledged to keep the rise in Earth's average temperature to "well below" 2.0 degrees Celsius above the pre-industrial level and preferably the much safer threshold of 1.5C. The 2020s are critical for keeping that 1.5C target in view, with UN climate experts estimating that planet-heating greenhouse gas emissions need to be slashed by some

43 percent by 2030. There is progress, with a surge in clean energy technologies like solar, wind and batteries, as well as electric vehicles.

But emissions continue to rise. A key challenge that is likely to take centre stage at this year's climate talks in Baku, as well as meetings of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, is how to help emerging economies manage and pay for their transition to clean energy. Many of these nations are currently mired in debt and facing a raft of challenges, from inflation to growing climate impacts.



Simon Stiell

Developing countries, except China, face an estimated \$2.4 trillion annual cost by 2030 to meet their climate and development priorities. Stiell urged multilateral development banks to deliver "concrete actions" this year and move towards doubling or tripling their financial capacity by 2030.

Meanwhile, global warming continues, with 2023 confirmed as the hottest ever recorded and experts warning 2024 could be even hotter. The Earth is now about 1.2C warmer than it was in the 1800s.

This is already having an accelerating impact on people and ecosystems across the planet, from stifling heatwaves and crop-wilting droughts, to devastating floods and storms. A damning appraisal of countries' decarbonization efforts so far, released last year, showed the world heading for catastrophic planetary heating. Stiell conceded it would take an "Olympian effort" to get the world on track. One key task for countries will be to outline a new round of national climate targets for 2035 ahead of a pivotal COP30 meeting, due to be held in Brazil in 2025. — AFP



An employee works on a large construction equipment at a factory in Haian city, in China's eastern Jiangsu province. — AFP

## Public transport walkout hits battered Germany

BERLIN: Public transport workers across Germany walked off the job on Friday in the latest industrial action to buffet Europe's top economy. The Verdi services trade union called on more than 90,000 workers at over 130 local companies operating buses, trams and underground services to join the walkout in an escalating dispute over pay and working conditions. The strike impacted 81 cities and 42 rural districts.

In most areas it was scheduled to stop public trans-

port for the whole day, with the exception of Berlin where service resumed mid-morning, and Bavaria where Verdi did not strike while pay negotiations continued. Long-distance and regional trains operated by Deutsche Bahn, where drivers went on strike last week, were unaffected. Verdi's deputy chair Christine Behle said the union was seeking a 35-hour work week with no losses in wages, in a bid to make jobs more attractive to workers.

Many operators are reporting up to 20 to 30 percent unfilled posts, with the staff shortages contributing to a vicious circle of overworked employees who are then falling ill, exacerbating the situation. Climate activists had earlier in the week given their support to Verdi despite the impact on public transportation, saying it was time for the sector's workers to receive better compensation. — AFP

## China's Tencent fires over 120 workers for fraud

BEIJING: Chinese tech giant Tencent said it last year dismissed more than 120 employees for violating its anti-fraud rules, including for corruption and embezzlement. The Hong Kong-listed company is the world's top video game maker and the owner of the popular super-app WeChat, which is installed on almost every phone in the country. Tencent's founder Pony Ma in 2022 described the level of corruption in his company as "shocking", and the firm promised to take action, according to state media reports.

Last year, more than 70 breaches of the code of conduct were reported, Tencent said. "More than 120 people were dismissed" from the company and

nearly 20 were reported to the authorities, the group said in a statement released on Friday. Some of the sacked employees belonged to the group's PGC branch, responsible for broadcasting content such as news, sport and films.

Others worked in the group's medical services arm, a sector where Tencent's telemedicine applications have huge market share in China. One of the employees implicated by Tencent was sentenced to four years in prison and fined 100,000 yuan (\$14,000), according to the press release. The announcements come after years of difficulties for China's tech giants.

After a period of meteoric growth, the sector underwent a broad regulatory crackdown by Chinese authorities that started in late 2020. As a result, billions of dollars in market capitalization have been lost, and the profits of powerful internet companies have plummeted. Tencent, which currently has just over 100,000 employees, was not spared. Restrictions in China to on-line gaming time for under-18s were also a blow to the group's profitability. — AFP



## Lifestyle

## How French film is quietly becoming more diverse

**“V**ermin”, a horror film about killer spiders invading a run-down apartment block, has become the first hit of the year in France. The eight-legged critters are not the only surprise in the low-budget film, however, which for once depicts France’s ghetto-like suburbs as more than just a den of drug dealers and terrorists. Instead the block is shown as a place of hard-scrabble solidarity whose problems stem from abandonment by police, media and society in general.



Jean-Pascal Zadi’s sharp satires about racial politics have won awards and international acclaim. — AFP

“We want to challenge stereotypes,” said Olivier Saby of co-producers Impact Films. The company was set up in 2018 with a mission to bring more diversity to French cinemas. “The goal is not to make sure there is a black, Arabic or white person in every scene,” he told AFP. “We just want films and TV to reflect real life. “If you walk into, for example, a lawyer’s office today, you

will find a lot more diversity than when you see one on TV.”

#### ‘Must be improved’

French cinema has made steady progress in some areas. French women won two of the last three Palmes d’Or, the top prize at the Cannes Film Festival. Three of the five nominees for best director at next month’s Cesars (France’s Oscars) are women. (The prize has only once gone to a woman, Tonie Marshall, 24 years ago.)

Race is trickier. Some black actors have become superstars in France, especially “Lupin” star Omar Sy, and comedian Jean-Pascal Zadi, whose sharp satires about racial politics, “Simply Black” and “Represent”, have earned awards and been big international hits on Netflix.

But progress is hindered because it remains illegal to gather data on

race in France on the grounds that it would perpetuate artificial divisions, said Wale Gbadamosi Oyekanmi, a PR consultant who invests in Impact Film. “France doesn’t really talk about race. You can’t monitor the depth of the challenge because you can’t measure it” with statistics, he told AFP.

“There are new voices that could be heard, that reflect the country as it is now. It’s something that can and must be improved.” Analysts work around the issue by measuring how people are “perceived” rather than directly asking their race. A study of 115 French films released in 2019 by 50/50 Collectif, a campaign group, found 81 percent of lead characters were “perceived as white”. That is not a commercial decision, it said, since the figure dropped to 68 percent for the 15 most popular films of the year.

#### ‘Perverting creativity’

But France’s cultural gatekeepers still bristle at the idea of mixing social issues with creativity, said Marie-Lou Dulac, founder of diversity consultancy DIRE et Dire. Many in France see encouraging diversity as a way of “perverting creativity,” she said. “Actually it’s a way to renew creativity, to encounter new stories and characters. “We can’t keep making the same old caricature of a French film -- a white professional couple in Paris who are cheating on each other,” she added with a laugh.

Impact Films supports films with disabled or ethnic minority leads, said Saby. It finances documentaries about



Omar Sy has become a symbol of increasing diversity in French film and TV.—AFP

environmental and social issues, and hires people from under-represented groups to work behind the camera. It also works with scriptwriters to avoid clichés. “Why are minority actors always playing a drug dealer?” he added. “Does every action hero need to drive a 4x4?”

As in other countries, pushing for change triggers a backlash. Powerful right-wing businessmen are also moving into film productions, such as last year’s “Vaincre ou Mourir” (“Victory or Death”) about the peasant counter-revolution of the 1790s, a favorite topic of

pro-Catholic, pro-monarchy ultra-conservatives. It was produced by the company behind the Puy du Fou theme park, owned by far-right former presidential candidate Philippe de Villiers.

