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Royal welcome for Amir in Oman

Sheikh Mishal and Sultan Haitham hold official talks, exchange medals

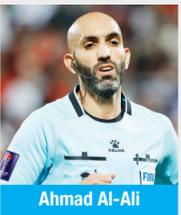


MUSCAT: HH the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and Sultan of Oman Haitham bin Tareq exchange medals at Al-Alam Palace on Feb 6, 2024. — KUNA photos (See Page 3)

NEWS IN BRIEF

Kuwaiti ref 'surprises' Iran

DOHA: Iran defender Saïd Ezatolahi has questioned the appointment of a Kuwaiti referee for their Asian Cup semifinal against hosts and holders Qatar on Wednesday. Ahmad Al-Ali is reportedly set to take charge of the game in Doha and Ezatolahi said it was "a little bit surprising". "We are wondering how it's possible that they put an Arabic guy in charge of the game," Ezatolahi said on Tuesday. — AFP



Saudi doubles tourism target

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia drew 27 million foreign tourists in 2023 and has more than doubled its goal for the end of the decade, an official said on Tuesday. "We have reached 100 million tourists this year, 77 million from home, 27 million from abroad, over 100 million," Tourism Minister Ahmed Al-Khateeb said. Authorities now hope to hit 150 million tourists by 2030, up from an earlier goal of 100 million, with 70 million of those coming from abroad, up from an earlier goal of 30 million. — AFP

Iran's 'oldest' woman dies at 125

TEHRAN: An Iranian believed to be the country's oldest woman has died at the age of 125, local media reported on Tuesday. Masoumeh Sanei Toroghi was born on Sept 23, 1898, in the northeastern city of Mashhad, according to state TV, which published a photo of her identity card. — AFP

MUSCAT: HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah arrived, along with an official accompanying delegation, in Omani capital of Muscat on a state visit on Tuesday. A fleet of Omani military jets accompanied HH the Amir's plane over Omani airspace. Receiving HH the Amir at the airport was Sultan of Oman Haitham bin Tareq and senior Omani officials. HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal was then treated to an official reception at Oman's royal palace. As HH the Amir's official convoy pulled up, he was warmly greeted by Oman's Royal Camel Corps, a customary gesture to welcome a visiting head of state, while the traditional 21-gun salute sounded to usher in the visit. HH the Amir shook hands with top Omani state officials before bilateral talks got underway.

Govt submits program with price rises, taxes; populist bills delayed

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Ahmad Al-Saadoun informed lawmakers on Tuesday that the Assembly has received the government's program of action. In the program, the government issued a stern warning that economic and financial reforms must not be delayed any longer, otherwise the cost of such reforms will be too expensive and the procedure will be extremely difficult. The government said in the program that it wants to review charges to a number of public services that are not controlled by a 30-year-old law banning the government from raising charges on some public services without the prior approval of the Assembly. The government said its program aims at restoring

Continued on Page 6

HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal and Sultan Haitham held a session of official talks at Al-Alam Palace. During the talks, the deep-rooted ties between the two countries were touched on, as well as boosting bilateral relations in various fields. The discussions also dealt with ways of expanding frameworks to support and enhance the progress of the Gulf Cooperation Council, the most prominent issues of common interest and the discussion of some matters in light of the latest events and developments taking place in the regional and international arenas. The talks were attended by the official delegation accompanying HH the Amir. HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal and Sultan Haitham also

exchanged medals at Al-Alam Palace. Sultan Haitham decorated HH the Amir with the Al-Saeed Medal in recognition and appreciation for His Highness, while HH the Amir gifted Sultan Haitham the Mubarak Al-Kabir Medal in appreciation of His Majesty and the distinguished achievements and efforts he has made for Oman and its people. HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal will attend the inauguration of the Al-Duqm refinery and petrochemical complex on Wednesday. The refinery, a joint venture with Kuwait, is considered one of the sultanate's most promising and significant investment projects, in addition to being a catalyst for an improvement in bilateral relations.



KUWAIT: Lawmakers attend a parliament session at the National Assembly on Feb 6, 2024. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Harry visits King Charles after 'early' cancer diagnosis

LONDON: Charles III's estranged son Prince Harry touched down in London on Tuesday, heading for his father's side less than 24 hours after it was announced the king had cancer. Harry, who now lives in California with his US actress wife Meghan and their children, has been at war with

his family since quitting royal life in 2020. But despite recent family tensions, Harry reportedly traveled straight from London's Heathrow airport to Charles' Clarence House residence. The UK's Press Association reported that two black SUVs, which were seen leaving Heathrow Airport's VIP Windsor Suite earlier, were pictured arriving at the royal residence at around 2:40 pm (1440 GMT). They left around 50 minutes later, followed soon after by a car carrying King Charles and Queen Camilla, the first time the king has been seen in public since his diagnosis was announced. PA reported that Charles was "believed to be preparing to

Continued on Page 6



LONDON: Britain's King Charles III and Queen Camilla wave as they leave by car from Clarence House on Feb 6, 2024. — AFP



Local

Australia remains 'partner in ensuring food security'

Kuwait-Australia to mark 50 years of diplomatic relations

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: The Australian Embassy organized a press roundtable conference discussing the Australia-Kuwait relationship and Australia's broader foreign policy issues. Australian Ambassador Melissa Kelly revealed her country will celebrate 50 years of diplomatic relations with Kuwait through 2024. "Throughout the year, we will be honoring this milestone in different ways. Focus will be on diplomatic activities between our governments: A key moment of reflection will be the historic visit of Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to Australia in 1992, the first-ever visit by a Kuwaiti ruler to Australia. I hope that during the year, we will see Kuwaiti ministers visit Australia, and more Australian ministers in Kuwait," she said.

During the press roundtable, the ambassador said in 2022, the Australian government announced the intention to phase out exports of live sheep by sea, indicating the gradual end will not begin before mid-2025. She affirmed her country's commitment to remaining a partner of choice for Kuwait in ensuring its food security.

On Australia's position on Gaza, she noted that the devastating crisis in Gaza underscores the need for a political solution to the conflict. "We are gravely concerned about the humanitarian situation and a large number of civilian deaths in Gaza," the ambassador said. Kelly indicated Australia has consistently called for safe, unimpeded and sustained humanitarian access and

it has voted at the UN for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire. "We see this as a critical step to a sustainable and permanent ceasefire. Australia's guiding principle has always been the pursuit of a just and enduring peace in the form of a two-state solution – we strongly support Palestinian aspirations for a state of their own," she pointed out.

Kelly added since 1951, Australia has funded UNRWA because it is the only organization of its kind delivering aid to Palestinians. "We are deeply concerned at the allegations against UNRWA staff and welcome UNRWA's immediate response. While UNRWA investigates, we have paused our latest disbursement of funding. Australian development assistance is funded by Australian taxpayers and therefore incorporates rigorous fraud protection requirements. However, given the scale of the humanitarian crisis and absence of alternatives to provide life-saving aid, Australia is working closely with UNRWA and other partners on how to effectively deliver assistance to Palestinians in the circumstances," she said.

Kelly said the number of the Australian community residing in Kuwait amounts to 800 people who work in various fields, especially in the oil and gas sectors. Regarding security and military cooperation, Kelly said Australia has been militarily present in the region since 1990, when it participated with coalition forces in liberating Kuwait. Since that time, it has made minor contributions to operations to protect navigation in the Red Sea. "We



Australian Ambassador Melissa Kelly speaks during the press roundtable.



Australian Ambassador Melissa Kelly with local media.

have a presence in military bases in Kuwait and we work closely with the Kuwaiti government in order to maintain the security of the region," she noted.

Concerning Kuwaiti investments in Australia, Kelly said: "There are large and diverse investments in various fields, especially in the field of green energy, as the volume of Kuwaiti investments in Australia amounts to about 13 billion Australian dollars." She expressed hope that the volume of investments will increase in line with the capabilities available in the two friendly nations.

On the occasion of 50 years of diplomatic relations, the Australian Embassy's social media accounts will showcase '50 stories for 50 years' across 2024 – a collection of stories that highlight the diversity and depth of the Australian-Kuwaiti

relationship. They will include Australia's support during Kuwait's liberation, the pioneering spirit of Australians like Alan Villiers, whose late-1930s adventures in Kuwait opened a window into Kuwait's pre-oil era through his book "Sons of Sinbad", to the innovative partnerships of today that are looking toward building a more sustainable future, the tale of the very first wheat trade agreement in 1966, which set the stage for decades of agricultural cooperation, joint ventures in science and innovation, where Australian and Kuwaiti expertise has come together to address global challenges, and deep bonds formed through education, highlighting the experiences of Kuwaiti students in Australia and how these cross-cultural exchanges have enriched both societies.

"While a big focus is celebrating the past and the people who have contributed to it, we also want to set the agenda for the next 50 years. This will mean looking at questions like how we bring our food security partnership into the future; how our education cooperation can respond to Kuwait's vision for economic development; and how can Australia and Kuwait work together to strengthen the international system in times of such great challenge," Kelly said.

"The story of Australia and Kuwait's cooperation is rich and multifaceted. As Australian ambassador, I am grateful to everyone who has played a part in the journey of Australia and Kuwait's enduring friendship, and I am looking forward to many decades of strong cooperation to come," the Australian ambassador added.

News in Brief

Expert warns against smoking, e-cigarettes

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Society for Smoking and Cancer Prevention organized a lecture on tobacco and e-smoking. The lecture shed light on one of the most important risk factors that may lead to getting cancer, which is smoking. It was held at the Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Ministry and delivered by Dr. Khalid Ahmad Al-Saleh. Dr. Al-Saleh said smoking is one of the problems the world is facing due to its risks and dangers, causing a rise in death rates. There are eight million people dying every year due to smoking. Besides, lung cancer, which is closely linked to smoking, is spreading very quickly, even with so-called electronic smoking, which is promoted as less dangerous. Studies showed that nicotine is available in electronic cigarettes, shishas, or pipes, in addition to the harmful emissions resulting from burning, which is risky. He said that there is no proof that e-cigarettes help with quitting smoking. Dr. Al-Saleh thanked the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs for its cooperation in making the activity a success.

Aligning AI usage with Islamic law 'important'

KUWAIT: The President of the Kuwait-based Islamic Organization for Medical Sciences (IOMS), Dr. Mohammad Al-Jarallah, stressed on Tuesday the importance of employing artificial intelligence (AI) in achieving the provision of Islamic law. This came in a workshop opening statement by Dr. Al-Jarallah under the title "Employing AI to improve the capabilities of doctors, scholars, and preachers in public speaking and media confrontation" with the participation of 70 scholars and preachers. The workshop was held by the organization in cooperation with the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs. It aimed to employ the capabilities of AI in achieving purposes that align with Sharia, noting that AI represents the beginning of a new era and indicating that this technology has dangers that one must be cautious of. Dr. Al-Jarallah pointed out that it also aimed to learn how to prepare a sermon, write an article, or create content using AI and identify the challenges and concerns related to AI. — KUNA

Umrah trip for cancer patients

KUWAIT: Chairman of the Board of the Kuwait Society for Smoking and Cancer Prevention (KSSCP) and Chairman of the Cancer Patients Fund, Dr. Khalid Al-Saleh, said the Fund organized an Umrah trip as it does every year for cancer patients, themed "O Soul that Art at Rest," due to the importance of psychological support for cancer patients. He said scientific studies proved that the psychological and spiritual effects of Umrah have a positive effect on cancer patients, particularly in improving the quality of their lives. Dr. Al-Saleh said this is the 21st Umrah trip organized by the Fund for patients. The program was held from January 31st until February 3rd, 2024. He said patients become more ready to continue their treatment with faith and psychological satisfaction, adding that the officials are keen on providing all means to ensure the success of the spiritual trip. 28 patients participated in this trip.

MoH welcomes 39 specialized doctors

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Health is welcoming 39 specialized doctors from various international medical centers during February. Director of the Public Relations and Media Department in the Ministry of Health, Dr. Mohammad Al-Azmi, said in a press release on Monday that the doctors are specialized in otolaryngology, ophthalmology, orthopedics, oncology, gastroenterology, and neurology. Al-Azmi added that the doctors' visit aims to enhance scientific communication with global medical centers and universities, provide opportunities for the exchange of expertise, and explore the latest treatments in various medical sectors. He stressed that the doctors recruited in the ministry's hospitals are divided into two sections: one will examine patients, and the other will prepare and train local doctors. — KUNA

Early cancer detection clinic opens in Faiha

By Abdellatif Sharara

KUWAIT: Chairman of Cancer Aware Nation (CAN) Dr. Khalid Ahmad Al-Saleh inaugurated the awareness and early preventative examination clinic at Abdulrahman Al-Abdulmughni Health Center in Faiha. This initiative is part of the 9th Gulf Cancer Awareness Week, conducted in collaboration with the health committee of Faiha Health City. Dr. Saleh highlighted that the clinic's establishment stems from a cooperation agreement signed with the committee to enhance health awareness in Faiha and educate individuals on the early detection of various cancerous tumors.

He emphasized the strategy of promoting prevention and addressing non-infectious chronic diseases, aligning with UN Sustainable Development Goals, WHO programs and Kuwait's 2035 vision. The campaign aims to raise awareness about non-infectious chronic diseases, with a focus on Al-Saqer Specialized Medical Center. According to Kuwait Cancer Control Center's (KCCC) statistics, annual cancer cases in men totaled 859. It comprises 423 Kuwaitis and 437 non-Kuwaitis. Women's cases reached 1,453, with 839 Kuwaiti women and 614 non-Kuwaitis. The highest occurrence rates are of colon and rectal can-



cer, prostate cancer and lung cancer for men, while breast cancer, thyroid cancer and endometrial cancer are prominent among women.

Dr. Amal Al-Suqubi, Head of Primary Healthcare at the Health Ministry, explained that the clinic's opening aligns with the strategic plan supporting health and awareness services for chronic diseases, including cancer. She stressed the importance of early detection and the subsequent higher rates of recovery, noting that necessary steps and doctors' training were undertaken in collaboration with the CAN campaign to achieve their goals. Dr. Anwar Buhamra, Head of Abdulrahman Al-Abdulmughni Health Center, highlighted that Faiha has been recognized as a Healthy City on the world's Healthy Cities map, ranking fifth in Kuwait.



Early cancer detection clinic in Abdulrahman Al-Abdulmughni Center in Faiha. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Moscow City Roadshow for travel industry held in Kuwait

KUWAIT: Moscow City Roadshow for the travel industry was held on Monday February 5, 2024, at one of Kuwait city's top hotels. The business event was organized by the Moscow city tourism committee and their Kuwaiti partners with support from the Embassy of Russia in Kuwait. Around 130 Kuwaiti and Russian travel agencies and companies were in attendance, as well as representatives of local and regional air carriers. Prominent bloggers and journalists also participated in the event.

Moscow's tourist potential was pre-

sented in a memorable and interactive format tailored to the needs of tourists from Kuwait and other countries of the Gulf. The program was continued by business meetings between representatives of the travel industry of the two countries. New direct business ties shall contribute to further growth of the flow of tourists from Kuwait to Russia, which has already increased six-fold during the past year. Ambassador of Russia to Kuwait Vladimir Zheltov addressed the participants of the event with a welcome speech.



Marbella 'an ideal destination to visit, and invest'

KUWAIT: The Mayor of Marbella, Angeles Munoz, emphasized that the city "is the ideal destination to visit, purchase a second home and invest" and that "its alliance with Kuwait strengthens its position as a world leader in excellence". The councillor of this Spanish town, a tourist emblem of southern Europe, was received by the Spanish ambassador to Kuwait, Miguel Jose Moro, to participate in an event held at the embassy to present the Marbella Tourism Trade Mission in the Middle East, in which the Spanish Luxury Association and some of the most emblematic hotels in the municipality of the Costa del Sol participate. Munoz thanked the ambassador for his invitation and for the presence of members of the Kuwaiti Royal Family, Princess Beatrix of Orleans – honorary president of the association – businessmen and representatives of luxury travel agencies. She highlighted that Marbella "feels very close to Kuwait, because we are two destinations that have a lot in common, we have a lot to contribute, and we are going to continue working on that line of collaboration that we opened long time ago."

The Mayor has mentioned, "the enthusiasm that the citizens of Kuwait show with Marbella is evident in the data of tourists from this market who come to our city and by the interest of investors who decide to buy homes in our town". In this sense, he recalled that Marbella's link with Kuwait



KUWAIT: Mayor of Marbella, Angeles Munoz, is received by Spanish Ambassador to Kuwait Miguel Jose Moro during an event held at the embassy to present the Marbella Tourism Trade Mission in the Middle East. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

dates back to the early 80s of the last century, when Kuwaitis who began to invest for the first time in the Spanish economy discovered that Marbella "was the ideal place to spend their holidays and also to buy a second home and do business". "And that alliance has been growing over all these years," she said. Munoz mentioned the fact that Marbella "is a benchmark of excellence and a synonym of quality, with a privileged tourist offer that has positioned them as a unique destination, the result of the hard work between the City Council and the private sector, which we continue developing because our purpose is always to improve ourselves, to continue moving forward and to continue meeting the expectations of all those who visit us and who, in most cases, they repeat."

