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KUWAIT: HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah meets editors-in-chief of local newspapers and media representatives at Seif Palace on Feb 5, 2024.

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah met with editors-in-chief of local newspapers and media representatives at Seif Palace, accompanied by Minister of Information and Culture Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, Head of the Prime Minister's Divan Abdulaziz Dekheel Al-Dekheel and senior state officials. Kuwait Times was represented by Deputy Editor-in-Chief Abdullah Boftain.

During the gathering, HH Sheikh Dr Mohammad expressed gratitude for the attendees' response to the invitation, emphasizing the significance of national holidays, remembrance of martyrs and loyalty to the country, adding such meetings will continue. He provided insights into the government's work program, which is nearing completion and will be presented to the National Assembly as per constitutional procedures. The program revolves around three pillars: Justice, security and sustainability.

The prime minister emphasized the blessings of security, safety and good governance, rooted in an open political atmosphere that upholds justice, participation and accountability. He acknowledged the bold and transparent speech delivered by HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, emphasizing HH the Amir's role as the guardian of the authorities responsible for the nation's security and citizens' well-being.

Addressing the legislative roadmap, HH Sheikh Dr Mohammad affirmed alignment with the government's work program and expressed eagerness to collaborate with the National Assembly to advance legislative initiatives swiftly. He said it is normal the Al-Sabah family, like any other family worldwide, may experience conflicts, but affirmed their resolution through wisdom and collaboration within the family.

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HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah meets Kuwait Times Deputy Editor-in-Chief Abdullah Boftain.

Blinken starts Mideast tour to press Gaza truce

GAZA: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken arrived in Saudi Arabia on Monday for another Middle East crisis tour, hoping to secure a new truce in the Zionist-Hamas war as Gaza saw no let-up in fighting. On his fifth trip to the region since Oct 7, Blinken landed in Riyadh and was later expected to visit the Zionist entity and mediators Egypt and Qatar.

Ahead of the trip he stressed the need for "urgently addressing humanitarian needs in Gaza", after aid groups have repeatedly sounded the alarm over the devastating impact nearly four months of war have had on the besieged Gaza Strip. "The situation is indescribable," said Said Hamouda, a Palestinian who fled his home to the southern Gaza city of Rafah on the border with Egypt.

Dubbed a "pressure cooker of despair" by the United Nations, Rafah now hosts more than half of Gaza's population, displaced due to the Zionist entity's assault. Over the weekend, the Zionist entity pressed further south towards the densely-crowded border city, warning that its ground

forces could advance on Rafah as part of the campaign to eradicate Hamas.

Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said "a complete victory will deal a fatal blow" to Hamas but also to other Iran-backed militant groups across the region. At least 128 people were killed in Zionist strikes overnight to Monday, according to the Gaza health ministry. Witnesses told AFP they heard artillery shelling in the areas of eastern Rafah and Khan Yunis, where the Zionist entity believes high-ranking Hamas officials are hiding.

Hamas reported Zionist bombardment across the center and south of the coastal strip, and the group's armed wing said its militants attacked troops near Gaza City. Blinken is expected to discuss a truce framework not yet signed off on by either Hamas or the Zionist entity. The protracted diplomatic efforts have become more urgent with a surge in attacks across the region by Iran-backed Hamas allies, triggering counterattacks by the United States and its partners.

The Zionist entity's massive military offensive has killed at least 27,478 people in Gaza, mostly women and children, according to the territory's health ministry. The proposed truce would pause fighting for an initial six weeks as Hamas frees hostages in exchange for Palestinian prisoners held by the Zionist entity and more aid enters Gaza, according to a Hamas source.

Netanyahu, who has faced divisions within his cabinet and public fury over the fate of the remaining captives, said the Zionist entity "will not accept" demands made by Hamas for an exchange. The premier's Likud party quoted him as saying the terms "should be similar to the previous agreement", which saw a ratio of captives exchanged for Palestinian prisoners during a November truce.

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Kuwait reopens visit visas under stricter conditions

KD 400 minimum salary • Travel on Kuwaiti carriers

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The interior ministry announced on Monday that it will start accepting from Wednesday applications for visit visas for family members but under new conditions, including a higher salary for applicants. The ministry said in a statement that residents applying for parents, wives and children must draw a monthly salary of KD 400, and a salary of at least KD 800 for other relatives.

Applicants must book an appointment in advance to submit the application through the interior ministry's platform Meta app. The app is available both in English and Arabic and pre-registration is required with a password. The ministry said the move was taken in a bid to promote trade, economic and tourism activities in the country, and in response to social considerations.

Last week, the interior ministry resumed accepting dependent visas for only wives and children after a halt of over one and a half years. It required that the sponsor must draw a minimum salary of KD 800 and have a university degree. The applicants' occupation must be in accordance with their profession. A number of professions are exempted from the salary precondition but not the university degree.

Applicants for family visit visas must meet a number of conditions, the interior ministry said. They must provide a two-way air ticket to visitors issued on Kuwaiti

national carriers — Kuwait Airways and Jazeera Airways. The applicants must sign a written commitment pledging they will not attempt to transfer the visit visas to dependent residency. They must also pledge to comply with the duration of the visit visa.

Medical treatment must be taken strictly in the private sector and visitors will not be allowed to seek treatment at public health facilities. If visitors overstay, they and their sponsors will be listed under a special security tracking system run by the detectives of the residency affairs department and legal measures will be taken against those violators, the ministry said.

The ministry said business or commercial visas are issued in accordance with applications submitted by Kuwaiti companies and establishments and are given to persons holding university degrees or technical skills in line with the activities of those companies. It said tourist visas are offered to nationals of 53 countries, mostly European and Asian, either on arrival or by visiting the ministry's website to obtain the visa.

Tourist visas are also given to foreign residents of the Gulf Cooperation Countries (GCC) states who are engaged in certain professions outlined in ministry decision 2030/2008 and its amendments. Tourist visas can also be issued through hotels and companies that are linked with the residency affairs department in accordance with listed conditions. Commercial and tourist visas had not been halted but continued with some restrictions.



Prime Minister meets media chiefs



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah receives chief editors of local newspapers and representatives of media outlets on Monday.



HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, Minister of Information and Culture Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi and Head of the Prime Minister's Diwan Abdulaziz Dekheel Al-Dekheel attend the meeting.



HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah meets editors-in-chief of local newspapers and media representatives at Seif Palace on Feb 5, 2024.

Continued from Page 1

HH Sheikh Dr Mohammad recognized the impossibility of sustaining the welfare state solely on depleted natural wealth. Plans to transform depleted natural wealth into renewable resources, focusing on intensive investment in human capital and the use of technology and artificial intelligence, were outlined. The prime minister highlighted the optimal exploitation of Kuwait's unique geographical location, leveraging population density and the proposed Gulf railways project.

He expressed confidence in Kuwait's potential to become a hub, especially with its intellectual capital, financial resources and conducive environment. He discussed the development potential of the Northern Zone, envisioning it as a center for international universities, hospitals and potentially Kuwait's own 'Wall Street'.

There was an emphasis on addressing imbalances in public sector wages, economic spaces in the private sector and subsidies. The commitment to supporting small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and preparing for an increase in the labor market was highlighted. HH Sheikh Dr Mohammad proposed reforming subsidies, ensuring fair distribution with a focus on supporting the middle class.

"It is expected that more than 300,000 citizens will enter the labor market during the next 10 years, and the public sector will not be able to absorb this number, which requires the participation of the private sector. Subsidies consume more than 20 percent



of the state's general budget, and I find that it is not fair that the able and the needy are equal in obtaining these subsidies," HH Sheikh Dr Mohammad said.

"The middle class must have the lion's share of the support, while the high-income class can give up part of this support in favor of those who need it most. The government's work program aims to reform and address the disparity in public sector wages through the (strategic payroll alternative) without prejudice to the acquired rights of those in service," he added.

Plans for internal security initiatives to combat organized crime, drug trafficking and human trafficking were discussed. Kuwait's commitment to maintaining an active role in external security amid regional challenges was underlined. Anticipation of foreign tours within the Gulf Cooperation Council countries to promote regional stability was mentioned. The commitment to strengthening Arab, Islamic and international relations at all levels was affirmed.



"At the level of external security, Kuwait is keen to continue its active role in light of the circumstances we are experiencing random wars, especially the heinous genocide to which our brothers in Palestine are subjected, which puts the security and stability of the region at risk," HH Sheikh Dr Mohammad warned.

"There will be many foreign tours to the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council, which were initiated by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah with a visit to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which resulted in the joint statement and the honest expression it contained that we all aspire to stability in the region," he said.



Local

Amir to inaugurate mega project, petrochemical complex in Oman

Kuwait diplomat: Oman visit reflects strength of ties



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is pictured with Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, Sultan of Oman.



His Highness the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah with Sultan Haitham bin Tariq.



His Highness the late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in a meeting with Sultan Qaboos bin Said, Sultan of Oman.

MUSCAT: His Highness the Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, is due to start a visit to the Sultanate of Oman on Tuesday for summit talks with Sultan Haitham bin Tariq and to sponsor the inauguration of the mega venture, the Al-Duqm refinery and petrochemical complex. The scheduled official ceremony at the site symbolizes the substantial outcome of the two GCC countries' partnership and economic and strategic cooperation, spanning three decades.

The mega project, the cornerstone of which had been placed by Kuwait and Oman, would set the stage for significant development in the Al-Duqm region, forecast to turn into a key regional energy hub with feasible affiliate industries. Occupying a 900-hectare plot of coastal land, the \$8.5 billion complex is a joint venture for the Omani International Energy Integrated Company (OQ) and Kuwait Petroleum International (Q8). Its preliminary refining capacity is estimated at 230,000 barrels of Kuwaiti crude oil per day.

The products include diesel, aviation fuel, naphtha, and liquefied petroleum gas. Kuwait Petroleum Corporation will

secure 65 percent of the refinery's crude oil resources. Kuwait-Omani relations have developed substantially since three decades ago, and the two countries have signed cooperation agreements at the political, economic, cultural, tourist, and artistic levels. The genuineness of these close and warm relations was visible in 1990, when Oman sided with Kuwait in the face of the flagrant Iraqi aggression.

Upon orders by the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said, the sultanate hosted a large number of Kuwaiti citizens during the occupation. In gratitude for the support, the late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah visited the sultanate on September 18, 1991, and met Sultan Qaboos. On December 28, 2009, the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah decorated Sultan Qaboos with the Order of Mubarak the Great during the latter's visit to Kuwait, and the sultan granted the Amir the Order of Oman.

In 2003, the two countries formed a joint committee to tackle economic, commercial, and tourist issues of common concern. It had held nine meetings, the latest of which convened in Muscat in March. The meeting was marked by five memoranda of understanding in



His Highness the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is received by Sultan Qaboos bin Said.

diplomatic training, higher education, competition protection, prohibiting monopolization, environment protection, and industrial exports. Kuwait and Oman had worked out 17 accords between

1974 and 2017. Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development had executed 23 projects in Oman, and Kuwait's investments in the Oman Fund for Fixed Income reached some KD 3 million (\$26.4

million), while the volume of the trade exchanges amounted to KD 105 million (\$346.5 million).

Strength of ties

The state visit of His Highness the Amir reflects the strength of ties between the two nations, said Kuwaiti Ambassador to Oman Dr. Mohammad Al-Hajri on Monday. Speaking to KUNA, Ambassador Al-Hajri lauded the historic relations linking the two countries, saying that the Kuwaiti and Oman people were looking forward to boosting ties on all possible domains.

The two countries also shared a similar vision and goals in relation to matters concerning Arab policies and happenings around the world, added the ambassador, indicating that the upcoming visit would push to solidify coordination on matters of ties in addition to regional and international developments. His Highness the Amir is expected to meet with Sultan Haitham bin Tariq during a state visit. The two leaders would be patronizing the opening of the Al-Duqm refinery and petrochemical complex, a project showcasing the Kuwaiti-Omani strategic and economic partnership. — KUNA

Kuwait-Oman relations: History of brotherhood, strong cooperation

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti-Omani ties have always been highlighted by a strong sense of cooperation, a keen sense of brotherhood, and mutual respect shown by the leaderships and people of both countries. Relations between the brotherly nations went beyond mere decades; the Kuwaiti and Omani people had been intertwined in familial and commercial relations for centuries. Perhaps the biggest indication of the strength of relations came when Kuwait experienced its darkest hours during the Iraqi invasion in 1990, for which the Sultanate of Oman expressed utter condemnation.

The Omani involvement in the liberation of Kuwait in 1991 had displayed the Sultanate's keenness to turn words of solidarity into action on the ground. On the political level, the leaderships of both countries were keen on visiting each other in an act to bolster and foster ties for the sake of their development and their peoples. On September 18, 1991, then Kuwaiti Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah visited Oman and met with the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said, expressing gratitude towards

Oman's support of Kuwait during the invasion.

On December 23, 1991, Sultan Qaboos visited Kuwait to partake in the 12th GCC Summit, meeting during the occasion with the Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad. On May 20, 2002, Sultan Qaboos bin Said, yet again, visited Kuwait, meeting with the late Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad to inquire about his health condition. During this visit, Sultan Qaboos held official rounds of talks with Sheikh Jaber, discussing matters pertaining to ties as well as developments within the Arab and Islamic spheres.

On June 7, 2005, Sultan Qaboos visited Kuwait, meeting with then-Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, with both officials focusing on the latest developments back then on the level of bilateral ties and happenings in the world. On December 28, 2009, the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah bestowed on Sultan Qaboos the "Order of Mubarak the Great" during his visit to Kuwait. Sultan Qaboos also bestowed Sheikh Sabah with the "Civil Order of Oman of the First Class."

On June 17, 2010, Sultan Qaboos bin Said visited Kuwait and met with Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad, discussing during the occasion a number of matters relating to relations and recent happenings in the world back then. On April 16, 2012, Sultan Qaboos was on a four-day visit to Kuwait, where he met with the Amir Sheikh Sabah, discussing with them an assortment of issues. The Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah visited Oman on February 20, 2017, where he met with Sultan Qaboos and discussed matters pertaining to relations.

On January 12, 2020, the late Amir Sheikh Sabah visited the Sultanate to offer condolences on the passing of Sultan Qaboos bin Said. The current Sultan Haitham bin Tariq visited Kuwait on October 1, 2020, to offer his condolences on the passing away of the Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. Sultan Haitham also visited Kuwait on June 18, 2023, to offer condolences over the death of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

On the level of cooperation, Kuwait and Oman had closely coordinated efforts throughout their history, forming in 2001 a cooperation committee to hold regular meetings. Officials from both countries also exchanged regular visits to seek bolstering of cooperation and ways to coordinate stances on issues of importance. On March 11, 2023, then

Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah headed Kuwait's delegation to the ninth meeting of the joint Kuwaiti-Omani committee in Oman, holding discussions with Omani counterpart Badr Al-Busaidi.

Al-Busaidi, on his part, visited Kuwait on November 16, 2023, where he held an official round of meetings with Sheikh Salem, signing on the occasion agreements in the fields of higher education, economy, environment protection, and industrial exports. On November 21, 2023, then Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Ahmad Fahad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah visited Oman, meeting with Omani Deputy Prime Minister for Defense Affairs Shihab bin Tariq.

The two discussed ways to bolster relations within the defensive domain. On the level of oil cooperation, the OQ8 trademark was launched on January 14, 2021, for the Duqm refinery in Oman, a venture amongst Kuwait Petroleum International (Q8) and Oman Oil Company (OQ). CEO of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC), Sheikh Nawaf Al-Sabah, also visited Oman on December 12, 2023, to follow up on the Duqm refinery project. On October 7, 2023, Kuwait hosted the "Oman in the Heart of Kuwait" exhibition with the participation of 50 Omani artists. — KUNA

Deputy FM receives Saudi, Greek and Indian envoys



KUWAIT: Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah received on Monday Saudi ambassador to Kuwait Prince Sultan bin Saad Khaled Al-Saud. They discussed bilateral ties and issues of joint concern. Separately, he hosted the Greek Ambassador, Ioannis Plotas (centre), discussing bilateral relations, and the Indian envoy, Dr. Adarsh Swaika (right). They held talks on means of cementing the bilateral relations. — KUNA

Emergency services conference to tackle occupational risks

KUWAIT: A health official announced the launch of the "Emergency Medical Services: Current Reality and Future Aspirations" conference on February 18 under the auspices of Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi. In a press statement on Monday, Director of the Emergency Medical Services Department (EMS), Dr. Ahmad Al-Shatti, said that the conference would include 10 sessions covering 40

scientific papers and three workshops.

He pointed out that the sessions and workshops will address how to determine arduous and dangerous professions, occupational risks, and the allowances disbursed by the Civil Service Commission. It will also be handling the quality, accreditation, and governance of services provided through leadership, sustainability, and quality.

Several emergency technicians, doctors, nurses, paramedics, and trainers in the Ministry of Health, along with oil, military, and academic sectors, the Patients Helping Fund, the Red Crescent, the Kuwait Crisis Management Center, and others, would be participating in the conference. AlShatti called on all doctors and workers in the medical sector to seek benefit from the annual emergency medical

conference, held over a period of three days.

Strengthening healthcare

In another development, the League of Arab States stressed on Monday the need to strengthen the healthcare systems of member countries to combat cancer and promote awareness and prevention. Assistant Secretary General and Head of Social Affairs Sector at the League of Arab States, Ambassador Haifa Abu Ghazaleh, said in a statement on the occasion of World Cancer Day 2024 that the League is keen on achieving health security for Arab citizens.

This comes through working to implement the 2030 sustainable development goals, which ensure everyone enjoys a healthy lifestyle and reduce pre-

mature deaths from non-communicable diseases. The Ambassador pointed out the importance of observation and conducting research, as well as strengthening the health system and increasing financial support for healthcare in member states.

She added that cancer, according to the World Health Organization, is one of the main non-communicable diseases and that deaths from cancer are expected to be over 600,000 by 2030. In addition, the Ambassador stressed the importance of innovative strategies to ensure universal access to quality health services and investment in resources to achieve a world free of cancer. The world celebrates World Cancer Day annually on February 4 to increase awareness of the disease and its seriousness. — KUNA

Local

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P.O.Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait.

Email: info@kuwaittimes.com

Website: www.kuwaittimes.com

In my view

Gulf Week, a step forward



Dr. Khalid A Al-Saleh

Local@kuwaittimes.com

Awareness of different cancer types is crucial in the fight against cancer, and a comprehensive national plan is essential due to its significance in saving lives. Scientific studies emphasize the importance of health awareness, especially regarding various cancer types. This awareness encompasses understanding both the risk factors and the initial symptoms of the disease, as well as being aware of health programs that facilitate early detection and higher recovery rates.