The risk of a backlash is no reason to give up, said Saby, with “Vermin” up for two Cesar awards and well on its way to being the most successful French horror flick in nearly 25 years. “There was always this battle. It’s just that only one side was winning up to now,” he said. “There’s plenty of room on screen for everyone.”—AFP

## Grammy winner Kidjo says art ‘humanizes’ Davos

**F**ive-time Grammy winner and African music legend Angelique Kidjo says she attends the annual meeting of global elites in Davos because “bringing art to it humanizes” the World Economic Forum. AFP sat down with Kidjo, a UNICEF ambassador and singer who performs in her native Fon and Yoruba languages as well as in French and English, for an interview in the Swiss Alpine resort. The following has been edited for length and flow:

#### Why did you come to Davos?

“I think that there’s no economy and no politics without arts. Culture is at the center of every developed society. I’ve been coming here because we have to come and break the mold that we put in place. Economy, politics, art: all of them are linked. But through music, and through art, you make people dream of a better world. Here at Davos, I think bringing art to it humanizes Davos. Most of the conferences around the world, you don’t have art at all in the center of it. You spend time talking, talking, talking and what you talk about is within this bubble that you are in. It is not having any impact on people’s lives, like music does.”



Beninese-French singer-songwriter Angelique Kidjo poses during an interview with AFP at the World Economic Forum (WEF) annual meeting in Davos.—AFP

“A human being is not just about economy. When you remove the emotion part of the human being, you are left with a zombie. As a musician, right, you have a role to play. Taylor Swift is one of the (artists who are) really bringing people together. Here I am in (the) presence of leaders, of economists, of great brains that need to understand -- and I want art to be also part of the decision-making. If we don’t invest in culture, we create a society of anger.”

**There was a lot of talk about AI in Davos. Will it have a positive or negative impact on the world?**

“We are at the beginning of AI right now. So we still are in the moment where we can avoid the mistake we made with other platforms. When you create something, and if you think when you’re creating it that it is going to hurt your child or anybody, you won’t do it. “For me, technology should be used to unify the world for us to get rid of xenophobia, anti-Semitism, racism. But are we willing to do that? The temptation to make money is more important than moral value. That’s the problem we have. We need to be really careful: what we put in ChatGPT has to be for the betterment of humanity. If we don’t do that and we start having unemployment, there is no more society, we’re going to blow up every society. We can’t just replace human beings by machines, no way. I’m not saying that technology’s bad. Technology is good, but we have to put safeguards in there.”—AFP



This photo shows (from left) executive producer and writer Masayoshi Yokoyama, Kazuhiro Nakaya, Takaya Kuroda, Hiroki Hasegawa, Ken Yasuda and Ryo Narita taking part in a press conference in Yokohama, ahead of the launch of “Like a Dragon: Infinite Wealth”, the latest in the Japanese video game “Yakuza” franchise.

## ‘We don’t hit women’: How Yakuza differs from GTA

**T**he “Yakuza” gangster series has long been seen as a Japanese “Grand Theft Auto” but Masayoshi Yokoyama, one of the main designers of the hugely successful games, dismisses any such comparison. “From the start, we decided not to have a game where you can hit people yourself. All fights start with a provocation from the opponent,” Yokoyama told AFP ahead of the release of the latest installment.

“And the hero never hits women, that’s an absolute rule,” explained the gravelly voiced executive producer of the series. “Our approach is the opposite (of GTA). It’s a completely different game.” The beat-em-up role-playing game franchise has been running since 2005, telling the stories of big-hearted tattooed yakuza struggling with small-time thugs and their ruthless bosses—but above all with their pasts.

The 15 games released so far have been set mostly in Kamuchuro, a fiction-



This photo shows executive officer, producer and director Masayoshi Yokoyama, posing next to a promotional poster at the headquarters of game and entertainment giant Sega in Tokyo. — AFP photos

al part of Tokyo that bears a strong resemblance to Kabukicho, the Japanese metropolis’s real-life red light district. The new one, titled “Like a Dragon: Infinite Wealth”, is set outside Japan for the first time, in Hawaii.

“From the beginning, we targeted a purely Japanese audience who actually go there and we wanted them to say: ‘Ah yes, that’s really how it is!’,” said Yokoyama, 47. GTA “offers a very large map where you can act freely, but in ‘Like a Dragon’, you operate in a tight and dense space where you enjoy a story,” he says.

#### A taboo word

But Yokoyama, speaking at Sega’s high-rise headquarters in Tokyo, also wonders about what influence violent games are having on society, especially “when you see mass shootings on TV, and you learn that the author was playing at home”. “It’s a very complex problem, but I think we can’t say that video games don’t have an influence, because, unlike a novel or a film, they allow you to have an immersive experience,” he says.

“So I think that when creating video games that contain violence or yakuza stories, it is imperative to think about the

effects that this can have on players.” The series was initially a niche affair in Western markets but, with 21 million copies sold, it now accounts for 70 percent of its sales outside Japan. The series was never called “Yakuza” in Japan, and the international title of the new episode “Like a Dragon: Infinite Wealth” drops the word for the first time too.

“The plots of the games in the series have gradually moved away from purely yakuza themes to focus on social issues and the story no longer only concerns the underworld,” Yokoyama said. One of the only references in the new game is that the hero—the same as in the last game, on the run in Hawaii—is an ex-gangster. “Having the word ‘yakuza’ in the (English) title harms sales in Japan,” Yokoyama said. “Japanese society is getting tougher and tougher towards yakuza. In the past, we could talk about it on television but it has become a taboo word.”—AFP

## TikTok pulls Taylor Swift, Weeknd in rights feud

**M**usic by Taylor Swift, The Weeknd, The Beatles and other artists can no longer be heard on TikTok after a breakdown in negotiations with music group Universal over compensation. All recorded music licensed to Universal Music Group has been removed from TikTok’s music library since Thursday, and all videos containing music licensed by Universal have been muted. The previous licensing agreement between UMG and TikTok expired on January 31st.

After the talks broke down, Universal on Tuesday accused TikTok of “trying to build a music-based business, without paying fair value for the music.” Among the issues raised in the negotiations were appropriate compensation for artists and songwriters, online safety for users, and the protection of artists from the harms of artificial intelligence, the company added.

TikTok said in a statement that it was “sad and disappointing that Universal Music Group has put their own greed



US singer-songwriter Taylor Swift arrives for the 81st annual Golden Globe Awards at The Beverly Hilton hotel in Beverly Hills, California.—AFP

above the interests of their artists.” Universal’s repertoire of artists is immense and includes Kendrick Lamar, U2 and Bob Dylan.

Despite TikTok’s large user base, it accounts for just about one percent of Universal’s total revenue, the label said. Universal noted other problems such as large amounts of AI-generated recordings on the platform, alongside what it called a lack of effort to deal with infringements on artists’ music. Owned by Chinese company ByteDance, TikTok is one of the most popular social media platforms globally, with more than one billion users. It is a major onramp for emerging artists and used as a promotional tool by music labels.—AFP

## Tom Holland’s ‘Avengers’ bonus sent to... actor Tom Hollander

**B**ritish actor and “White Lotus” villain Tom Hollander often gets mistaken for “Spiderman” star Tom Holland, but occasionally it works in his favor—like when he got the payslip for the other man’s seven-figure film bonus. Hollander, who also had turns in “Pirates of the Caribbean” and “Pride and Prejudice,” at one time shared an agent with the younger Marvel star.