"Our fantastic climate, our 27 kilometers of coastline with a unique promenade, our natural environment and our rich histo-

ry, which are combined with the extensive range of golf courses, the presence of the best commercial brands and the nautical offer, help you to visit us". "As well as the opportunities for leisure and our excellent gastronomy, with more than a thousand restaurants, with traditional and international cuisine, and the privilege of having five Michelin stars, the city in Andalusia with the highest number of these awards," said the Mayor.

"In addition, large brands in the tourism sector choose us to invest, to undertake new adventures or to expand their hotel offer, within alliances that generate wealth and employment". "Our hotel offer is a real luxury", said Munoz, who thanked the hotels participating in this trade mission – Meliá Don Pepe, Hard Rock, Boho Club, Alanda and La Quinta – for their "firm commitment to Marbella and their support for" a brand that is a guarantee of the quality of life".

Kuwait-Oman refinery expected to augment global oil market

Omani state media praises Amir's visit as epoch in ties



MUSCAT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the Omani Sultan Haitham bin Tareq held a session of official talks at Al-Alam Palace in Muscat. During the talks, the deep-rooted ties between the two countries were touched on as well as boosting bilateral relations in various fields. — KUNA photos



MUSCAT: Oman's Duqm refinery, a joint venture with Kuwait, is considered to be one of the Gulf Arab Sultanate's most promising and significant investment projects, in addition to being a catalyst for an improvement in bilateral relations. The venture, expected to lure up to USD nine billion worth of foreign investment, is among the Middle East and North African region's most sprawling oil facilities, while it should equip the global market with sublime oil-based products.

The refinery is a state-of-the-art facility with the capacity to churn out some 230,000 barrels per day of renewable energy, according to Kuwait Petroleum Corporation chief executive Shafi Al-Ajmi, citing hydrogen breakthrough technology as among the refinery's most notable features. Given its proximity to the Arabian Sea, the facility is seen as a "window" for adjacent markets and global shipping routes, added the official, hailing the "multifaceted"

nature of the oil-based products there, 73 of which have already been shipped to various locations in the Middle East and beyond since operations started.

Describing the refinery as a "transitional" project, Duqm Refinery and Petrochemicals Industries Company chairman Hilal Al-Kharusi said it would help boost economic cooperation between the two Gulf Arab neighbors, underscoring that the facility could pave the way for future economic projects in the region.

Discussing the potential impact the "strategic" facility could have, he said the refinery is tantamount to an "exemplary paradigm" of pan-Gulf Arab relations thanks largely to its ability to transform Kuwait and Muscat into "significant contributors" towards the global energy market, besides keeping afloat fledgling markets across Asia and Africa, he underlined. State oil giant Kuwait Petroleum Corporation, since its inception in 1983, seeks to boost its

"role in the responsible production and distribution of hydrocarbon resources worldwide to foster growth and prosperity," the company says.

Epoch in ties

Meanwhile, a number of Omani journalists agreed that His Highness the Amir of Kuwait's visit would mark a watershed moment in bilateral relations, expecting the event to propel these ties to greater levels. In separate remarks to KUNA, the journalists pointed out that while ties have long been marked by their solidity and breadth, there remains more room for progress across various significant realms, which run the gamut from political and economic cooperation to tourism and social development.

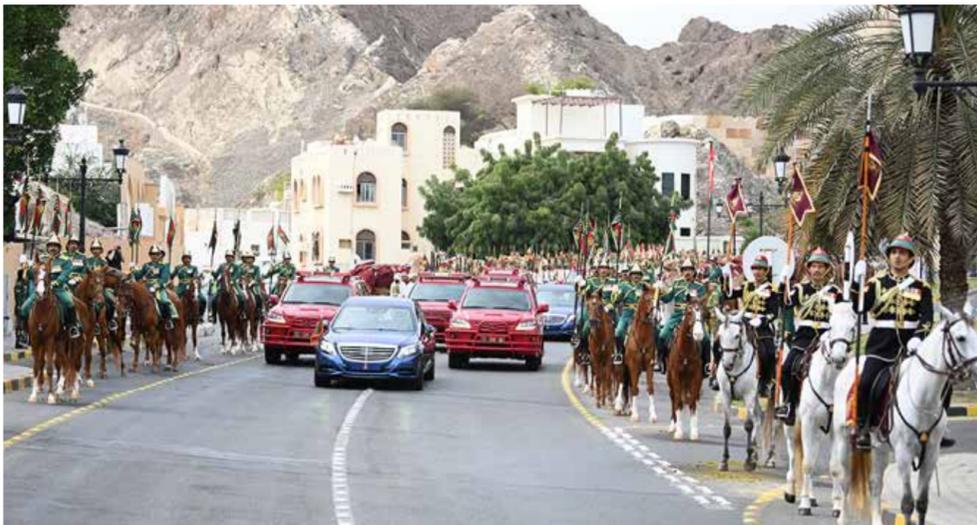
On His Highness the Amir's visit, Oman Daily's chief editor, Assem Al-Shaidi, said the visit is tantamount to the start of a "new era" in bilateral relations, describing ties as the "paradigm" of intra-Arab rela-

tions. As he chronicled the history of relations between the two Gulf Arab countries, he praised the "harmony and unity" among the two nations, pointing out that His Highness the Amir's visit would coincide with the opening of the Gulf Arab Sultanate's Duqm refinery, which he said would be instrumental in further bolstering economic development.

Addressing bilateral relations, the chief editor of Oman's Al-Masara newspaper, Ali Al-Ajmi, said the two countries are bound by common "history, vernacular, and blood," saying Omanis have always shared amicable relations with their Kuwaiti neighbors. Under the respective leadership of His Highness the Amir and Oman's Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, he prognosticated more development in bilateral ties, particularly after the opening of the Duqm refinery, a joint venture between Oman Oil Company and Kuwait Petroleum International, which is estimated to lure up to \$8.5 billion worth of investment, he underlined.

Echoing their sentiments, Omani pod-cast host Bader Al-Shaibani said His Highness the Amir's visit typifies the camaraderie shared between the two countries, which continues to "grow deeper" with every passing day. He went on to praise the two countries' "joint stance" on the Middle East conflict, as evidenced by their unwavering support for the Palestinians and their determination to protect them from "brutal Zionist crimes."

Omani journalist Majid Al-Hatali believes that economic ties between the Gulf Arab neighbors have seen the most growth, citing robust trade relations that have seen Kuwaiti investments in Muscat exceed 922 million Omani riyals in the third quarter last year, he said. He concurred that Oman's Duqm refinery is among the country's most marquee development projects, describing it as the "cornerstone" of bilateral cooperation, thanks in part to its ability to usher in "sustained development" in the two Gulf Arab states. — KUNA



Government program 'to transform Kuwait, raise living standards'

By Khaled Al-Abdullhadi

KUWAIT: The government has published its program for the second session of the current parliament, which addresses economic and social issues profoundly. The aim is to tackle low international indicators and raise living standards for locals and residents in Kuwait while transforming the economy into a world economy driven by production and local human resources

In the current government program, there is a noticeable return to the vision of "New Kuwait 2035", retracting from the previous revision of "New Kuwait 2045". The explicit goal is to transform Kuwait into a commercial and trading hub that attracts foreign investments, raising productivity within a supportive institutional organization, human development, reengraving social values and

encouraging a business environment.

The program will focus on the transformation from a rentier economy to a productive economy, a formula for economic development proven by international experience. It emphasizes achieving balance in the structure of the national economy to support the long-term sustainability of economic and social welfare. However, there is an imbalance between the growth of crude oil prices and local production, which could cause a deficit of KD 45-60 billion within the next five years.

The program highlights the potential consequences if financial and economic conditions continue to deteriorate, including the erosion of individuals, companies, banks and institutions, a dangerous level of unemployment rates, the collapse of social services and a deterioration of social security alongside major inflation in the cost of living.

Comparing international averages with Kuwait in economic indicators, the program notes that "57 percent of total government expenditure is for wages". Kuwait spends three times as much as the average of the OECD, and total government expenditure is 25 percent higher than OECD averages. The program clarifies that government employment

consists of 23 percent of the total manpower in Kuwait, which is higher than the average of OECD. Meanwhile, direct foreign investments consist of 0.2 percent of GDP, which is 12 times lower than OECD averages and nine times lower than Middle East and North Africa averages.

Continuing with current policies, the program explains that government funding requirements are expected to double over the next 10 years. Financing government spending will require high oil prices, and the local economy will not develop into an economy that focuses on innovation and entrepreneurship. Kuwaitis are expected to increase in the public sector instead of the private sector, and residents' welfare will deteriorate despite increased government spending.

The program also diagnoses the main challenges facing the execution of projects into six categories and 48 specified issues. The categories include human resources, work environment, measuring work policy indicators, technology, project planning and financial expenditures. The first step, according to the program, is activating article 20 of the constitution by expanding investment opportunities, allowing the private sector to create national job opportunities in different economic sectors. This is the main

goal of the government program.

The program states that its principles stand on fairness, security and development, transforming citizen ambitions not only to consume products but also to produce them. Criteria for choosing initiatives and projects include eliminating current negative practices, initiating standing and new projects within 100 days, and moving forward with initiatives that reflect positively on global indicators. The program allocates 42.48 percent of projects for development, 26.30 for investment opportunities and 32.36 for infrastructure.

Initiatives and projects that the government aims to activate within 100 days include studying railroad connections between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, constructing three research centers, developing health facilities and organizations, as well as repricing public and real estate services, among others. The program heavily emphasizes that within the second parliamentary session, important legislation includes the development of the northern economic zone, the transition to green energy, organizing media, improving the social services system, enhancing electronic documentation, raising wages and fostering private and public cooperation.

GCC chief affirms the role of DCO in economic growth

RIYADH: The Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Jassem Al-Budaiwi, affirmed the important role of the Digital Cooperation Organization (DCO) in accelerating the growth of the digital economy. This came in a meeting between Al-Budaiwi and the DCO General Secretary, Deemah Al-Yahya, in Riyadh, the GCC Secretariat said in a statement. The DCO aims to enable digital prosperity and facilitate cooperation in response to the dynamic challenges of the digital era, which Al-Budaiwi praised. Al-Budaiwi's remarks included the results of the roundtable going over the gap in digital talents among young adults, digital rights, patents, financial incentives, and the cooperation of the public and private sectors to develop the role of women and the digital economy in the communication field.

Customs agreement

In another development, the second meeting of the Arab Customs Cooperation Committee took place at the Arab League on Tuesday, presided over by Saudi Arabia, to continue discussing the executive mechanism of the agreement. Director of the League's Economic Integration Department, Dr. Bahjat Abu Al-Nasser, said in his opening speech at the meeting that the agreement has been in effect since August 3rd, 2022, with eight Arab states joining it.

Abu Al-Nasser stressed the importance of Arab member states' cooperation in executing this agreement, saying that the General Secretariat of the Arab League presented a draft mechanism to execute the agreement and presented it to the member states in the committee's first meeting last October. He added that the Economic and Social Council issued a decision to form a technical committee of the member states to follow up on the implementation of the agreement.

The Arab Customs Cooperation Agreement, which was adopted in 1950, aims to facilitate trade and economic integration among Arab League member states. The agreement seeks to harmonize customs procedures, enhance cross-border trade facilitation, and promote mutual cooperation in combating customs offenses and illicit activities. Meanwhile, the League of Arab States confirmed that the Arab region has been considered a crossing point for international trade convoys throughout history due to its geographical location. However, the developments taking place in the region have led to a change in the landscape of transport management around the world. — KUNA

Municipality adorns roads with 3,880 flags

KUWAIT: Kuwait Municipality has adorned bridges and roads with the state's flags in preparation for the 63rd National and 33rd Liberation Day celebrations. The director of the public relations department and the official spokesperson for Kuwait Municipality, Mohammad Al-Sindan, announced in a press release that 183 road advertisements have been installed throughout all governorates of the nation, as well as 3,880 new flags replacing old ones. He further urged citizens and residents to cooperate with municipal bodies to maintain the cleanliness of public spaces. — KUNA



Mohammad Al-Sindan



KIB, KU ink MoU for enhanced Real Estate education, training

KUWAIT: Kuwait International Bank (KIB) has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Kuwait University - College of Administrative Sciences, aimed at enriching student training and enhancing educational curricula in the real estate sector. This initiative will involve practical studies on diverse property types and the organization of academic workshops and training courses, benefiting both university students and professionals interested in this crucial sector. The three-year MoU was officially signed by Prof. Adel Abdullah Al-Wuqayan, Acting Dean of the College of Administrative Sciences, and Jassim Al-Abdulhadi, KIB's General Manager of the Real Estate Department.

It authorized Dr. Nawaf Al-Abduljader, Acting Assistant Dean for Planning, Consulting, and Training, Dr. Fahad Al-Mudhaf, Associate Professor in the Finance and Financial Institutions Department, along



KUWAIT: Kuwait International Bank and Kuwait University - College of Administrative Sciences sign a memorandum of understanding to enrich student training and enhancing educational curricula in the real estate sector.

with Fahad Al-Saleh, Real Estate Advisory and Real Estate Product Development and Support Division Manager at KIB's Real Estate Department, Engineer Hossam Al-Kolak, Real Estate Expert in the Real Estate Department, and Engineer Ahmed Al-Yaqoub, Manager of the Real Estate Appraisal Department, to implement the joint cooperation between the University and the Bank.

Commenting on the occasion, Al-Abdulhadi, said: "The objective of the memorandum is to incorporate practical studies in investment and real estate valuation into Kuwait University's academic curriculum. The initiative aims to enrich the educational experience of both undergraduate and graduate students through academic workshops. These workshops will cover a range of property types and specialized valuation techniques, providing students with practical insights into current trends in the sector and networking opportunities with real estate professionals. This approach is intended to substantially enhance their knowledge and practical skills in the field of real estate."

Al-Abdulhadi added that the memorandum also aims to strengthen the positive strategic partnership between KIB and Kuwait University by offering real estate courses designed to develop the knowledge, skills, and experience necessary for both Kuwait University students and real estate professionals and bro-

kers. This is in addition to strengthening cooperation in preparing scientific studies on investment and real estate valuation and the real estate market in general, to gain a deeper understanding of the local market.

KIB has been a pioneering institution in establishing the real estate valuation profession in Kuwait since 1973, Al-Abdulhadi highlighted. Renowned as the leading entity for real estate valuation and economic feasibility studies, KIB caters to a diverse clientele including companies, individuals, government institutions, accounting firms, and law offices. With its profound expertise and competence, KIB is well-equipped to offer comprehensive and reliable practical studies in this domain, encompassing a wide range of property types such as residential, investment, commercial, industrial, and artisanal.

It is worth mentioning that KIB recently launched its entirely new digital real estate platform, KIB Aqari, designed specifically for its customers interested in owning, selling, and leasing properties. It is supported by a digital real estate appraisal request service, launched for the first time in Kuwait, in addition to creating the largest real estate database in the country through the application. This reaffirms the Bank's commitment to keeping up with the latest digital innovations to provide an exceptional customer experience, saving their time and effort, and meeting their business needs more easily and securely. — KUNA

Kuwait ambassador presents credentials to King of Bhutan

NEW DELHI: Ambassador of Kuwait to the Kingdom of Bhutan Adel Al-Jassam presented his credentials to Bhutan King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck. In a statement to KUNA, the Kuwait Embassy in Bhutan said that Ambassador Al-Jassam presented his credentials to the King of Bhutan at a function held at the Royal Palace of the Kingdom of Bhutan on Sunday. Diplomatic attaché Fawaz Adel Khalifa accompanied him to the accreditation ceremony.

The ceremonies included performances of ancient Bhutanese cultural heritage in which several officials and bodies participated as a mark of respect and appreciation of the royal family for His Highness the Amir and the ruling family in the State of Kuwait. Ambassador Al-Jassam conveyed to the King of Bhutan the greetings of Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the greetings of Deputy Amir and Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, and the leadership and people of Kuwait.

He stressed the keenness of the leadership of Kuwait to strengthen and consolidate bilateral relations between the two countries. Ambassador Al-Jassam also recalled that the long political history that goes back more than forty years in the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two friendly countries came on the basis of the vision of the rulers of Kuwait beginning in 1983. In order to serve the common interests of the peoples of the two friendly countries, the leadership of both countries developed strong bridges in many fields.

Ambassador Al-Jassam expressed his pride in meeting the King and assuming his position as Ambassador of Kuwait to Bhutan during the rule of Amir Sheikh



Newly appointed Ambassador of Kuwait to the Kingdom of Bhutan Adel Al-Jassam presents credentials to Bhutan King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck. — KUNA

Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, who supports all efforts to achieve more prosperity for the people in the two friendly countries. The Ambassador indicated that the new year will witness demand in the Kuwait Embassy in Bhutan for jobs in Kuwait.