Cancer, being a chronic disease with mostly unknown causes, prompts an ongoing race in scientific studies to shed light on various aspects related to this ailment. Studies in the Gulf countries have revealed a low rate of cancer awareness, averaging around 49 percent, with this percentage being linked to knowledge about risk factors and initial symptoms.

In particular, awareness about common cancers like breast cancer is even lower, with a rate of approximately 46 percent. Insufficient awareness is evident in screening practices, as indicated by the low percentages of breast X-rays for deserving women in Kuwait (14.6 percent), Saudi Arabia (4.9 percent), Oman (8.9 percent) and UAE (13.9 percent). Similarly, the percentage of pap smear tests for women aged 25 to 49 is low in Kuwait (17.7 percent), Saudi Arabia (7.6 percent), Oman (10.6 percent) and UAE (28 percent). Kuwait, however, stands out among these Gulf countries, showcasing the success of its awareness programs.

To make a substantial impact, these programs need to be intensified to achieve a public awareness percentage of over 90 percent, particularly regarding knowledge of risk factors and the initial symptoms of cancer that warrant a visit to the doctor. Awareness is easily accessible, thanks to renowned campaigns such as Cancer Aware Nation (CAN) in Kuwait. The media office and non-profit organizations, including the Patients Helping Fund, Sidra Society and Positive Support Foundation, have played a significant role in promoting health awareness.

Their collaboration has resulted in the successful activation of Gulf Cancer Awareness Week, inaugurated by Health Minister Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi on January 31, demonstrating their understanding of its crucial importance. Several years ago, the percentage of advanced cancer cases visiting clinics was as high as 50 percent in some countries; today, it has dropped to approximately 27 percent. This reduction serves as an indication of the success of awareness campaigns.

Considering that the recovery rate doubles or even triples with early detection, the impact of these awareness programs on the number of individuals cured from cancer is substantial. As emphasized at the beginning of this column, awareness about cancer will continue to be the cornerstone of success in combating this disease. It is hoped that the state will increase its support for these efforts, recognizing their significant contribution to the well-being of individuals in our country.

Seminar sheds light on psychological and personality disorders

By Zainab Al-Mashoor

KUWAIT: Mujtama Nouri, a non-profit organization affiliated with Sheikh Abdullah Al-Nouri Charitable Society, conducted a seminar on Sunday to shed light on the distinction between psychological and personality disorders. The event featured Dr Mariam Alawadi, a specialized psychiatrist, and Dr Hana Alamoudi, a psychologist.

Differentiating between the two, psychiatrists are trained in both medicine and mental health, while psychologists focus solely on mental health. Dr Alawadi emphasized that medications are prescribed based on the patient's condition, determined through in-depth conversations. She added that medications alone may not be entirely effective without complementary actions.

Therapeutic methods, including cognitive-behavioral and motivational theories, play a crucial role in treating diseases and disorders through research. Dr Alawadi highlighted that a person's state of mind begins to form in toddlerhood, influenced by family responses to their actions, with symptoms of mental disorders appearing during adolescence.

Both doctors stressed that mental disorders are often

Zain 'strategic partner' of 14th International Invention Fair

Under the patronage of the Amir

KUWAIT: Zain announced its return as a strategic partner to the International Invention Fair in the Middle East in its 14th edition. The prestigious event, organized by the Kuwait Science Club with support from the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS), runs from 4-7 February with the participation of 40 nations, and comes under the patronage of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Zain joined the event's inauguration at Arraya Ballroom, attended by the representative of HH the Amir, Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education and Research Dr. Adel Al-Adwani, Kuwait Science Club Chairman and Head of the Fair's Organizing Committee Talal Al-Kharafi, Zain Kuwait Chief Corporate Affairs and Relations Officer Waleed Al-Khashti, along with diplomats, academics, and distinguished guests.

Zain is proud to remain a key partner of this prominent scientific gathering since its inception, especially that it is privileged with HH the Amir's patronage every year, something that reflects the nation's keenness to support scientists, inventors, and innovators, and highlights Kuwait's leading position in the international scientific community.

Through this participation, Zain aspires to showcase the key role played by Kuwait's private sector to encourage and promote initiatives that push the scientific innovation wheel locally and regionally. This event's past successes have greatly contributed to highlighting Kuwait's rich cultural involvement in scientific areas across regional and international levels, proving itself to become the biggest in the Middle East.

The 14th edition of the fair witnesses notable participation from several GCC and Arab science institutions, including the GCC Patent Office, the King Abdulaziz Foundation, KSA-based Majmaah University, the Qatar Scientific Club, the Emirates Science Club, the International University of Rabat, the Iraqi Inventors and Innovators Society, the Yemen-based Hadramout Foundation of Inventions, as well as first-time participation from the China Association of Inventions and the Russia-based Federal Institute of Industrial Property. The event also witnesses the return of several previous par-



Dr Adel Al-Adwani with Talal Al-Kharafi and Waleed Al-Khashti during the event's inauguration.

ticipants, including the Geneva International Exhibition, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), and the International Federation of Inventors' Associations (IFIA). During the event, these institutions will present their own awards to winners.

Over 40 nations participate in the International Invention Fair in the Middle East this year, with over 200 inventions submitted. 21 Kuwaiti inventors also submitted 21 inventions representing several local scientific institutions, including Kuwait University, the Kuwait

Institute for Scientific Research (KISR), Sabah Al-Ahmad Center for Giftedness and Creativity (SACGC) — a center of the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS), and others.

This event is one of the major specialized exhibitions of inventions in the Middle East region, offering an opportunity for inventors from different cultures to be exhibited and for inventors to build connections with investors. Zain will spare no efforts to offer its support and encouragement to any entity that adopts creativity and innovation within the community and contribute to the further progress of national economy.



KUWAIT: The Kuwait Science Club holds the 14th International Exhibition for Inventions in the Middle East under the patronage of HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. The Minister of Education Adel Al-Adwani inaugurated the exhibition. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Kuwait Science Club holds 14th exhibition for inventions

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: Under the patronage of HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Kuwait Science Club organized the 14th International Exhibition for Inventions in the Middle East, which has achieved great success in its previous editions and has become the second-largest exhibition for inventions after the Geneva International Exhibition globally. The exhibition opened on Sunday.

"I am pleased today to inaugurate the 14th International Exhibition of Inventions in the Middle East, organized by the Kuwait Science Club, representing His Highness the Amir. This comes as a continuation of His Highness' directives in the care and support of inventions and innovations by Arab youth in general and Kuwaiti youth in particular," Minister of Education Adel Al-Adwani said.

"It also aims to provide the scientific conditions for them to achieve further innovations and inventions to

propel Kuwait towards global recognition by achieving tangible results that highlight Kuwait's civilized image and its role in supporting and encouraging inventors. This sponsorship also aligns with the noble vision of His Highness the Amir to transform Kuwait into a knowledge-based financial and economic center, especially with the world's shift towards new standards of growth and development based on human capital, which is one of the pillars of Kuwait's 2035 vision," he said.

"I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the president and members of the Kuwait Science Club for their support of inventors and innovation, their embrace and optimal utilization of human resources and their development of capabilities in the field of innovation and invention. They have provided the necessary resources to promote a culture of innovation and belief from inventors' experiences in enhancing the innovation system. This is accomplished through the establishment of this international exhibition and the convergence between investors and inventors to produce inventions that serve humanity, with the participation of nearly 40 countries from around the world, showcasing approximately 200 projects and involving 160 inventors, including 21 Kuwaiti inventors with 14 inventions," Adwani said.

The minister then addressed the youth, saying: "I call upon our youth to recognize the importance of continuing their academic pursuits while developing their skills in the field of innovation and invention. I urge them to

engage in specialties that align with the needs of the job market and strive for the highest levels of achievement and international recognition. This will reflect the prestigious image of our beloved country, Kuwait. The youth are the true wealth of the nation," he stressed.

"Through today's exhibition, which we are proud to have launched from our beloved Kuwait, we affirm Kuwait supports and enhances international cooperation in encouraging youth participation in innovation, invention and artificial intelligence as long-term investments. This is how countries rise — through economic diversification and sustainable, comprehensive smart growth based on knowledge and digitization, supporting global economic development," Adwani concluded.

Waleed Al-Khashti, CEO of Relationships and Corporate Affairs at Zain Kuwait, told Kuwait Times: "Zain is the main supporter of the International Inventions Exhibition in the Middle East, which takes place every year. Zain is committed to being present at this exhibition every year, where we see a group of inventors with new ideas and innovations, which encourages us to support these young people not only at the local level, but also at the regional level in the Middle East. Zain has a great strategy in this regard, focusing on creativity and encouraging it, especially among the youth in Kuwait. We strive to collaborate with them in services and other matters. We also focus on monitoring, and God willing, Zain will be present every year."



KUWAIT: Mujtama Nouri conducts a seminar to shed light on the distinction between psychological and personality disorders. The event featured Dr Mariam Alawadi, a specialized psychiatrist and Dr Hana Alamoudi, a psychologist.

Second, mood disorders such as depression can be treated mentally and emotionally, but when it becomes severe and reaches to suicidal thoughts, then medicine should be involved. Third, severe diseases such as psychotic disorders, schizophrenia with symptoms such as hallucinations, delusions, and extreme disorders are treated 90 percent through medicine and not psychologically. Fourth, eating disorder is also very responsible to medicines, and finally, cognitive disorders such as dementia or Alzheimer's.

Dr Alamoudi said different types of personalities come through genetics, upbringing, emotions and environment.



"When we talk about personality, there is no right or wrong, it is differentiated through each person's mental state and body. Some can adapt or deal with while others can't."

The seminar concluded with insights into dealing with personality disorders affecting daily life. Understanding, setting boundaries, recognizing that the issue lies not within oneself and finding personalized solutions were highlighted. The doctors added that therapy is often available at most public sector hospitals. Dr Alawadi closed the seminar with a prayer: "Grant me the serenity to accept things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."



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Hamza Al-Ahmed walks past destroyed buildings at the camp where he lives on February 4, 2024. — AFP photos

Syria's quake orphans mark first year without families

Hundreds of survivors living in tents, makeshift shelters mourn lost loved ones

JINDAYRIS, Syria: A year ago, Afraa Al-Sawadi was pulled from the rubble of her family home still attached to her dead mother by the umbilical cord, after a devastating earthquake hit northwest Syria. Now in the care of relatives after the February 6, 2023 quake, which ravaged Turkey and Syria and killed nearly 60,000 people, she is among the orphaned children toughing it out in the war-ravaged country.

"We named her after her mother, Afraa, to carry on her name and not forget her family," said her uncle Khalil al-Sawadi, 35, who has taken the infant girl in alongside his seven children. "My wife breastfed Afraa because we have a baby girl who we called Aataa ... they've become like twins," he said.

According to Damascus, the earthquake killed more than 1,400 people in government-controlled areas of Syria, while more than 4,500 died and tens of thousands were injured in areas held by opposition factions in the country's northwest.

Jindayris, in Aleppo province near the border with Turkey, was one of the areas worst-hit by the quake, heaping more misery onto war-weary residents, many of them were displaced during the conflict from other parts of the coun-

try. From the first moments after Afraa's rescue, her story captured hearts and made international headlines as the earthquake's "miracle baby".

Now, Sawadi's daughters sing to Afraa, who is bundled up in winter clothes at their modest home. The little girl with rosy cheeks and wide eyes turns one on Tuesday and has started crawling. "When she began talking, she started calling me dad and calling her aunt mum," said a visibly emotional Sawadi.

Making a living through odd jobs after being displaced from eastern Syria, he said he felt a heavy responsibility for raising Afraa. He expressed hope that she would have a bright future, getting a good education and even "doing better than my own children".

'Nothing is left'

In Jindayris, controlled by Turkish-backed armed Syrian opposition factions, quake-stricken buildings sit in ruins while others remain partially collapsed. Hundreds of families still live in tents and makeshift shelters, while the luckier ones are in displacement camps made up of small cement buildings constructed thanks to foreign donations.

Hamza al-Ahmed, 15, walks with crutches through the streets of Jinday-

ris, where he lives with his brother, who is married. The teen was left orphaned when his family's building was destroyed in the quake. "My father and mother and four siblings died. I spent 35 hours under the rubble," he told AFP. "The building totally collapsed, nothing is left of it. It's become empty land," he said.

Ahmed's leg had to be amputated and his arm was left injured due to crush syndrome, which occurs in limbs starved of blood circulation for too long. "To me, the anniversary of the earthquake means destruction," he said. "I feel as if life stopped that day. We lost all those who were dear to us," he said.

"Life without your parents is hard, but it goes on," said Ahmed, who is also getting used to using a prosthetic leg. "My dream now is to get better and to go back to standing on my feet," he said.

'It broke us'

According to the United Nations, 265,000 people in northwest Syria had their homes destroyed in the quake, and more than 43,000 people displaced by the disaster have yet to return home. Yasmine al-Sham, 10, survived the quake after 18 hours under the ruins of her family's building.

But her father, pregnant mother and



Afraa al-Sawadi sits in a swing at her uncle's house.

three of her siblings, including her twin sister Mal al-Sham, died after two days trapped under the rubble, and she is now in the care of her grandmother. "I was sleeping when the quake struck ... my older brother picked me up and rushed me towards the door of the house, which fell down around us," she said.

The quake worsened a pre-existing vision problem and she had to wear special glasses after dust got into her eyes. Sham, who loves drawing and coloring, now only has her grandmother and cous-

ins left, and said she missed her twin sister. "We used to spend our time together in the same class at school," she said. "We used to play together."

Her grandmother Samira al-Yassin, 62, who was previously displaced from central Syria, said 47 people — all relatives — were killed when the family's building collapsed. "The memory of the earthquake is painful," said Yassin, who was widowed in the quake. "It broke us. We lost our whole family. Only a few of us survived." — AFP

Turkey remembers its worst disaster of modern times

ISTANBUL: Turkey on Tuesday holds pre-dawn vigils for the loss of more than 50,000 people — and parts of entire cities — in the earthquake-prone country's deadliest disaster of modern times. Grieving Turks are still coming to terms with how a 7.8-magnitude tremor could upturn the lives of millions of people in a matter of seconds while they were still asleep.

An updated toll released Friday showed that 53,537 people had died across 11 southeastern provinces officially designated as the disaster zone. The confirmed loss of 5,951 more lives in neighboring Syria makes last year's February 6 earthquake one of the 10 deadliest in the world in the past 100 years.

Ancient cities such as Antakya have been effectively wiped off the map. Others have gaping holes in place of apartment towers that toppled like houses of cards when the ground began to move at 4:17 am.

Shellshocked survivors stood outside in the freezing cold in their pajamas and listened to

those trapped under concrete slabs of debris scream in agonizing pain. "It's been a year, but it doesn't leave our minds," housewife Cagla Demirel told AFP in one of the container camps set up for hundreds of thousands of survivors in Antakya. "Life has lost its spark," the 31-year-old said. "I have no family left to visit, no door to knock on, no pleasant place to be. Nothing remains."

'Can you hear us?'

Antakya's remaining residents plan to gather on Tuesday at 4:17 am for a vigil that will see everyone cry out: "Can you hear us?" The call became ubiquitous across the disaster zone as people searched for loved ones in the rubble. But it also appears to be a nuanced reminder for President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government that many in the quake zone feel left behind.

Analysts at the Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey (TEPAV) point out that the disaster struck an area already weighted down by unemployment and underinvestment. "Some districts in the region have the highest poverty rate in Turkey," TEPAV said in a report.

Erdogan pushed back hard against complaints that government rescuers were unprepared and slow to respond. He has branded the

quake "the catastrophe of the century" that no nation could have averted or quickly overcome. He crisscrossed the nation in the first weeks of the disaster and promised to deliver 650,000 new housing units within a year.

'No return to normal'

He began to hand out keys in Antakya on Saturday for the first 7,000 apartments of the 46,000 ready to be delivered across the quake zone this month. He said up to 20,000 units would be delivered monthly and 200,000 by the end of the year — short of his initial promise but still impressive for a region hit by post-quake chaos.

"Of course, we cannot bring back the lives we lost, but we can compensate all the other losses," Erdogan told Antakya residents on Saturday. "We made promises to do so." But Erdogan's words offer little solace to people such as ice cream vendor Kadir Yeniceli.

The 70-year-old native of Kahramanmaraş — a hard-hit city where Erdogan's Islamic-rooted party enjoys overwhelming support — said people feel "confused" about what happens next. "There has been no return to normal," Yeniceli told AFP. "It remains the same, there is no progress. There is a lack of employment, there is a lack of money, there is a lack of income." — AFP

Spain to release urgent funding for UNRWA

MADRID: Spain said Monday that it would give an additional 3.5 million euros (\$3.8 million) in aid to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which is facing a cash crunch after several nations suspended their funding.

Over a dozen countries, including major donors the United States, Germany, Britain and Sweden, have suspended their funding to the agency over accusations that 12 of its staff members were involved in the October 7 attack on the Zionist entity.

The UNRWA — which has received a Norwegian nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize — has warned that it will have to cease operations by the end of February if the funding is significantly pulled.

"Spain will release an urgent envelope of 3.5 million euros so that UNRWA can maintain its activities in the short term," Spanish Foreign Minister Jose Luis Abures told a parliamentary committee.

"UNRWA's situation is desperate and there is a serious risk that its humanitarian activities will be paralyzed in Gaza within a few weeks," he said. European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said Sunday that suspended total funds currently amount to "more than \$440 million, or around half the agency's expected funds for 2024".

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said last week that the UN agency had been "totally infiltrated" by Hamas, which has ruled Gaza since 2007. The Zionist entity has responded to the October 7 attack with an air and ground offensive that has killed 27,365 people, mostly women and children, according to a Gaza health ministry toll updated Sunday. Spain is one of the most critical voices in Europe of the Zionist offensive. — AFP

International

Chile wildfire toll tops 110

'The fire consumed everything — memories, comforts, homes'

VIÑA DEL MAR, Chile: The death toll from central Chile's blazing wildfires climbed to at least 112 people on Sunday, after President Gabriel Boric warned the number would rise "significantly" as teams searched gutted neighborhoods.

Responders continued to battle fires in the coastal tourist region of Valparaiso amid an intense summer heat wave, with temperatures soaring to 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit) over the weekend. Abraham Mardones, a welder who fled his burning home in Vina del Mar, told AFP he narrowly escaped the fast-paced inferno that raged over a hillside Friday and through several blocks of the seaside city. "We looked out again and the fire was already on our walls. It took only 10 minutes. The entire hill burned," he said.