This week, the 56-year-old told late night host Seth Meyers that his agency had once sent him an email containing

a pay slip with an “astonishing” sum and labeled as the first tranche of a box office bonus for “The Avengers.” “I don’t think I’m in ‘The Avengers,’” the actor thought to himself as he opened the missive, he told Meyers. “It was an astonishing amount of money,” he said. “It was not his salary. It was his first box office bonus. Not the whole box office bonus, the first one. “And it was more money than I’d ever (seen),” he said. “It was a seven-figure sum.”

Other times Hollander has been confused for the younger star have been less fun, the Tony nominee said. “I’m (sometimes) introduced to somebody’s very, very excited, then confused, then disappointed children,” Hollander recalled. “It’s been very difficult. Because, you know, I was here first,” he joked. Hollander was on NBC’s “Late Night with Seth Meyers” to promote his forthcoming series “Feud: Capote vs. The Swans,” in which he plays American writer Truman Capote.—AFP



(Left) Tom Hollander and Tom Holland.



Lifestyle



(From left) Honoree US singer-songwriter Jon Bon Jovi, singer Sammy Hagar and singer Shania Twain perform during the 2024 MusiCares Person of the Year gala at the LA Convention Center in Los Angeles.--AFP photos



Honoree US singer-songwriter Jon Bon Jovi waves during the 2024 MusiCares Person of the Year gala.

# Rocker Jon Bon Jovi honored at pre-Grammy gala



US singer-songwriter Lenny Kravitz speaks on stage during the 2024 MusiCares Person of the Year gala.



Honoree US singer-songwriter Jon Bon Jovi speaks on stage during the 2024 MusiCares Person of the Year gala.

**B**ruce Springsteen played a blistering duet with Jon Bon Jovi to honor the latter artist at a pre-Grammy gala Friday, as superstars including Paul McCartney danced along to an event heavy on New Jersey pride. The two rock icons had the crowd on its feet for rollicking renditions of Bon Jovi's hit "Who Says You Can't Go Home" and Springsteen's "The Promised Land."

The star-studded gala in Los Angeles is an annual pre-Grammy tradition from MusiCares, the charitable wing of the Recording Academy that raises money to help musicians in need. Past honorees include Dolly Parton and Joni Mitchell as well as Springsteen and McCartney.

In accepting the award, Bon Jovi heralded his friend The Boss, including to acknowledge the death of Springsteen's mother earlier this week. "He wanted to be here tonight for me, and I'm forever grateful to you," Bon Jovi, 61, told Springsteen.

Comedian and actor Jim Gaffigan hosted the event, which was brimming with riffs on short shorts and big hair, a look elemental to Bon Jovi's rise in his heady hair band days. At one point, Gaffigan even donned a teased wig and denim cutoffs, telling the audience: "When most people see Jon or me they see a piece of ass—but that's not fair to Jon or me. There's many more dimensions."

Sporting a sparkling blazer and cowboy hat, nineties rocker Melissa Etheridge harnessed her powerful vocals for a performance of the bluesy



US singer Shania Twain performs on stage during the 2024 MusiCares Person of the Year gala.



Honoree US singer-songwriter Jon Bon Jovi (right) and singer Bruce Springsteen (left) perform on stage.

"Blaze of Glory" in honor of the artist she told journalists on the red carpet she has "loved for years." "Just seeing him and the band, you know for decades, just making music and keeping relevant, keeping singing the songs we love, and just, you know, being cool."

**'Friend for life'**

Jelly Roll, the rapper turned country singer in the running for a Best New Artist Grammy, gave a spot-on performance of the glam arena rock favorite "Bad Medicine" that drew resounding applause. Also up for Best New Artist are the husband-and-wife duo The War and Treaty, a country and blues act who brought the crowd to their feet with a

heartstring-pulling duet of "I'll Be There For You." Country-pop legend Shania Twain performed the power ballad "Bed of Roses," while Lainey Wilson, the country artist up for two awards on Sunday, staged a twangified version of "We Weren't Born To Follow."

And fellow Grammy nominee Jason Isbell smashed his performance of Bon Jovi's "Wanted Dead Or Alive." The Goo Goo Dolls, who have toured extensively with Bon Jovi, performed "This House is Not For Sale," including a power solo worthy of any guitar hero. "He's always been generous and open, and those are the people that I admire most in this business," said Goo Goo Dolls' John Rzeznik of Bon Jovi.

"I think he truly deserves it, he's genuine about what he does, and he's always given back a lot. And I think that helps keep you sane, and it makes this worthwhile." The night ended with an ensemble performance of the smash "Livin' On A Prayer," after Bon Jovi delivered a speech heralding the "gift" that is music. "Every time that I strum my guitar, I'm reminded that I have a best friend for life. That instrument will never let you down," he said. "It doesn't matter if you're eight or if you're 80, if you're playing in a bedroom or at the local stadium." "Tonight, and every night, I know how blessed I've been."—AFP

## Michael Morpurgo on refugees, trauma and why he hated Spielberg's 'War Horse'

**C**hildren's author Michael Morpurgo finally has a film adaptation he is happy with in the upcoming "Kensuke's Kingdom". But don't get him started on Steven Spielberg's version of "War Horse". "Even the horses are wrong!" Morpurgo said of the Hollywood legend's 2011 adaptation of his beloved World War I novel. "They're all fine, aristocratic animals. The horses that go to war are farm horses, great big chunky things." Morpurgo, 80, is one of the world's best-loved children's writers, with more than 100 books to his name.



British writer Michael Morpurgo poses during a photo session in Paris. — AFP

He has loved some theatre adaptations of his work, but the films have rarely captured the spirit of his books, he said. Spielberg's "War Horse" was a particular disappointment, failing to show that the soldiers came from poor, rural backgrounds, sent to their deaths for a war that had nothing to do with their lives. "It's poorly written," Morpurgo told AFP. It was full of "cliches of war, cliches of people... so I didn't care for it."

**'Exceedingly beautiful'**

By contrast, he has nothing but good to say of the adaptation of "Kensuke's Kingdom" about a Japanese boy alone on an island after losing his family to war. The animated film features the voices of Oscar contender Cillian Murphy and Ken Watanabe. It is released in France next week, and due elsewhere later this year. "This is the first film I've been involved with, which I can honestly say is, to me, better than the book," said Morpurgo.

"It's extraordinarily rich in emotion and suspense. Nothing is rushed, it's given time, it's exceedingly beautiful." The story includes a frank look at the violence of the animal kingdom, and Morpurgo has never shied away from difficult topics including the Holocaust ("The Mozart Question") and Zionist-Palestinian conflict ("The Kites are Flying!").

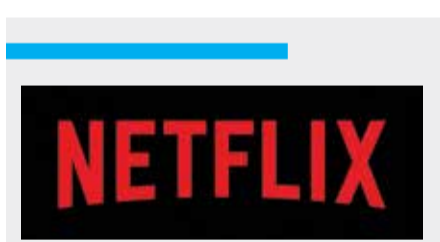
Does he have advice for parents seeking to explain the world's problems to children? "My rule is introduce these things slowly in a way they can handle. Not too soon but not too late," he said. He compares it to his childhood in London after World War II when adults shared little of the horrors they had experienced.

There were clues: the photo on the piano of an uncle killed in action at 21, a beggar with a missing leg outside the sweet shop. "But it took me years to comprehend what had happened because no one talked about it. "The problem with that is it can come rushing on later and it can be very bad for your mental health to have these sudden shocks. Stories can play a part in explaining how the world is, and your place in it."