Revitalization of the tourism, economic, and investment sectors is also expected in the city of Gelephu, south of the capital Thimphu, which is emerging as the largest economic, investment, and tourism city and a future economic gateway on the Himalayas between the neighboring border countries in South Asia. Ambassador Al-Jassam added that the Bhutanese King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck conveyed to the Ambassador his pride in the fact that the Kuwait Embassy was the first Gulf embassy accredited by his country during the reign of his father. The King also appreciated the rulers of Kuwait for their political leadership, which has received global respect. — KUNA



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Turkey grieves on first quake anniversary

Trump pressures Republicans to kill Ukraine aid deal

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HEBRON: Palestinians walk in the empty streets of the old town of Hebron in the occupied West Bank on February 5, 2024. — AFP

West Bank Palestinians 'exhausted' by omnipresent Zionist surveillance

Zionists use facial recognition technology, cameras to collect data, violating Palestinians' freedoms

HEBRON: Rotating cameras planted on a rooftop terrace "follow our every move", said Hebron resident Umm Nasser, protesting intensified Zionist surveillance of her occupied West Bank city since the start of the Gaza war. "Psychologically, I'm exhausted," admitted the 55-year-old Palestinian woman.

She lives above the Abu al-Rish checkpoint, the site of frequent violence at the heart of historical Hebron. It is one of numerous sentry boxes manned by Zionist forces separating Palestinian streets from Jewish settler enclaves in the old town, which hosts a disputed holy site. Known to Muslims as the Ibrahim mosque and to Jews as the Cave of the Patriarchs, it is revered by both faiths.

Dozens of heavily armed Zionist soldiers guard the site, assisted by security cameras. Umm Nasser said that surveillance enhanced by artificial intelligence tools has become "especially difficult during the war" waged by the Zionist entity in the Gaza Strip. To Umm Nasser, the use of technology is stifling. "We've tried putting pieces of wood or fabric over the cameras to maintain our privacy, but every time, the army removes them," she said. "One day, soldiers took our identity cards and told us they were going to use them for a facial recognition system."

She said she hadn't heard about it since. Shai Cohen, a 23-year-old Zionist settler, said the surveillance cameras scattered all over the city "very (much) help us" to feel safe. The Zionist entity describes itself as a "start-up nation" and takes pride in its leading cyber industry and cutting-edge surveillance and weapons technology. Facial recognition

technology — highly regulated in civilian settings — is used by Zionist forces along with a range of advanced tools in the Palestinian territories they have occupied since 1967.

'Automated surveillance'

"Blue Wolf", for example, is an app soldiers use on their mobile phone. They take face pictures of Palestinians, which are then checked against a database. Once matched, the system indicates whether the person photographed is wanted for arrest.

This system is part of the Zionist army's "frictionless occupation strategy", said Sophia Goodfriend, a doctoral student specializing in artificial intelligence and human rights. The app "relies on automated surveillance technology, often based on artificial intelligence and designed to reduce interaction" between soldiers and Palestinians, Goodfriend told AFP.

Another system, "Red Wolf", has been deployed at Zionist checkpoints in Hebron since at least 2022, according to an investigation by human rights group Amnesty International. Soldiers know "before I approach the checkpoint that I'm 'red' in the system. It means I'm 'a threat'," said Hebron activist Issa Amro, lamenting yet "another layer of humiliation".

He said residents had their photos taken without their consent, and they do not know how the Zionist entity uses their images and data that it collects. The army in late 2022 confirmed it was testing a surveillance system with riot control tools, developed by a private firm, Smart Shooter. The remote-controlled system can fire shots which, ac-

ording to the army, are not lethal. Asked by AFP about the system and the "Wolf" software, the Zionist military did not comment.

'Anxiety and fear'

The automated tools make for "more and more efficient" control over the lives of Palestinians who are further "dehumanized" in the process, according to Zionist anti-occupation group Breaking the Silence. "The very purpose and essence of the system is to create anxiety and fear," said Adel, a rights defender living in Zionist-annexed east Jerusalem who asked to use a pseudonym because of security concerns. "Our behavior and movements are scrutinized."

In east Jerusalem, he said, facial recognition technology is regularly used by Zionist forces during demonstrations. Adel recalled an inspection at a checkpoint when "many pages of data appeared on the tablet" used by the soldiers. "They mentioned an arrest that occurred several years earlier and for which I had been cleared by the courts," he said.

Footage and media reports from Gaza have raised concerns over the use of facial recognition technology by Zionist forces there, too. The army said that as part of the war it was conducting "security and intelligence operations". Online videos from mid-November showed Gazans, fleeing south for safety, passing through gates allegedly equipped with surveillance tech. And official Palestinian news agency Wafa reported "smart" cameras had been installed at Gaza City's Al-Shifa hospital during a raid by Zionist troops. — AFP

The Red Crescent said Monday on social media that the fate of the team, "Yousef Zeino and Ahmed Al-Madhoon, who went to rescue 6-year-old Hind Rajab, remains unknown for seven days".

It called on "the international community to intervene immediately to pressure the (Zionist) occupying authorities to disclose the fate of Hind and the rescue team". Contacted by AFP, the Zionist military did not comment on the incident.

Hamada, himself displaced in the southern city of Rafah, said: "We want to know her fate, whatever it was. I can't imagine her, between the bodies, without eating or drinking and in the extreme cold. Dogs and cats are eating the corpses."

The majority of those killed in Gaza by the Zionist entity since early October have been civilians, according to the health ministry in the territory. The Zionist entity's devastating air, sea and land offensive has killed at least 27,478 people in Gaza, according to the latest ministry toll. The war was sparked by Hamas's attack on the entity, which resulted in the deaths of about 1,160 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on official figures.

Apart from Hamada's brother and sister-in-law, five children aged four to 15 were crammed into the car. His three-year-old grandson and the boy's parents remain stuck in Gaza City. "Hind is my first grandchild, she's a piece of my heart," said Hamada.

In a series of photos he showed AFP, the child poses for the camera, smiling in brightly-colored party clothes. Unable to hold back his tears, Hamada recalled the final moments speaking to his granddaughter. "She was telling me that she was scared and hungry, asking us to go and rescue her. She was telling me the tanks were coming closer." — AFP

Girl, 6, missing with rescuers in Gaza after car comes under fire

RAFAH: The last time six-year-old Hind Rajab was heard from, she was surrounded by dead relatives and trapped in the family's car after it came under fire in war-ravaged Gaza City.

"She was scared, freaking out, and was wounded in her back, her hand and her foot," said her grandfather, Baha Hamada, one of the last people to speak to the girl on the phone. "She kept asking me to come and get her," Hamada added, weeping uncontrollably as he recalled the heart-wrenching call.

Gaza City has been devastated by the military invasion waged by the Zionist entity, which is nearing its four-month anniversary. The city has been largely cut off from the south of the besieged territory for weeks, with the United Nations repeatedly protesting insurmountable difficulties for aid to reach the hundreds of thousands of people estimated to remain in the Gaza Strip's northern areas.

Hind was with Hamada's brother Bashar, his sister-in-law and other children in the car as they attempted to flee from approaching Zionist forces in Gaza City's Tel al-Hawa area a week ago. But, Hamada said, they ended up in the paths of Zionist tanks and were fired on.

He said he was initially able to reach Bashar's daughter Layan, who told him that her parents and her three brothers were killed, and that she and Hind



This undated handout photograph obtained courtesy of the family shows six-year-old Palestinian girl Hind Rajab posing for a picture. — AFP

were alive. "We tried to calm her down and told her we would call an ambulance," said the 58-year-old.

But when rescuers from the Palestinian Red Crescent spoke to 15-year-old Layan on the phone, they said they were cut off from the call by what sounded like gunfire. Both Hamada and the organization say Layan was killed in the shooting.

Zionist tanks 'coming closer'

"While the ambulance was heading there, Hind's mother was talking to her on the phone. The girl told her mother she could see the ambulance, her mother heard the sound of the car door opening, then lost connection," Hamada told AFP.

They haven't heard from her or the Red Crescent ambulance crew that was deployed to save her since.

India's ruling party pushes polarizing common civil law

DEHRADUN, India: India's ruling party introduced contentious legislation Tuesday to create a common civil code in a northern state, including for marriage, reigniting a polarizing debate weeks before national elections.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has long campaigned for standardized individual laws but its pitch has fueled tensions, with many minority Muslims seeing it as yet another majoritarian push by Modi's Hindu nationalist party.

The move comes weeks after Modi's consecration of a grand temple in Ayodhya at the site where a Mughal-era mosque was demolished by Hindu zealots. Critics see it as a signal from the ruling BJP to its base and an unspoken promise to implement the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) nationally after elections expected in April that it is already tipped to win.

The UCC bill tabled in the assembly of BJP-ruled Uttarakhand state represents one of the BJP's three key long-standing promises. The other two, already fulfilled, were the consecration of the Ayodhya temple and ending the constitutional autonomy of the Muslim-majority Kashmir region.

"Our government, taking all sections of society together, has tabled the Uniform Civil Code Bill," state chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami said, adding they were close to achieving the "historic" win to implement Modi's vision. The bill is expected to be approved this week, with the BJP enjoying a comfortable majority in the state. Uttarakhand has a population of about 12 million people, roughly 80 percent of them Hindu.

India's 1.4 billion people are subject to a common criminal code, introduced during the British colonial era. But they have never followed uniform laws for personal matters such as marriage, divorce, adoption and inheritance.

These are instead governed by a patchwork of different codes based on the customary traditions of different communities and faiths. The rights of women, children, and families across India vary considerably depending on which code they fall under.

Many right-wing politicians, jurists and reformists have described these custom-based codes as regressive and have lobbied for a code that would apply to all Indians equally. However, many communities, particularly Muslims, fear it would encroach on their religious laws as an attack on their identity and against India's secular constitution. Among the many clauses in the 192-page bill is a proposed end to polygamy. Goa, the beach resort state on India's west coast, is the only part of India with a common code, introduced when it was still a Portuguese colony.

International

Trump pressures Republicans to kill Ukraine aid deal, flexing clout

Republican nominee says bill tying aid to border security measures 'death wish' for his party

WASHINGTON: It is a full nine months until the presidential election but Donald Trump is already wielding extraordinary influence as he seeks to bend US foreign policy to his ambitions of a return to the White House.

The Republican has been a private citizen since leaving office in 2021 but is running for re-election and urging his party to reject a bill tying the toughest border security measures in a generation to \$60 billion in Ukraine aid.

"Don't be STUPID!!! We need a separate Border and Immigration Bill. It should not be tied to foreign aid in any way, shape, or form!" Trump, who looks almost certain to be facing President Joe Biden again in November, posted on social media.

Biden and Trump offer starkly divergent approaches to Ukraine, with the Democrat clear that helping the pro-Western ally repel Russia is vital to ensure a safer world while his predecessor pushes an isolationist, "America First" policy.

At home, Biden has pressed for a humane immigration policy but Republicans point to statistics showing migrant apprehensions reaching a record high of 302,000 in December, a surge Trump has been wielding as a major issue in the campaign.

The demand that military aid for Ukraine

be tied to immigration reform came from Republicans in the first place, with Trump keen to equate the crisis at the border with chaos abroad that he repeatedly claims he would have averted.

Iron grip

On Sunday, senators unveiled a bipartisan \$118 billion package of immigration restrictions that Biden has committed to signing into law. It is tied to a foreign aid package that includes \$60 billion for Ukraine and \$14 billion for the Zionist entity. The deal provides \$20 billion in new border funding and would be a major win for immigration hawks, as it is full of concessions that Democrats would normally have opposed.

"We don't have enough agents. We don't have enough folks. We don't have enough judges. You don't have enough folks here. We need help. Why won't they give me the help?" a frustrated Biden said Monday when asked about the bill's prospects.

But Trump has an iron grip on Republicans leading the House of Representatives, and has called repeatedly for the party to kill the legislation and deny Biden and his Democrats a political victory ahead of November's election.

"This Bill is a great gift to the Democrats, and a Death Wish for the Republican Party," Trump said Monday on his Truth Social website. Some House Republicans in districts won by Biden have voiced concerns about walking away from the deal - especially when the party plans to impeach Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas this week over the border crisis. But Trump's overwhelming victories in the early nominating contests in the Republican presidential primary have solidified support around his candidacy, with more than 150 members of Congress now endorsing him.

'Existential fears'

The critical test for the bill will be its first procedural vote, expected on Wednesday, which will require support from 60 senators in a 100-member chamber that is almost evenly divided between the two parties. Even if it gets over that hurdle, House Speaker Mike Johnson, who talks to Trump regularly, said the deal would be "dead on arrival" if it reaches the Republican-controlled lower chamber.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken warned last week that Ukraine's gains over two years of fighting were all in doubt without US approval of the \$60 billion. While Trump



LAS VEGAS: Former US President and 2024 presidential hopeful Donald Trump greets supporters on January 27, 2024. — AFP

has focused his criticism on the domestic aspects of the bill, critics see his opposition as another example of the controversial billionaire placing his electoral ambitions above national security when it comes to Ukraine.

Trump was impeached in 2019 over his attempts to strongarm Kyiv into smearing Biden as the Republican withheld \$400 million in vital military aid that had already been approved by Congress for the embattled ally. — AFP

8 dead, 80 injured in India firework factory explosion

NEW DELHI, India: At least eight people died and 80 were injured Tuesday in a giant explosion at a firework factory in India that saw balls of flames soar into the sky, officials said.

Footage on Indian television showed a tower of flame after the explosion at the firecracker plant, with dozens of ambulances sent and army helicopters called in to evacuate the wounded.

Senior district police official Rajeshwari Mahobia told AFP there were "eight deaths so far and around 80 injured", at the factory in Harda in Madhya Pradesh state, adding that "the death toll is likely to go up".

Images from the factory site showed a wasteland of blackened and smoking rubble. Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav said reports of the explosion were "very sad news" and said medics at burn units in nearby major hospitals were called to make "necessary preparations".

"Ambulances are being rushed to Harda from the surrounding areas, and the army has been contacted to arrange for helicopters," Yadav said in a post on X, formerly Twitter. At least 20 ambulances were at the site, with 50 more being sent to help those

injured, he added. Manish Sharma, a surgeon at the Harda district hospital, said the center had been flooded with a stream of casualties.

"We have eight deaths at our hospital, a total of 90 people were admitted here so far and we have referred 15 of them to a bigger hospital," Sharma told AFP. "As more people are being rescued from the site, they are being brought here."

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said he was "distressed by the loss of lives", saying the government would give the families of those killed \$2,400 each in compensation, and \$600 to those injured.

Kailash Chand Parte, a senior district official who is coordinating rescue efforts from the factory, said fire engines were battling the fierce blaze. — AFP

"The fire is still not under control and we have around 15 fire engines and many rescue workers at the site", Parte said. He said between 200 and 300 people worked at the factory, but it was not known how many were inside at the time of the explosion.

"At least 10 buildings around the complex where the blast happened have been damaged because of the intensity of the explosion", he added. One policeman told the Times of India that the dead included those trampled during the panic to escape the raging flames.

Some died during the "stampede after the blast", local police officer Abdul Raees Khan told the newspaper, adding rescue teams were "yet to reach the actual blast site as (the) fire is on". Explosions often occur in firecracker workshops in India. — AFP



GAZA: Smoke billows during Zionist bombardment in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on Feb 6, 2024. — AFP

Hamas hands response to Gaza truce deal

GAZA: Palestinian group Hamas said Tuesday it handed its response on a truce deal aimed at halting the war with the Zionist entity to key mediators. "A short while ago, the Hamas movement delivered its response to the framework agreement to the brothers in Qatar and Egypt," a statement said, referring to "a comprehensive and full ceasefire".

The militant group has for more than a week mulled the deal drawn up in its absence at Paris talks, as international pressure mounts to end the four-month war. Hamas said the proposal was aimed at "ending the aggression against our people, securing relief and shelter, reconstruction, lifting the siege on the Gaza Strip, and completing the process of a prisoner exchange".

Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani said Doha had received a "positive" response from Hamas to the truce plans. The premier was speaking alongside US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who has embarked on another crisis tour of the Middle East. Blinken said he would bring a response from Hamas on a hostage deal to the Zionist entity on Wednesday and called it "essential" to move ahead.

"There's still a lot of work to be done. But we continue to believe that an agreement is possible and indeed

essential, and we will continue to work relentlessly to achieve it," Blinken told reporters in Doha on Tuesday after being informed of the reply by Qatar. The Zionist entity's withering military campaign has killed at least 27,585 people in Gaza, mostly women and children. Heavy strikes and fighting in Gaza killed at least 107 people in 24 hours.

Fears grew for more than a million Palestinians crowded into the far southern Rafah area as the battlefront draws ever closer in the Zionist entity's campaign to eradicate Hamas. Palestinian Raed Al-Bardani, 32, who has been displaced multiple times and now lives in Rafah with his wife and four children, charged that "the goal is to destroy Rafah because it is the only area that the occupation has not yet destroyed". "Where will we go if they storm Rafah?" he asked.

Blinken — on his fifth regional tour since the bloodiest ever Gaza war broke out — earlier met Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi in Cairo, a day after he held talks with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in Riyadh. Blinken and Sisi "discussed ongoing efforts to secure the release of all hostages held by Hamas," said State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller.

The US envoy also "expressed appreciation for Egypt's leadership role in facilitating the delivery of humanitarian assistance to Palestinians in Gaza". And Blinken emphasized Washington's "rejection of any forced displacement of Palestinians from Gaza and commitment to establishing a Palestinian state that provides peace and security for (Zionists) and Palestinians alike", Miller said. — AFP



HARDA, India: Rescue personnel and local residents gather near a firecracker plant following an explosion at Harda district in India's Madhya Pradesh state on February 6, 2024. — AFP

Govt submits program with price rises...