"The fire consumed everything — memories, comforts, homes. I was left with nothing but my overalls and a pair of sneakers that were given to me as a gift," Mardones told AFP. "I could only rescue my dog." Upon his return on Sunday, he said he found several neighbors who had died in the flames. Friends passed by driving a truck "carrying the burned bodies of their brother, their father, their daughter."

The Interior Ministry said late Sunday that the medical examiner's office had received 112 dead victims, 32 of whom have been identified, and that there are 40 fires still active in the country. Speaking earlier in Quilpue, a devastated hillside community near Vina del Mar, Boric had said the death toll was 64 but "we know it is going to increase significantly," adding it was the country's deadliest disaster since a 2010 earthquake and tsunami that killed 500 people.

Vina del Mar mayor Macarena Ripamonti told

reporters "190 people are still missing" in the city. "Not a single house was left here," retiree Lilian Rojas, 67, told AFP of her neighborhood near the Vina del Mar botanical garden, which was also destroyed in the flames.

Dead victims in the streets

Boric, who met with fire survivors at a Vina del Mar hospital Sunday, has declared a state of emergency, pledging government support to help people get back on their feet. According to national disaster service SENAPRED, nearly 26,000 hectares (64,000 acres) had been burned across the central and southern regions by Sunday.

Supported by 31 firefighting helicopters and airplanes, some 1,400 firefighters, 1,300 military personnel and volunteers are combating the flames. SENAPRED chief Alvaro Hormazabal, noting the dozens of blazes still burning out of control, said weather "conditions are going to continue to be complicated."

Authorities have imposed a curfew, while thousands in the affected areas were ordered to evacuate their homes. In the hillsides around Vina del Mar, AFP reporters saw entire blocks of houses that were burned out. Some of the dead were seen lying on the road, covered by sheets.

'Inferno'

The fires, raging for days, forced authorities on Friday to close the road linking the Valparaiso region to the capital Santiago, about 1.5 hours away, as a huge mushroom cloud of smoke impaired visibility. Images posted online from trapped motorists showed mountains in flames at the end of the famous "Route 68"

Deadliest wildfires of the 21st century

PARIS: Blazing wildfires in central Chile which have claimed at least 112 lives are among the deadliest this century. Here are the others:

2009: Australia, 179 dead

On February 7, 2009, which became known as "Black Saturday", 179 people were killed when firestorms swept through towns and hamlets in the southeastern state of Victoria. Whole towns, including Kinglake, Marysville, Narbethong, Strathewen, and Flowerdale and more than 2,000 homes were destroyed or badly damaged in the fires which lasted several weeks.

2018: Greece, 103 dead

In Greece's worst-ever fire disaster, 103 people died when wildfires swept through homes and vehicles in the coastal town of Mati near Athens in July 2018, leaving only charred remains. Most of the victims were trapped by the flames as they sat in traffic jams while trying to flee. Others drowned while trying to escape by sea.

2023: Hawaii, 100 dead

The August 8, 2023 fire in the US state of Hawaii was the deadliest wildfire the United States has seen for more than a century. It burned through around 2,000 acres (800 hectares), killing 100 people on the island of Maui. A handful of people are still listed as missing.

2021: Algeria, more than 90 dead

More than 90 people were killed in dozens of wildfires in northern Algeria in August 2021. The fires affected 26 of the country's 58 provinces, including the worst-hit province of Tizi Ouzou. The government blamed arsonists and a blistering heatwave for the blazes, but experts also criticized authorities for failing to prepare for the annual wildfire season. — AFP

Protesters rally in Texas against migrant crossings

EAGLE PASS, United States: In trucks, vans and RVs, hundreds of people converged Saturday in southern Texas to rally against what they say is a migrant "invasion" and to demand tough new controls at the US border with Mexico. Scrawled on the side of one of the vehicles reaching Quemado — population 162 — were the words "Join the God Fight." The convoy gathered in the tiny town along the Rio Grande river, which forms the natural border between the United States and Mexico, as debate swirls again about how to address record high migrant crossings.

Hundreds of thousands of people from Central and South America, and beyond, have waded across the river in recent months in hopes of better lives in the United States. But their huge numbers have become a galvanizing issue, especially ahead of the November presidential election, with Republicans in Congress blocking additional US aid to Ukraine and the Zionist entity over demands that President Joe Biden's administration does more to stop the flow.

In Quemado this weekend, conservative activists, including a group calling itself "We the People" — the first words in the preamble to the US Constitution — met to make their anger over immigration known, rallying under the slogan "Take our border back."

One of the event's organizers has called those massing here "God's Army," suggesting holy backing for their cause. "Migration on the border is out of control," said 43-year-old Robyn Forzano, who was guarding the entrance to the Quemado ranch where protesters were meeting. "We're being invaded and, you know, ultimately we have to be able to control what's happening," he told AFP, echoing Republican leaders and conservative media pundits in recent weeks.

Many arriving vehicles bore signs supporting former president Donald Trump, the Republican favorite in this fall's election, or blasting his likely opponent, incumbent



VALPARAISO, Chile: A man holds belongings after losing his house to a wildfire in Villa Independencia, Valparaiso region, Chile on February 4, 2024. — AFP

leading to the Pacific coast.

According to Interior Minister Carolina Toha, the weekend blazes have been "without a doubt" the deadliest fire event in Chile's history. "This was an inferno," Rodrigo Pulgar, from the town of El Olivar, told AFP. "I tried to help my neighbor ... my house was starting to burn behind us. It was raining ash."

During his Sunday address, Pope Francis, a na-

tive of neighboring Argentina, called for prayers for the "dead and wounded in the devastating fires in Chile." The fires are being driven by a summer heat-wave 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. — AFP



SAN YSIDRO, United States: Trump supporters attend a Take Our Border Back Convoy near the Mexico-US border in San Ysidro, California, on February 3, 2024. — AFP

Biden. Biden campaigned in 2020 on restoring "humanity" to immigration — ending controversial Trump-era policies that led to families being separated at the US-Mexico border. But Republicans dismiss his term as a failure, pointing to data showing "migrant encounters" — when a border agent picks up a migrant after they've entered the United States — reaching a record high of 302,000 in December.

"We love legal immigrants in this country because they work hard to be here," said 39-year-old Adam Chavin, who works for an IT company and wore a T-shirt with Trump's image. But he said "these illegals" were "keeping us from having jobs," an oft-repeated anti-immigrant claim. Another activist held a sign that read: "Heaven has walls, hell has open borders."

"The people in Mexico, they are wonderful, beautiful people — love them," Marty Bird, a 73-year-old Trump supporter, told AFP in the nearby town of Eagle Pass. "But it seems like once they come here ... they become militants. You know, they become angry. They do robbery, burglaries," he claimed, seemingly parroting a 2016 campaign remark by Trump in which he referred to Mexican migrants as "rapists" and criminals.

Eagle Pass, about 20 miles (30 kilometers) from Quemado, has become the epicenter of a prickly conflict between Texas Governor Greg Abbott, a Republican, and the Biden administration. The federal government is suing Abbott for taking control of a park that includes an access ramp to the river, and for laying barbed wire along the riverbank. — AFP



GAZA: People look for salvageable items in the Al-Maqoussi towers area on Feb 3, 2024 amid the rubble of buildings destroyed by Zionist bombardment on Gaza City. — AFP

Blinken starts Mideast tour to...

Continued from Page 1

As Gazans have suffered dire humanitarian conditions, the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, is facing a major controversy after accusations that 12 staff members were involved in Hamas' attack. More than a dozen countries, led by top donors the United States and Germany, suspended their funding to the aid agency after the claims surfaced. Spain however said it would give an additional 3.5 million euros (\$3.8 million) "so that UNRWA can maintain its activities in the short term", said Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Albares.

United Nations chief Antonio Guterres announced the creation of an independent panel to assess UNRWA and "whether the agency is doing everything within its power to ensure neutrality", a UN statement said. Jordan's King Abdullah II urged

donors to maintain support for the agency "to allow it to provide its vital humanitarian services... particularly in light of the tragic humanitarian situation in Gaza", a royal statement said.

In a meeting with Emirati President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan in Amman, the two leaders urged the protection of civilians in Gaza and called to intensify efforts towards a lasting ceasefire and a "political solution" to the conflict, the statement said. French Foreign Minister Stephane Sejourne, on his first visit to the region since taking office, said peace will only be achieved through diplomacy, urging the resumption of Zionist-Palestinian peace talks "without delay".

Since the Gaza war broke out, violence has surged across the region including on the the Zionist entity-Lebanon border where the military reported Monday more exchanges with Iran-backed militant group Hezbollah. Foreign Minister Israel Katz told Sejourne that "time is running out" to reach a solution, warning of military action in the Lebanon border area "to return the evacuated citizens" if diplomacy fails. — AFP

Latinos in the US: A shifting voting bloc

LAS VEGAS: Restaurateur Antonio Munoz feels the political winds changing in his native Nevada, where parts of the traditionally Democratic Latino community are drifting Republican ahead of this year's presidential election. It's a trend across the United States, and with a fifth of eligible voters identifying as Latino, it's one that could prove decisive in November. "In the last election, I voted Democrat... but this year I really am in the middle. I don't know what to do," Munoz, an ex-police officer, tells AFP at his colorful Las Vegas eatery.

Joe Biden, the 81-year-old incumbent, will almost certainly go head-to-head again with Donald Trump, whom he defeated in 2020 partially by harnessing a significant majority of Latino voters. Despite facing a raft of criminal charges, including some relating to his alleged efforts to overthrow results of the last election, 77-year-old Trump has the edge in several national polls.

That's also true in Nevada, a southwest swing state that Biden carried last time by a small margin — and where voters begin casting ballots this week in the parties' nominating processes. Munoz says his feeling is that Latinos in Las Vegas overall probably lean Democratic, but not like in years past. "I have friends (who are) there in the middle like me," he said.

The Latino community is one of the fastest growing in the United States, explains Mark Hugo Lopez, director of research on race and ethnicity at Pew Research Center. While it is not a monolith — Latinos in Florida, many of whom have family connections to communist Cuba, lean heavily Republican — historically the community has been more favorable to Democrats, he said. Polling data shows that is changing.

Biden won Hispanic voters two to one over Trump in 2020, but now trails among that demographic by five points, 39 to 34 percent, according to January's USA Today/Suffolk University poll. "Our most recent figures show... 65 percent disapprove of the job he's doing and 32 percent approve," Lopez said of Biden. That is down significantly from 2021 when most Latinos approved of Biden's performance.

Some of that is related to kitchen table issues such as inflation, but also immigration, with the widely held belief there is a border crisis that the White House



LAS VEGAS: Republican political consultant Jesus Marquez speaks during an interview in his office studio on Feb 2, 2024. — AFP

cannot control. Those on the left have made much of Trump's anti-immigrant rhetoric — such as when he said "rapists" and drug dealers were crossing the border from Mexico — assuming this would play badly in immigrant communities.

But a changing Latino demographic means such sentiment is not always unpopular. "In a place like Nevada... there are many US-born children of immigrant parents," said Lopez. "But there's also a growing number of people who are third or higher generation. And they have tended to lean more Republican" than other Latinos.

It's a shift that life-long Democrats like Maria Elena Castro have noticed with dismay. She says she hears increasingly rightwing sentiments from her son and nephews when they talk politics. "Kids don't know much about the past, what their parents had to go through," said the 51-year-old Mexican-American. Young Latino voters favor Republicans "due to the lack of information".

It is perhaps the struggle of previous generations of Latinos that is animating the community's growing animosity towards newcomers, said Jesus Marquez, a political consultant who has worked on Trump's campaign in Nevada and spoke at a recent Las Vegas rally headlined by Trump. The constant drumbeat of right-wing media and its associated social media sphere emphasizes what is happening at the border, where thousands of impoverished people arrive daily. Once there, they walk across into the United States and say they want to claim asylum, before being released for a court date many years down the line. The perception that this is unfair is a powerful one, according to Marquez. — AFP

International

Censorship follows Khan's party online

Independents, online businesses affected as government blames blackouts on 'technical difficulties'

RAWALPINDI, Pakistan: Former prime minister Imran Khan's party has redefined election campaigning in Pakistan with its social media rallies and use of AI technology in a bid to sidestep a nationwide crackdown that has followed it online.

Khan was jailed in the build-up to the campaign, while his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has been heavily restricted from campaigning for Thursday's vote and banned from the television airwaves. Censorship then followed as the party pushed its election campaign online.

"They can ban what they want, they can ban YouTube and TikTok, whatever they want but our vote is for Imran Khan," 18-year-old Imran Aziz, a first-time voter, told AFP at a bustling electronics market in the garrison city of Rawalpindi.

Pakistani Internet freedom watchdog Bytes 4 All recorded four hours-long social media shutdowns in January — cutting off access to TikTok, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube while Khan's PTI live-streamed to its supporters. The blackouts were blamed by the government on "technical difficulties".

The party's main website was also blocked in January and, within hours, a seemingly perfect duplicate appeared — except that it contained disinformation meant to confuse voters. The methods are not new and were also used by Khan when he was in power, but activists say the scale of the crackdown is "unprecedented". "It challenges the democracy of a nation when you have the incumbents preventing the opposition's ability to participate," said Alp Tokar, the director of global network monitor NetBlocks.

Websites removed

Khan says the campaign against him is an attempt by the government and military to keep him from returning to power after analysts say he fell out with the generals — Pakistan's kingmakers. PTI websites have been blocked, including an official portal listing its candidates nationwide.

A duplicate site with a slightly different web address appeared online hours later containing mis-



ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's former prime minister Imran Khan's supporters wear scarves with prints of his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party as they listen to a virtual election campaign on phones. — AFP

leading candidate information, directing voters to cast ballots for representatives from other parties. PTI activists told AFP they have had the fake site taken down but their own candidate webpage is still blocked.

It had already been severely hampered by a ban preventing the party from using its traditional election symbol of a cricket bat. Literacy rates hover around 60 percent in Pakistan, so parties use symbols to identify their candidates.

Despite the restrictions, PTI remains far ahead of its rivals when it comes to connecting online with Pakistan's youthful population and tens of millions tune in to their live-streams. They've also become the first

party to use AI voice-cloning technology, releasing a fresh speech by Khan from behind bars.

"They have apps, they have online speeches, they've done a Tiktok jalsa (gathering) which is unprecedented, at least in Pakistan, so they have a way of innovating and it's always been the case," said Ramsha Jahangir, a technology journalist. She said censorship efforts by the government have little impact on PTI's popularity because the party is nimble enough to keep reaching its voters.

Bytes 4 All director Shahbaz Ahmed agreed that, in a country with more than 70 million social media users and a median age under 21, such "shutdowns are counterproductive". "The youth is quick to adopt

new technologies to circumvent such blockades," he said, pointing to the use of virtual private networks (VPN).

'Attack on freedom'

Independent candidates with scant resources who rely on social media to spread their message have also been hit hard. Lawyer Jibran Nasir, who is running in the port city of Karachi, has taken the government to court over the social media shutdowns, saying it sets a "dangerous precedent" for the future and violates people's constitutional rights.

"It is a direct attack on the freedom of expression of all Pakistanis regardless of what part of the political spectrum they belong to," he told AFP. "I primarily rely on social media because, given the inflation, it is virtually impossible to run a fully-fledged campaign within the budget limits."

AFP spoke to two other independents who said their messaging was also affected. Apart from the curbs on political freedom, the measures have seeped into the operations of online businesses in a country facing an economic crisis.

Rabia Farhan, who runs a baked good business on Instagram from her home in Islamabad, said the outages left her unable to connect with vendors at a time when millions of Pakistanis are struggling due to rampant inflation and currency devaluation. "Everything was paused online until and unless we used physical resources," she told AFP.

Saba Mushtaq, of ride-hailing and delivery service Bykea, said the company experienced "significant operational disruptions" affecting 100,000 commuters and 25,000 drivers. IT trade association Pasha told AFP it was trying to get the government to ensure Internet shutdowns do not knock out the tech sector by protecting certain websites.

The brazen attempts to shut down the party's online presence only hardens the resolve of PTI supporters. "They are imposing these restrictions, but they cannot take (Khan) out of our hearts," PTI supporter Malik Noman, 28, said. — AFP



LAHORE: Pakistan's former prime minister Imran Khan (center) arrives at a registrar office in Lahore High court in this file photo. — AFP

Jailed Khan looms large over flawed Pakistan election

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan goes to the polls this week in an election that rights observers have dubbed deeply flawed, with the country's most charismatic politician languishing in jail, barred from taking part. The nuclear-armed nation of 240 million people presents itself as the world's fifth largest democracy, but judicial hounding of former prime minister Imran Khan has some questioning that claim.

In the past week Khan, a former international cricketer who led Pakistan to victory in the World Cup in 1992, has been sentenced to lengthy jail terms for treason, graft, and an illegal marriage. Analysts say the character assassination shows how worried the military-led establishment is that his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party could still prove a decisive factor in Thursday's vote.

"I am sure they are worried about it, and the military doesn't have the capacity to put in a fix at national level," said analyst Shuja Nawaz, author of "The Battle for Pakistan", a book examining Islamabad's relations with Washington. "PTI can squeak in with a sizeable number and still be a player," he told AFP.

Shuja said while Western nations were avoiding making any comment on the political chaos gripping Pakistan, they were still watching events closely, worried about the risk of insecurity. "In a broad sense, an election in Pakistan is a mere blip on the radar, given all the crises proliferating around the world," said Michael Kugelman, director of the South Asia Institute at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington.

"But let's be clear: Pakistan's polls do matter." The country has been run by the military for much of its history since partition from India in 1947, and occupies a strategic space neighboring also Afghanistan, Iran and China.

It has been at the center of the so-called "war on terror", with Al-Qaeda founder Osama bin Laden finding shelter in the country until he was killed in a Navy Seal commando raid in 2011. The architect of the 9/11 attacks on the United States, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, is a Pakistani, now incarcerated at Guantanamo Bay. The strategic importance is highlighted by the fact that Beijing made the China-Pa-

kistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) the centerpiece of its trillion dollar Belt and Road initiative, giving the world's most populous nation access to the Arabian Sea and beyond via an "all-weather friend".

Poll prediction

The country itself, however, appears permanently in crisis. Deeply in debt, the economy has for decades been propped up by successive bailouts from the International Monetary Fund and loans from wealthy Gulf Arab nations who use Pakistanis as cheap labor.

Inflation is galloping at nearly 30 percent, the rupee has been in freefall for three years — losing nearly 50 percent of its value since 2021 — and a balance of payments deficit has frozen imports, severely hampering industrial growth.

The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) is expected to win the most seats in Thursday's vote, giving its 74-year-old founder Nawaz Sharif a fourth shot at running the country. He will most likely have to form a coalition with one or more junior partners — including the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), another family-run dynasty now led by Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari.