**'Makes me unpopular'**

Morpurgo said many of his stories are drawn from these formative years and those of his family. He was particularly marked by his grandfather's story of arriving in England as a refugee from Belgium during World War I. "We British welcomed 240,000 Belgians and they went to our schools and hospitals and lived there at a time when no one knew who would win the war, because people said they needed help."

He despairs of the anti-immigrant feeling in Britain today, particularly the plan to send refugees to Rwanda for processing. "All they can think of doing with refugees is to pack them away out of sight and I hate that," he said. "So I've written about refugees quite a lot and it makes me quite unpopular, and I think that's fine. Literature is there to protest what's wrong, and children's literature is the same."—AFP



## Netflix unveils 2024 slate led by sci-fi from 'Thrones' creators

**N**etflix is betting on its ambitious new sci-fi series from the creators of "Game of Thrones" to help extend its streaming dominance in 2024, as the company unveiled a sprawling TV and film lineup Thursday. "3 Body Problem," out March 21, is adapted from a bestselling Chinese trilogy of novels which takes place in an alternate version of modern reality where humanity has made contact with an alien civilization.

The series will be "part thriller, part sci-fi," chief content officer Bela Bajaria told journalists at a Los Angeles press conference. It is at least partly set in modern-day London. One scene showed a British police inspector (played by Benedict Wong) investigating a strange and grisly apparent suicide. "It's a big swing. A huge, cinematic bet," said Bajaria.

The series from "Thrones" pair David Benioff and D.B. Weiss features prominently in a Netflix 2024 preview reel published online Thursday, and was the first content shown to reporters at this week's presentation. Other shows due later this year include the eagerly awaited second season of "Squid Game"—the dystopian Korean horror tale about a fictional, deadly game show which remains by far the most-watched Netflix TV series ever.

It will follow returning hero Gi-hun as he abandons his plans to go to the United States and "starts a chase with a motive." Also among a notably international lineup were a Spanish-language, Colombian-made TV series based on Gabriel Garcia Marquez's beloved novel "One Hundred Years of Solitude," and a six-part drama about the life of Brazilian racing great Ayrton Senna.—AFP

## Queen Margrethe wins Denmark's best costume 'Oscar'

**D**enmark's 83-year-old Queen Margrethe, who abdicated in January in favor of her son Frederik, on Saturday won Denmark's equivalent of an Oscar for best costume designer. The royal was honored with a Robert Award for her work on the Netflix film "Ehregard: The Art of Seduction", an adaptation of a book by Danish author Karen Blixen, best known for her memoir "Out of Africa", and directed by Bille August, one of the Scandinavian country's most acclaimed filmmakers.

The ex-monarch, who cited health issues when she announced her shock abdication in her annual New Year's Eve address, was not present at Saturday's award ceremony in Copenhagen. The film's producer, Marcella Dichmann, accepted the prize on her behalf. Alongside her royal duties, the queen has made a name for herself as an accomplished artist over the years.

She is a painter and illustrator, and has worked as a costume and set designer with the Royal Danish Ballet and Royal Danish Theatre on numerous occasions.

The queen also designed the sets for "Ehregard" and was nominated for a Robert prize in that category as well.

Hugely popular in Denmark, Margrethe studied at Cambridge in England and the Sorbonne in Paris, and is fluent in English, French, German and Swedish. She has also translated plays, including Simone de Beauvoir's "All Men Are Mortal" with her French-born husband, the late Prince Consort Henrik, under a pseudonym.

She has illustrated several books, including a Danish 2002 edition of J.R.R. Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings", and her paintings have been exhibited in museums and galleries in Denmark and abroad. Margrethe underwent major back surgery last year, and passed the throne to her son on January 14 after a 52-year reign, making him King Frederik X. She has retained her title of queen following her abdication.—AFP



(From left to right) Then Queen Margrethe II of Denmark, King Harald V of Norway using crutches and Queen Sonja of Norway visit Saglandet Lejre near Roskilde, Denmark. — AFP



# Australia thump West Indies by 83 runs to seal ODI series

## Australia's 11th consecutive ODI win to wrap up series

SYDNEY: Man of the match Sean Abbott grabbed three wickets and slammed an entertaining 69 as Australia cruised to an 83-run victory over the West Indies in the second one-day international to seal the three-match series on Sunday. Chasing 258-9, the visitors were dismissed for 175 in the 44th over at a humid Sydney Cricket Ground. Abbott starred with 3-40 while Josh Hazlewood took 3-43.

"It was a challenging start to the game, the West Indies bowled quite well early on. It was a tricky surface, but our late middle order did a terrific job," said Australia skipper Steve Smith. "I thought 250 was around par and we came out and did the job really nicely with the ball."

It was Australia's 11th consecutive ODI win to wrap up the series with a match to play in Canberra on Tuesday. Australia won the first game in Melbourne by eight wickets and while it was a more disciplined bowling performance by the West Indies, their batters struggled against the hosts' relentless attack.

"I thought we stuck to our guns really well in the bowling department," said West Indies captain Shai Hope. "But the Aussies bowled very well and we need to find a way to bat a bit more freely." The West Indies run chase started with a flourish as Alick Athanaze slammed successive boundaries off Aaron Hardie.

But he was out the following ball for 11 and fellow opener Justin Greaves (eight) went the next over with Hazlewood — back in the side for rested Melbourne bowling hero Xavier Bartlett — doing the damage.

When Kjom Otley was out for eight, caught behind

off Abbott, they were struggling at 34-3. Hope and Keacy Carty ground out a 53-run stand, but it took them 14 overs. Hazlewood returned to bowl Hope for 29 and when Abbott accounted for Carty (40), the West Indies were 108-5 with the match slipping away.

Hazlewood struck again to remove Matthew Forde lbw and the night was capped by a sensational one-handed diving catch by Cameron Green to dismiss Roston Chase. Earlier, Abbott hit 69 off 63 balls to help Australia post a respectable score after slumping to 167-7.

Explosive 21-year-old Jake Fraser-McGurk was handed a debut in place of Travis Head, but failed to fire after the West Indies won the toss and sent Australia in, out for 10 to Alzarri Joseph. Joseph struck again seven balls later to remove Josh Inglis for nine, caught at backward point.

Green and Smith had steered Australia to their resounding win in Melbourne with an unbeaten 149-run stand. But they were unable to repeat the feat with Forde bagging the key wicket of Smith, who chopped on to leave Australia tottering at 50-3.

Green added 39 with Marnus Labuschagne before he lofted Oshane Thomas to mid-on and was gone for 33. Labuschagne (26) again failed to convert a start to a big score, with spinner Gudakesh Motie picking up his wicket before removing dangerous Aaron Hardie (26) and Matt Short (41). Abbott then put on 57 with Will Sutherland — another debutant — before a late flurry took him to only his second one-day half-century. — AFP



SYDNEY: West Indies' batsman Shai Hope is clean bowled by Australia's paceman Josh Hazlewood during the second one-day international (ODI) cricket match between Australia and West Indies at the Sydney Cricket Ground in Sydney on February 4, 2024. — AFP

## Clark sets record at Pebble Beach with superb 60

SAN FRANCISCO: Wyndham Clark, the reigning US Open champion, broke the course record at Pebble Beach on Saturday with his 12-under par third round of 60 at the PGA Tour's Pebble Beach Pro-Am. Clark leads on 17-under 199 through 54 holes by a stroke from rising Swedish star Ludvig Aberg, who shot 67, with France's Matthieu Pavon, winner at last week's Farmers Insurance Open, third on 201 after his 66.