Continued from Page 1

the leading role of the private sector in the national economy by offering more investment opportunities to the sector to help it create job opportunities for citizens.

The program lists several objectives it plans to achieve in the next 100 days. These include taking measures to control price rises, repricing a number of government services that have a limited impact on citizens, preparing the draft of corporate tax law and studying sections of the society that deserve to receive public subsidies.

The program also lists 22 pieces of legislation that should be approved by the Assembly throughout the current term that ends in July. These include the northern economic zone, amending the wage scheme in the government sector, the selective tax law, amending the residency law for expats, establishing an independent establishment for electricity and water, regulating the information sector and others. The program says that the average spending on wages in Kuwait is three times higher than that of members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which comprises advanced economies of Western nations.

Average foreign investment is very low in Kuwait, lower by nine times than in Middle East and North African countries and lower by 12 times than OECD members, the program stated. Budget deficits are

projected to continue if prevailing factors are not corrected, the program said. Current deficit is KD 3 billion and is expected to rise to KD 13 billion in 2033. The oil price needed to balance the budget this year is \$78 a barrel and in 2033 is expected to be above \$100 a barrel.

Meanwhile, the National Assembly voted to agree on a government request to delay for a month debating two populist draft laws calling to hike citizens' cost of living allowance and providing interest-free loans to retired Kuwaitis. Thirty-six MPs, including Cabinet ministers, voted for the delay requested by the new government, while 26 lawmakers voted against the move, saying the two draft legislations are needed to serve the Kuwaiti people.

Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs Dawood Maarafi, the only elected MP in the Cabinet, vowed that the delay does not mean that the government is opposed to the two legislations and populist laws, but it wants to review them carefully. MPs opposed to the delay insisted that the new government, formed just two weeks ago, is sending a wrong signal to the Assembly and the people. Others said the government has managed to break up the solid bloc consisting of 48 out of the 50 lawmakers.

During the session, MPs agreed to extend the work of a parliamentary panel probing alleged torture by the defense ministry against a Kuwaiti citizen by two months to complete its investigation and report. MP Marzouq Al-Ghanem protested against the lengthy extension, saying the committee had been given a lot of time. Head of the panel MP Mohammad Hayef said the committee's investigation was interrupted by the demise of former Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Harry visits King Charles after...

Continued from Page 1

travel by helicopter to Sandringham", a royal residence in eastern England, with a helicopter seen leaving from behind Buckingham Palace around 10 minutes later.

Buckingham Palace has not specified the type of cancer afflicting the 75-year-old monarch — although it is understood not to be prostate cancer — and he will now step back from public-facing royal duties to complete his treatment. Royal watchers said Charles's ill health could be a catalyst for a rapprochement between father and son. But they warned that healing the rift with his brother Prince William, heir to the throne, would be more difficult.

Royal commentator Richard Fitzwilliams told AFP there was "no doubt" Harry and Meghan's public airing of their grievances had "caused a great deal of bitterness" within the royal family. After relocating to California, the couple launched a string of damaging accusations against the royals in a Netflix series and Harry's bestselling autobiography "Spare".

The situation between the brothers would be "very hard to heal", Fitzwilliams said, but the family should now put on a united front. "The royal family is, in this connection, just like any other family and it should pull together," he said. "And what we therefore ought to be seeing is rapprochement, however gradual or however it's handled in the coming weeks and months," he added.

The Daily Mail's Richard Kay said that while Charles had "longed for" a reconciliation, "William is convinced that trust, the basis of any relationship, has been utterly destroyed". He said that it would be a relief to courtiers that Harry appeared to be making the visit without Meghan. "The question is will he also see William?" he said.

UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said the cancer had been "caught early". Charles is just 17 months into his reign having waited decades to begin the job he was born to do following the death of his 96-year-old mother, Queen Elizabeth II, on Sept 8, 2022. People in Britain expressed shock and sympathy at the news. "We feel so flat because the king really has hit the ground running," said Sue Hazell, a retiree from the northern English city of Doncaster, as she visited Buckingham Palace.

"It's not nice to hear anyone's been diagnosed with cancer," added Sarah Firsen, 55, a software sales worker. "I feel kind of bad for him. He waited all these years to be king." The diagnosis will prolong a frontline shortage of royals created by Charles's admission to hospital last month for a prostate procedure and the almost simultaneous hospitalization of Catherine, Princess of Wales.

Catherine's hospital admission for abdominal surgery meant that William also stepped back to support her and their three children. Although he is expected to resume royal duties on Wednesday, the family's health issues had left 76-year-old Camilla as the highest profile royal over recent weeks. "Thankfully, this has been caught early and now everyone will be wishing that he gets the treatment that he needs and makes a full recovery," Sunak told the BBC.

International

Turkey grieves on first quake anniversary

People struck with disbelief, anger at officials for awarding permits to collapsed buildings

ANTAKYA: Ravaged by grief, bearing torches and holding up portraits of their lost families, thousands of earthquake survivors gathered on Tuesday for the first anniversary of Turkey's worst disaster of modern times. At 4:17 am, the moment the first 7.8-magnitude quake set off a calamity that claimed more than 53,000 lives in Turkey and nearly 6,000 in Syria, the mourners gathered in the ruins of Antakya, an ancient city transformed into deserted wasteland.

The night before, many of them had listened in tears to the local symphony orchestra play a memorial concert in a central square, surrounded by vast empty spaces where bustling neighbourhoods once stood. Last year's February 6 disaster flattened swathes of cities across 11 southeastern Turkish provinces and parts of Syria, becoming the earthquake-prone region's worst catastrophe in centuries.

It displaced millions and forced hundreds of thousands to move into container camps, where they have spent the past year haunted by the past. The trauma and bouts of rage spilled over when people briefly scuffled with the police, who tried to stop one Antakya procession with barrier fences, according to AFP reporters at the scene.

But the overall mood was much the same as it was when disaster first struck — overwhelming grief and lingering disbelief. The survivors embraced, placing candles where their loved ones were crushed to death in their sleep. "It doesn't feel like it was a year ago. For me, it feels like it was yesterday," said Eda Boz, 44, who was forced to move to the capital Ankara and returned to Antakya for the commemorations. "My childhood friends and classmates lived in this building," Boz said. "We all knew each other."

Pakistan women barred from voting by their husbands

DHURNAL, Pakistan: Perched on her traditional charpai bed, Naeem Kausir says she would like to vote in Pakistan's upcoming election — if only the men in her family would let her. Like all the women in her town, the 60-year-old former headmistress and her seven daughters — six already university educated — are forbidden from voting by their male elders.

"Whether by her husband, father, son or brother, a woman is forced. She lacks the autonomy to make decisions independently," said Kausir, covered in a veil in the courtyard of her home. "These men lack the courage to grant women their rights," the widow told AFP.

Although voting is a constitutional right for all adults in Pakistan, some rural areas in the socially conservative country are still ruled by a patriarchal system of male village elders who wield significant influence in their communities. In the village of Dhurnal in Punjab, spread across crop fields and home to several thousand people, men press myriad reasons for the ban of more than 50 years. "Several years ago, during a period of low literacy rates, a council chairman decreed that if men went out to vote, and women followed suit, who would manage the household and childcare responsibilities?" said Malik Muhammad, a member of the village council.

"This disruption, just for one vote, was deemed unnecessary," he concluded. Muhammad Aslam, a shopkeeper, claims it is to protect women from "local hostilities" about politics, including a distant occasion that few seem to remember in the village when an argument broke out at a polling station. Others told AFP it was simply down to "tradition".

First Muslim woman leader

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has stressed that it has the authority to declare the process null and void in any constituency where women are barred from participating. In reality, progress has been slow outside of cities and in areas that operate

'Millions of neighbours gone'

Gulhan Baklavaci, a 58-year-old whose eyes welled with tears as she inspected the remains of her old neighbourhood, said the scale of the disaster — and people's grief — was difficult to quantify. "In the past, someone would die and we would mourn them for years," Baklavaci said. "Now, millions of our neighbours are gone," she said, referring also to the people who have been displaced. At around the same time, a similar gathering was taking place further to the northeast, in the city of Kahramanmaraş, a provincial capital lying just 50 kilometers (30 miles) from the epicenter of the first big quake.

The initial quake lasted 65 seconds, followed by thousands of aftershocks including a particularly frightening 7.5-magnitude one later that first fateful day. A social media message urging people to attend the Kahramanmaraş event called them "65 seconds which were worth an eternity". Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who was expected in Kahramanmaraş later on Tuesday, posted a social media message at around 4:17 am saying the tragedy "continues to burn our hearts as fresh as the first day". Erdogan survived initial criticism about rescuers being slow to respond to the gravest emergency of his two-decade rule, winning re-election fewer than four months after the disaster.

'Still in ruins'

Erdogan has been pledging to rebuild the region and urging national unity, a message he repeated on Tuesday. "We will remember February 6th as a date when we not only commemorated our losses in the earthquake but also proved our national solidarity in the face of disasters," Erdogan told supporters gathered



ANTAKYA: People take part in a vigil to mark the first anniversary of the earthquake, in Antakya on February 6, 2024. — AFP

in a concert hall in Kahramanmaraş. Erdogan handed out to lottery winners the keys of the first homes built in the region for survivors, pledging to deliver 200,000 apartments and housing units by the end of the year across the disaster zone. But lingering resentment at both Erdogan's conservative government and opposition politicians who oversee more liberal cities such as Antakya runs deep.

Health Minister Fahrettin Koca was booed loudly by the Antakya crowd as he prepared to speak at one

pre-dawn event. And a large, angry crowd gathered around Antakya's opposition mayor, Lutfu Savas, when he made a brief appearance.

"Lutfu, resign!" they chanted, while security guards tried to keep a safe cordon around the mayor. "A year has passed and the city is still in ruins," said Esat Gul, 19, who like others is furious at officials for awarding buildings permits for buildings that toppled like houses of cards in the quake. "I no longer have much hope for the future," the student said. — AFP



DHURNAL: Women look on as they walk along a street in Dhurnal of Punjab Province, ahead of the upcoming general elections. — AFP

under tribal norms, with millions of women still missing from the electoral rolls. The elders in Dhurnal rely on neighbouring villages to fill a government-imposed quota which maintains that 10 percent of votes cast in every constituency must be by women.

Those who are allowed to vote are often pressured to pick a candidate of a male relative's choice. In the mountainous region of Kohistan in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province home to almost 800,000 people, religious clerics last month decreed it un-Islamic for women to take part in electoral campaigns. Fatima Tu Zara Butt, a legal expert and a women's rights activist, said women are allowed to vote in Islam, but that religion is often exploited or misunderstood in Pakistan.

"Regardless of their level of education or financial stability, women in Pakistan can only make decisions with the 'support' of the men around them," she said.

Pakistan famously elected the world's first Muslim woman leader in 1988 Benazir Bhutto, who introduced policies that boosted education and access to money for women, and fought against religious extremism after military dictator Zia ul-Haq had introduced a new era of Islamisation that rolled back women's rights.

However, more than 30 years later, only 355 women are competing for national assembly seats in Thursday's election, compared to 6,094 men, the election commission has said. Pakistan reserves 60 of the 342 National

Assembly seats for women and 10 for religious minorities in the Muslim-majority country, but political parties rarely allow women to contest outside of this quota.

Those who do stand often do so only with the backing of male relatives who are already established in local politics. "I have never seen any independent candidates contesting elections on their own," Zara Butt added.

'Everyone's right'

Forty-year-old Robina Kausir, a healthcare worker, said a growing number of women in Dhurnal want to exercise their right to vote but they fear backlash from the community if they do — particularly the looming threat of divorce, a matter of great shame in Pakistani culture. She credits part of the shift to access to information as a result of the rising use of smartphones and social media. "These men instil fear in their women — many threaten their wives," she told AFP. Robina, backed by her husband, is one of the few prepared to take the risk.

When cricketing legend Imran Khan swept to power in the 2018 election, Robina arranged for a minibus to take women to the local polling station. Only a handful joined her, but she still marked it as a success and will do the same on Thursday's election. "I was abused but I do not care, I will keep fighting for everyone's right to vote," Robina said. — AFP

Azerbaijan leader eyes easy election after Karabakh war

BAKU, Azerbaijan: Azerbaijan will hold snap leadership elections Wednesday with President Ilham Aliyev poised to secure a fifth term on a wave of popularity fueled by his army's sweeping victory over Armenian separatists. The strongman was heralded after his troops recaptured the Nagorno-Karabakh region in September from Armenian rebels that controlled the enclave for three decades. Calling the victory "an epochal event unparalleled in Azerbaijan's history", Aliyev said last month that the country would hold presidential elections on all its territory for the first time on February 7. "The elections will mark the beginning of a new era" for the country, he said.

The lightning operation saw the entire ethnic-Armenian population of more than 100,000 people flee to Armenia. Aliyev responded to Western criticism with angry rhetoric, and last autumn he snubbed peace talks with Armenia that were to be attended by German and French leaders. On Thursday, he accused France of "adding fuel to the fire" in the volatile Cau-



BAKU: A man walks past campaign posters of presidential candidates, including President Ilham Aliyev, ahead of the upcoming snap presidential election. — AFP

casus region by pursuing "anti-Azerbaijani policy". He also threatened to withdraw from the European Court of Human Rights, the Council of Europe rights watchdog, after refusing to invite its observers to monitor Wednesday's elections.

The vote, which Aliyev called a year ahead of schedule, is being boycotted by the oil-rich nation's main opposition parties. "There are no conditions in the country for the conduct of free and fair elections," said Ali Kerimli, leader of the opposition National Front party. Supporters have praised Aliyev for turning a republic once thought of as a Soviet backwater into a flourishing energy supplier to Europe.

'Exercise in futility'

But critics say he has crushed the opposition and suffocated independent media. "All fundamental rights are being violated in the country, opposition parties can't function normally, freedom of assembly is restricted, media are under government pressure, and political dissent is being suppressed," Kerimli said.

Independent analyst Najmin Kamilsoy said the electoral climate in Azerbaijan was marked by a "colossal asymmetry in favor of Aliyev, coupled with the elimination of all potential opponents by repressions". "There is a total absence of competition — a sustained standstill," he said. In recent months, Azerbaijani authorities intensified a crackdown on independent media, arresting several critical journalists who have exposed graft at high levels. "The intention is very clear. They do not want opposition voices," said Giorgi Gogia, the Human Rights Watch associate director for the Caucasus.

He called the coming elections "an exercise in futility" with a predictable outcome since "there isn't a legitimate or viable opposition challenge to President Aliyev's leadership". Aliyev, 62, was first elected president in 2003 after the death of his father Heydar Aliyev, a former KGB officer and communist-era leader who had ruled Azerbaijan since 1993. He was re-elected in 2008, 2013, and 2018 in elections that were denounced by opposition parties as rigged. In 2009, Aliyev amended the country's constitution so he could run for an unlimited number of presidential terms, a move criticized by rights advocates who say he could become a president for life. — AFP

3 die in 'terrorist' attack outside Istanbul court

ISTANBUL: Turkish police on Tuesday shot dead two assailants from a leftist organization, branded "terrorists" by authorities, who attacked a security checkpoint outside Istanbul's main court, killing one person and injuring five, officials said. Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya said the assailants were members of the Revolutionary People's Liberation Party-Front (DHKP-C) — a fringe leftist group that has staged periodic attacks in Turkey since the 1980s. The DHKP-C issued no initial claim of responsibility.

The group, which is considered a terrorist organization by the United States, has been fighting US influence in the Middle East and across the world. In 2014, Washington offered a \$3 million reward for the capture of the group's leaders.

"I congratulate our security forces, who eliminated the treacherous attack with timely intervention," President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said in televised remarks. "Two terrorists, one a woman and the other a man, were neutralized."

Erdogan said the attack injured three police and three civilians, one of whom died later. A witness told AFP the assailants opened fire on police after a brief altercation at a checkpoint leading to a main entrance to the sprawling building, which has been used for some of Turkey's biggest trials.

"A conflict broke out at the exit gate. I saw two people, a man and a woman, shooting at the police. The male was shot first. Then the woman fired a few more shots. They shot her," said 25-year-old Mahir Yildiz. "I heard 20-25 gunshots. There was great panic and fear at that moment. We didn't know which way to go. The police blocked the entrance and exit and gathered everyone inside". Police sealed off the courthouse entrances as a security precaution.

'Heroic police'

Justice Minister Yilmaz Tunc said "heroic police officers prevented a treacherous attack", adding that prosecutors had launched a "multi-faceted investigation". Turkey has begun to emerge from a violent spell which started a decade ago, when it was hit by repeated bombings and other attacks linked to jihadist fighters and Kurdish militants.

Although those attacks have largely eased, Istanbul and the capital Ankara remain on high alert. Last month, one man was shot dead by two gunmen who opened fire inside a Catholic church in Istanbul. The attack was claimed by Islamic State group jihadists.