But the showing of PTI's candidates — forced to run as independents since the party was barred from competing as a bloc — will be crucial. "No party will get an outright majority, leaving the top finishers — likely led by the PML-N — to put together what will probably be a weak coalition susceptible to heavy influence by the military," predicted Kugelman. "If PTI loses, its large support base — already reeling from crackdowns on the party — will be highly aggrieved."

His supporters took to the streets last May after Khan was first arrested, a year after he was booted from office following a National Assembly vote of no-confidence. Khan claims his dethroning was orchestrated with the help of Washington, angered by his visit to Moscow the day after Russia invaded Ukraine and his refusal to take sides in that conflict.

Khan is out of the picture for now, sentenced to prison terms of 14, 10 and seven years in three hastily-run trials held inside a prison court last week. But disgrace rarely lasts long in Pakistan politics — frontrunner Sharif was himself sentenced to lengthy jail terms and exile abroad, only to have the convictions quashed when his party's fortunes improved.

It all depends on the mood of the military, said Munizae Jahangir, co-chair of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP). "They first make up all these leaders and then they demolish them," she told AFP last week. — AFP

El Salvador's Bukele claims 'record' victory

SAN SALVADOR, El Salvador: Fireworks erupted in El Salvador's capital Sunday as President Nayib Bukele claimed a massive first-round reelection victory on the back of a "war" on gangs credited with slashing homicide rates in the violence-weary country. Bukele, 42, claimed to have won more than 85 percent of the presidential vote and his party Nueva Ideas 58 of the 60 seats in parliament. In a victory speech given to cheering, flag-waving crowds from a balcony of the National Palace before final official results were announced, Bukele claimed his win represented "the biggest difference between first place and second place in the history" of democratic presidential elections anywhere.

And he said El Salvador would be the first country with "a one-party system in a democracy." Partial results released by the Supreme Electoral Tribunal late Sunday, as Bukele was speaking, showed that nearly 83 percent of votes cast were for the president, streaks ahead of five competitors. Bukele had already claimed a "record" victory on X, formerly Twitter, hours before, as supporters set off fireworks in several areas of the capital, and hundreds gathered on a central square chanted "Nayib! Nayib!" "We are more than happy with this victory: we will have Bukele for five more years," Lorena Escobar, a 38-year-old nurse, told AFP.

Bukele polls as Latin America's most popular leader, mainly for his roundup of more than 75,000 presumed gangsters under a state of emergency that entered into force nearly two years ago. El Salvador's fearsome gangs had taken some 120,000 civilian lives in three decades, according to the government, which says criminal groups controlled 80 percent of the country when Bukele took power in 2019. 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 global average.

Shortly after voting Sunday, Bukele batted away criticism of his rights record and boasted he had cured the Central American country of a "cancer" of gangs. "Why do we have the biggest incarceration rate in the world? Because we ... changed the murder capital of the world, the world's most dangerous country, into the safest country in the Western Hemisphere," he told reporters in English. "The only way to do that is to arrest all the murderers."

Activists say many innocents — including minors — have been caught up in the dragnet, locked up in inhumane conditions and even subjected to torture. Thousands are held in a brand-new prison — plugged as the largest in the Americas — which the president had built in a matter of months. "We did surgery, we are in radiotherapy, and we will leave healthy without the cancer of gangs," insisted Bukele, who has ironically adopted the moniker "dictator" sometimes used to describe him. The president added that "our police made a couple of mistakes, of course they did, that's why our judicial system has been freeing innocent people" — some 7,000 to date. — AFP



SAN SALVADOR: Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele greets supporters after casting his vote during the elections on February 4, 2024. — AFP



DAKAR: Opposition supporters walk next to a burning barricade during demonstrations called by the opposition parties on February 4, 2024. — AFP

Clashes as Senegal parliament debates election delay

DAKAR: Senegalese lawmakers on Monday debated an unprecedented move to delay this month's presidential election, which sparked clashes outside parliament and has prompted international concern. Security forces used tear gas to disperse small groups of opposition protesters outside the National Assembly. Demonstrators chanted "Macky Sall dictator" in reference to the president after being scattered. The sporadic clashes were a rare sight in the normally calm area of downtown Dakar, where police and security forces backed up by heavy vehicles were mobilized to protect parliament.

The mood in Senegal — often viewed as a bastion of stability in coup-hit West Africa — has been tense since Saturday when President Macky Sall announced a delay to the February 25 vote, just hours before campaigning was officially set to begin. Demonstrator Malick Diouf, 37, said he had no preferred candidate and did not even have a voting card, but felt it crucial to come and protest. "The main thing for me is to say 'no' to this political agenda, this coup de force to try to stay in power," he told AFP.

Opposition leaders have denounced the proposed delay as a "constitutional coup", saying it is an assault on democracy. Violent street protests rocked the capital Dakar on Sunday, during which two opposition candidates, including former prime minister Aminata Toure, were arrested and later released.

The government early on Monday suspended mobile internet access, citing the dissemination of "hateful and subversive messages" on social media. It was a repeat of a move last June, which saw mobile data restricted amid high tensions in the country. The measure has become a common response to curb mobilization and communication via social networks. Parliamentarians later began considering a proposal for a delay of six months or even up to a year, until February 2025, according to the text distributed at the meeting. The text — adopted a day earlier by a preparatory committee — is supported by MPs from Sall's party. But it will need the support of three-fifths of the 165 deputies to pass and does not appear to be a done deal. The vote was expected later in the day on Monday.

Regardless of the outcome of the vote, the situation is unprecedented in Senegal. The country has never experienced a coup since gaining independence from France in 1960, making it a rare outlier in a volatile region. The proposed delay has sparked growing international concern, with the United States, European Union and France all appealing for the election to be rescheduled as soon as possible. The chairman of the African Union commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, also urged Senegal to resolve its "political dispute through consultation, understanding and dialogue".

The crisis has led to fears of the kind of violent unrest that broke out in March 2021 and June 2023, which resulted in dozens of deaths and hundreds of arrests. Tensions soared over speculation that Sall was considering running for a third term, until he eventually confirmed last July that he would not stand again. — AFP

Business

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 2024

OECD raises world growth forecast but warns Middle East poses a 'risk'

Global economic growth to expand to 2.9%; US outlook up

PARIS: The OECD raised its 2024 world economic growth forecast Monday but warned that the Middle East conflict posed a risk, with disruptions in Red Sea shipping threatening to increase consumer prices.

The OECD now expects a 2.9 percent expansion, up from 2.7 percent in its previous forecast in November, as it sharply lifted the outlook for the United States, the world's top economy. Global growth "proved unexpectedly resilient" in 2023, reaching 3.1 percent as inflation declined faster than anticipated, with strong growth in the United States and emerging markets offsetting slowdowns in European nations. But indicators suggest "some moderation" of growth, with higher interest rates affecting the credit and housing markets while global trade remains subdued, according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

While inflation is falling in major economies, "it is too soon to be sure that underlying price pressures are fully contained", the OECD added in an update to its annual economic outlook. The OECD highlighted the threats from the Zionist entity war in Gaza, and the attacks on ships in the Red Sea by Yemeni rebels who say they were targeting Zionist-linked ships in solidarity with the Palestinians.

The US and UK forces have responded with strikes against the Houthi rebels, who have since declared American and British interests to be legitimate targets as well. "High geopolitical tensions are a significant near-term risk to activity and inflation, particularly if the conflict in the Middle East were to disrupt energy markets," the report said.

"A widening or escalation of the conflict could disrupt shipping more extensively than presently expected, intensify supply bottlenecks, and push

up energy prices if traffic is interrupted in the key routes for the transport of oil and gas from the Middle East to Asia, Europe and the Americas."

Around 15 percent of global maritime trade volume passed through the Red Sea in 2022, according to the OECD. The attacks have sharply raised shipping costs and lengthened delivery times of goods as companies have rerouted their vessels around the southern tip of Africa, increasing their journey by as much as 50 percent, it said. Production schedules have been disrupted in Europe, notably for automakers, the report said. "The attacks on ships on the Red Sea are having an impact on trade. Freight rates have more than doubled since the end of last year," OECD chief economist Clare Lombardelli said at a news conference. The increase in shipping costs, if persistent, could add 0.4 percentage points to consumer prices inflation after about a year, the OECD warned.

The organization said monetary policy needs to "remain prudent" to ensure that inflationary pressure is "durably contained". The US Federal Reserve, the European Central Bank and the Bank of England raised interest rates sharply in efforts to rein in consumer prices that rose after the COVID pandemic and jumped further after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. "Growth could also be weaker than projected if the lingering effects from past policy rate increases are stronger than expected," the OECD said.

The three central banks have recently paused their rate-hike campaigns and have kept them at high levels. But markets are hopeful that policymakers will soon begin to cut rates as inflation has slowed in major economies, though it remains above two-percent targets. "The good news is that inflation has been coming down but it is still too high," Lombardelli



SANAA, Yemen: Merchants wait for customers at the old market in Sanaa, on February 4, 2024. — AFP

said. Inflation this year is expected to slow to 2.3 percent in the United States, 2.6 percent in the eurozone and 3.6 percent in Britain, the OECD projected. One outlier is Argentina, where the average annual rate of inflation is expected to soar to 250.6 percent this year. Among major economies, the United States

is forecast to post growth of 2.1 percent in 2024, up from 1.5 percent in the previous OECD report. But the eurozone's outlook was downgraded to 0.6 percent growth from 0.9 percent previously. The forecast for China, the world's second biggest economy, remained unchanged at 4.7 percent. — AFP



A group photo of representatives of the Gulf Bank and members of the Dahiya and Mansouriah co-op societies with Ahmad Al-Amir and Ahmed Al-Rashed Al-Khaleej in the center.

Gulf Bank launches environmental sustainability initiative

KUWAIT: Following the specified timeline, Gulf Bank has launched the "A Step Towards Change" environmental sustainability initiative yesterday, Feb 5, 2024. Conducted in partnership with the Al-Dahiya and Al-Mansouriah co-op the initiative aims to change societal habits by promoting the use of reusable bags. Over the course of a week, the initiative involves distributing around 20,000 reusable bags at the Al-Dahiya and Al-Mansouriah co-op, accompanied by various informative events.

Gulf Bank had earlier revealed the timetable for executing the initiative within the participating co-ops, which include Al-Dahiya and Al-Mansouriah, Al-Shamiya and Shuwaikh, Al-Rawda and Hawally, Kaifan, and Mishref. This disclosure took place in the presence of bank officials, representatives from the Environment Public Authority, and the Committee for Environmental, Food, and Water Security in the National Assembly.

On this occasion, Ahmad Al-Amir, Deputy General Manager of Corporate Communications at Gulf Bank, stated, "We are pleased at Gulf Bank to launch the initiative today at the Al-Dahiya and Al-Mansouriah co-op. Our goal is to achieve the desired outcome, by cultivating a change in the mindset of our community. This will be accomplished through the distribution of reusable bags and by encouraging co-ops in Kuwait to reduce their plastic usage."

He emphasized that this initiative is part of Gulf Bank's annual commitment to implement various initiatives aimed at reinforcing the principles of environmental sustainability within the community. Gulf Bank believes that the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step, and they found it fitting to initiate this program with selected major co-ops in Kuwait. Around 100,000 reusable bags will be distributed to the selected co-ops, marking the first step towards changing behavior, and becoming an integral part of their daily lives.

He added, "This initiative is rooted in Gulf Bank's 2025 strategy, with the goal of establishing principles of environmental, social, and governance sustainability. It aligns with the country's environmental strategy under the vision of 'New Kuwait 2035,' as well as legislation related to the environment, laws



Gulf Bank distributes reusable bags to the selected co-ops as part of its efforts to reinforce the principles of environmental sustainability within the community.

safeguarding the environment, resource conservation, pollution reduction, environmental safety, ecosystem rehabilitation, biodiversity protection, waste management efficiency improvement, utilization of renewable energy, and building and developing national capabilities in environmental work."

He conveyed optimism that this initiative would actively contribute to shaping government decisions and laws, compelling both institutions and individuals to minimize plastic usage. Ultimately, this effort is expected to contribute significantly to the protection of Kuwait's environment from the significant harm caused by plastic bags.

In response, Ahmed Al-Rashed, Chairman of the Board of the Al-Dahiya and Mansouriah co-op, expressed appreciation to Gulf Bank for initiating this noteworthy program and choosing the Al-Dahiya and Al-Mansouriah Cooperative as the trailblazer in its execution.

Moreover, Mashaal Jassim Al-Khalib, Head of the Social Committee at the Al-Dahiya and Al-Mansouriah Cooperative, praised the initiative. She highlighted the co-op's role in community service and its collaboration with both private and public sector institutions to execute various initiatives focused on environmental preservation.

Turkey's January inflation piles pressure on CB

ISTANBUL: Turkey's annual inflation rate stayed stable in January at nearly 65 percent, but month-on-month consumer price increases jumped sharply following a huge minimum wage hike, official data showed Monday. The year-on-year inflation rate moved to 64.86 percent—up a notch from 64.77 percent in December, the TUIK statistics agency reported. The monthly inflation rate in January, however, climbed to 6.7 percent, from 2.9 percent in December, following a 49-percent rise in the minimum wage that went into effect in January. Turkey's finance minister, Mehmet Simsek, attributed the monthly inflation jump to "temporary effects".

"We predict that, starting from February, monthly inflation will decrease significantly and remain in line with our forecast," Simsek said on social media. "We will see a significant decline in annual inflation in the second half of the year." Inflation remains a pressing issue for President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government ahead of local elections in March. His ruling AKP party is trying to win back control of major cities, including Istanbul and the capital Ankara, currently held by the main opposition party. Turkey's central bank, which has raised its key rate from 8.5 percent to 45 percent since June, said last month that the level was sufficient to start easing the cost of living crisis.

The bank's governor Hafize Gaye Erkan resigned on Friday, less than a year into her tenure, after a scandal involving her family. She was replaced by Fatih Karahan, a former economist at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York and the US online retail giant Amazon, who may be under pressure to again start raising the interest rate, analysts said. "The arguments in favor of restarting the tightening cycle with another interest rate hike later this month are compelling and would underline the central bank's commitment to tackle inflation—and help to build Governor Karahan's credibility," Capital Economics analyst Liam Peach said. — AFP

EU walks farming minefield with new climate goals

BRUSSELS: The EU's climate goals for 2040 are set to further dial up the pressure on a farm sector that has yet to get tough on greenhouse gas emissions—but is already up in arms over existing environmental rules.

With European elections just months away, the European Commission will Tuesday put forward its next major target for cutting the bloc's global warming emissions, and agriculture—which emits 11 percent of them—is a key part of the equation. Politically the timing could hardly be worse, with farmer protests simmering across Europe—thronging Brussels with tractors last week—and populist politicians swooping in

to ride the wave of discontent.

Environmental constraints are high on the farmers' list of grievances—both longstanding rules stemming from the bloc's common agricultural policy (CAP), and new ones from the sprawling environmental Green Deal that have yet to come into force. The 27-nation EU has pledged to be carbon neutral by 2050, and to get there implies massive adaptation by industry and consumers. A first target has been set for 2030: cutting emissions by at least 55 percent compared with 1990. For the next milestone, 2040, working documents suggest the EU will aim for a net drop of 90 percent.

But the Green Deal—having taken on emissions in transport, energy and manufacturing—has hit a rock when it comes to farming, faced with stiff resistance from the sector and from conservative lawmakers. Emissions from agriculture—two thirds of which are linked to methane and manure from livestock farming, and the rest to ni-

trogen-based fertilisers—have been stable since 2005, according to Ottmar Edenhofer, chair of the European Scientific Advisory Board on Climate Change.

According to projections by the board, achieving a 90 percent target would require halving the bloc's livestock herd and slashing nitrogen fertilizers by 60 percent. Edenhofer blames the status quo on a lack of incentives, since the CAP "continues to provide financial support to emission-intensive agricultural practices, including livestock production." A report from the advisory board has recommended the CAP become "better aligned" with the bloc's climate goals: setting mandatory best practices, shifting support away from livestock production, and encouraging a less meat-heavy diet. But the EU knows it must tread cautiously: in the Netherlands, an ambitious scheme to cut livestock numbers and nitrogen emissions sparked a farmers revolt—and a populist surge at the ballot box. — AFP



RIVOLI, Italy: Farmers have a lunch and chat after parking their tractors alongside the road during a demonstration near the highway in Rivoli, near Turin, on February 5, 2024. — AFP

Business

Al-Bahar: We are optimistic about a stable political environment, promoting Kuwait business landscape

NBK Deputy Group CEO in an interview with Bloomberg

KUWAIT: In an interview with Bloomberg, Shaikha Al-Bahar, NBK Deputy Group CEO, expressed optimism that a stabilized political environment will improve Kuwait's business landscape. During the interview, Al-Bahar confirmed that in 2023, NBK consistently maintained strong asset quality and solid capitalization.

Optimism & positivity

Al-Bahar expressed confidence in the impact of Kuwait's political landscape on business prospects. She underscored the favorable perspective on the newly appointed government and the transformative policies introduced by the new Prime Minister. Recognized as technocrats committed to a reform agenda, the new cabinet representatives aim to implement strategic changes that will boost the business environment in Kuwait.

"The new cabinet has started to actively engage with the parliament to align on the direction and promote cooperation," Al-Bahar stated, noting that while the political scene is currently calm, the resumption of sessions and further interaction and execution progress by the newly appointed government are key to gain more confidence in a more optimistic outlook.

"What is important here is to highlight that a stable period of political dialogue can see a lot of these hanging issues get resolved and translate into a more productive legislative calendar," Al-Bahar added. Discussing the projections for 2024, Al-Bahar pointed out that NBK maintains an optimistic and positive outlook regarding the revival of project execution, fostered by a more stable political environment. Such stability is expected to catalyze improvements in the non-oil GDP growth and boost credit demand.

"The strong momentum of projects is expected to continue and feed into the market in 2024, with another KD 6.2 billion worth of awards in the pipeline," Al-Bahar indicated.

She also pointed out that the projects market rebounded sharply in 2023 with KD +2.5 billion worth of awards: surpassing last year's awards by almost 300 percent.

"We are hopeful to see some political stability and an improved dialogue between parliament members and the newly-appointed Cabinet as this will trigger project activity that can revive non-oil GDP activity and demand for credit," Al-Bahar noted.

Al-Bahar also mentioned that Saudi Arabia is considered a key market that NBK is approaching from all fronts. She also noted that as the operating environment in the kingdom continues to improve, presenting lot of emerging opportunities that align with the bank's strategic goals.