But with rough storms expected on Sunday and early Monday, Clark may sit atop the leaderboard for some time after his outstanding round, which went so close to a rare sub-60 score. Clark, who had already made two eagles in his round, needed a third on the par-5 18th to finish on 59 but his 26-foot putt stopped just inches short of the hole.

The 30-year-old American, who won twice on the PGA Tour last season, also saw birdie putts on the 16th and 17th both stop just short of the hole. "I really didn't think about it until I got to 18 tee box and when I did, I thought oh, my gosh, it would have been really nice to have one of those last two because then I only have to birdie 18," Clark said.

"Once I hit the fairway on 18 I knew I was going to have a chance to hopefully try to shoot that special number. I gave it my best shot. Unfortunately, I left some putts short. I'm super happy with my round. Any time you shoot 12 under anywhere you've got to be happy."

The previous course record of 62 was set by Tom Kite in 1983 and matched by fellow Americans David Duval in 1997 and Patrick Cantlay in 2021 plus Austrian Matthias Schwab in 2022. Clark got off to a flying start with an eagle on the par-5 second, finding the green with his 200-yard approach then sinking a 39-foot putt.

He birdied the par-4 fourth and then produced his second eagle on the par-5 sixth, superbly draining a 42-foot putt. Clark, taking advantage of slow greens, then made three birdies in a row to reach the turn in 28 strokes. The birdie streak continued on the 10th and 11th before a setback on the par-3 12th, where he made bogey after finding the greenside bunker and rough before avoiding a double-bogey with a 26-foot putt from the fringe.

The push for 59 came back into sight with birdies on the 13th and 14th before his exceptional putting fell short. He took an aggressive approach on the final hole, where he blasted his second onto the green and although his eagle effort failed he had the compensation of the record low score on the historic course. "To have the course record at a place like this, you don't even dream about stuff like this, really," said Clark. "I didn't even visualize the day this good. It was honestly surreal."

### Confidence Pavon's key

Weather permitting, he will face a challenge in the final round from Aberg, who shot his second straight bogey-free round, and in-form Pavon. Aberg shot five birdies, including on the 18th where he left a 38 foot eagle putt just short.

Pavon became the first Frenchman to win on the modern US PGA Tour last week at Torrey Pines and continued his excellent form, making eight birdies, only slightly undone with bogeys on the par-3 fifth and the par-4 eighth. Pavon, whose first DP World Tour win came in his 185th start at the Spanish Open in October, said it was difficult to fathom his recent improvement.

"It's just I think a combination of many things," he said. "Got better and better since I won my tournament back in Spain six months ago, then got my PGA Tour card and now I come to America with some confidence in myself and my game. I think that's the key."

Australian Jason Day shot the second best round with a 63, including an eagle on the par-4 11th where he found the rough off the tee but sank his second shot from 124 yards. — AFP

## Gill ton keeps India in control as England chase 399

VISAKHAPATNAM: Shubman Gill struck form with a century as India left England a record victory target of 399 on day three of the second Test on Sunday. England, who lead the five-match series 1-0, reached 67-1 at stumps after opener Ben Duckett fell for 28 in Visakhapatnam.

Left-hander Duckett put on an attacking 50-run stand with fellow opener Zak Crawley, batting on 29, before Ravichandran Ashwin got him out for his 497th Test wicket. Nightwatchman Rehan Ahmed, on nine, joined Crawley with England needing another 332 for victory.

The highest fourth-innings target successfully chased against India is England's 378 at Edgbaston in 2022, and the most successful in India was when the hosts got 387 against England in 2008. Spinners Tom Hartley and Ahmed combined to bowl out India for 255 after Gill's 104 on a day of bowling and fielding brilliance.

Veteran pace bowler James Anderson struck early to remove the openers, and India slipped further after a stunning catch by captain Ben Stokes before Gill stabilized the innings. Gill hit his third Test ton, and first in his 12 innings since March 2023, to pull India out from 122-4 with two key stands including 89 runs with Axar Patel.

He reached the hundred with a single off debutant spinner Shoaib Bashir, and raised his bat to a cheering Sunday crowd. He soon attempted a reverse sweep and departed when Bashir got him caught behind, a dismissal that was turned down by the umpire but replays showed the ball grazed the batsman's glove before wicketkeeper Ben

## Afghanistan fight back with record partnership in Sri Lanka Test

COLOMBO: A record first-wicket partnership helped Afghanistan fight back Sunday against hosts Sri Lanka in their one-off Test, as they reached 97 for no loss at tea on day three in Colombo. Afghanistan started their second innings trailing Sri Lanka by 241 runs, but openers Ibrahim Zadran and Noor Ali Zadran reduced the deficit to 144 runs by tea.

Their 97-run unbroken stand for the first wicket is a record for Afghanistan, improving vastly on the 53-run partnership between Ibrahim himself and Javed Ahmadi against the West Indies in 2019. Ibrahim — who had been dismissed for a second-ball duck in the first innings — produced a solid effort to reach his fourth half-century in Test cricket. He achieved it elegantly, driving Kasun Rajitha for four.

Providing good support was Noor Ali, the

## Team Matthews beat Team McDavid 7-4 in NHL All-Star Game

TORONTO: Alston Matthews scored two goals in the championship game to earn the Most Valuable Player award as Team Matthews beat Team Connor McDavid 7-4 in Saturday's NHL All-Star Game final. The 26-year-old American, who leads the NHL with 40 goals this season for the Toronto Maple Leafs, delighted fans in his team's home arena by sparking his hand-picked squad to the overall crown.

"Winning it is a cherry on top," Matthews said. "We had some guys play unbelievable. Just a lot of fun. The atmosphere in here was great. Nice to get the W in front of the fans." Matthews, the NHL's top goal scorer in two of the last three



VISAKHAPATNAM: India's Axar Patel (R) plays a shot during the third day of the second Test cricket match between India and England at the Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy Cricket Stadium in Visakhapatnam on February 4, 2024. — AFP

Foakes took a sharp catch.

Gill had two lucky escapes on four, both close lbw calls and one successfully reviewed, but then batted fluently with his flicks and drives until his exit. England kept chipping away, as Hartley, who returned figures of 4-77 with his left-arm spin, sent back Axar lbw for 45 to leave India six down by tea.

Ashwin played a stubborn knock of 29 before Ahmed took him down to wrap up the innings with his third strike. Earlier, in the first session, Shreyas Iyer made 29 and was out after a moment of magic

35-year-old debutant reaching 42 not out at tea. Sri Lanka burned two reviews during the Afghan innings, as the tourists batted through the afternoon session without losing a wicket.

A caught-behind appeal against Noor Ali off the bowling of Asitha Fernando had been turned down, but Sri Lanka opted to review — but the ball only touched the arm guard. They reviewed again in a bid to dismiss Noor Ali, when wicketkeeper Sadeera Samarawickrama appealed for a leg-side catch, but again there was no bat involved.

Sri Lanka's fielders missed some opportunities too. Ibrahim was on 29 when he flashed hard at Vishwa Fernando, but the ball just missed Dhananjaya de Silva at slip. Prabhath Jayasuriya then failed to hold on to a difficult return catch with Ibrahim on 39.

While attempting to catch the ball, Jayasuriya ended up hurting his spinning finger and had to retire to the dressing room. He had bowled unchanged for 14 overs. Rajitha was drafted into the side after debutant fast bowler Chamika Gunasekara was hit on the helmet. Sri Lanka were bowled out for 439 after resuming with their overnight

seasons and NHL Hart Trophy winner in 2022 as league MVP, was modest about the All-Star MVP award, saying, "There might be a slight bias with it being in Toronto."