In October, two assailants injured two police in an attack on the government district in Ankara that was claimed by Kurdish militants. Turkey responded by stepping up air strikes against Kurdish targets in Syria and Iraq. In one of its highest-profile attacks, the DHKP-C in 2013 staged a suicide bombing of the US embassy in Ankara, killing a Turkish security guard. — AFP



ISTANBUL: Police forensic experts examine the area after a shooting outside the Caglayan courthouse on February 6, 2024. — AFP

Business

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2024

EU chief bows to protesting farmers on pesticide use

Bloc eyes 90% cut to greenhouse gases by 2040

STRASBOURG: EU chief Ursula von der Leyen on Tuesday recommended the bloc bury a plan to cut pesticide use in agriculture as a concession to protesting European farmers. The original proposal, put forward by her European Commission as part of the European Union's green transition, "has become a symbol of polarization," she told the European Parliament in Strasbourg, France.

Noting that the plan—to halve chemical pesticide use in the EU by the end of the decade—had also stalled in discussions in the parliament and in the European Council representing EU member countries, von der Leyen said she would ask her commission "to withdraw this proposal".

The pesticide issue is just one of a long list of grievances that have prompted a mass protest movement by EU farmers, who in recent weeks have used tractors to block key roads to complain of shrinking income and rising production costs. With far-right and anti-establishment parties—which are predicted to make significant gains in June's European elections—latching onto the farmers' movement, the environment debate has turned politically explosive.

Meanwhile, the EU on Tuesday urged a 90-percent cut to its greenhouse gas emissions by 2040, even as the bloc's transition to a greener future was clouded by a widespread farmers' revolt. "Based on the best available science, and a detailed impact assessment, we are recommending that the 2040 target should be a 90 percent emission cut" compared to 1990 levels, said the EU climate commissioner, Wopke Hoekstra.

He called for a "fair transition" that will still allow EU businesses to thrive and ensure "nobody is left behind" as the bloc seeks to become carbon-neutral by 2050. In a sign of how politically fraught the environmental issue has become, with farmers venting their anger around the bloc, European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen earlier Tuesday gave key ground by burying a plan to halve chemical pesticide use by the end of this decade.

Tuesday's announcements came as dozens of farmers protested outside the European Parliament building, angry over shrinking incomes, rising costs and what they say are increasingly onerous green regulations. The 27-nation European Union is already working towards an interim target of cutting greenhouse gas emissions by 55 percent by 2030.

The commission's original proposal "has become a symbol of polarization", she acknowledged to the European Parliament, noting that the legislation had



STRASBOURG: European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen speaks during a debate on the results of the latest EU summits, as part of a plenary session at the European Parliament in Strasbourg, eastern France, on February 6, 2024. — AFP

stalled due to divisions between EU lawmakers and member countries. The concession, made hours before the 2040 climate announcement, came as farmers converged outside the parliament building in another protest over shrinking incomes and rising production costs.

The 27-nation European Union has already committed to a 55-percent cut in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, as it seeks to become carbon neutral by 2050. For the next milestone, 2040, working documents suggest the European Commission will aim for a drop of 90 percent, compared to 1990 levels. But this time Brussels has to factor in growing discontent—illustrated by the snowballing farmer pro-

tests of recent weeks—over the social and economic impact of its much-vaunted Green Deal.

Last week, 1,300 tractors clogged the area around an EU summit in Brussels, forcing their revolt to the top of the leaders' agenda and resulting in a number of other concessions, especially in France.

Some European leaders welcomed the shelving of the pesticide legislation. "Long live the farmers, whose tractors are forcing Europe to take back the madness imposed by the multinationals and the left," said Italy's far-right Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini. He spoke as groups of Italian farmers rallied at the edges of Rome ahead of a planned move into the Italian capital as early as Thursday.

Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo hailed von der Leyen's announcement, saying it was "crucial we keep our farmers on board to a more sustainable future of farming". The proposed pesticide concession follows another the commission unveiled last week, to give farmers wider exemptions on rules that required them to keep parcels of land fallow. France has also moved to promise more cash to its farmers, ease rules imposed on them and protect them from what they see as unfair competition. The pledges have been enough for two of the country's main farmer unions to suspend protests. But farmers in other EU countries including Italy, Spain and Greece say they will continue to mobilize. — AFP

NBK named 'Best Trade Finance Provider in Kuwait'

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) has received the award of "Best Trade Finance Provider in Kuwait" for 2024 in Global Finance's annual survey. The selections were based on entries from banks and other providers, as well as input from industry analysts, corporate executives and technology experts worldwide. Global Finance stated that the criteria for choosing the winners included transaction volume, scope of global coverage, customer service, competitive pricing and innovative technologies. NBK was selected as one of the World's and MENA's best trade finance providers in Global Finance's 24th annual World's Best Trade Finance Providers in more than 100 countries across 8 regions.

The award was granted to NBK in recognition of its initiatives in developing top-notch banking solutions and high-quality services to meet customers' expectations. This prestigious award underscores NBK's solid position and dominant share in the trade finance market given its participation in the major deals across many vital sectors, thanks to its outstanding customer service and added value provided. This is helped by the bank's broad regional



and international network encompassing branches and subsidiaries across 4 continents.

The award also reflects NBK's exceptional ability to maintain close and sustainable relationships with its clients, making it well-positioned to participate in major financing deals and strengthening its leadership and dominance, locally and regionally. NBK has a highly experienced professional team in Trade Finance who work tirelessly to ensure delivering the highest service level to customers.

Global Finance, founded in 1987 and headquartered in New York, is one of the most reputable magazines specialized in finance and economics. It

has a circulation of 50,000 readers in 193 countries around the world, including senior corporate and financial officers responsible for making investment and strategic decisions at multinational companies and financial institutions. The magazine conducts various annual surveys about innovation and profitability for banks and financial institutions worldwide, based on which it selects top performers on the regional and international levels.

For more information about Global Finance magazine's Best Trade Finance Provider Award in Kuwait 2024, please visit their website at: <https://www.gfmag.com/>

Gulf Bank to launch GB Market event on February 10

KUWAIT: As part of its ongoing efforts to promote sustainability principles in society, Gulf Bank is introducing its first GB Market event, with the goal of supporting small-scale initiatives and businesses in Kuwait.

Scheduled for next Saturday, Feb 10, 2024, from 10 am to 6 pm at the Dhah Complex in the Al-Bida'a area, the event is poised to showcase approximately 11 businesses and initiatives exclusively owned by young Kuwaitis. These enterprises encompass various sectors, such as perfumes, jewelry, restaurants, and cafes. Participants are selected via competitions and voting by followers on Gulf Bank's social media platform, reflecting their preferences for specific



Abdullah Al-Mulaifi

stores and products.

Abdullah Al-Mulaifi, Assistant Manager of Corporate Communications at Gulf Bank, emphasized Gulf Bank's commitment to supporting youth and small to medium-sized initiatives and businesses. He highlighted the bank's proactive involvement in events and initiatives aimed at fostering youth talent, prioritizing the promotion of sustainability, and offering support to young individuals – both integral components of the bank's 2025 strategy.

He emphasized that GB Market provides an excellent opportunity to bring together entrepreneurs and small to medium-sized business owners, enabling them to showcase their products directly. This nurtures the growth of these businesses and enhances

their overall contribution to the national economy. Moreover, the market enables the public to explore products from their preferred stores, while having an enjoyable family day, filled with diverse entertainment options and prize giveaways.

Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the future. The Bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience. Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining robust developments in sustainability at environmental, social and governance levels through diverse sustainability initiatives, strategically selected to benefit the Bank both internally and externally. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with various parties to achieve it.

QatarEnergy signs 20-year gas deal with India's Petronet

DOHA: Qatar has agreed to supply India's Petronet with liquefied natural gas (LNG) for 20 years, the Gulf emirate's state-owned energy firm announced on Tuesday.

QatarEnergy will supply 7.5 million tons of LNG per year to government-owned Petronet destined for India under the deal, the Qatari company said in a statement. "This agreement is another key milestone in the long-standing energy partnership between Qatar and India and comes on the heels of the 20th anniversary of the first LNG shipment to India," Energy Minister Saad Al-Kaabi, QatarEnergy's CEO said. The first deliveries of gas to India by QatarEnergy's LNG fleet are due from May 2028.

"We believe that this new agreement... will further strengthen the relationship with India and support its vision to increase the contribution of natural gas in its energy mix," Kaabi said. Qatar is one of the world's top LNG producers alongside the United States, Australia and Russia. Asian countries led by China, Japan and South Korea have been the main market for Qatari gas, but demand has also risen from European countries since Russia's war on Ukraine threw supplies into doubt. — AFP

Syria increases public sector salaries by 50%

DAMASCUS: Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad ordered Monday a 50-percent pay rise for civil servants, military personnel and public sector pensioners, with the economy in free fall and inflation soaring after nearly 13 years of war. Assad announced a similar decision last year, doubling salaries and pension payments, while also lifting fuel subsidies. The Syrian economy has been battered by the conflict that has killed more than 500,000 people and displaced millions since it began in 2011.

More than 90 percent of Syrians have been pushed into poverty, according to UN figures, and the value of the Syrian pound has been slashed. Prior to Monday's decision, the monthly salary of civil servants had been between around \$20 and \$40, depending on the Syrian pound's street value. A separate presidential decree issued Monday set the minimum monthly wage in the private sector at 278,190 pounds, or about \$19 on the parallel market. — AFP

Business

KD 351.4m stc revenues for year ended Dec 31, 2023 with KD 32.7m net profit

Revenue increased by 4.5% to reach KD 351.4m, the highest since inception

KUWAIT: Kuwait Telecommunications Company (stc), a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers and enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, announced its financial results for financial year ended Dec 31, 2023, highlighting the most significant achievements, financial and operational performance in addition to the social initiatives made by the company during 2023.

In this regard, Eng Maziad Al-Harbi, stc's Chief Executive Officer, has stated that: "In 2023, Kuwait Telecommunications Company (stc) achieved numerous financial and operational milestones represented in expanding its business model and efficiently managing its internal operations. stc's implementation to its corporate strategy, which was designed to keep pace with the rapid developments in the telecommunications sector has played a vital role in its success, and thus, has contributed in meeting the shareholders' aspirations.

Driven by the importance of digital transformation and innovation in shaping the global economy, the company has successfully embraced the latest technologies, including 5G services, Internet of Things (IoT), artificial intelligence (AI), and data analytics to ensure its comprehensive and integrated technical services and solutions are at the forefront of all the available offerings in the telecommunications market through implementing its corporate strategy based on expanding its operations. stc's constant focus on developing solutions specifically designed to meet the evolving needs of both individual and corporate customers reflects its unwavering commitment to better serve its customers. This represents one of the key pillars of its corporate strategy "LEAD" for the years 2023 to 2025, which enabled the company - during the first year of implementation - to achieve remarkable strong results, which, in turn, contributed to strengthening stc's position as a leader in the ICT market. The company's expansions along the past few years demonstrate stc's efforts to provide the best integrated solutions in the communications and networks field, along with the advanced technical solutions, fixed services, broadband, integration systems, and cloud services for both individual and corporate customers, leveraging its highly advanced network and the expertise of its subsidiaries specializing in fixed communication services



Eng Maziad Al-Harbi



as well as ICT, in addition to providing the enterprise sector with innovative, comprehensive, and high-quality solutions. Therefore, stc has managed to maintain its competitive position in the telecommunications and ICT markets in Kuwait, whereby our primary focus is the implementation of a productive and digital operating model for stc, with our unwavering commitment to enhance profitability, increase the potential of our employees, enhance their future professional skills and work on the sustainability of the company, in addition to the hard work that our subsidiaries are eager to do with their ability to deliver solutions in the telecommunications and ICT markets.

were executed throughout the previous years, which played a notable and effective role in capturing growth opportunities in the telecommunications and ICT sectors, especially in the enterprise sector. These initiatives have propelled stc towards new horizons of sustainable growth by delivering high-quality products, services, and innovative solutions in the enterprise sector in Kuwait.

Commenting on the announcement of stc's financial results for the year ended December 31, 2023, Eng. Maziad Al-Harbi noted: "stc has achieved strong financial results by leveraging its technical and human capabilities in accordance with the aspirations and expectations of both its customers and shareholders,

solutions to companies across various sectors had the greatest impact on stc's success. Not to mention stc's focus on driving its operations towards new areas of sustainable growth through a series of innovative initiatives aimed at optimizing company's operations as well as delivering high-quality services and products that cater to the market's requirements and demand, in addition to enhancing the company's infrastructure."

Al-Harbi added: "These outcomes resulted in a growth of EBITDA by 3.7 percent to reach KD 85.1 million in 2023 compared to KD 82.0 million in 2022 supported by the increase in the company's revenue. As a result, the company's net profit reached KD 32.7 million (EPS 33 fils) in 2023, whereby, stc's customer base reached approximately 2.3 million customers at the end of December 2023".

Commenting on stc's financial position as of Dec 31, 2023, Al-Harbi said: "stc's total assets reached KD 447.7 million by the end of December 2023, while the total shareholders' equity increased by 1 percent reaching KD 243.9 million by the end of December 2023 compared to KD 241.4 million in 2022 whereby, stc has a strong solvency position amongst the telecom companies in the Middle East.

The Board of Directors has recommended distributing cash dividends of 35 fils per share representing 35 percent of the share nominal value for the year ended 2023, subject to the approval of the Ordinary General Assembly of the company. This decision was based on stc's confidence in the continuous advancements of its operations, the robustness of its financial position, and the strength of its cash flows."

Al-Harbi noted: "stc is committed to periodically review and update its financial strategy, with the aim of allocating resources towards the development of its services in order to remain at the forefront of the telecommunications companies, meet customers' needs and provide an added value to shareholders. As part of this commitment, stc has successfully implemented numerous strategic projects, supported by the digital solutions that align with the company's strategic and financial objectives. These initiatives are designed to enhance operational efficiency, process control practice, and achieve excellence in treasury management operations."

Regarding stc's corporate social responsibility (CSR), Al-Harbi stated: "Supporting the



community in various ways has been a long-standing commitment under stc's extensive and sustainable corporate social responsibility (CSR) program. Considering its role as a pioneer in Kuwait's telecommunications market, stc has implemented programs that aim to foster long-term growth focusing on key areas such as education, environmental sustainability, sports, health, youth empowerment and entrepreneurship. stc's programs and initiatives in 2023 were diverse and sustainable, each targeting specific community needs and causes that coincided the company's values and beliefs. These efforts were reflected through various programs in partnership with a range of key players, including government institutions and the private sector under the umbrella of "Wyak", which focuses on supporting young entrepreneurs and startups. The second primary initiative was the educational 'upgrade' umbrella, which aims to contribute towards empowering the youth and supporting the local education initiatives. The last primary initiative is the 'Because we care', which aims to spread awareness on health and wellness, and environment.

Looking ahead, stc is set to build on the solid foundation established through its comprehensive and sustainable CSR program over the years. stc envisions a sustainable future where its partnerships with government bodies, private sector entities, and community organizations will continue to address a broader spectrum of societal needs and challenges, combining diverse perspectives and expertise to create more effective and sustainable outcomes.

The financial results for the financial year ended Dec 31, 2023	
Revenues	KD 351.4mn
EBITDA	KD 85.1mn
Net Profit	KD 32.7mn
Earnings per share	33 Kuwaiti fils
Assets	KD447.7mn
Shareholders' equity	KD 243.9mn
Book value per share	244 fils per share
Customer base	2.3mn customers

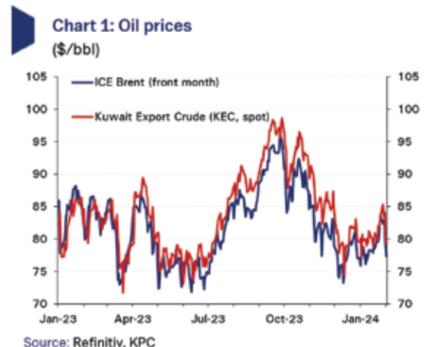
stc is committed to innovation and excellence through its investments in the latest technologies to enhance its services and maintain its leading position in the rapidly evolving telecommunications sector, whereby stc's workforce has the ability to adapt and proactively face challenges. We also emphasize the significance of the Company's strategic partnerships and acquisitions that

whereby, stc recorded the highest total revenue since inception to reach KD 351.4 million in the financial year ended Dec 31, 2023 with a growth rate of 4.5 percent compared to KD 336.4 million in the previous year. The expansion of the company's operations and its focus on providing digital services to the enterprise sector through the development of its digital services and offering integrated technical

NBK ECONOMIC BRIEF

Brent prices gain on higher risk premium, global growth upgrade

KUWAIT: Brent futures rallied in January, posting their first monthly increase since September with a rise of 6 percent m/m to \$81.7/bbl. Price gains reflected a combination of heightened geopolitical risk in the Middle East, inventory drawdowns in the US and better-than-expected global economic activity. Houthi attacks on passing vessels in the Red Sea forced shipping companies to transit around the much lengthier—and costlier—Cape of Good Hope in South Africa. Meanwhile, US commercial crude oil inventories dropped to a multi-month low in December, further adding to the bullish impulse. Prices were also buoyed with the release of data showing that the US economy grew at a much faster rate than expected in Q4 23 and after Chinese authorities unveiled stimulus measures to support the economy. Local marker Kuwait Export Crude (KEC) closed the month at \$84.1/bbl, up 5.7 percent ytd.