"We are also expanding under our newly launched Global Wealth Management platform. We have been active in the Saudi market and the NBK franchise is playing an important role in our AUM growth in KSA," Al-Bahar stated.



NBK Deputy Group CEO Shaikha Al-Bahar during an interview with Bloomberg.

- No plans to exit Egypt, being one of our key strategic markets.
- We are well positioned to mitigate the impact of the interest rate cycle throughout 2024.
- We expect the robust momentum in the project market to persist throughout 2024.
- The Saudi market is a priority for us, and the NBK brand is fundamental to our AUMs growth in KSA
- Our robust balance sheet will help us navigate through various economic cycles

2024 outlook: Navigating the future

Al-Bahar emphasized that the performance in 2024 may be influenced by an anticipated shift in the Fed's monetary policy towards a direction that generally does not favor banks, given their business models are designed to thrive in environments of high or rising interest rates. She pointed out that the operational challenge for banks in 2024 will be to defend their margins. "With our diversification and our growing focus on fee business, we partially hedge revenue from interest rate movements. Our focus will remain on strategy execution and keeping the strength of our balance sheet intact as this is what helps us navigate through different economic cycles," Al-Bahar explained.

Al-Bahar further elaborated that alongside the core banking's growth momentum, there is an ex-

pectation for the ongoing expansion of NBK's international and wealth management operations, supported by the Group's presence in key markets, stating that "Our commitment to digital investments will persist in defining our future, with an increased emphasis on incorporating digital services across all business sectors and markets".

In answering a question regarding provisions in 2023, Al-Bahar explained that the provisions are primarily a precautionary measure, reflecting a historically prudent stance towards managing credit risk.

The challenges facing the Egyptian pound

When asked about the Egyptian market's condition and the future of the bank's investments there, Al-Bahar stated, "The Group considers Egypt to

be a key strategic market for our operations, often referring to it as our 'second domestic market.' She emphasized that NBK has a steadfast presence in Egypt and has no intentions of exiting from this investment, viewing it as a long-term commitment." "With regards to our operations in Egypt and in domestic currency terms, it remains one of the most profitable in the Group with the highest ROEs and ROAs," Al-Bahar responded.

"We are looking forward to some easing of geopolitical tensions to allow for some recovery in foreign currency inflows and a reactivation of the government's asset sales program. Once the confidence is restored in the economy and the currency, we believe there are huge opportunities in Egypt and remain optimistic on its prospects," Al-Bahar concluded.

Yandex announces \$5.2 billion Russian divorce



MOSCOW: Photo taken on October 12, 2021 in Moscow shows Russia's Internet search engine Yandex's logo on a laptop screen. — AFP

MOSCOW: Technology giant Yandex on Monday announced long-awaited plans to split its Russian and international units in a corporate divorce worth \$5.2 billion. The deal marks an end to more than two decades of Western investment in Yandex, which for years was seen as a darling of Russia's fast-growing tech industry and an example of successful Western investment in Russia. But after Moscow sent troops into Ukraine in February 2022, the company's status as an internationally headquartered firm with a foreign stock market listing became untenable.

The Netherlands-based holding company, Yandex N.V., said it "entered a definitive agreement... to sell all of the Yandex group's businesses in Russia and certain international markets." It will sell those branches, which make up 95 percent of total revenues, assets and employees, to a consortium of local investors in a deal worth 475 billion rubles (\$5.2 billion). The deal is one of the largest among the spate of corporate exits since Moscow ordered troops into Ukraine.

Initially known as "Russia's Google", Yandex grew to become Russia's most successful technology company and a major player in everything from online search and advertising to taxis and food delivery. The company, which is listed on the US-based Nasdaq exchange, has been mulling some form of corporate break-up for more than 18 months.

The buyers include a group of the company's senior managers and a fund owned by oil company Lukoil. The Netherlands-based holding company will retain a small chunk of Yandex's international-focused business lines, including AI cloud and data platforms, and self-driving technologies.

Yandex Chairman John Boynton said the deal, which needs final approval by shareholders, was the "best possible solution for our shareholders, our teams and our users in these extraordinary circumstances." The company's future was thrown into doubt by Moscow's offensive on Ukraine and the barrage of sanctions Western countries levied on Russia's economy. — AFP

South Korean court acquits Samsung chief over merger case

SEOUL: A South Korean court acquitted Samsung Electronics chief Lee Jae-yong on Monday of a raft of crimes linked to a controversial 2015 merger, Lee's lawyers said. Yonhap news agency reported that the court said it did "not recognize intention to harm shareholders" through the merger, which critics had claimed was bad value and done mostly to ensure a smooth third-generational power transfer to Lee, a scion of Samsung's founding family.

"Solidifying Lee's control and ensuring his succession wasn't the only purpose of the merger," the court ruled, according to the Yonhap news agency, adding that there were "no validations to prove prosecution's charge". The verdict from the Seoul Central District Court clears Lee of several charges, including stock price rigging, breach of trust and accounting fraud, in the 2015 merger between Samsung C&T — a construction and engineering firm — and Cheil Industries.

"Today's verdict has made it clear the merger was legitimate. We sincerely thank the court for its judicious judgment," Lee's attorneys said in a brief statement.

Critics argue that the 2015 takeover deliberately undervalued the construction firm's stock price, unfairly affecting its shareholders. Lee, who has already served jail time over a high-level fraud and embezzlement case, is the current executive chairman of Samsung Electronics, the crown jewel of the sprawling Samsung group. In the deal, three Samsung C&T shares were offered for one Cheil share, a transaction prosecutors claimed had "undermined the fundamentals of the market", according to an earlier Yonhap report.

In the merger process "multiple illegal acts were mobilized... for the smooth succession of the group chief", the prosecution said in its closing argument in



SEOUL: Samsung Electronics chairman Lee Jae-yong (second left) leaves after receiving his verdict on the controversial 2015 merger case, at the Seoul Central District Court in Seoul on February 5, 2024. — AFP

November, demanding a five-year sentence.

"A structure in which company's owner groups are allowed to pursue personal interest is the biggest cause of the worsening Korea discount," the prosecution said, referring to the perceived global undervaluation of South Korean businesses. "We feel utterly distressed it was done by Samsung, the country's number-one company." Lee said in court he had not been driven by "personal interest in the merger".

"I swear I had never imagined increasing my stake at the expense of causing damage to other shareholders," he was reported by Yonhap as saying in his closing argument.

One observer told AFP they were "appalled" by the court's decision to acquit Lee, saying he had been given a "free pass". "The court appears to have based its ruling on the grounds that some of the evidence against Lee was collected without due process," said Oh Se-hyung, director of civic group Citizens' Coalition for Economic Justice. "But that alone should not have given Lee a free pass and I question whether the prosecution

Argentina inflation to soar to 250% this year: OECD

PARIS: Argentina's inflation rate is expected to skyrocket to 250.6 percent this year and its economy to shrink more than previously forecast, the OECD said Monday.

The sharp downgrade comes as libertarian new President Javier Milei launches sweeping reforms that have triggered protests in Latin America's third biggest economy. "High inflation and sizeable fiscal tightening are projected to result

in an output decline in Argentina in 2024 before growth recovers in 2025 as reforms start to take effect," the OECD said in an update to its world economic outlook report.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development had forecast average annual inflation of 157.1 percent in its last report in November. But the OECD said consumer price increases in Argentina — and Turkey — "accelerated in late 2023, implying a strong carryover effect for average annual inflation in 2024". The higher inflation in the two countries stemmed "from loose macroeconomic policy settings in the past", the report said.

Argentina's economy is now expected to contract by 2.3 percent this year, compared to 1.3 percent in the OECD's November forecast. Milei, a self-styled "anarcho-capitalist", won a re-

did its best to hold him accountable," Oh said.

The verdict came almost three years after the first court hearing in the case, with more than 100 hearings held since. It is likely to be a boon for Samsung Electronics, one analyst told AFP.

"Lee's acquittal will help Samsung Electronics, which supplies around 60 percent of all memory chips in the global market, think about setting long-term investment plans," Kim Dae-jong, a professor of business administration at Sejong University in Seoul, told AFP.

Lee spent 18 months in jail after a fraud and embezzlement conviction that followed a sweeping investigation that also brought down former president Park Geun-hye in 2017.

Lee was released on parole in August 2021, having served half his sentence. He returned to management shortly after his release and was officially named executive chairman of Samsung Electronics in October 2022, two months after South Korea's president pardoned him for the embezzlement and corruption convictions. — AFP

sounding election victory in October, riding a wave of anger over decades of economic crisis in the South American nation.

Milei began his term by devaluing the peso by more than 50 percent, cutting state subsidies for fuel and transport, reducing the number of ministries by half, and scrapping hundreds of rules to de-regulate the economy. His reform package touches on many areas of public and private life, from privatizations to cultural issues, the penal code, divorce and the status of football clubs.

The bill won the "general" approval in principle of the lower house of Congress on Friday. Last week, IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva praised the Milei government's "bold actions to restore macroeconomic stability and... address long-standing impediments to growth." — AFP

Business

ABK wins Best Corporate Bank award from International Finance magazine

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) is pleased to announce its recognition as Best Corporate Bank by International Finance, a testament to its unwavering commitment to excellence in corporate banking. The prestigious accolade reflects the Bank's exceptional achievements and contributions to the corporate sector. The award was presented at a ceremony held at Jumeirah Emirates Tower Hotel in Dubai where ABK representatives were honored to receive this esteemed recognition. The event brought together leading figures and experts from across various sectors, further highlighting the significance of ABK's achievement in winning Best Corporate Bank.

Loai Muqames, CEO-Kuwait at ABK, expressed his delight at the bank's achievement, stating, "This accolade signifies our unwavering dedication to delivering exemplary corporate banking services and our steadfast commitment to supporting the diverse needs of our corporate clients."

Muqames emphasized ABK's continuous efforts to provide innovative solutions and superior financial products, tailored to meet the specific requirements of corporate customers. He underscored the Bank's dedication to enhancing its corporate banking offerings, empowering clients with comprehensive financial solutions and strategic advisory services to support their growth and success.

Yasmine Salamah, General Manager of Multinational Corporates and Structured Finance at ABK, highlighted the strategic importance of the award in recognizing ABK's exceptional performance and significant contributions to corporate banking. Salamah emphasized the Bank's dedication to enabling its corporate clients to thrive by offering new products, expanding their projects, and providing invaluable financial advice at the highest level.

She said, "ABK has played a substantial role in financing major development projects in alignment with Kuwait's 2035 vision for growth and development. The Bank endeavors to continue to offer its support to companies across all sectors in both local and international markets." ABK's win as the Best Corporate Bank underlines its success in providing substantial financing across diverse sectors, exemplifying its ability to meet the complex needs of corporate clients with excellence.

Commenting on the achievement, Ahmad Al-Duwaisan, General Manager of Corporate Banking, said, "This award reflects the Bank's continued adherence to international standards when it comes to serving corporate clients. We endeavor to continue to meet their aspirations and support the development of their oper-



Loai Muqames:
This accolade signifies our unwavering dedication to delivering exemplary corporate banking services



Yasmine Salamah:
The Bank endeavors to continue to offer its support to companies across all sectors in both local and international markets



Ahmad Al-Duwaisan:
This award reflects the Bank's continued adherence to international standards when it comes to serving corporate clients



ABK receives International Finance's 'Best Corporate Bank' award.



ations as their trusted banking partner."

Al-Duwaisan praised ABK employees' efforts which greatly contributed to enhancing the Bank's position in the corporate banking sector. He affirmed that ABK will continue to seize opportunities and provide added value to contribute to even more accomplishments. This award is one of many accomplishments and accolades that ABK has received this year, adding to the Bank's impressive track record of years of achievements. In the past year alone, ABK has been recognized for its outstanding performance, innovation, and commitment to excellence in the banking industry across human resources, retail, governance, and corporate banking. Furthermore, it solidifies

ABK's position as a key player in the corporate banking landscape, reflecting its commitment to continuously evolving while catering to the dynamic demands of the sector. With a focus on delivering exceptional financial solutions and fostering strong partnerships, ABK remains dedicated to empowering businesses and contributing to their sustained success.

Since its establishment in 1967, ABK has progressed to become one of the leading Kuwaiti banks in the region that offers a wide array of personal, corporate, and private banking products and services. ABK also provides a broad range of local, regional, and global investment solutions and services through its subsidiary, ABK Capital. This is in addition to ABK's three

branches located in Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC) in the United Arab Emirates, servicing both Kuwaiti and Emirati individual and corporate clients.

ABK is a strong supporter of Central Bank of Kuwait and Kuwait Banking Association's 'Let's Be Aware' awareness campaign. Through its various initiatives, the Bank aims to promote financial inclusion by educating Kuwaiti society about customers' rights, responsibilities, and the different types of banking and special needs services. Additionally, ABK consistently provides strategic information on how to avoid banking and financial fraud, loan application requirements, digital services, and more.

News in Brief

Indonesia economic growth slows

JAKARTA: Indonesia's economic growth slowed last year owing to weak exports driven by lower commodity prices, official data showed Monday. Southeast Asia's largest economy expanded 5.05 percent, slightly above government projections but down from 5.3 percent in 2022, Statistics Indonesia said. Fourth-quarter growth came in at 5.04 percent, marginally better than the same period in 2022. Domestic consumption was the key driver for the economy, offsetting lagging exports, said acting Statistics Indonesia head Amalia Adininggar Widyananti. "The main contributor to the GDP (growth)... included household consumption, which grew 4.82 percent," Widyananti told reporters, adding that investment also grew. — AFP

Societe Generale to cut 900 jobs

PARIS: French banking group Societe Generale announced plans on Monday to slash around 900 jobs at its head office as part of a cost-cutting program. The group's new chief executive, Slawomir Krupa, presented in September a strategic roadmap that included reducing costs by 1.7 billion euros (\$1.8 billion) by 2026 compared to 2022. Societe Generale said Monday that five percent of its head office staff would be cut as part of organizational changes "to simplify its operations and structurally improve its operational efficiency". The job reductions will be carried out "through internal transfers, end-of-year support or voluntary departures", the bank added. — AFP

German exports slump in December

FRANKFURT: German exports fell sharply in December on weaker demand from eurozone countries, official data showed Monday, capping a disappointing year in foreign trade for Europe's largest economy. Exports totalled 125.3 billion euros (\$135 billion) in December, a 4.6-percent plunge on the previous month, federal statistics agency Destatis said. Analysts surveyed by FactSet had forecast a smaller drop of 2.4 percent. Imports declined even more sharply by 6.7 percent to total 103.1 billion euros, widening the trade surplus to 22.2 billion euros. The export plunge was driven by a six-percent drop in shipments to fellow eurozone countries. The decline was partly offset by a 3.5-percent rise in demand for "made in Germany" goods from outside the European Union. — AFP

German car sales climb in January

FRANKFURT: German car sales rose in January, official data showed Monday, but experts warned that the auto industry still faced a tough year ahead. A total of 213,553 new cars took to the roads in Germany last month, the KBA federal transport authority said, a 19.1-percent increase on a year earlier. The surge was however mainly down to the comparison effect with an extremely weak January 2023 when expiring subsidies cratered electric car sales. E-car purchases had soared at the end of 2022 as customers raced to take advantage of clean energy subsidies before they expired, and demand has since cooled. The electric auto sector suffered another blow in December when the government unexpectedly announced the end of an environmental bonus after a shock legal ruling forced Berlin to rethink its spending plans. — AFP

Swiss watchmaker says it's time to make luxury sustainable

GENEVA: Vegetal leather and recycled stainless steel melted in a solar oven are among the materials a Geneva watch brand is using in its quest to make sustainable luxury timepieces. The small ID Geneve start-up launched in 2020, vowing to make high-end watches with a climate- and environmentally-friendly circular production approach using non-traditional materials.

"It is out of the question to use boxes made of Amazonian wood that will be left to gather dust in a closet," Nicolas Freudiger, the company's 35-year-old co-founder, told AFP.

Instead, the 620 watches the company has made so far have been presented in compostable packaging made from algae, which can dissolve in water and be used as garden fertilizer. ID Geneve, which sells pieces for between 3,600 and 5,000 Swiss francs (\$4,200-\$5,800), has already made a splash in the world of Swiss watchmaking.

And the buzz has grown louder since US actor Leonardo DiCaprio came on board as an investor last October. Freudiger, a graduate of Lausanne's Hospitality Business School who previously worked at Coca-Cola, came up with the idea to make a sustainable luxury watch brand after attending a circular economy seminar.

He discussed it with childhood friend Cedric Mulhauser, a watchmaker trained at the prestigious Vacheron Constantin brand, and a designer friend, Singal Depery Moesch.

The three decided to create "a credible luxury alternative", Freudiger said. For their first

model, Circular 1, they used stainless steel recycled from scraps left over from the manufacturing of watches and medical materials in Switzerland's Jura region. They also snapped up unsold watches from larger brands, which had been destined for destruction, for components.

And for the delicate wrist straps, they turned in part to an Italian company that uses grape marc — the solid residue left after pressing — and also to a British start-up that makes vegetal leather from green waste gathered in London parks. The trio also went to the French Pyrenees mountains to test a solar oven, returning with recycled steel ingots, melted down without using fossil fuels.

They are soon hoping to move that part of the production to Switzerland, amid plans for a new solar oven in the northwestern town of La Chaux-de-Fonds in the Jura mountains.

During the ChangeNow innovation fair in Paris last March, the trio discovered a healable composite technology developed by doctorate students from the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Lausanne (EPFL). The students, who launched a start-up named CompPair, say their technology allows for the simple and rapid repair of carbon fiber materials used in fields like aeronautics, wind power and sports equipment. ID Geneve and CompPair decided to team up, using recycled carbon fibres sourced from wind turbine production scraps to make dials that can be repaired with a heat gun if scratched or dented, with no chemicals needed.

"We want to show that it is as sexy to wear a watch using CompPair technology as a watch made with 18-carat pink gold," Freudiger said. For now, these watches appear to appeal to company executives and engineers specialized in environmental materials, who are seeking "a jewel to reflect their values", he said. Analysts say ID Geneve may have found a niche.



GENEVA: A photo taken on December 4, 2023 in Geneva shows ID Geneve watch brand founders (left to right) Singal Depery, Nicolas Freudiger and Cedric Mulhauser posing in their workshop. — AFP

"There is definitely a part of the market looking for these sorts of products," Jon Cox, an industry analyst with the Kepler Cheuvreux financial services company, told AFP. "Surveys consistently say that... consumers of luxury want more sustainably-sourced products."

British luxury retailer Watches of Switzerland agreed. "The next generation of watch buyers are more environmentally conscious now than ever," it told AFP in an email. The watches have been a hit in Europe and North America "with pieces being sold immediately after launch", it said.