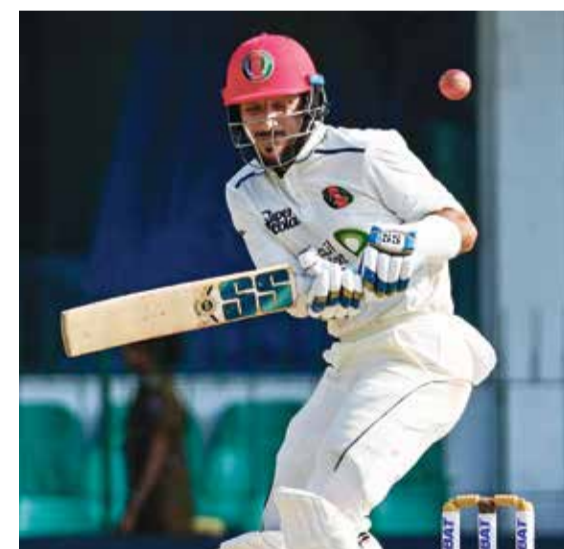
Elite NHL talent was drafted into four squads by team captains McDavid of Edmonton, Matthews, Colorado's Nathan MacKinnon and Vancouver's Quinn Hughes. Teams played 3-on-3 plus goaltenders over two 10-minute periods in the final and the semi-finals, which each ended in shootouts.

The final was deadlocked 3-3 at half-time with Clayton Keller, Mitch Marner and Matthews each scoring to give Team Matthews leads only for Team McDavid to equalize each time on goals from Boone Jenner, David Pastrnak and Leon Draisaitl.

Filip Forsberg lifted Team Matthews ahead 66 seconds into the second half and Matthews netted his second goal of the final with 5:03 to play for a 5-3 advantage. Alex DeBrincat padded the Team Matthews lead with 1:51 remaining. Tomas Hertl answered for Team McDavid but Mathew

by Stokes. Iyer attempted a big hit off Hartley but Stokes sprinted back from mid-off and dived at full stretch to pull off a screamer of a catch.

Anderson, in an excellent morning spell of fast bowling, rattled Rohit Sharma's stumps with a superb delivery that pitched and moved away from the right-hander. The old warhorse then got the left-handed Yashasvi Jaiswal caught at first slip, for his 695th Test wicket. India had a lead of 143 at the start of their second innings and began the day on 28-0. — AFP



COLOMBO: Afghanistan's Rahmat Shah plays a shot on the third day of the one-off Test cricket match between Sri Lanka and Afghanistan at the Sinhalese Sports Club (SSC) in Colombo on February 4, 2024. — AFP

Barzal added a Team Matthews goal to create the final margin.

"I liked the picks," Matthews said. "A lot of guys I was familiar with, some friends I played with in the past, so it was cool to get some guys back together." Team McDavid beat Team MacKinnon 4-3 to capture the first semi-final thanks to late heroics from three-time NHL MVP McDavid, who won the \$1 million All-Star Skills competition, and David Pastrnak.

Team MacKinnon led 3-1 in the dying seconds but five-time NHL scoring champion McDavid set up Pastrnak's goal with 32 seconds remaining then took a pass from Pastrnak and scored with six seconds remaining to force a shootout.

McDavid scored on the first shot of the extra session and Pastrnak netted the clincher on the final shot to give McDavid's squad 2-0 win and the overall victory. In the second semi-final, DeBrincat scored twice in regulation and added the only goal in the shootout to give Team Matthews a 6-5 victory over Team Hughes. — AFP



Sports

# Jordan plot S Korea upset as Asian Cup braces for semis

## Goalkeeper Qatar's hero, Iran stun Japan

DOHA: Jordan will make a slice of history when they face Son Heung-min's South Korea in the Asian Cup on Tuesday while hosts Qatar play Iran in the other semi-final. On paper South Korea would be expected to beat a Jordan side who are the lowest-ranked team left in the tournament and in the last four for the first time.

But Jordan held South Korea 2-2 in the group phase, with Jurgen Klinsmann's side salvaging a draw in injury time when Yazan Al-Arab deflected Hwang In-beom's shot into his own net. Under their admired Moroccan coach Hussein Ammouta, Jordan scored twice at the death to beat Iraq in the last 16 and then saw off fairytale debutants Tajikistan in the quarter-finals.

That put Jordan, who are 87th in the FIFA rankings and made their Asian Cup debut in 2004, into their first semi-final. "Our eyes are now on the trophy," defender Abdallah Nasib, whose second-half header deflected off Tajikistan defender Vahdat Hanonov for the only goal of the game, told AFP.

"What the Jordanian team has achieved confirms that nothing is impossible." Of the semi-finalists, Jordan are the only ones never to have won the Asian Cup. Their opponents South Korea have lifted the trophy twice, but the last time was in 1960 and they are under big pressure at home to end that barren run.

They have not been convincing. Held by Jordan and Malaysia in the group phase, they beat Saudi Arabia in the last 16 on penalties and then needed some magic from Son to see off Australia in extra time. As well as the enduring quality of skipper and Spurs star Son, Klinsmann's side have also been re-

liant on a series of late goals to stay alive in Qatar.

South Korean media, who have no fondness for the German Klinsmann, have called it "zombie football". Son says the team's ability to keep coming back from the dead in games is proof of their resilience. The Koreans will be missing Bayern Munich's Kim Min-jae, a rock at the heart of their defence, because of suspension.

### Iran close on fourth title

Qatar, who defeated Japan in the 2019 final, and Iran clash on Wednesday in the second semi-final. Both sides won all three of their group games—the only teams to do so along with now-eliminated Iraq—and Iran then squeezed through on penalties against Syria, before beating Japan 2-1 in the last eight.

That victory on Saturday over the pre-tournament favourites, thanks to a stoppage-time penalty from Alireza Jahanbakhsh, has Iran dreaming of a first Asian title since 1976 and fourth overall.

They will welcome back prolific striker Mehdi Taremi after he was suspended for the Japan game. "This match can be a turning point for Iranian football," coach Amir Ghalenoei said following the victory over Japan.

"Not just for the senior national team, but also for the U23s, U19s and the whole football set-up." After romping through the group phase, Qatar defeated Palestine and then saw off Uzbekistan on penalties, their quarter-final having ended 1-1 after 120 minutes.

Qatar won the Asian Cup for the first time in



DOHA: Qatar's players lift their teammate goalkeeper #22 Meshaal Barsham after winning the Qatar 2023 AFC Asian Cup quarter-final football match between Qatar and Uzbekistan at Al-Bayt Stadium in al-Khor. — AFP

2019 and went into the game on a run of 11 straight wins in the competition. Meshaal Barsham was the hosts' hero in the penalty shootout, saving three times, and said: "Since the beginning our goal has

been defending the title, but we're not thinking about that now. It's one match at a time. The atmosphere in the team is positive and this is what is making us united. We're like a family." — AFP

## Girona drop vital points in title race, Barca beat Alaves

BARCELONA: Shock title challengers Girona dropped two vital points in La Liga with a 0-0 draw against Real Sociedad on Saturday. Barcelona, third, earned a 3-1 win at Alaves in La Liga on Saturday with Brazilian teenager Vitor Roque scoring and then sent off in a lively appearance off the bench.

Catalan minnows Girona, second and now trailing leaders Real Madrid by one point, could not find a way through against their Basque visitors. Los Blancos face city rivals Atletico Madrid on Sunday at the Santiago Bernabeu and can potentially move four points clear at the top.