- In terms of oil demand expectations for the year ahead, the outlook looks slightly more positive following the upgrade to global GDP growth by the IMF in January growth was revised up from October's forecast by 0.2 percent pts to 3.1 percent. The International Energy Agency (IEA), which takes its economic cues from the IMF, may follow suit with another upgrade to its oil demand projections for 2024, having just last month revised them up by 180 kb/d to 1.24 mb/d from 2.25 mb/d in 2023.
- The organization has raised its 2024 forecast by a cumulative 380 kb/d in total since June last year and was behind the curve in its 2023 oil demand growth estimates, underestimating the resilience of gasoline consumption especially. OPEC, meanwhile, has been consistent since the outset in its projection of oil demand growth of around 2.25 mb/d for 2024. The oil exporters' group has been firm in its view of above-trend demand and has extended the bullish narrative into 2025 with its projection of growth of 1.85 mb/d to 106.2 mb/d. Consumption growth in non-OECD countries will account for 94 percent of this rise.
- On the supply side, OPEC+ has determined that further supply restraints will be necessary in 2024. The group will roll over and deepen last year's vol-

untary production cuts through Q1—and potentially longer—to balance the market and prevent a large buildup of oil inventories. The volume of cuts pledged at November's OPEC+ meeting was around 2.2 mb/d, though in practice only about 500 kb/d will be fresh cuts including 135 kb/d from Kuwait, 223 kb/d from Iraq and 82 kb/d from Kazakhstan. Russia signed up to an additional 200kb/d of export reductions (refined products). Saudi's 1 mb/d voluntary production cut rollover remains the largest item in the 'cut' announcement.

- OPEC+ output (quota-bound members only and excluding Angola) is therefore scheduled to fall to 34.3 mb/d in Q1. Supply in December rose to 34.7 mb/d (+49 kb/d), according to combined OPEC secondary source and S&P Global data, with the largest gains coming from Nigeria (+99 kb/d) and Kazakhstan (+30 kb/d), offsetting slight declines in most members. Outside of quota-bound members, Iran's output declined modestly from November's post-2018 sanctions high of 3.2 mb/d to 3.1 mb/d. Iranian production soared in 2023: with gains of almost 600 kb/d, it was one of the largest contributors to global supplies. Meanwhile, Venezuela, which has benefitted from a reprieve in US sanctions, has been gradually pumping more oil. Output in December reached 786 kb/d (+7 kb/d m/m), its highest level since February 2019.
- Non-OPEC supply, meanwhile, increased by 2.3 mb/d in 2023, the IEA estimated. This was mainly on the back of output gains in the US, Canada, Brazil and Guyana. In the US, oil production expanded at the fastest rate since 2019, by more than 1.0 mb/d to 12.9 mb/d, according to US Information Administration (EIA) data. Weekly EIA data showed that output, at 13.0 mb/d, was hovering near its record high of 13.3 mb/d. Remarkably, such gains have taken place while oil drilling has been in decline (-19.5 percent in 2023), though by the end of January the drop in the number of active oil rigs appeared to stabilize at the 500 level, according to Baker Hughes. Looking ahead, the EIA thinks such oil production gains are unlikely to be sustained, with growth dropping to less than 300 kb/d on average over the next two years.
- As far as the outlook for 2024 is concerned, notwithstanding the forecasting uncertainties by research houses over the pace of global economic and demand growth amid a myriad of factors including the prospects for monetary policy easing in the US and the Europe, we think that overall activity will be fairly solid. Oil demand growth will slow from last year's 2.2 mb/d but remain slightly above trend at 1.4 mb/d given ongoing consumption gains in emerging markets. Non-OPEC supply growth should also moderate, with Iran and the US not expected to bring on supply at 2023's breakneck pace.
- OPEC+ supply management will, therefore, once again be key to the oil price outlook, geopolitical risk apart. Provided that supply cuts remain in place beyond Q1, we think OPEC could succeed in keeping market balances tight, with bias towards a stock decline. Of course, OPEC+ compliance issues and market share considerations are bound to come into play and could result in supply cuts being unwound from Q2 onwards: OPEC+ will not want to cede market share to rivals by suppressing supply indefinitely. Nevertheless, we think that Brent will find support at the \$80/bbl level for the year.

Net Profit

32.7

KD Million

FY - 2023

Total Revenue

▲ 4.5%

351.4

KD Million

Net Profit

32.7

KD Million

FY - 2023

EBITDA

▲ 3.7%

85.1

KD Million

The Board of Directors of **Kuwait Telecommunications Company (stc)** is pleased to announce to its shareholders that the company has achieved a net profit of KD 32.7 million (earnings per share 33 fils) for the financial year ended 31 December 2023.

FY - 2023

EPS

▼ 1.6%

33

Kuwaiti fils per share

stc

31 December 2023

Subscribers

▲ 0.5%

2.3

Million

Business

Burgan Bank expands private banking, wealth management product portfolio

Bank obtains CMA licenses to offer HNWI-tailored solutions, services

KUWAIT: On its mission to expand the scope of its banking and financial services, Burgan Bank announced that the Central Markets Authority (CMA) has granted it several new licenses that allow the Bank to offer its high-net-worth individuals (HNWIs) a new suite of Private Banking and Wealth Management services and products. By acquiring the CMA-issued licenses for custodian, investment advisory, portfolio management, and unregistered securities broker, Burgan Bank reinforces its commitment to serving its high-net-worth customers and fulfilling their financial, banking, and investment aspirations, in partnership with KAMCO Invest.

Commenting on Burgan's latest development, Dalia Mohammad Qasem, Assistant General Manager – Private Banking and Wealth Management at Burgan Bank, said: "As a trusted financial partner to our customers, we are always on a mission to offer them a wider and better range of financial services and products that respond to their needs and aspirations and that adhere to the highest international banking standards. With the CMA

licenses, we are delighted to continue expanding our scope of offerings to include investment advisory and wealth management services that are tailored to each customer's aspirations and financial needs."

"For many of our high-net-worth customers, Private Banking and Wealth Management services are essential to their success in achieving their diverse financial goals and realizing their aspirations," added Qasem. "In a bid to uphold the same level of commitment to our role as a trusted financial partner, our highly trained, CMA-registered investment advisors and relationship managers are dedicated to tailoring investment plans that are suited to each HNWI's portfolio, liquidity requirements, and capacity for risk."

On her part, Nour Abdulaziz Al-Baghli, Assistant General Manager – Private Banking and Wealth Management at Burgan Bank, said: "Available to customers whose accounts hold a minimum of KD 300,000, Burgan's Private Banking offers a suite of remarkable benefits that include access to concierge and special priv-

ileges, a dedicated relationship manager to fulfill their requests and inquiries, as well as a wide range of deposit products and exclusive cards. Adding to the Private Banking benefits, customers have the option to make transactions via phone or email, in addition to lending against Investments, properties, and deposits."

Al-Baghli added: "As part of Burgan Bank's adherence to excellence and human capital development, it remains committed to offering its private banking relationship managers top-notch training workshops, conducted by market-leading national and international coaches. Through consistent development, Burgan ensures that all relationship managers are equipped with comprehensive knowledge of investment approaches and business tactics to efficiently guide and advise customers."

It serves to note that Burgan Bank has long considered investments as a tenet of successful banking for all customers, to which end it has developed and innovated numerous savings and investment products



Nour Abdulaziz Al-Baghli

Dalia Mohammad Qasem

and services to multiple segments of the market. With the expansion of Burgan's Private Banking and Wealth Management services, the Bank is set to establish new grounds for domestic banking success.

UBS to reward shareholders as losses narrow



ZURICH: Swiss banking giant UBS said Tuesday it would hand shareholders up to \$1 billion in share buybacks as it posted a smaller-than-expected quarterly loss stemming from the costs of absorbing fallen rival Credit Suisse.

Presenting its fourth-quarter and full-year earnings, the bank reported a net loss of \$279 million in the final three months of 2023 – far less than the nearly \$500 million analysts had been bracing for. The result followed a bigger, \$785 million loss in the third quarter.

For the full year, UBS bagged a net profit of \$29 billion in 2023. The exceptional gain stemmed from the difference between the value of the assets obtained in the acquisition of Credit Suisse and the discount price of \$3.25 billion it paid to buy then Switzerland's second biggest bank, which was on the verge of bankruptcy. UBS chief Sergio Ermotti hailed the group's position nearly a year after it was strangled by Swiss authorities into a takeover aimed at averting a wider financial crisis.

"2023 was a defining year in UBS's history with the acquisition of Credit Suisse," Ermotti said in the earnings statement. "Thanks to the exceptional efforts of all of our colleagues, we stabilized the franchise and have made tremendous progress in the integration."

The bank, which suspended share repurchases after the acquisition, said it plans to reinstate them as soon as the merger is fully finalized in coming months, with plans to buy back up to \$1-billion-worth by the end of this year. It added that it would raise the dividend it dishes out to shareholders to \$0.70 per share for 2023, up from \$0.55 a year earlier.

UBS also announced \$4 billion in cost savings last year across the combined banks, adding that it now expects them to swell to \$13 billion by 2026, up from the \$10 billion forecast previously. In another sign that UBS is weathering the mega-merger well, Ermotti highlighted that clients had entrusted the bank's global wealth management division with \$77 billion in new assets since the acquisition closed last year.

"UBS has made significant progress in restructuring," senior equity analyst Andreas Venditti of Vontobel said in a research note, highlighting the strong increase in dividends, resumption of share buy-backs and higher cost savings target. "There is still a lot of work to do," he cautioned.

Following the news, UBS' shares were down 2.8 percent at 24.98 Swiss francs (\$28.68) shortly after trading began Tuesday. The dip is small compared to the more than 48 percent UBS' shares have gained since the takeover deal was announced.

The bank provided some details on a three-year growth strategy it has been hinting at. "As we move to the next phase of our journey, we will focus on restructuring and optimizing the combined businesses," Ermotti said.

"While our progress over the next three years will not be measured in a straight line, our strategy is clear. With enhanced scale and capabilities across our leading client franchises and improved resource discipline, we will drive sustainable long-term growth and higher returns."

UBS' decision to fully absorb its former closest domestic rival instead of listing it separately, as some had called for, will entail a vast restructuring. The integration of Credit Suisse's Swiss business alone is set to slash 1,000 job-cuts in the wealthy Alpine country by the end of this year, and another 2,000 in the years to come, the bank has said. Most work will need to be put into integrating Credit Suisse's investment bank, which was at the heart of multiple scandals and crises that preceded its demise. — AFP

BP bags bumper 2023 profits, rewards investors

LONDON: British energy giant BP logged multi-billion-dollar annual profits Tuesday despite lower oil prices and following boardroom turmoil, sending its share price rallying thanks also to more big payouts to investors. Net profit came in at \$15.2 billion in 2023, following a loss the prior year linked to its exit from Russia following Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, it said in a results statement.

The annual results sparked fresh fury from the green lobby but herald a new era under new chief executive Murray Auchincloss, following the dramatic sacking of his predecessor Bernard Looney.

The oil giant suffered a net loss of \$2.5 billion in 2022, when it booked a gigantic charge of \$24 billion on its exit from Russian energy group Rosneft. Reflecting lower oil prices and refining margins last year, BP revealed Tuesday that underlying profit excluding exceptional items halved to \$13.8 billion.

That compared with a record \$27.7 billion the prior year when prices of fossil fuels had surged on key gas and oil producer Russia's assault on neighboring Ukraine, boosting the performance of the global energy sector. Shares rallied six percent to top London's FTSE 100 risers board after BP also announced forecast-beating fourth quarter profit, vast stock

buybacks and a shareholder dividend hike. BP will deliver \$1.75 billion in buybacks for the fourth quarter of last year.

It also revealed \$3.5 billion for the first half of this year under plans to buy back at least \$14 billion over 2024-2025.

"BP joins the throng of the other global oil majors in capping off a difficult year with a resilient performance which beat expectations on most metrics," said Richard Hunter, head of markets at Interactive Investor. The global industry was also energized in 2022 by rebounding demand and prices, as the world economy emerged from COVID pandemic lockdowns the prior year.

Prices have since declined but remain elevated due to concerns that the Zionist entity-Hamas conflict could spark broader unrest in the crude-rich Middle East. "Looking back, 2023 was a year of strong operational performance with real momentum in delivery right across the business," Auchincloss said in the earnings release. BP's former chief financial officer took the reins in September, after Looney resigned and was later officially sacked over his failure to disclose past relationships with colleagues.

Activist investor Bluebell Capital last week urged BP to scale back its "irrational" clean energy ambitions to "invest in clean energy" like biofuels and hydrogen, rather than areas like renewable energy where the investment fund claims the group has no competitive advantage or experience.

However, BP stressed on Tuesday that it remains committed to its energy transition strategy. "As we look ahead, our destination remains unchanged — from international oil company to integrated energy



company — focused on growing the value of BP," added Auchincloss.

BP had diluted its long-term carbon emission reduction targets one year ago for its oil and gas production. Environmental campaigners Greenpeace on Tuesday slammed it for "falling far short" in tackling climate change. "The company is still making billions from fossil fuels and its green policies fall far short of what's needed to avoid the worst impacts of climate change," said Charlie Kronick, senior climate advisor at Greenpeace UK.

"We simply cannot leave the future of the planet in the hands of executives and shareholders concerned only with cashing in on fossil fuels until the band stops playing."

UK rival Shell revealed last week that annual net profit more than halved in 2023 on lower oil and gas prices, but it returned \$3.5 billion to shareholders and hiked its dividend.

US rivals Chevron and ExxonMobil also posted lower but still strong profits, and pushed ahead with hefty shareholder payouts. — AFP

Lufthansa says strike to axe up to 90% of flights

FRANKFURT: Up to 90 percent of Lufthansa's flight schedule will be cancelled Wednesday due to a walkout by ground staff, the carrier warned, the latest strike-related travel chaos to hit Germany. Some 25,000 staff will take part in the walkout over pay, which will last for around 27 hours from 4 am (0300 GMT), the union Verdi announced this week.

The strike will affect Germany's biggest airport in Frankfurt as well as those in Munich, Hamburg, Berlin and Duesseldorf.

"Due to the strike, we currently assume that around 10 to 20 percent of the Lufthansa airline program will be possible" on Wednesday, the carrier said in a warning to passengers online.

"Please only come to the airport if your flight has not been cancelled," it said, adding that counters to rebook flights would also be closed due to the industrial action. The airline had previously warned up to 100,000 passengers would be affected.

Lufthansa ground staff are demanding a 12.5-percent pay increase over 12 months as well as one-off bonuses to counter inflation, according to Verdi. The airline says it has offered workers increases totaling more than 13 percent over the

Taiwan chip giant TSMC announces second Japan plant

TAIPEI: TSMC will build a second foundry in Japan, the semiconductor giant and its local partners announced Tuesday, weeks before its first in the country officially opens. Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company — which counts Apple and Nvidia as clients — controls more than half the world's output of silicon wafers, used in everything from smartphones to cars and missiles.

It has had to navigate geopolitical tussles between the United States and China in recent years as the two face off over technology import restrictions, trade and Taiwan — its primary manufacturing base.

The second factory "is scheduled to begin operation by the end of the 2027", TSMC said on Tuesday in a statement jointly issued with Sony Semiconductor Solutions Corporation, DENSO and Toyota.

"Together with JASM's first fab, which is scheduled to begin operation in 2024, the overall investment in JASM will exceed \$20 billion with strong support from the Japanese government," the statement said. Joint venture JASM, or Japan Advanced Semiconductor Manufacturing, is TSMC's majority-owned manufacturing subsidiary in Kumamoto



MUNICH: An employee carries a ladder under an Airbus A 350 at the Lufthansa terminal of the Franz-Josef-Strauss-airport in Munich. — AFP

next three years, as well as the "prompt payment of significant inflation bonuses".

But the union has rejected the offer as "totally unacceptable". The strike comes as Germany faces a growing wave of social unrest in the transport sector. Pilots with German airline Discover, a subsidi-

prefecture, where both factories will be based.

"In response to rising customer demand, JASM plans to commence construction of its second fab by the end of 2024. The increased production scale is also expected to improve overall cost structure and supply chain efficiency for JASM," the companies said.

Company chairman Mark Liu said last month the first foundry's opening ceremony would be on Feb 24. Total production capacity at both plants is expected to reach more than 100,000 12-inch wafers per month. The sites will add more than 3,400 high-tech professional jobs, they said.

TSMC said in a separate statement on Tuesday that its board of directors had approved a capital injection of up to \$5.26 billion into JASM, without elaborating. Japan's government said last year it planned to spend \$13 billion to boost domestic production of strategically important semiconductors and generative AI technology. Part of that spending would be to support the construction of a second TSMC plant in Kumamoto, a Japanese trade ministry official said in November.

The company said its board also approved on Tuesday capital injection of up to \$5 billion into its wholly-owned subsidiary TSMC Arizona, without elaborating. Global worries about Taipei's plummeting relations with Beijing, which claims the self-ruled island as its territory, have fuelled a US push to successfully woo TSMC into building the Arizona plant, one of the largest foreign investments in the country. — AFP

Nintendo lifts net profit forecast on weak yen

TOKYO: Game giant Nintendo raised its annual net profit forecast on Tuesday, saying the weak yen and steady sales of the Switch console, now in its seventh year, would boost earnings. Sales grew in the first three quarters for major releases including the new Zelda game, the company said, while the Super Mario movie helped sell games from the Mario franchise. Nintendo now expects net profit of 440 billion yen (\$2.96 billion) in the current financial year, up from its previously announced forecast of 420 billion yen.