Luca Solca, a luxury goods analyst at asset management firm Bernstein, hailed the company's "very clean and nifty attempt to stand out" as a newcomer in a very established industry. While it may face swelling competition as others, including the big, established brands, follow suit, by then ID Geneve may "no longer be so small, and may have carved out a niche for itself", he said. The company is ramping up production, aiming to make 1,000 watches this year. — AFP

New problem found in 737 could slow deliveries: Boeing

NEW YORK: US aircraft manufacturer Boeing said Sunday it has learned of new problems with the fuselage of its flagship 737 model which, while not posing an immediate in-flight danger, will require "rework" on dozens of planes.

"This past Thursday, a supplier notified us of a non-conformance in some 737 fuselages," Boeing Commercial Airplanes chief executive Stan Deal said in a statement to employees that was released to reporters. According to Deal, an employee working at the supplier "flagged to his manager that two holes may not have been drilled exactly to our requirements."

"While this potential condition is not an immediate flight safety issue and all 737s can continue operating safely, we currently believe we will have to perform rework on about 50 undelivered airplanes," an issue that "could delay some near-term 737 deliveries."

Deal described it as "the only course of action" to deliver perfect aircraft to clients.

Boeing has struggled over the past year with



EL SEGUNDO, US: The Boeing Co logo is displayed outside of company offices near Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) in El Segundo, California. — AFP

difficulties on its star plane, the 737 MAX, culminating with a major in-flight safety incident on Alaska Airlines in early January that prompted a sweeping investigation by the regulating body the Federal Aviation Administration.

In his letter, Deal said employees offered suggestions on more than 1,000 improvements since a series of training events following the January 5 incident. Some have already been taken into account, Deal said, including a process to expedite the purchase of new tools and improve ease of access to certain parts of the plane. — AFP

Fed chief: US public debt is 'unsustainable'

NEW YORK: The United States is on an "unsustainable" path with regard to its national debt and it is time to address the issue, Federal Reserve chief Jerome Powell said in an interview aired Sunday. The US national debt currently stands at more than \$34 trillion, according to the US Treasury.

"In the long run, the US is on an unsustainable fiscal path. The US federal government's on an unsustainable fiscal path. And that just means that the debt is growing faster than the economy," Powell told CBS' "60 Minutes" news program. "It's probably time, or past time, to get back to an adult conversation among elected officials about getting the federal government back on a sustainable fiscal path," he said in the interview, which was recorded on Thursday.

"I do think it's pretty widely understood that it's time for us to get back to putting a priority on fiscal sustainability. And sooner's better than later." Last week, the Fed voted to leave interest rates unchanged for the fourth straight meeting, and while it said at the time that "risks to achieving its employment and inflation goals are moving into better balance," it also hinted that rate cuts were not imminent. In the CBS interview, Powell reiterated that stance, saying it was unlikely that a rate cut would come at the next meeting of the rate-setting Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) in March. — AFP

Lifestyle

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 2024



Haleema Al-Mulla (Bahrain)

1st

The "Layered Bench" combines practicality and modern design, transforming from a chair to a table. It offers creative color pattern possibilities, ideal for versatile spaces.



2nd

Asil Al-Harrasi (Oman)

Asil's chair harmonizes with nature through its eco-friendly materials and sleek design, adding a modern, sustainable touch to interiors.



3rd

Jassim Al-Nashmi (Kuwait)

Inspired by the watermelon symbol of resilience, Jassim's chair merges comfort with artistic expression, featuring modular colors and a unique peel pattern.

Kutayba Alghanim Design Award: Championing the next wave of furniture design in the Gulf

Alghanim Industries (Kutayba Alghanim Group), one of the largest privately-owned companies in the region, is proud to reveal the winners of the Kutayba Alghanim Design Award. Now in its second iteration, the award has broadened its reach to encompass the entire Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region, reflecting the company's dedication to fostering emerging talent. This year, in partnership with Alghanim Industries' furniture brand Safat Home, the award has concentrated on furniture design, with a special focus on the categories of seating and tables.

The Kutayba Alghanim Design Award successfully showcased outstanding designers from across the Gulf region. In the seating category, the first prize was awarded to Bahrain's Haleema Al-Mulla, with Oman's Asil Al-Harrasi and Kuwait's Jassim Al-Nashmi securing the second and third places, respectively. The tables category saw Abdulaziz Al-Khonaini from Kuwait take the lead, closely followed by Taqwa Shaheed and Batool Al-Sayed, both hailing from Bahrain, in

the subsequent positions. Selected from a competitive shortlist of 12 talented finalists, with six in each category, these designers distinguished themselves through their innovative submissions.

The top two winners in each category were honored with cash prizes. Additionally, all finalists were provided the invaluable opportunity to have their designs produced and sold at Safat Home showrooms, offering them a significant launchpad for their burgeoning design careers.

Cultivating Innovation and Creativity

The Kutayba Alghanim Design Award, conceived by Alghanim Industries' Executive Chairman, Kutayba Yusuf Alghanim, represents a dedication to encouraging innovation and creativity among young talents in the Gulf region. The award, initially focusing on architecture in Kuwait, has now opened new avenues for aspiring designers in the GCC to creatively reimagine everyday objects. Executive Chairman Kutayba Yusuf Al-



Kutayba Alghanim and Farah Al-Humaidhi with some of the competitors at the Mirzaam expo.

ghanim remarked, "Connecting with the vibrant and creative young designers from across the GCC has been truly inspiring. Seeing their ability to merge innovation with functionality offers a glimpse into the future of design in our region."

At Alghanim Industries, we're genuinely committed to nurturing these emerging talents. Their fresh ideas and innovative approaches are essential for advancing the design landscape and fostering a culture of creativity."

Alghanim Industries hosts award finalists

The finalists of the Kutayba Alghanim Design Award had the significant opportunity to visit Alghanim Industries' headquarters in Kuwait, a central element of the competition's judging process. During this visit, they interacted directly with Kutayba Yusuf Alghanim, the Executive Chairman. This meeting provided a forum for the designers to showcase their work, receive insights, and engage in meaningful conversations about design innovation and creativity. In addition to this important engagement, the finalists were also given the opportunity to display their work at the Mirzaam Expo, Kuwait's leading interior design and furniture event. While this part of the program served as an additional platform, it offered valuable exposure for the designers, allowing them to present their prototypes to a broader audience and connect with industry professionals, enhancing their experience and visibility in the design world.



1st

Abdulaziz Al-Khonaini (Kuwait)

The "Stacks Table" is inspired by Japanese craftsmanship, blending traditional joinery with modern aesthetics for organizing versatility.



2nd

Taqwa Shaheed (Bahrain)

Taqwa's side table represents the Gulf's economic history, from pearl diving to oil, symbolized in its design and sleek black finish.



3rd

Batool Al-Sayed (Bahrain)

Batool's coffee table is designed for social connectivity, combining straight lines and filleted edges with a mix of travertine, wood, and stone for a modern yet elegant look.

GRAMMYS RED CARPET

Metallics, Barbiecore and white



Summer Walker

Music's brightest stars on Sunday rocked up to the Grammys in revealing metallic gowns, Barbiecore pink and stark, classic white. While the Oscars are known for embracing a certain brand of Hollywood glamour, the Grammys are in your face: some of the most iconic fashion looks have emerged at the storied music industry gala, like Jennifer Lopez's plunging green Versace gown in 2000. Here's a look at what the A-listers wore to the Grammys in Los Angeles:

Metallics

If you want to shine at the Grammys, metallics are a strong bet. Pop princess Miley Cyrus, who scored two Grammys for her hit "Flowers," made quite the red carpet entrance in a barely-there gold metal naked dress by John Galliano for Maison Margiela and big, in-your-face hair.

But when she accepted her award from Mariah Carey, she had changed into a black sparkly halter jumpsuit. She changed twice more during the event. Dua Lipa, a nominee for her huge smash "Dance the Night" from the summer blockbuster "Barbie" movie, wore a low-cut floor-length Courreges silver gown with long sleeves and slashed cutouts, her red hair wavy and flowing. On the carpet, she said she felt like a "warrior."

Jon Batiste, the sole man in the running for Album of the Year, wore a sparkly silver suit with a pleated kilt over his trousers. And Victoria Monet, who won three Grammys including the coveted Best New Artist prize, dazzled in a copper Versace corset dress with a train, a trend seen on several red carpets this season.



Taylor Swift

Barbie World

A lot has been written about who was and who was not nominated for Oscars for "Barbie," but the movie racked up 11 Grammy nominations as well — and has definitely influenced showbiz red carpets for months.

Billie Eilish — who won two Grammys for her poignant "What Was I Made For?" from the film — rocked a pink and black Barbie bomber jacket made by Chrome Hearts over a white shirt, black tie and black trousers.

Icelandic singer Laufey, a winner for best traditional pop vocal album, looked sweet in a sleeveless pink dress with black polka dots and strategic cutouts. And the Blind Boys of Alabama, winners of the Grammy for best roots gospel album, rolled up in matching Barbie pink three-piece suits, showing that a Barbie world is for men too.

Women in white

Olivia Rodrigo, a multiple nominee on the strength of her sophomore album "GUTS," glittered in a slinky white vintage Versace column dress adorned with silver sequins and tiny red hearts. The three members of boygenius — Phoebe Bridgers, Julien Baker and Lucy Dacus — bounded on stage during the pre-ceremony to accept their three Grammys in white Thom Browne suits. And the queen of the music world, Taylor Swift, rocked a strapless white Schiaparelli gown, to claim her record-breaking fourth Album of the Year prize. Sleek black opera gloves, a watch choker, several silver necklaces and a classic red lipstick completed the glamorous and elegant look. Some observers saw in Swift's look a coded message: the album cover of her "Reputation" was black and white. — AFP



Jon Batiste



Laufey



Billie Eilish



US singer-songwriter Taylor Swift accepts the Best Pop Vocal Album award for "Midnights" on stage during the 66th Annual Grammy Awards at the Crypto.com Arena in Los Angeles.--AFP photos



US singer-songwriter Taylor Swift accepts the Album of the Year award for "Midnights" on stage.



US singer-songwriter Miley Cyrus accepts the Record of the Year award for "Flowers".

TAYLOR SWIFT WINS RECORD FOURTH BEST ALBUM GRAMMY AT STAR-STudded GALA



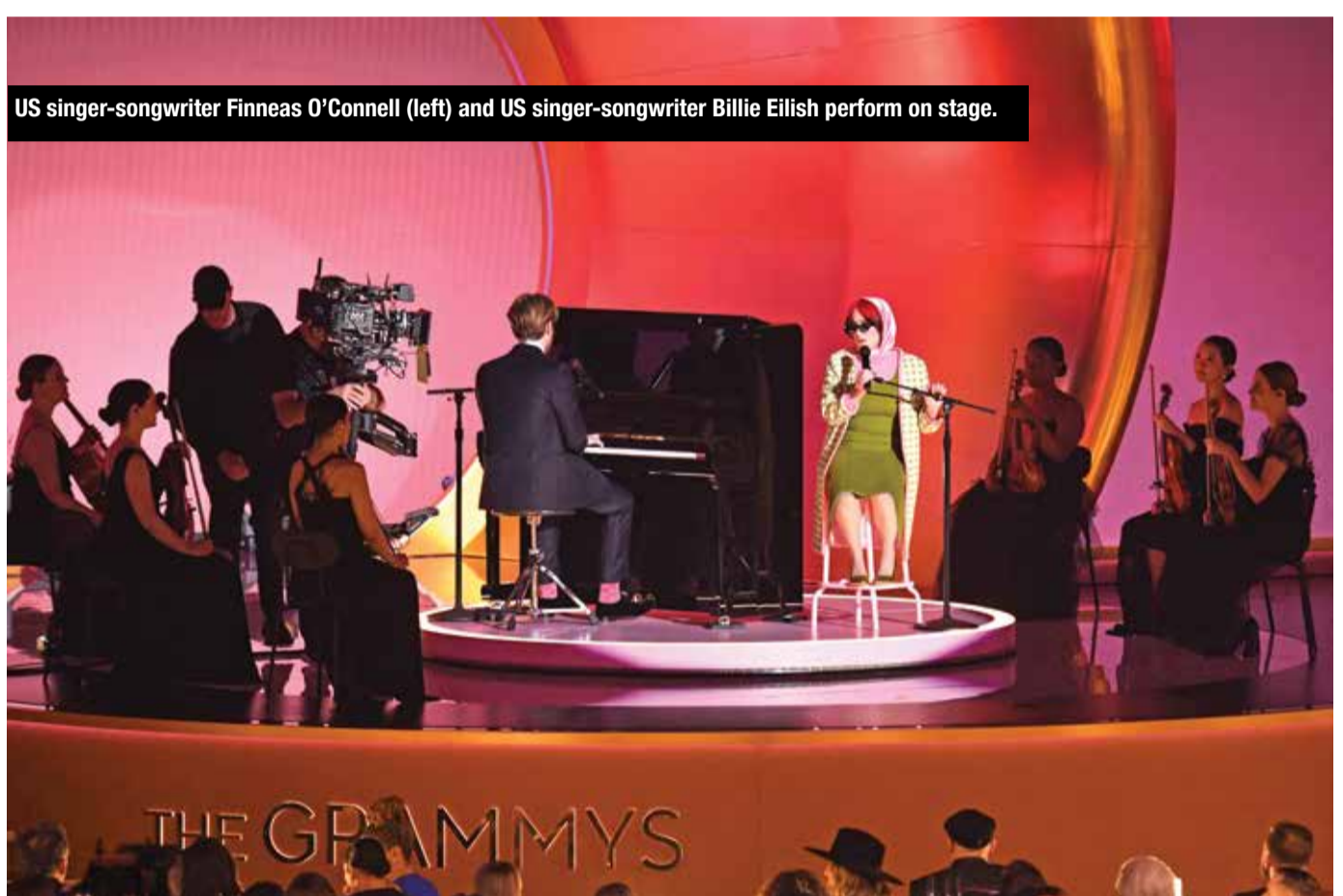
US singer-songwriter Victoria Monet poses in the press room with the Grammys for Best New Artist, Best Engineered Album, Non-Classical and Best R&B Album for "Jaguar II".

Taylor Swift made Grammys history Sunday by winning her fourth Album of the Year prize, the most of any artist—the crowning moment of a night of electric performances and breakthrough wins. In taking home the honor at the 66th annual Grammys in Los Angeles, Swift surpassed the likes of Frank Sinatra, Paul Simon and Stevie Wonder, industry greats she previously had been tied with. It's a cherry on top for the 34-year-old, who is already one of music's blockbuster stars.

"For me, the award is the work," Swift said, who earlier in the night announced she would drop a new album on April 19. "I love it so much." "It makes me unbelievably blown away that it makes some people happy who voted for this award too." Swift however lost two other top prizes she was up for. Record of the Year honors went to Miley Cyrus' "Flowers" and the prize for Song of the Year, which honors songwriting, went to Billie Eilish and Finneas O'Connell for "What Was I Made For?" from the "Barbie" soundtrack.

"This award is amazing but I really hope it doesn't change anything because my life was beautiful yesterday," Cyrus said onstage as she accepted her prize, her second of the evening—and the second of her career. "Not everyone in the world will get a Grammy, but everyone in this world is spectacular, so please don't think that this is important." The already decorated Eilish was equally humble in accepting her prize, saying: "I just want to say everyone in this category, like—that was a crazy list of incredible people, incredible artists, incredible music!"

And Victoria Monet won the coveted Grammy for Best New Artist, her third prize of the evening. Monet entered the night with seven nominations, including one for Record of the Year, after her



US singer-songwriter Finneas O'Connell (left) and US singer-songwriter Billie Eilish perform on stage.

debut studio album "Jaguar II" sparked a commercial breakthrough following years in the industry. "Thank you to the champagne servers of tonight. That's my first thank you," Monet told the audience, also thanking her mother.

'Feel very seen'

A clean sweep of the top awards for women was a triumph for the Recording Academy, which has been working for years against criticism that it heavily favors white men. "As a woman, it feels a lot of the time like you're not being

seen... this makes me feel very seen," Eilish told journalists backstage, when asked what the banner year for women meant to her going forward. "Sometimes it feels really good to, like, have somebody telling you 'good job'."

This year, just one man, the jazz polymath Jon Batiste, was up for Album and Record of the Year; he left the gala empty-handed. Top nominee SZA, who entered the night with nine nods, seized three total prizes, including Best R&B Song, Best Progressive R&B Album and Best Pop Duo or Group Performance

with Phoebe Bridgers.

She burst onto the stage in a fluster to claim her Best R&B Song prize, telling the crowd she had just finished changing following her sizzling performance. "I'm just really overwhelmed," she said. "You don't really understand, I came really, really far and I can't believe this is happening." Karol G won the prize for Best Musical Urbana Album for "Manana Sera Bonito"—recognition that some industry watchers said wasn't enough given that Latinos were excluded this year from the major categories.



US songwriter Theron Thomas poses in the press room with the Grammy for "Songwriter of the Year, Non Classical".



Tyla, winner of the "African Music Performance" award for "Water".



US singer-songwriter Billie Eilish poses in the press room with the Grammys for Song of the Year and Best Song Written Visual Media for "What Was I Made For?"



US rapper Killer Mike poses in the press room with the Grammy for Best Rap Performance, Best Rap Album and Best Rap Song.



(From left to right) Phoebe Bridgers, Lucy Dacus, and Julien Baker of Boygenius, winner of the "Best Rock Performance" award for "Not Strong Enough", the "Best Rock Song" award for "Not Strong Enough", and the "Best Alternative Music Album" award for "The Record", pose in the press room.



Canadian singer Celine Dion with the Album of the Year award on stage.



US television host and producer Oprah Winfrey speaks on stage.