Girona's draw leaves them six points ahead of champions Barcelona, third, and they were left upset after Yangel Herrera had a goal ruled out for offside in the build-up. The offside against Savinho occurred 36 seconds before the midfielder found the net, set up by the Brazilian winger, with Girona arguing VAR should not have intervened.

Some crosses had been half-cleared by Real Sociedad before Savinho scooped the ball to the back post for Herrera. "The reality is that if there's a second, third phases (of play), VAR should not get involved, I think it's obvious," said Michel.

"Beyond the goal ruled out, I think it was a very, very difficult game ... and it's a good point." Despite leading the league in goals scored, Michel Sanchez's



VITORIA: Alaves' Spanish defender #07 Alex Sola (L) fights for the ball with Barcelona's Portuguese defender #02 Joao Cancelo during the Spanish league football match between Deportivo Alaves and FC Barcelona at the Mendizorroza stadium in Vitoria. — AFP

side were largely kept at arm's length by La Real.

After Herrera's goal was disallowed, Real Sociedad's Mikel Oyarzabal also had one chalked off for a clearer offside infringement. Alex Remiro made a solid save to deny Herrera in the final stages as the hosts were frustrated and Michel was sent off for complaining on the touchline.

Valery Fernandez missed a fine chance in stoppage time after Yan Couto scrapped hard to win the ball back and crossed for the Spanish winger. Without La Liga's joint top goalscorer Artem Dovbyk, who watched from the stands after suffering knee discomfort according to Spanish reports, Girona did not shine in attack. — AFP

utes when it became clear that the eight-time Balon d'Or winner would not make even the briefest of cameos. The jeers rose to a crescendo at the final whistle after former Liverpool and Barcelona striker Luis Suarez also failed to take to the pitch because of a knee injury.

Miami co-owner Beckham was drowned out by booing as he tried to thank the crowd "for their incredible support" while fans signalled their anger with thumbs-down gestures. "We understand the disappointment of the fans for the absence of Leo (Messi) and Luis Suarez," Miami coach Gerardo Martino told reporters, explaining the club's medical team had taken the decision after an assessment on Sunday morning.

"We understand a lot of fans are very disappointed and we ask for their forgiveness. "We wish we could have sent Leo and Luis on for at least a while but the risk was too big." The 36-year-old Messi played just six minutes in Miami's last match, in Saudi Arabia on Thursday, and now faces a race against time to be fit for the new MLS season which starts on February 21. — AFP

## Slovakia rout Serbia in Djokovic absence to make Davis Cup finals

PARIS: Serbia, without Novak Djokovic, proved no match for Slovakia who surged into the group stage of the Davis Cup finals for the first time, with Germany and Finland among five other countries qualifying on Saturday.

Slovak doubles duo Lukas Klein and Igor Zelenay clinched the decisive point with a 7-6 (7/4), 6-3 win over Nikola Caci and Miomir Kecmanovic to take an unassailable 3-0 lead in the tie. Lukas Pokorny made it 4-0 after Laslo Djere retired while trailing in the first set of the reverse singles on indoor clay at Kraljevo.

"Too many years we didn't qualify but finally we made it," said Zelenay. Alex Molcan, who won Friday's second singles, added: "We knew it was going to be tough against Serbians in their home nation. I'm happy we were able to win two matches today." Zelenay and Klein had recovered from a break in the first set, digging deep with 31 winners to see off 2010 champions Serbia.

On Friday, Klein got Slovakia off the mark with a 7-6 (7/2), 6-2 win over Kecmanovic, with Molcan rallying past Dusan Lajovic 4-6, 6-2, 6-0. In Hunga-

ry, three-time winners Germany—missing Alexander Zverev due to illness—clinched the first two of Saturday's matches for an eventual 3-2 victory.

Doubles pairing Kevin Krawietz and Tim Puetz's 6-3, 7-6 (7/3) win over Fabian Marozsan and Mate Valkusz pulled the Germans ahead. Jan-Lennard Struff sealed their ticket with a 6-3, 6-2 win over Valkusz to advance to September's group stage featuring 16 teams. Zsombor Piros won a dead fifth rubber against Krawietz.

Finland cruised to a 3-1 win over Portugal, while Brazil qualified for a first finals appearance as Thiago Monteiro defeated Elias Ymer in three sets to cement a 3-1 victory of their own. Dutch delight. The Netherlands won a thrilling contest against Switzerland, Botić van de Zandschulp edging Marc-Andrea Huesler 5-7, 7-6 (7/5), 6-3 in the decisive second reverse singles as the Dutch prevailed 3-2 in Groningen.

The Swiss led the tie 2-1 after Huesler and Leandro Riedi won Saturday's doubles, but Tallon Griekspoor kept the hosts alive by seeing off Riedi in two tie-break sets. "We had to win and it was up to me to do it," said Griekspoor. "That is what you have to do as a team leader. I really didn't feel any tension - I really enjoyed it." Canada, the 2022 champions, seized a 3-1 lead over South Korea to clinch victory on Saturday in Montreal when Gabriel Diallo defeated Hong Seong-chan 7-5, 4-6, 6-1. Two-time winners Croatia are level at 1-1 with Belgium as are Argentina and Kazakhstan. — AFP



TATABANYA: (L to R) Germany's head coach Michael Kohlmann, Germany's Jan-Lennard Struff, Dominik Koepfer, Tim Puetz, Kevin Krawietz, and Maximilian Marterer pose for a team photo after winning against Hungary's team during the Davis Cup Qualifier singles tennis match between Hungary and Germany for the 2024 Davis Cup Finals in Tatabanya, Hungary. — AFP

# Classifieds

### Clinics & Hospitals

#### Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752

Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

#### Hospitals

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

### Change of Name

I, KHADIJA, holder of Indian passport no. X5367006 having permanent address Bohra Colony Gadajasrajpur Galiakot, Dungarpur, pin: 314026, Rajasthan, India residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as (given name) KHADIJA and (surname) SHABU. (#5154 5/02/2024)

henceforth my name will be read as (given name) MURTAZA and (surname) AMAR. (#5153 2/02/2024)

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

I, Sakina Yunus Fida Husein holder of Indian passport no X5367581 issued in Kuwait on 07/05/2023 permanent address being Mohammedi Pura Temba, VPO Sagwara, Dungarpur-314025 and presently residing at Kuwait, do hereby 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)





MANCHESTER: West Ham United's Mexican midfielder #19 Edson Alvarez (L) fights for the ball with Manchester United's Brazilian midfielder #18 Casemiro (2nd L) during the English Premier League football match between Manchester United and West Ham United at Old Trafford in Manchester, north west England, on February 4, 2024. — AFP

## Pochettino under fire as Chelsea crash

### Birthday boy Hojlund sparks Manchester United

LONDON: Mauricio Pochettino's problems mounted as struggling Chelsea crashed to a dismal 4-2 defeat against Wolves, while Manchester United striker Rasmus Hojlund celebrated his 21st birthday with a goal in Sunday's 3-0 win against West Ham.

Premier League leaders Liverpool face a crucial clash with title rivals Arsenal later on Sunday, but it was Chelsea's travails that took the spotlight before the showdown at the Emirates Stadium. Languishing in 11th place, Chelsea were booed off by furious fans after Matheus Cunha's hat-trick condemned them to a second successive defeat.