"This fiscal year is the seventh year since the launch of Nintendo Switch, but sell-through has remained steady and there are more annual playing users than ever before," Nintendo said.

The Switch, both a handheld and TV-compatible device, became a must-have distraction among all age groups during the COVID pandemic, but buzz around the gadget is slowly fading.

The Kyoto-based firm sold 13.74 million Switch consoles in April-December 2023, down 7.8 percent year-on-year. Speculation is rife that Nintendo will soon announce a new console to replace the Switch, although the company has so far remained tight-lipped about its plans. — AFP

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2024



A vendor shows necklaces adorned with turquoise stones at the old bazaar.



Turquoise stones are displayed in a shop at the old bazaar.



Stone rings are displayed in a shop at the old bazaar.



A vendor shows turquoise stones to a customer at the old bazaar in the city of Shahr-e Ray (Rey).



A ring seller and manufacturer displays stone rings in his shop at the old bazaar in the city of Shahr-e Ray (Rey), south of Tehran, Iran. — AFP photos



Turquoise stone rings are displayed in a case at the old bazaar.



Turquoise stones are displayed in a shop at the old bazaar in the city of Shahr-e Ray.



A ring seller and manufacturer displays stone rings on a stall at the old bazaar in the city of Shahr-e Ray (Rey).

Iran's long-lasting love for gemstones



An Iranian man shows his stone rings at the old bazaar in the city of Shahr-e Ray (Rey).



A ring manufacturer works on an agate stone ring in his workshop at the old bazaar.



A ring manufacturer shapes a turquoise stone at the old bazaar.

At a prominent Shiite shrine in southern Tehran, Qasem Asghari was buying yet another gemstone ring in the hope it would help his prayers to be answered promptly. Asghari, in his 30s, who was already wearing several bands on each hand, had a specific ring in mind: a silver one, adorned with yellow agate and engraved with religious scripts. "The reward of one prayer is multiplied... if done with an agate ring," he told AFP while strolling through the meandering alleys of the market near the shrine of Shah Abdolazim.

Asghari's appreciation for gemstones is shared by many Shiite Muslims in Iran, where prominent male scholars and senior officials are often seen publicly sporting similar rings. Many in the Shiite-majority country attribute high religious significance to gemstones, which they view as a way to ensure divine protection, ward off evil, and prevent poverty.

Common beliefs associated with gemstones are largely what motivates people to buy them, said Hassan Samimi, a lapidary at the market. "It is very rare to find someone who wears a ring just for its beauty," said Samimi, 52, in his workshop where he carves large uncut gemstones for rings, necklaces, prayer beads and other items.

Agate and turquoise

Inside, one customer, Maryam, browsed through a collection of rings bearing agate, turquoise, topaz, lapis lazuli, emeralds and other stones. "I get



Turquoise stone rings are displayed in a shop at the old bazaar.

a good feeling from these stones," said the 50-year-old teacher after picking a turquoise set comprising a ring, earrings, and a bracelet. Samimi says his sales were mostly from agate and turquoise, the most revered stones, especially among Iran's religious community.

Turquoise has been mined in the country since the times of ancient Persia, with Iran home to one of the oldest such mines in the world. Its bluish-green color has inspired artists over the years and features prominently in Persian monuments and artefacts as well as Islamic architecture.

The turquoise from the eastern city of Neyshabur "is the most expensive," said Samimi. "The smoother and bluer the turquoise is, the higher its price is." Hamid Rashidi, another craftsman, says the stone is generally affordable but depending on the quality a piece could sell for as much as four billion rials (\$6,000-7,000).

Many Iranians believe it attracts wealth to the bearer and sometimes cite the religious saying "the hand that wears turquoise... will never see poverty". It is also believed "to enhance eyesight and calm the nerves", said Samimi. Agate,

especially from Yemen, is also popular "because it is recommended by imams" who often claim it can boost livelihoods, said Rashidi.

'Cultural heritage'

Iran's senior officials including Ayatollah Ali Khamenei have often been spotted wearing rings with agate or turquoise stones and the supreme leader has been known to gift them as tokens of his appreciation. The body of the revered Revolutionary Guards commander Qasem Soleimani, who was killed in a 2020 US strike in Baghdad, was in part identified by the agate ring he wore. Iran subsequently declared the ring "cultural heritage" and a "national asset". Samimi says demand for gemstones has remained relatively steady despite Iran's severe economic challenges. Inflation in the country has in recent years hovered near 50 percent while the rial has sharply declined against the dollar. "The stones market has become much better" over the years, he said, adding that there had been a significant increase in the number of craftsmen in the market compared with nearly three decades ago.

Its continued success, however, may hang on evolving tastes. Samimi admitted that agate and turquoise are not popular among younger generations. "Young people mostly buy rubies and emeralds and birthstones," he said. "For them, they are more fashionable." —AFP



Stone rings are displayed in a shop at the old bazaar.



Gemstones are displayed in a shop at the old bazaar.



A youth looks at stone rings in a shop at the old bazaar in the city of Shahr-e Ray (Rey).



A collection of stone rings, adorned with agate, turquoise, topaz, lapis lazuli, emeralds and other stones, are displayed in a shop at the old bazaar in the city of Shahr-e Ray (Rey).



A ring manufacturer shows an agate stone ring at the old bazaar.

Ice and fire

Antarctic volcano may hold clues to life on Mars



Tourists visit Deception Island in the western Antarctic Peninsula.— AFP Photos



A chinstrap (*Pygoscelis antarcticus*) penguin is pictured at Deception Island.



Tourists visit Deception Island in the western Antarctic Peninsula.



On Deception Island in Antarctica, steam rises from the beaches, and glaciers dot the black slopes of what is actually an active volcano - a rare clash of ice and fire that provides clues to scientists about what life could look like on Mars.

The horseshoe-shaped isle in the South Shetland Islands is the only place in the world where ships can sail into the caldera of an active volcano. In the waters here, some 420 kilometers (260 miles) from Chile's Port Williams, fish, krill, anemones and sea sponges survive, while unique species of lichen and moss grow on the surface in an ecosystem of extreme contrasts.

The island, uninhabited by people, is home to perhaps the world's largest colony of chinstrap penguins, seabirds, seals and sea lions. The volcano has been active for thousands of years, with the most recent eruptions - in 1967, 1969 and 1970 - devastating British and Chilean bases and forcing the evacuation of an Argentine base.

Yet life always returns and thrives on an island where water temperatures in steam vents, or fumaroles, have been measured at around 70 degrees Celsius (158 degrees Fahrenheit), even as air temperatures can plummet to -28 degrees. It is "similar to Mars because there what we have is a planet with (a past of) immense volcanic activity ... where currently there are very cold condi-

tions," Spanish planetary geologist Miguel de Pablo told AFP. "It is the best possible approximation that we can make to understand Mars without stepping on" that planet, added de Pablo.

Scientists believe an immense volcanic eruption changed the planet's atmosphere and led to the appearance of oceans and rivers that later evaporated. Even though temperatures on Mars are far lower

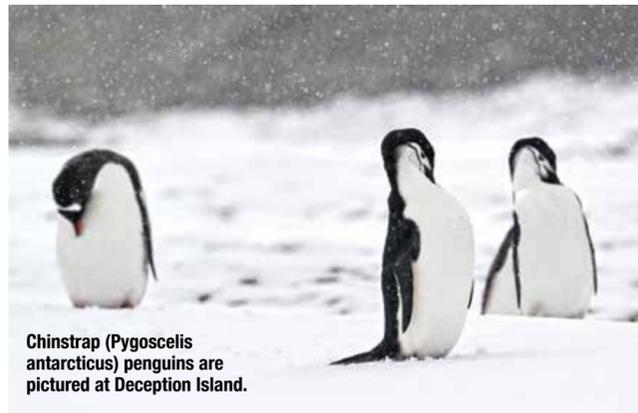
sent back to Earth sometime in the 2030s for lab analysis.

The South Shetlands are claimed by Britain, Chile and Argentina but are not administered by any one country. The 1959 Antarctic Treaty states they shall be used "for peaceful purposes" and guarantees "freedom of scientific investigation." Deception Island, first visited by British sealers in 1820, has a rich history, with abandoned scientific bases and an old whaling station resting in the icy air.

Wilson Andres Rios, a researcher and captain of a Colombian navy frigate conducting a scientific expedition in Antarctica, said the hunting of seals and whales from the island in the early 20th century was "indiscriminate." In 1931, a Norwegian whaling station on the island closed when the price of whale oil slumped.

Then, in 1944, Britain established a base there as part of a secret wartime mission to occupy Antarctic territories. After several evictions and eruptions, the island is now dedicated to scientific research. And, under the scientists' wary eyes, thousands of tourists now arrive on cruises.

That phenomenon, said Natalia Jaramillo, scientific coordinator of the Colombian expedition, is "worryingly increasing." — AFP



Chinstrap (*Pygoscelis antarcticus*) penguins are pictured at Deception Island.

A rich history

The analysis of rocks on Deception Island complements the work of engineers, scientists and astronomers who study Mars from afar. In 2023, researchers with the US space agency NASA concluded that Mars once had a climate with cyclical seasons, conducive to the development of life, according to evidence found on the red planet by the Curiosity rover.

now - estimated by NASA at about -153 degrees Celsius - "Antarctic conditions can help us understand if the conditions for the development of life could, or could have, existed on Mars," said de Pablo.

Another Mars rover, Perseverance, landed on the planet in February 2021 to look for signs of past microbial life. The multitasking rover will collect 30 rock and soil samples in sealed tubes to be



View of the remains of the Hector Whaling Company at Whaler's Bay in Deception Island.



View of the remains of the Hector Whaling Company at Whaler's Bay in Deception Island.



The Ocean Victory tourist ship sails at Whaler's Bay in Deception Island.



Tourists visit the remains of the Hector Whaling Company at Whaler's Bay in Deception Island.



View of the remains of the Hector Whaling Company at Whaler's Bay in Deception Island.



View of the remains of the Hector Whaling Company at Whaler's Bay in Deception Island.



Chinstrap (*Pygoscelis antarcticus*) penguins are pictured at Deception Island.



A chinstrap (*Pygoscelis antarcticus*) penguin is pictured at Deception Island.

Lifestyle



Waving glow sticks, and wearing sequin dresses and friendship bracelets, Chinese fans of American pop sensation Taylor Swift turn a normally-quiet Beijing cinema into a raucous celebration of their favourite singer.

The 14-time Grammy winner this month kicks off the Asia-Pacific leg of her "Eras" world tour with dates in Japan, Australia and, in March, Singapore. She won't, however, be stopping off in China, where she has a devoted fan base.

"She might have more fans in China than all her followers on Instagram," 31-year-old auto industry worker and superfan Flora Sun told AFP. A bold claim -- Swift has 280 million followers on Instagram. But the devotion is definitely intense, and fans hope that by packing out cinemas with wild watch parties for her concert film, "Taylor Swift: The Eras Tour", they can convince her to come perform.

"Today is the eighth time I have seen the film," 28-year-old educator Qi Yi told AFP at a recent watch party in the Chinese capital. Wearing a silver sequin



Chinese fans of US singer Taylor Swift reacting as they watch concert film "Taylor Swift: The Eras Tour" at a cinema in Beijing.—AFP photos

dress resembling one of Swift's concert outfits and holding a silver microphone, Qi said she was "really happy" the film was being shown in China.

Fans know every song by heart, belting out the lyrics word for word. Many have the number 13 -- Swift's lucky number -- in temporary tattoos on their hands. There are in-jokes aplenty: references to Swift's public spat with mercurial rapper Kanye West and even a special "Eras" currency.

"I go to the cinema every weekend to watch it," said 25-year-old Mu Guangyuan, dressed in a purple-and-black graduation robe mimicking one Swift wore when she received an honorary degree in 2022.

He and his friends held papers proving their status as graduates of Taylor Swift University -- with a degree in "Doctor of Swiftie". Mu told AFP he's been a fan for 15 years -- and that he is going to Singapore to see her next month. "I'm

really looking forward to seeing her," he said. "I also really hope that she can come to China and meet us Chinese fans." More than 1.8 million movie tickets have been sold since the concert film's release in December -- making it the highest-grossing music documentary in China with 93 million yuan (\$13 million) in earnings.

'Positive energy'

Fans said they would see every one of her gigs if she made it to China. "Be it Shanghai, Beijing, Guangzhou or Shenzhen -- wherever Taylor Swift holds her concert, I will go and watch every one of them," one 22-year-old fan said.

Not everyone is so optimistic that she will come to China. Jess Wang, a megafan who has seen Swift perform in the United States, said she believed that authorities would disapprove of the American superstar's progressive politics. Her open support for LGBTQ causes, her decision to work with dancers who do not conform to traditional gender roles and "revealing" -- by Chinese standards -- clothing could all land her in Beijing's bad books, Wang argued.



A Chinese fan showing souvenirs with the image of US singer Taylor Swift before watching concert film "Taylor Swift: The Eras Tour".

"I don't think Taylor Swift's team would risk censoring (those things) just to get the approval." And for her fans, that message of openness and good vibes is what they love about her in the first place. "Taylor Swift gives me positive energy, which helps me to work hard", student Liu Jingyi said. "She gives me a lot of strength."—AFP



A Chinese fan shows his T-shirt with image of US singer Taylor Swift.



Chinese fans reading a lyrics book of US singer Taylor Swift before watching concert film "Taylor Swift: The Eras Tour".



Chinese fans of US singer Taylor Swift reacting as they watch concert film "Taylor Swift: The Eras Tour" at a cinema in Beijing.

India's tigers climb high as climate, human pressure rises

Tigers in India have been photographed in high-altitude mountains rarely seen before, with experts suggesting relentless human pressure and a heating climate are driving them from traditional hunting grounds.

Researchers from the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) said they were surprised to find "multiple pictures" of tigers in the mountains of Sikkim -- the Indian state squeezed between Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet -- including one snapped at 3,966 metres (13,011 feet). The camera traps were installed in "high-altitude regions to understand the impact of climate changes on large mammals", said Sandeep Tambe, ecologist and chief warden of Sikkim's forest department.

"One of the major possible causes may be the impact of climate change and rising anthropogenic pressure," said WII researcher Pooja Pant.

Tigers have been spotted in the colder higher mountains before. In neighbouring Nepal have been spotted at a record 4,000 metres, according to the World Wide Fund For Nature (WWF). As long as there is enough prey, tigers are usually expected to stay in warmer forests lower down. But they are now being seen more regularly at higher reaches.

While tigers are known to range over varied terrains and altitudes, the highest concentration of the big cats in the Corbett Tiger Reserve is in the foothills of the Himalayas, ranging from around 385 to 1,100 metres. In India, WWF director Anamitra Anurag Danda said a tiger had

been spotted at 3,602 metres by a WWF team in Sikkim in 2019, while another in the state was spotted at 3,640 metres last year.

'Tiger migration'

"It may be a range shift of tigers," said Pranabesh Sanyal, a geologist and



a leading tiger expert in Kolkata. "In the past two decades, temperatures at high altitudes have warmed faster than at altitudes below 2,000 meters. Due to climate change, tiger migration is taking place." As global temperatures rise due to climate change, scientists have documented swaths of species shifting their ranges. Last month, the UN's World Meteorological Organization said the 2023 annual average global temperature was 1.45 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels (1850-1900) -- the warmest year on record.

Scientists have warned that any rise

above 1.5 C risks the collapse of ecosystems and the triggering of irreversible shifts in the climate system. Conservation biologist Qamar Qureshi, chairman of WII's Tiger Cell, said tigers would usually prefer lower-altitude forested valleys.

"Climbing of the mountains by the tigers... proves that they are under pres-

sure," he said, noting both an "increasing human population, along with the increasing number of tigers". But Qureshi also suggested one reason more tigers were being reported higher than before was partly due to increasing technology -- including both sophisticated camera traps, and more people with camera phones using social media.

Tiger expert Shrikant Chandola, who was Uttarakhand's top forest official before retirement, said that tigers can still cope in the cold. But he said tigers were moving because human-wildlife conflict was "increasing everywhere" with grow-

ing construction, coupled with more competition for food. "The prey base of the tiger is decreasing, due to which his nature is also becoming irritable," he said. "Young tigers are trying to push the older and less powerful tigers out", he added.

'Small islands in a vast sea'

India is believed to have had a tiger population of around 40,000 at the time of independence from Britain in 1947.

That fell to about 3,700 in 2002 and an all-time low of 1,411 four years later, but numbers have since risen steadily to above 3,000. India has more than tripled protected areas for tigers past half century, now made up of 53 reserves totalling 75,796 kilometres squared (29,265 miles squared), an area bigger than neighbouring Sri Lanka. But pressures are growing.

"Most tiger reserves and protected areas in India are existing as small islands in a vast sea of ecologically unsustainable land use," India's Status of Tiger report reads, released in 2022.

"Although some habitat corridors exist that allow tiger movement between them, most of these habitats are not protected areas," it noted, warning those areas "continue to deteriorate further due to unsustainable human use and developmental projects". Dheeraj Pandey, field director of the Corbett Tiger Reserve in Uttarakhand state, said awareness campaigns were being run to try to mitigate the impact of tigers on the people who live around parks. —AFP



File photo shows a Bengal Tiger pauses in a jungle clearing a Kaziranga National Park.