Key winners for the 2024 Grammy Awards

- Album of the Year**
"Midnights" - Taylor Swift
Record of the Year, recognizing overall performance on a song:
"Flowers" - Miley Cyrus
- Song of the Year, recognizing songwriting**
"What Was I Made For?" (From The Motion Picture 'Barbie') - Billie Eilish & Finneas O'Connell, songwriters (Billie Eilish)
- Best New Artist**
Victoria Monet
- Best Pop Vocal Album:**
"Midnights" - Taylor Swift
- Best Pop Solo Performance**
"Flowers" - Miley Cyrus
- Best Rock Album**
"This Is Why" - Paramore
- Best Rock Song**
"Not Strong Enough" - Julien Baker, Phoebe Bridgers & Lucy Dacus, songwriters (boygenius)
- Best Rock Performance**
"Not Strong Enough" - boygenius
- Best Alternative Music Album**
"the record" - boygenius
- Best Rap Album**
"Michael" - Killer Mike
- Best Rap Performance**
"Scientists & Engineers" - Killer Mike featuring Andre 3000, Future and Eryn Allen Kane
- Best Rap Song**
"Scientists & Engineers" - Andre Benjamin, Paul Beauregard, James Blake, Michael Render, Tim Moore and Dion Wilson, songwriters (Killer Mike Featuring Andre 3000, Future and Eryn Allen Kane)
- Best Global Music Album**
"This Moment" - Shakti
- Best African Music Performance**
"Water" - Tyla
- Best Music Video**
"I'm Only Sleeping" - The Beatles
- Best Comedy Album**
"What's in a Name?" - Dave Chappelle
- Best Audiobook, Narration and Storytelling Recording**
Michelle Obama, "The Light We Carry, Overcoming in Uncertain Times". —AFP



Songwriter Kenneth "Babyface" Edmonds poses in the press room with the Grammy for Best R&B Song award for "Snooze".

Joni, Tracy deliver classic performances
The broadcast gala—in which just nine competitive awards were presented—followed the hours-long pre-show, in which the vast majority of the more than 90 gramophones were distributed. The supergroup boygenius cleaned up in the rock categories. Bridgers, Lucy Dacus and Julien Baker—the members of boygenius—were giddy with delight as they ran onstage to accept three trophies.
Music from the film "Barbie" had 11 chances at Grammy gold, and ultimately took home three, two of them thanks to Eilish. The rapper Killer Mike won big in the rap categories, taking home three trophies for music off his album "Michael." "I consciously set out to tell the story of a young Black boy growing up on the west side of Atlanta so that the world can see that our narrative isn't just victimization and losing, but we can win, we can thrive and prosper," he told journalists backstage.
But his wins were overshadowed by his reported detention at the venue. The Los Angeles Police Department did not immediately respond to a query from AFP about the situation. Joni Mitchell beamed as she accepted the honor for best folk album for "Joni Mitchell At Newport," a live recording of her performance at the storied festival that came just years after an aneurysm led to fears she might never play again. Along with Tracy Chapman's moving performance of her 1988 classic



US singer-songwriter Phoebe Bridgers poses in the press room with the Grammy Awards for Best Alternative Music Album for "The Record", Best Rock Song for "Not Strong Enough", Best Rock Performance for "Not Strong Enough" and Best Pop/Duo Group Performance for "Ghost In The Machine".

"Fast Car" with Luke Combs, Mitchell delivered one of the most moving performances of the night, bringing some in the audience to tears with her rendition of "Both Sides Now." —AFP



Australian singer and actress Kylie Minogue poses in the press room with the Grammy "Best Pop Dance Recording" award for "Padam Padam".



Colombian singer Karol G poses in the press room with the Grammy for Best Musica Urbana Album for "Manana Sera Bonito".



Band Shakti poses in the press room with the Grammy for Global Music Album for "This Moment".



Songwriter Blair Ferguson poses in the press room with the Grammy for Best R&B Song for "Snooze".



US rapper Jay-Z (left) accepts the Dr Dre Global Impact Award alongside his daughter Blue Ivy on stage.



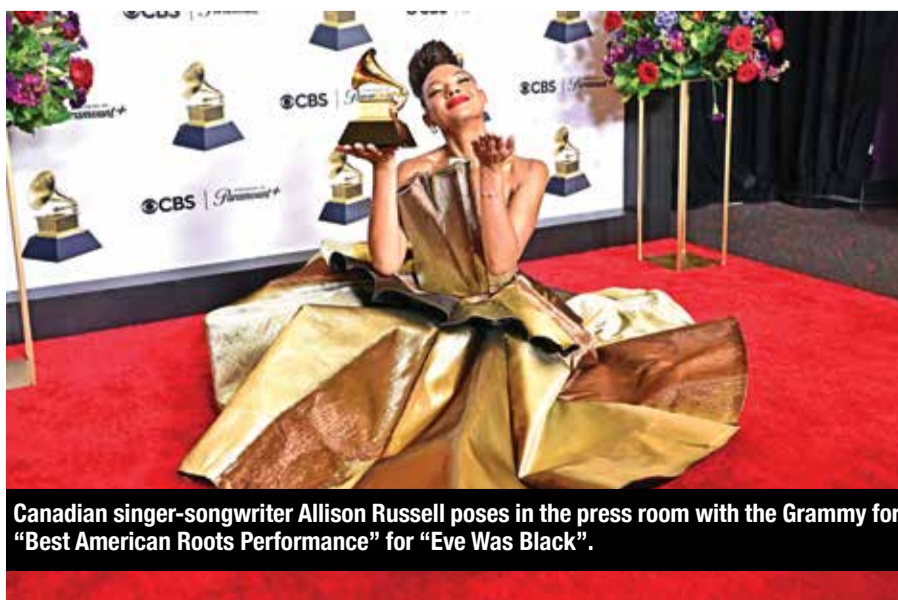
Swedish composer Ludwig Goransson poses in the press room with the Grammy for Best Score Soundtrack for "Oppenheimer".



US singer-songwriter Lainey Wilson poses in the press room with the Grammy for Best Country Album for "Bell Bottom Country".



(From left) Tracy Chapman and Luke Combs perform onstage.



Canadian singer-songwriter Allison Russell poses in the press room with the Grammy for "Best American Roots Performance" for "Eve Was Black".



US singer Coco Jones poses in the press room with the Grammy for Best R&B Performance for "ICU".

Sports

Bumrah stars as India down England to level Test series

England bowled out for 292 on day four in Visakhapatnam

VISAKHAPATNAM: Fast bowler Jasprit Bumrah took a match haul of nine wickets to lead India's 106-run win over England in the second Test on Monday and level the five-match series. Chasing a record 399 for victory, England were bowled out for 292 in the second session on day four in Visakhapatnam, despite an attacking start and Zak Crawley's 73.

Bumrah and spinner Ravichandran Ashwin, who ended the match on 499 Test wickets, took three each in the final innings and the pace spearhead bowled Tom Hartley to seal the win. Shubman Gill set up the comeback victory for the hosts with his 104 on day three to set England, who won the opening Test, a daunting target.

Yashasvi Jaiswal had made an impact with his 209 in India's first innings of 396 after they elected to bat. England came out swinging with their "Bazball" brand of cricket, Crawley and company hitting boundaries despite losing wickets. "The way we have gone about taking on challenges like that is what we are about," said skipper Ben Stokes.

"In moments like that, when you have scoreboard pressure, that is when we get the best out of ourselves as individuals. "The way we applied ourselves and put India under pressure was great, unfortunately we didn't end up on the right side of the result."

He said a virus had hit the team Monday morning with a couple of players waking up sick but did not offer that as an "excuse" for the loss. India's left-arm spinner Axar Patel got a key breakthrough when he trapped Rehan Ahmed lbw for 23 after the night-watchman hit five fours in his 31-ball knock.

Ollie Pope hammered five boundaries in his brief stay at the wicket before Ashwin had him caught at slip on 23. Joe Root showed no signs of the finger injury that kept him out of the field for much of Sunday as he reverse-swept for two fours. But he fell for 16 while attempting a slog off Ashwin, who remains one away from entering the 500-wicket club.

'Champion player'

The chase soon lost steam with two wickets in five balls before lunch, including Crawley out lbw off left-arm wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav. The lbw appeal was turned down by the on-field umpire but India successfully reviewed the call. Jonny Bairstow followed just four balls later, with England at 194-6.

Stokes attempted to get the chase back on track after lunch but a direct hit by Shreyas Iyer had the left-hander run out on 11 while eyeing a quick single. Wicketkeeper-batsman Ben Foakes (36) and the left-handed Hartley (also 36) put on a stubborn stand of 55 but Bumrah, named player of the match, broke through to get Foakes caught and bowled.

The Three Lions nevertheless stuck to their fearless style, which has got them 14 wins in 20 matches under coach Brendon McCullum, nicknamed "Baz", and Stokes. Bumrah played a key role with his six wickets in England's first-innings total of 253 as the tourists conceded a crucial lead of 143.

"He's a champion player for us, he has done the job for us for a while," said Indian skipper Rohit Sharma. "When you win a game like that you have to look at the overall performance. We know that win-



VISAKHAPATNAM: India's Jasprit Bumrah celebrates after taking a catch to dismiss England's Ben Foakes during the fourth day of the second Test cricket match between India and England at the Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy Cricket Stadium in Visakhapatnam on February 5, 2024. — AFP

ning a Test match in these conditions is not going to be easy, the bowlers stepped up." Veteran England pace bowler James Anderson finished with a match haul of five wickets to take his tally to 695 in a gli-

tering Test career, which began in 2003. The third Test starts February 15 in Rajkot and the teams will take a break beforehand, with England expected to fly to the United Arab Emirates for the week. — AFP

Sri Lanka celebrate 10-wicket Test win against Afghanistan

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka won their one-off Test match against Afghanistan by 10 wickets with a day to spare, with their opening batsmen chasing down an easy target of 56 in Colombo Monday. Afghanistan were bowled out for 296 in their second innings, setting Sri Lanka the low goal, with Dimuth Karunaratne (32 not out) and Nishan Madushka (22

not out) finishing the job within 7.2 overs.

Afghanistan were playing catch-up after conceding a lead of 241 runs in the first innings, but fought back well in their second dig with Ibrahim Zadran leading the way with a maiden Test hundred. Rahmat Shah backed up the opening batter with a half-century but once the pair were dismissed, Afghanistan folded quickly.

Sri Lanka skipper Dhananjaya de Silva said Afghanistan did well on day two with the ball but his team stuck to their plan. "When both Angelo (Mathews) and I got dismissed, it might not seem that bad but that was the point that Afghanistan felt they were back in the game," he said.

"I think that was the crucial moment of the match.

But our bowlers stuck to the plan all day (day 3), not giving runs away and keeping it tight." Prabath Jayasuriya finished with his seventh five-wicket haul in Test cricket. "I'm really happy at the moment, the last couple of days were tough," said Jayasuriya, named man of the match.

"We knew this was a batting-friendly wicket, so we were just trying to do the basics right." Afghanistan were looking good to stretch the game to the final day when they resumed on day four at 199 for one in their second innings.

However, six wickets fell in the morning session for just 52 runs as the second new ball hurt the Afghans. Seamer Kasun Rajitha dismissed overnight batsman Rahmat for 54 and then left-arm spinner

Jayasuriya ran through the middle order as the new ball offered him bounce and turn.

Jayasuriya used his arm ball—which goes straight on—to good effect, foxing batsmen who were playing for turn. Zadran, who had batted for more than six hours for his hundred, was confused by one such delivery, and was bowled through the gate.

Jayasuriya finished with five for 107, while seamers Asitha Fernando and Kasun Rajitha shared five wickets between them. Jayasuriya ended the game with eight wickets, having taken three in the first innings. Despite the loss, Afghanistan's fast bowlers were impressive, with Naveed Zadran picking up four wickets in Sri Lanka's first innings on his debut. — AFP



Ghuloum wins Sahari Resort Showjumping Championship

KUWAIT: Masayel Club rider Mohammad Ghuloum came out the winner of Sahari Resort Showjumping Championship among a large participation by riders from local clubs.

Ghuloum won the fifth heat of the height 110

cm, 53.13 seconds without faults. The same rider also won first place in the fourth heat at 100cm, 57.81 seconds.

Rider Fai Al-Quoud won first place of the third heat at the height of 90 cm without faults. Dalal Al-Obaid said "we worked on organizing a championship that is entirely for juniors and beginners with heights from 70 to 110 cm".

She said Sahari Resort is the only equestrian club that sponsors the international championship "The Stadium" where activities take place at the Marina Beach.

Training course for judo coaches

KUWAIT: The training course for Judo coaches to present and discuss the latest upgrades on the International Judo Federation regulations for the 2023-2024 season was opened on Sunday. The

course is being held under the Supervision of Abdullah Al-Salem Leadership Center and will continue until Feb 8th.

The lectures are being given by Egyptian International Lecturer Ramadhan Darweesh and Kuwait's Dr Khalid Al-Tuwajiri, representing Kuwait Judo Federation. The course will qualify trainers to receive a practice license stating that he is an approved coach and allows him to work anywhere in the world.



Heatwave risk hovers over Paris Olympics

PARIS: Scorching summer heat is hard to imagine now in mid-winter Paris, but in six months' time when the world's athletes arrive for the Olympics, another pounding heatwave would spell trouble for organisers. A new study presenting "climate simulations to anticipate worst-case heatwaves during the Paris 2024 Olympics" has focused minds after it warned that the French capital faced a not insignificant risk of record-breaking high temperatures.

The research, published in December in the Npj Climate and Atmospheric Science journal, looked at the risk of a two-week heatwave that would surpass the all-time record hot spell seen in Paris in 2003. "In 20 years, the climate has changed and the idea was to warn policymakers that something even worse than 2003 could happen, that it's possible," lead author Pascal Yiou told AFP.

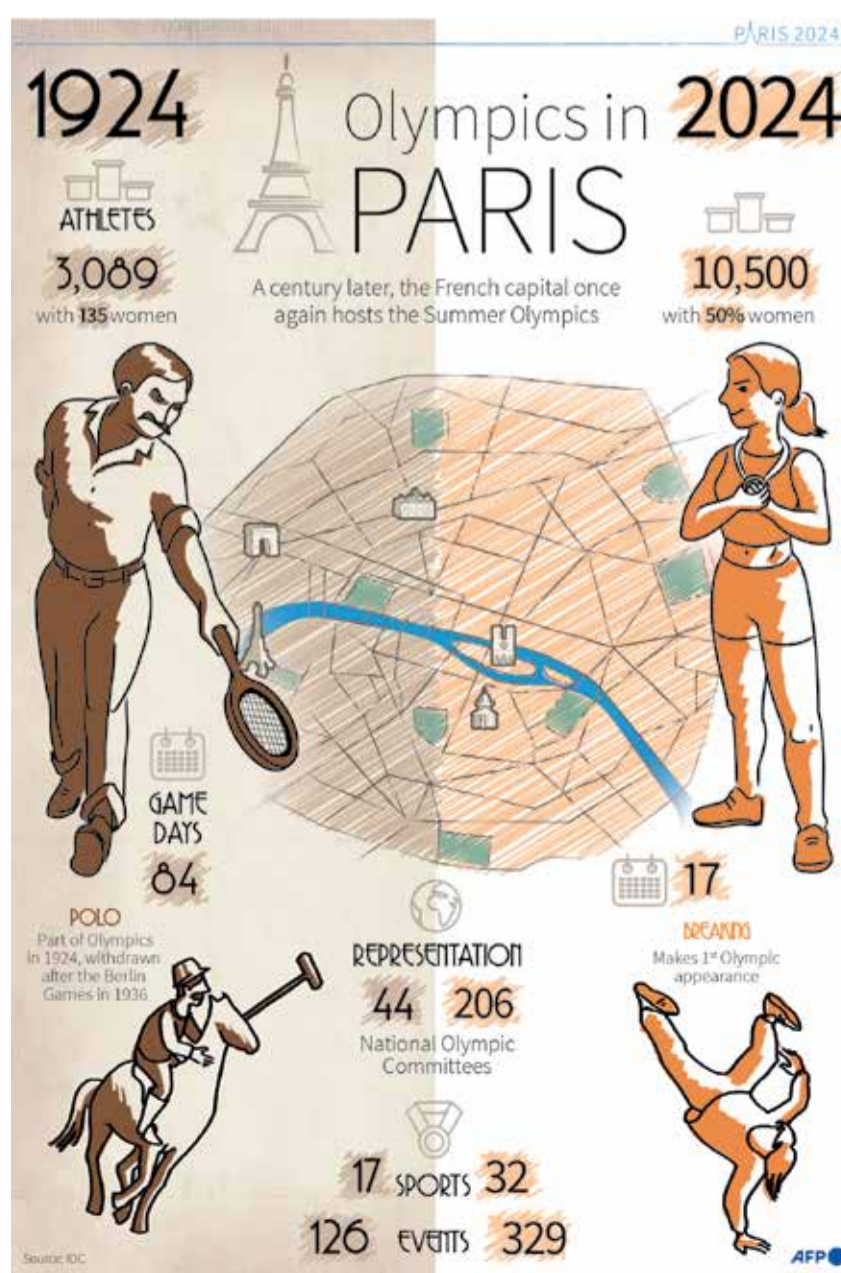
"In the 20th century, it wasn't possible to go beyond this record, but now we cannot only equal it but surpass it with a probability that is ultimately quite high, in the region of 1/100," he added. A separate study in the Lancet Planet Health journal last May found that Paris had the highest heat-related death rates of 854 European towns and cities, partly due to its lack of green space and dense population. The statistics were also heavily skewed by the events of 2003 when 15,000 people died, most of them vulnerable elderly

people living on their own, sparking a bout of national soul-searching.

In the last five years, Paris has witnessed a series of blistering summers that have seen heat records crumble. A new all-time temperature peak was set in July 2019 when the Meteo-France weather service clocked 42.6 degrees Celsius (108.7 degrees Fahrenheit) in the capital. Organisers of the 2024 Paris Olympics, which will run from July 26 to August 11 and the Paralympics which start in late August, say they are "fully aware" of the climate-related risks to the Games. "Heatwaves and extreme weather events are factors that we take into account and that we are preparing for as much as possible, in order to take necessary action," a spokesperson told AFP.

Operational teams have run simulations looking at the consequences of shifting some outdoor events to earlier or later start times to avoid the midday heat. The athletics events, particularly the marathon, as well as tennis or beach volleyball are all seen as being vulnerable to the effects of punishing sunshine and high temperatures.

Young and fit athletes might also prove more resistant than spectators who will likely face queues to enter venues and potentially hours without shade in open-air stadia. The head of the French agency responsible for building the Olympics venues, Nicolas Ferrand, reassured a Senate hearing that all indoor facilities had been built with global heating in mind. "We checked that all of our buildings would be comfortable in the summer of 2050," he said last month, adding that the national weather office and IT consultancy firm Dassault Systemes had helped with the modelling. — AFP



Ravindra double ton has NZ in control of first Proteas Test

MOUNT MAUNGANUI: Rachin Ravindra struck a majestic double century before South Africa's top order collapsed on Monday, leaving New Zealand in command of the first Test in Mount Maunganui. Ravindra crafted a career-best 240 as the home side were dismissed for 511, before the tourists' inexperience was exposed as they were reduced to 80-4 at stumps on day two.