Chelsea were thrashed by Liverpool 4-1 on Wednesday and their week to forget finished with an even more embarrassing loss as Wolves completed the double over the

woeful west Londoners. Cole Palmer put Chelsea ahead with a composed angled finish from Moises Caicedo's defence-splitting pass in the 19th minute.

But Chelsea's lead lasted just three minutes, with Cunha's shot taking a hefty deflection off Thiago Silva to leave Blues keeper Djordje Petrovic wrong-footed as it whistled into the net. Pochettino wore an exasperated look in the 43rd minute when Rayan Ait Nouri's shot deflected in for an own goal off Chelsea defender Axel Disasi.

The already fraught atmosphere turned even more toxic in the 63rd minute as Pedro Neto teed up Cunha to drive in Wolves' third goal. Cunha's 82nd minute penalty, awarded when he was fouled by Malo Gusto, capped a miserable afternoon for Pochettino, who took no consolation from Silva's close-range finish in the 86th minute.

It has been a dispiriting first season in charge for Pochettino and the former Tottenham boss is certain to face calls for his sacking unless results improve quickly. Chelsea co-owner Todd Boehly has already shown his ruthless side by sacking Graham Potter after less than seven months in charge last term. With trips to Aston Villa and Manchester City among their next three games, Chelsea could be in complete disarray by the time they face Liverpool in the League Cup final at Wembley on February 25.

**Hojlund leads United revival**

Inspired by the revitalised Hojlund, Manchester United made it three consecutive wins in all competitions as they climbed above West Ham into sixth place. Finally emerging from a slow start to his first sea-

son with United following his move from Atalanta, Hojlund got his birthday party started in the 23rd minute at Old Trafford.

Casemiro's pass reached Hojlund and the Denmark striker cleverly took a touch to find space for a fierce drive that flashed past Alphonse Areola from just inside the area. After failing to score in the league until December 26, Hojlund now has five goals in his last six games in all competitions.

Alejandro Garnacho was left unmarked in the area for a 49th minute shot that deflected in off West Ham defender Nayef Aguerd. United manager Erik ten Hag and West Ham boss David Moyes had laid wreaths on the pitch before kick-off to mark the anniversary of the 1958 Munich air crash that killed eight United players on the way back from a European Cup game in Belgrade.

United's current crop cannot be compared to the 'Busby Babes' who perished in Munich, but Ten Hag's team at least marked their memory with the kind of enterprising display that was the hallmark of their predecessors. Fittingly, it was Garnacho—United's brightest young star—who wrapped up the points with a cool finish in the 84th minute.

Nottingham Forest are two points above the relegation zone after a 1-1 draw at Bournemouth. Dutch forward Justin Kluivert gave Bournemouth the perfect start when he poked home in the fifth minute. But Callum Hudson-Odoi hauled Forest level on the stroke of half-time with a curler from the edge of the area. Bournemouth had Philip Billing sent off for a foul on Hudson-Odoi in the 84th minute. — AFP

## Williams heroics take S Africa into Cup of Nations semi-finals

YAMOISSOUKRO: Goalkeeper and captain Ronwen Williams was the hero with four saves in the shoot-out as South Africa beat Cape Verde 2-1 on penalties to reach the Africa Cup of Nations semi-finals on Saturday after a goalless draw in their last-eight tie.

Williams had already come up with one vital stop at the end of normal time and the match went to penalties as it finished 0-0 after 120 minutes in Yamoussoukro. He then produced a remarkable performance to keep out penalties by Bebe, Willy Semedo, Laros Duarte and Patrick Andrade as South Africa—who themselves failed to convert two spot-kicks—progressed to a last-four showdown with Nigeria on Wednesday.

"We were not lucky because we had a very good 'keeper today. If you can stop four penalties it is not luck anymore," said South Africa coach Hugo Broos. "He did not only that, he also saved us two minutes before the end with a player who was alone in front of him, so yes he was man of the match. I think you could choose nobody else."

The 32-year-old Williams, of Mamelodi Sundowns, refused to accept all the credit for his heroics however, instead giving a nod to the South African back-room team. "I give credit to the analysts. They prepare me, they cut so many vid-

eos. We study the clubs. I study them as well, I try to pick up trends," he said.

"My phone is full of penalty clips so it is credit to the analysts for doing the work because it is not easy to get footage of some of those players because they play all over the world." South Africa go through to their first AFCON semi-final since what can be termed as their glory days, when they won the title as hosts in 1996, were runners-up in 1998 and then finished third in 2000.

**Cape Verde coach 'proud'**

Meanwhile, Cape Verde go home at the end of a campaign in which they won a Cup of Nations knockout tie for the first time, although they will regret their poor performance in the shoot-out after having the best chances during the match itself.

"I think in some way we deserved to be in the semi-finals," said their coach, Pedro 'Bubista' Brito. "I am proud of my team, I think we have had an excellent campaign. We always played to attack, were well organised when we didn't have the ball, and showed that a small country like us can compete."

"The people of Cape Verde must be proud of what we have done." Approaching the Charles Konan Banny Stadium along the deserted wide avenues of Ivory Coast's capital, it was hard to avoid the sensation that the main event



YAMOISSOUKRO: South Africa's midfielder #4 Teboho Mokoena (2R) takes a free kick during the Africa Cup of Nations (CAN) 2024 quarter-final football match between Cape Verde and South Africa at the Stade Charles Konan Banny in Yamoussoukro. — AFP

was happening elsewhere, in Saturday's other quarter-final 100 kilometres further north in Bouake.

The stadium was almost entirely empty at kick-off although fans, many of them wearing the orange of Ivory Coast's national team, did start flooding in as the game went on. Those who were absent at the beginning did not miss much, and it took until just after the hour mark for either team to have a clear opportunity.

The chance fell for Cape Verde, with Joao Paulo Fernandes playing in Garry Rodrigues, who could only shoot straight at Williams. Jovane Cabral hooked a shot over

from an inviting position in the 78th minute, and extra time began to feel inevitable.

Yet Cape Verde could have ended it before then when substitute Gilson Tavares Benchimol was played in, but his thunderous shot was tipped onto the underside of the bar by Williams. It took South Africa until the second minute of extra time to seriously trouble Vozinha, the Cape Verde goalkeeper producing two fine saves from efforts at point-blank range in quick succession, first from Mhlahli Mayambela, then from Evidence Makgopa. Onto the penalties they went, and Williams made the difference. — AFP

## Kuwaitis shine at Arab Women's Club Games

ABU DHABI: Kuwait's archery champions won gold and silver medals on Sunday at the 2024 Arab Women's Club Games, currently held in its seventh edition in Sharjah. The gold medal in the 10-meter pistol shooting competition for teams was won by Kuwaiti Champions Ghazlan Hassan, Isra Bahman and Adh'ari Al-Balushi, who succeeded in winning first place, while Ghazlan Hassan grabbed the silver medal in the 10-meter pistol shooting competition for individuals.

"Thanks to Allah Almighty, I feel very proud to achieve the silver medal in the 10 pistol shooting competition," Ghazlan Hassan told the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA). "This achievement reflects how determined we are," Ghazlan added. She dedicated this achievement to the Kuwait leadership and people of Kuwait. She looked forward to more challenges and opportunities to represent Kuwait and raise its name in the upcoming international tournaments, stressing the need to continue working hard and persistently in order to achieve more successes and make my country proud.

Kuwait is participating in the seventh edition of the Arab Women's Club Games 2024 along side with more than 550 players representing 63 teams from 15 Arab countries. The event is organized by the Sharjah Women's Sports Foundation and will continue until the 12th of February. — KUNA