A Proteas team featuring six players new to international cricket will resume on Tuesday facing a deficit of 431 runs, after four wickets tumbled in the space of 14 overs late at Bay Oval. Seamer Kyle Jamieson took 2-21 and could have had a third if Matt Henry had held a chance in the outfield to remove David Bedingham. Instead, Bedingham was unbeaten on 29 at stumps, alongside Keegan Petersen on two. The pair are the only members of South Africa's tour squad who played in the drawn home Test series against India a month ago, with the bulk of their first-choice players having committed to play in the country's domestic Twenty20 league.

Opener and captain Neil Brand was Jamieson's first victim, caught behind for four, before fellow-debutant Raynard van Tonder departed in the same over, trapped leg before wicket for a two-ball duck. Edward Moore (23) ballooned a Henry bouncer to a close fielder before Zubayr Hamza (22) edged a ball from spinner Mitchell Santner into his stumps.

South Africa batting coach Imraan Khan conceded his team would need to fight their way out of a hole. "Fair play to the Kiwis, I thought they executed quite nicely, in particular Jamieson," Khan said. "We've got to knuckle down, create some partnerships through the rest of the innings and hopefully we can put on a good performance tomorrow. We've got two fantastic players who are in at the moment." — AFP

Sports

Inter Milan beat Juve to take control of Serie A title tussle

Kvaratskhelia fires Napoli to comeback win over Verona

MILAN: Inter Milan took firm control of the Serie A title race by winning Sunday's highly-anticipated clash with Juventus 1-0 and moving four points clear of their closest rivals for the Scudetto. Simone Inzaghi's side prevailed in a tense but eventful clash at the San Siro thanks to Federico Gatti's own goal eight minutes before half-time.

Home fans who packed the stands for the biggest match of the season roared in delight as leaders Inter put daylight between themselves and second-placed Juve with their sixth straight win in all competitions. "It's a step in a long journey because there are lots of games to go and Juve won't give up, but it was a great night in front of a great crowd," said Inzaghi to DAZN.

"It's hard to find a weakness tonight... we've won 18 matches from 22 which is great but we're only four points ahead of Juve. Napoli were much further ahead at this stage last season." Inter also have a game in hand — at home against Atalanta at the end of the month — a big advantage just as they head into a run of tough fixtures featuring their Champions League last-16 tie with Atletico Madrid.

They also travelled to Riyadh last month to win the Italian Super Cup. Juventus, who on Sunday suffered their second defeat of the season and their first since September, have no European distractions. Serie A's two leading goalscorers Lautaro Martinez and Dusan Vlahovic were on the San Siro pitch but it was the unfortunate Gatti who provided the decisive touch.

Advantage Inter

Inter made most of the running but bumped up against a black and white wall as Juve set up to frustrate the hosts and hit them on the break. Marcus

Thuram thought he was about to put Inter ahead midway through the first half but just as he prepared to sweep home Federico Dimarco's low cross, Bremer nipped in to take the ball from his toes.

Juve rarely ventured outside their own half in the opening period but Vlahovic could have put them ahead just after the half hour had he not miscontrolled the ball after Weston McKennie's powerful burst upfield. But Inter got the stroke of luck they needed in the 37th minute when Nicolo Barella's cross missed both Benjamin Pavard and Thuram before deflecting over the line off Gatti.

The second half was played at a much faster pace and both teams exchanged half chances until Wojciech Szczesny's brilliant reaction stop denied Barella from close range in the 69th minute. The Juventus goalie pulled off another miracle with four minutes remaining when he stopped Marko Arnautovic tucking home Denzel Dumfries' perfect low cross, but Inter had done enough for a huge win.

"Everyone has negative moments during a season, and it was our turn tonight," Juventus coach Massimiliano Allegri told DAZN. "We just need to get past this and focus on our next game with Udinese."

Kvaratskhelia saves Napoli

Khvicha Kvaratskhelia struck a wonder goal to fire ailing champions Napoli to a morale-boosting 2-1 win over struggling Verona. Georgian star Kvaratskhelia curled home a long-range finish with three minutes remaining at the Stadio Diego Armando Maradona to snatch a comeback victory.

Walter Mazzarri's side are seventh and were temporarily a single point away from Italy's Champions League positions until fourth-placed Atalanta beat



MILAN: Inter Milan's French forward #09 Marcus Thuram celebrates following an own-goal attributed to Juventus' Italian defender #04 Federico Gatti during the Serie A football match between Inter Milan and Juventus at the San Siro stadium in Milan. — AFP

Lazio 3-1. "When you win like that it's a great feeling... but in reality, it would've been better to take an early lead and get it done without suffering so much," admitted Mazzarri to DAZN after another underwhelming performance from his team.

Napoli are firmly in the fight for Champions

League football but the top four wasn't their target after their stunning Scudetto triumph last season. Next weekend Napoli travel to the San Siro to take on AC Milan, a difficult trip for a team who have only won four league matches since Mazzarri took over from Rudi Garcia in November. — AFP

Llorente snatches Atletico late draw at Real Madrid

MADRID: Marcos Llorente headed home in the 93rd minute to snatch Atletico Madrid a 1-1 draw at La Liga leaders and bitter rivals Real Madrid on Sunday. The Spain midfielder rescued a point to keep Atletico's faint title hopes alive and stop Los Blancos opening up a wider lead on second-placed Girona.

Brahim Diaz, who replaced the hurt Vinicius Junior just before the game, opened the scoring for Madrid at the Santiago Bernabeu. Llorente's leveller means Madrid are two points clear of Girona, who drew against Real Sociedad on Saturday, and 10 points above Atletico in fourth.

Catalan minnows Girona visit Real Madrid next weekend in a title showdown made even juicier by Llorente's vital contribution. "The team has to be calm, we're leaders with a two-point advantage," said Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti.

"We have another chance to make a statement win next Saturday." Llorente was happy to snatch his team a draw and above all, deny Madrid victory. "We worked so hard during the whole game and at the end took this prize, a point, and stopped them from getting more, just one," Llorente told Movistar.

"It doesn't feel like a win, as we don't get three points, but for how the game was, and the situation, we take a very valiant point from here." This was the third of three hotly-competed Madrid derby clashes in under a month.

Real Madrid won the first, beating Atletico on the way to winning the Spanish Super Cup, while Diego Simeone's side ousted Los Blancos from the Copa del Rey a week later. Atletico also beat Real in La Liga in September and are the only team to beat them this season in any competition, but could not complete their hat-trick.

Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti pulled Vinicius out of the starting line-up after he suffered neck discomfort before the game and deployed Diaz in his stead. "After the warm-up (Vinicius) was not comfortable," said Ancelotti. "The two options were Brahim and Joselu, and Brahim let us keep the same defensive system."

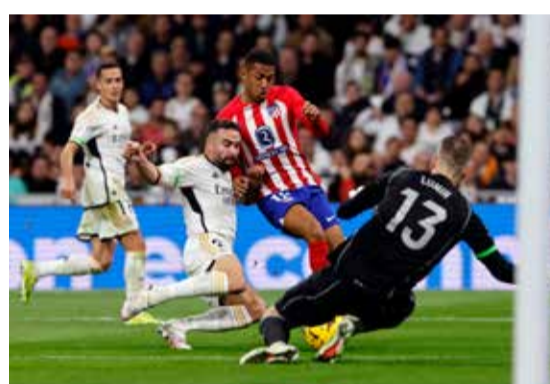
The coach also lined up with full-back Dani Carvajal in the centre of defence as Antonio Rudiger was not fit to start and both Eder Militao and David Alaba are injured. Former Manchester City playmaker Diaz struck in the 20th minute after Atletico's defence failed to clear.

'I'm always ready'

Diaz has proven a reliable option for Ancelotti to turn to this season during Vinicius' previous spells out injured and he notched his fourth goal of the league campaign. "Vini had a little problem, they told me it was me starting and I'm always ready," said Diaz.

Madrid goalkeeper Andriy Lunin made a good save to deny Axel Witsel and Savic nodded narrowly over as Atletico hunted for the equalizer. The Rojiblancos thought they had it early in the second half when Savic headed Antoine Griezmann's corner home but the goal was disallowed for a controversial offside.

At the moment Savic headed the ball, Saul Niguez was offside in front of Lunin. Madrid's top goalscorer



MADRID: Real Madrid's Spanish defender #02 Dani Carvajal (2L) vies with Atletico Madrid's Brazilian forward #12 Samuel Lino (2R) during the Spanish league football match between Real Madrid CF and Club Atletico de Madrid at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium in Madrid. — AFP

Jude Bellingham appealed for a penalty at the other end as he tangled with Savic but the referee waved his appeal away. Atletico goalkeeper Jan Oblak made a solid stop from Rodrygo at the near post, with Ancelotti throwing out an arm in frustration.

Diaz nutmegged Mario Hermoso brilliantly and bent a shot wide of the far post moments before he was replaced by Joselu. Madrid looked to have closed the game out but Atletico refused to give in and finally found the equalizer through Llorente.

It was the first time Carvajal and centre-back partner Nacho Fernandez had put a foot wrong, failing to react to Memphis Depay's flick-on, and Llorente charged in to head past Lunin. "(Atletico) are taller and they took advantage of that," noted Ancelotti. — AFP

World Aquatic Championship opens in Qatar

DOHA: The President of Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC) Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad Al-Thani opened Sunday the World Aquatics Championship 2024 in Doha, set to continue until Feb 18th.

The QOC General Secretary, and Deputy President of the committee Jassim Al-Buenain expressed his joy in a speech during the opening ceremony which for

was the first time to be hosted in Middle East region. He stressed that this championship embodies the world's will of celebrating aquatic sports and engaging in competition among more than 2,600 athletes from more than 200 countries to qualify for the Paris Olympics 2024.

He also mentioned that Qatar always believed that sports was a priority that enables human growth and produces success. The championship consists of 75 competition in six different sports five of which are Olympic level, and it will be held in three locations, aspire dome, Hamad complex for aquatic sports, and Old Doha Port. — KUNA

Footballer Dani Alves goes on trial for rape

BARCELONA: Former Brazilian football star Dani Alves went on trial Monday in Barcelona accused of raping a woman in a local nightclub in 2022. Prosecutors are demanding a nine-year prison sentence, followed by 10 years of conditional liberty, where he would remain under supervision. They are also asking that he pay 150,000 euros (\$162,000) in compensation to the woman.

The 40-year-old former Barcelona, Juventus and Paris Saint-Germain defender,

deked out in a white shirt and jeans, was driven to court in a police van from a prison near Barcelona, where he has been held on remand since his arrest in January 2023.

He was arrested after a young woman accused him of raping her in a bathroom of the VIP area of the upmarket Sutton nightclub in Barcelona in the early hours of December 31, 2022. The three-time Champions League winner has said they had consensual sex after initially denying knowing the woman during a television interview.

The trial is scheduled to hear testimony from around 30 people, including Alves, his wife, the alleged victim and staff from the nightclub. It is expected to wrap up on Wednesday, with a verdict likely to come several weeks later. Alves' lawyer asked that he take the stand last, but the court still must decide on the request.

'Anguish and terror'

According to the prosecution, Alves — who was on holiday in Barcelona at the time after playing for Brazil at the World Cup in Qatar — offered champagne to the young woman and her friend. Alves then allegedly invited the woman to enter a small enclosure at the nightclub, which she says she did not know was a lavatory.

Once inside the footballer showed a "violent attitude" and forced her to have intercourse despite her resistance, prosecutors say according to the indictment. "The victim asked him several times to let her go, saying she wanted to leave but the defendant prevented her from doing so," according to the indictment, which describes a "situation of anguish and terror" for the young woman. — 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
Ayoum 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, MOHAMED SADIQ RIYASAT, holder of Indian Passport No. M6103097, and Civil ID No. 274080203016, have changed my name to Sadique Riyasat Pathan. Herein after in all my dealings and documents I will be known by name of SADIQUE RIYASAT PATHAN. (#5155 6-02-2024)

I, KHADIJA, holder of Indian passport no. X5367006 having permanent address Bohra Colony Gadajrasapur Galiakot, Durgapur, 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)

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Arsenal beat Liverpool to ignite Premier League title race

Chelsea succumbed to another embarrassing defeat at home to Wolves



LONDON: Arsenal's English midfielder #41 Declan Rice (R) tackles Liverpool's Colombian midfielder #07 Luis Diaz during the English Premier League football match between Arsenal and Liverpool at the Emirates Stadium in London. — AFP

LONDON: Arsenal rekindled their bid for a first Premier League title in 20 years by beating leaders Liverpool 3-1 at the Emirates as Chelsea succumbed to another embarrassing defeat, 4-2 at home to Wolves, on Sunday.

Liverpool's hopes of sending off manager Jurgen Klopp as a champion of England were dented as Arsenal closed to within two points at the top of the table. Mikel Arteta admitted before the game that his side could not afford a repeat of their 2-0 FA Cup defeat by Liverpool last month if they were to keep their title hopes alive. As in the cup tie, Arsenal dominated the opening stages but this time got their reward with the opening goal. Bukayo Saka stroked home after Alisson Becker denied Kai Havertz. Liverpool did not have a shot on target in the first half but levelled, after a defensive mix-up, when Gabriel Magalhaes turned Luis Diaz's cross into his own net.

The visitors repaid the favour after the break as Alisson collided with Virgil van Dijk as he rushed out from his goal and presented Gabriel Martinelli with the simple of tasks to roll into an empty net. Liverpool missed the presence of Mohamed Salah in their

push for an equaliser and were left with a mountain to climb when Ibrahima Konate was sent off for a second yellow card after fouling Havertz.

Leandro Trossard then took advantage of the space on the right side of the Liverpool defence as he surged forward and blasted beyond Alisson. "We were ruthless when we had a chance and it feels like a big win," said Arteta. "It gives us momentum and the way we have done it we are back on (the title race). (I'm) really excited." Defending champions Manchester City remain just five points off the top but now have two games in hand, starting with a visit to Brentford on Monday, to overhaul Liverpool.

Pochettino sorry for Chelsea shambles

Mauricio Pochettino apologised to the Chelsea fans after Matheus Cunha's hat-trick handed Wolves their first victory at Stamford Bridge since 1979. The Blues were booed off by furious fans after dropping into the bottom half of the table. 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. 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. With trips to Aston Villa in the FA Cup 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. "We are not matching the history of the club," said Pochettino. "It is a different project and it is a matter of time but it is difficult for me to always say (we need more) time." — AFP

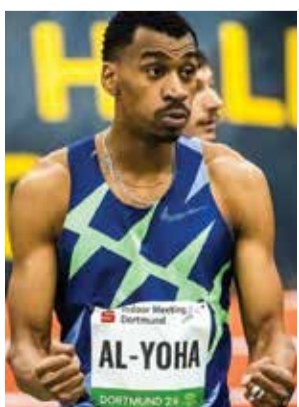
Kuwait wins three medals in Arab Taekwondo tourney

ABU DHABI: Kuwait won three medals, one gold, silver and bronze in the final stages Sunday of the Arab Taekwondo Cup Championship in United Arab Emirates with the participation of 1,200 players from 22 Arab countries. The head of Kuwaiti Association for Taekwondo Hani Al-Mershad said to KUNA that the winner of the gold medal is Musab Al-Masoudi under the height 160, the silver medal was scored by Walid Al-Mutairi under the height 160 whereas the bronze medal was achieved by Hussain Shamouh under the height 172 all players competed in the Juniors Category. Al-Mershad stressed the importance of giving full support to the young Kuwaiti athletes pointing to this big achievements scored by the young athletes. He also mentioned that these tournament could enhance and improve the players' experiences and levels so that they could compete internationally and to achieve more trophies and results in the name of Kuwait. — KUNA



Yaqoub Al-Youha qualifies for World Athletics Championships

DORTMUND: Kuwait's Yaqoub Al-Youha qualified for the World Athletics Indoor Championships Glasgow to be held on 1-3 March 2024, after winning the men's 60 meters hurdles final at Indoor Meeting Dortmund, finishing the race in 7.58 seconds. Youha had set a new tournament record in the same race at the competition taking place in Dortmund, Germany. He is participating in the tournament as part of his preparations for the Tehran Asian Indoors Championships.



Youha has most recently won the gold medal of the men's 100 meters hurdles race in the Asian Games, Arab Championships and West Asian Championships. Over 700 competitors from more than 130 countries are expected to take part in the World Athletics Indoor Championships Glasgow, competing in 26 events - 13 for men and 13 for women.

Kuwaiti team grabs 6 medals at Sharjah para-athletics

ABU DHABI: Kuwait's athletes secured three golds, one silver and two bronze medals at 12th Sharjah International Open Athletics meeting, which opened on Sunday evening. Saja Al-Azemi, a female athlete, won gold in the 33F javelin throw event, while Faisal Sorour and Ahmad Al-Mutairi won similar medals in the 37-36-35F discus throw and 51T wheelchair events, respectively. Al-Mutairi won a silver medal in the 100m wheel-

chair racing. Malak Hadi, a female javelin thrower, won the bronze medal in the 55F event while Hamad Hejji won a similar medal in the 38-36-35F discus throw event, raising to six Kuwait's tally of medals in the opening day of the tourney. Hailing the performance of the Kuwaiti team, Shafi Al-Hajeri, chairman of Kuwait Disabled Sport Club (KDSC), said the achievement of the outstanding champions testifies to excellence of Kuwait's para-athletes in major sports events.

KDSC is keen on active participation in international championships to improve the expertise of athletes, he said in statements to KUNA. Al-Hajeri appreciated the support provided to the Club and the Kuwaiti mission to the event, by Public Authority for Sport, headed by Yousef Al-Beidan. The three-day para-athletics gathered nearly 290 athletes from 38 countries. — AFP

New York selected to host 2026 FIFA World Cup final

MIAMI: The 2026 World Cup final will be held at MetLife Stadium in New York/New Jersey, organisers FIFA announced on Sunday. The New York bid held off a strong challenge from Dallas to secure the July 19 game, the culmination of the expanded 48-team tournament being co-hosted by the USA, Canada and Mexico. The competition will kickoff with the opening game at Mexico City's iconic Azteca Stadium on June 11.

"The most inclusive and impactful FIFA World Cup ever is no longer a dream but a reality that will take shape in the form of 104 matches in 16 state-of-the-art stadiums across Canada, Mexico and the USA," said FIFA president Gianni Infantino.

"From the opening match at the iconic Estadio Azteca to the spectacular final in New York New Jersey, players and fans have been at the core of our extensive planning for this game-changing tournament... that will not only set new records but also leave an indelible legacy." Atlanta and Dallas will host the semi-finals while the third-place game will be played in Miami. The quarter-final games will take place in Los Angeles, Kansas City, Miami and Boston. A total of 16 cities across the three countries will host games with the bulk of the matches being held in the USA. — AFP