File photo shows a Bengal tiger reacts while cooling off in a pond at Alipore Zoological Garden in Kolkata.—AFP photos

US country music star Toby Keith dies aged 62

Country music star Toby Keith, celebrated in Middle America for his patriotic fervor and songs extolling the pleasures of drinking, has passed away aged 62, a statement on his social media account said Tuesday. "Toby Keith passed peacefully last night on February 5th surrounded by his family. He fought his fight with grace and courage," a statement posted to Keith's account on X, formerly Twitter, stated.



The Oklahoma-born singer, who was a roughneck in the oil fields of his home state before breaking into country in the 1990s, had been diagnosed with stomach cancer in 2022. Keith was a controversial figure who often raised eyebrows for the intensity of his nationalist sentiments, with detractors calling him jingoistic.

"Courtesy of the Red, White and Blue (The Angry American)," released in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, memorably has the line, "We'll put a boot in your ass / It's the American way."

In "The Taliban Song," Keith describes ordinary Afghans praying for US forces to drive out the foreign fighters of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda -- which was led by the Saudi-born Osama bin Laden. In the chorus, Keith sings, "Ride, camel, ride!" Usually clad in a cowboy hat, he also had a long list of songs exploring the cathartic effects of alcohol including "I Love This Bar," "Whiskey Girl," "Get Drunk and Be Somebody," "Drinks After Work" and "Drunk Americans."—AFP

Sports

Australia take just 6.5 overs to destroy woeful WI in 3rd ODI

Our batting let us down as it did for the entire series: Captain Shai Hope

CANBERRA: Australia needed just 6.5 overs to thrash a woeful West Indies by eight wickets in an embarrassing end to their one-day international series in Canberra on Tuesday, with Jake Fraser-McGurk slamming 41 off 18 balls.

The hosts won the first game in Melbourne by eight wickets and the second in Sydney by 83 runs to clinch the series, with the West Indies playing for pride. But after Australia skipper Steve Smith won the toss and sent them in on a humid day, they crumbled to 86 all out in the 25th over against an attack missing Josh Hazlewood, Pat Cummins and Mitchell Starc.

In reply, Australia recorded their shortest successful run chase in the format with 259 balls remaining to cap a stunning capitulation by the Caribbean side. "It was a good performance, the bowlers put it in the right areas and everything seemed to work out. One of those days where everything came off," said Smith.

"It's been good opportunity to expose a few players to international cricket and they've shown that they can play at this level." Explosive 21-year-old opener Fraser-McGurk showed his immense talent in only his second match with five fours and three sixes in an electric 41 before he was caught going for another big hit off Alzarri Joseph.

Aaron Hardie was the only other wicket to fall, caught behind for two off Oshane Thomas. Josh Inglis blasted an unbeaten 35 while Smith was not out six. Earlier, pacesman Xavier Bartlett took 4-21 to go with the 4-17 he bagged on his debut in Melbourne. Fellow

fast bowler Lance Morris grabbed 2-13 before leaving the field with a side strain.

"Our batting let us down. It did for the entire series," said West Indies captain Shai Hope. "We need to do some real soul searching to understand what's needed in certain conditions. Can't really put your finger on one thing, it comes down to mindset."

Bartlett struck early with Kjom Otley trapped lbw for eight and, while Alick Athanaze and Keacy Carty steadied the ship, they were in survival mode, with just 36 runs coming from the opening 10 overs. Their partnership ended when Morris was introduced and grabbed his first international wicket, courtesy of Mar-nus Labuschagne holding a spectacular diving catch at point to remove Carty for 10.

Hope needed a big score and drove Morris to the ropes, but he lasted just five balls before falling lbw to Shaun Abbott, leaving the visitors in trouble on 43-3. Debutant Teddy Bishop soon followed for a duck, undone by the sheer pace of Morris whose fullish ball clattered the middle stump before he left the field midway through his fifth over. Athanaze was the one shining light, making a battling 32 off 60 balls before mis-hitting a sweep off spinner Adam Zampa with Abbott collecting a simple catch.

Two more wickets in three balls left the West Indies reeling, with Romario Shepherd out for a golden duck to Bartlett and Matthew Forde run out after a comical mix-up with Roston Chase. Bartlett then cleaned up the tail with two more wickets. — AFP



CANBERRA: Australian players celebrate their 3-0 victory in the series after defeating West Indies in the third one-day international (ODI) cricket match at the Manuka Oval in Canberra on February 6, 2024. — AFP

News in Brief

Quintana doctor doping trial

MARSEILLE: Nairo Quintana's former team doctor will go on trial in Marseille in September, suspected of helping the Colombian cyclist to dope during the 2020 Tour de France, French prosecutors said on Tuesday. After the Tour four years ago a probe into Quintana's then team, Arkea-Samsic, was opened after suspicious substances had been discovered during the race. "The investigation has closed and it was decided to pursue Fredy Alexander Gonzales Torres, the team's Colombian doctor," authorities in Marseille told AFP. Torres is suspected of "possessing a substance or method that is prohibited for a sporting use without medical justification" it added. He is also facing charges of administering a banned substance to Quintana, and his teammate and brother Dayer Quintana, without medical justification during the Tour. Torres risks a five-year prison sentence and a 75,000 euros (\$80,500) fine. Former Giro d'Italia and Vuelta a Espana champion Quintana, 33, said he had "nothing to hide" after the 2020 investigation. — AFP

Naqvi elected as PCB chief

LAHORE: Media mogul Mohsin Naqvi elected chairman of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) Tuesday, a volatile position frequently the target of political interference. Naqvi, who is also the caretaker chief minister of Punjab province as the cricket-mad country heads into an election on Thursday, will serve a three-year term. "I am deeply honoured and humbled to have been unanimously elected," Naqvi said in a statement from the PCB. "I am fully committed to upgrading the standard of the game in the country and bringing professionalism in the administration of cricket in Pakistan." Naqvi, 45, is the first chairman to be elected since Ramiz Raja was sacked in December 2022, with Najam Sethi and Zaka Ashraf appointed head of interim boards in the intervening months. Pakistan cricket has a history of political meddling, with the incumbent prime minister usually the patron of the board and allowed to nominate two officials to the 10-member body that elects the chairman. — AFP

Second century for Williamson as NZ extend lead

MOUNT MAUNGANUI: Kane Williamson crafted his second century of the match Tuesday as New Zealand took complete command of the first Test on day three against understrength South Africa.

Run machine Williamson was out for a rapid 109 as the home side reached 179-4 in their second innings at Mount Maunganui, extending their overall lead to 528 runs by stumps. Daryl Mitchell was at the crease on 11 and Tom Blundell on five, with the Black Caps looking to declare early on Wednesday with South Africa facing a mammoth target on a deteriorating Bay Oval pitch.

The depleted Proteas were dismissed for 162 soon before tea in response to New Zealand's first innings 511. The follow-on wasn't enforced, allowing the world's top-ranked batsman Williamson to craft another big score to follow his 118 in the first innings.

It was the former skipper's 31st Test century but the first time he has reached three figures twice in the same match. The 34-year-old played with aggression from the outset, striking 12 fours and a six in a 132-ball stay that signalled New Zealand's intent

before he was stumped off the bowling of Proteas captain Neil Brand.

New Zealand coach Stead said Williamson's prolific form was "fantastic" for his team-mates, noting the role he played as a support act when Rachin Ravindra posted a maiden double century in the first innings. "Kane's been an incredible player for us and he keeps churning out the runs," Stead said.

"He's a tired lad in their now, he'll be getting a bit of treatment tonight I'd imagine, but he's just fantastic for the team." Stead wouldn't say if New Zealand will declare overnight, preferring to "keep them guessing".

He explained the decision not to enforce the follow-on, deeming the fitness of his bowling attack a priority ahead of next week's second Test, followed by two Tests against Australia. "We just felt this is the first of four Tests in a pretty quick period of time for us and we wanted to make sure our bowlers had an element of freshness to them."

As was the case in the first innings, Williamson survived a dropped catch in the outfield, with Edward Moore again the culprit when he was on 61. Moore responded in the following over by catching Devon Conway for 29 off Brand's spin bowling, ending a partnership of 92 with Williamson after opener Tom Latham fell cheaply.

The second-string nature of South Africa's side was exposed when they lost their last six wickets for 82 runs on Tuesday. The top score was 45 from Kegan Petersen who, in his 13th Test, is the most expe-



MOUNT MAUNGANUI: New Zealand's Kane Williamson celebrates reaching his century during day three of the first cricket test match between New Zealand and South Africa at the Bay Oval in Mount Maunganui on February 6, 2024. — AFP

rienced batsman in the squad after most first-choice players remained behind to compete in a domestic Twenty20 competition.

Petersen lost his overnight partner David Bedingham for 32 when trying to hook seamer Matt Henry, before Ruan de Swardt followed for a second-ball duck in the same over. Wicketkeeper Clyde Fortuin, one of six Proteas debutants, departed for nine just before the tourists went to lunch at 129-7. Henry took 3-31 and Mitchell Santner capitalised on spin-friendly conditions to finish with 3-34. — AFP

Equestrian lovers to enjoy thrills at Marina beach

KUWAIT: Lovers of Equestrian Sport in general and showjumping in particular will enjoy the excitement at the Marina beach during 'The Stadium' International Showjumping Championship of three stars that qualify for the World Cup under the patronage of KIB from 2 pm Thursday until Saturday evening by holding the grand prize heat at 150 cm height.

The 9th and final heat will be the highest at an international championship held in Kuwait during the current season 2023-2024. Suffix CEO Ahmad Al-Majed said the championship will have Kuwait's elite riders as well as those from Arab and European countries and "we are ready to host this event at the Marina beach".

He said sport has become an industry and is part of the state economy and there will be another championship of the two star category next week. The judges committee will be headed by Kuwait's Sharon Al-Quoud with Nabeela Al-Ali, Nadhar Mustafa, Raghad Al-Dabous and members.



Veteran US women gymnasts to light up Paris Games

KATY: Superstar Simone Biles leads a list of veteran champions vying with a talented new generation aiming to make a US women's Olympic gymnastics team that could be one for the ages. Biles, who dazzled in winning four gold medals at the Rio de Janeiro Olympics in 2016, returned last year from a two-year absence to win four world titles—taking her career tally to 23 as she battled back from the bout of the disorientating "twisties" that cut short her Tokyo Olympics campaign.

Sunisa Lee, who won Olympic all-around gold in Tokyo, and London 2012 all-around champion Gabby Douglas are also in training as what promises to be a hyper-competitive Olympic year gets underway. Add in Tokyo floor champion Jade Carey and team silver medalist Jordan Chiles, two-time world all-around medalist Shilese Jones and two-time world team champion Skye Blakely and it is clear the US has plenty of experienced talent to draw on.

"The depth this year is actually really insane," said 17-year-old Joscelyn Roberson, who is hoping to be in the Paris 2024 conversation when Minneapolis hosts the US trials in June. "I honestly think this will be one of the best teams the United States has ever had and one of the best teams that the world has ever seen." Roberson said



KATY: US gymnast Sunisa Lee participates in a workout at the USA Gymnastics Women's Artistic and Rhythmic Gymnastics Media Day in Katy, Texas on February 5, 2024. — AFP

Sunday at a media opportunity during a USA Gymnastics training camp in Katy, Texas. "So it'll be really cool to see. I honestly feel like the United States could make three teams and they'd all be amazing." Roberson qualified for last year's World Championships and helped the US team win gold before her campaign was cut short by injury.

Roberson has had Paris 2024 circled on her calendar for a while. "Probably from like eight or nine (years old) I was, like, 'OK, so that's my year,'" she said. "Ever since then I've been counting down the years." Now that it has arrived, she said, it's nerve wracking but exciting.

"It feels like any other season. But then you always have

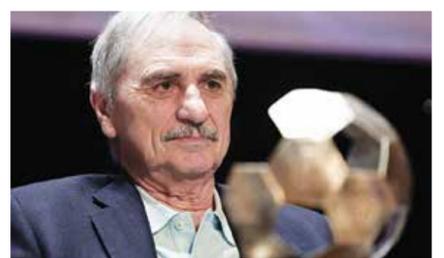
it in the back of your mind, like, 'Oh my gosh, at the end of the season I'll be trying to go to Olympic trials and the Olympics,'" she said. Jones, who missed out on a Tokyo Games berth, said the arrival of youngsters like Roberson and fellow teenagers Tiana Sumanasekera, Zoe Miller and Kaliya Lincoln, who all helped the US to Pan American Games gold last year, will make the path to Paris a tough one. "There's babies coming up to teenagers to older athletes—that's me being one of them," Jones said. "So it should be fun. Honestly, I feel like we're already working really hard pushing off each other. It's going to be tough, and I'm looking forward to it."

Case by case expectations

The first big test for many of America's hopefuls will be the Winter Cup held on February 23-25. The Core Hydration Classic in May will be another key competition before the US championships on May 30-June 2, with the US trials June on 22-30.

Alicia Sacramone Quinn a former world champion who won team silver at the 2008 Olympics and is now part of the US women's elite team leadership, said she likes the mix of old and new blood. But she cautioned it would be months before a team coalesces as the seasoned competitors she calls the "super seniors" ramp up their training and youngsters chase competitive experience.

"I think the expectations are a case by case," she said. "Right now each athlete's in a different point, either they're nursing some aches and pains or had an injury or they're a seasoned vet who doesn't need to be really ready for early spring meets. Each athlete's journey is their own," she added. — AFP



Gonzalez dies at 76

MADRID: Real Madrid announced Tuesday their former goalkeeping great Miguel Angel Gonzalez has died aged 76 years old. Gonzalez played for Madrid between 1968-1986, winning eight league titles and two UEFA Cups among 16 trophies, making 346 appearances. "Real Madrid, their president and their board of directors deeply mourn the death of Miguel Angel Gonzalez, one of the great goalkeepers in our history, a legend at Real Madrid and in Spanish football," said Los Blancos in a statement. Spanish media reported Gonzalez was suffering from the neurodegenerative disease commonly known as ALS. The goalkeeper, who worked at Real Madrid after retirement in a variety of roles, also went to the 1978 and 1982 World Cups as part of the Spain squad. — AFP

Sports

Naomi Osaka falls in Abu Dhabi

Osaka due back on court to team up with Tunisian Ons Jabeur in doubles

ABU DHABI: Naomi Osaka's comeback hit another roadblock as she suffered a 7-5, 6-0 defeat to former world number seven Danielle Collins in the first round of the Abu Dhabi Open on Tuesday. Osaka, 26, returned last month from a 15-month absence from the tour, during which she gave birth to her first child Shai, but has been handed some tricky draws and has lost three of her four matches so far this campaign.

Despite a close opening set that witnessed supreme serving from both players, Osaka struggled in her service games in the second set and failed to convert any of her six break point opportunities to fall to the American qualifier in one hour and 23 minutes. "I know she's still only a couple of matches into her comeback. But I think she's playing well," said Collins, who is currently ranked 71 in the world.

"She played a good first set and was serving very well and doing some really great things out on court. I'm sure at this point it's just kind of regaining confidence and getting more matches under her belt and getting back into the routine of tournaments and that stuff, which can be challenging. But I thought she played well overall."

Japan's Osaka won her first three meetings with Collins but had lost their most recent affair coming into Abu Dhabi, a straight-set defeat to the American in the first round of the 2022 US Open. In windy conditions in the UAE capital, neither player was troubled on serve early on, with the first deuce of the contest coming in the 10th game as Collins served to stay in the set but the American shook off the pres-

sure to hold for 5-5. Collins created the first break point opportunities of the match in game 11 and converted her second chance to inch ahead 6-5. Despite hitting a couple of double faults, Collins managed to close out the frame on her fourth set point to take the lead in 54 minutes.

Next up Rybakina

Each player dropped just two points behind their first serve in the opening set but it was Collins that capitalized on her chances, and with the wind in her sails, the former Australian Open finalist soon went up a triple-break 5-0 against Osaka in the second set. Osaka tried to narrow the deficit but Collins played flawlessly on the break points, saving all six she faced on her way to a second-round meeting with the top-seeded Elena Rybakina. Osaka is due back on court in Abu Dhabi later on Tuesday to team up with Tunisian Ons Jabeur in doubles against Chinese duo Zheng Saisai and Wang Xinyu.

The 30-year-old Collins has announced this will be her final season on tour and has herself navigated some brutal draws in her first five weeks of 2024.

At the Australian Open, she beat three-time major winner Angelique Kerber before falling to world number one Iga Swiatek in round two. She has been handed two more grand slam champions in Abu Dhabi in the form of Osaka and 2022 Wimbledon winner Rybakina.

Collins said wanting to live a normal life away from the constant travel and the daily grind on tour has



ABU DHABI: Japan's Naomi Osaka hits a return against Danielle Collins of the US during the women's singles match at the Mubadala Abu Dhabi Open tennis tournament in Abu Dhabi on February 6, 2024. — AFP

been the main reason behind her decision to retire at the end of this season.

"At this point I feel like I'm ready for the next chapter and I'm really excited about it. I needed to

have an end date and it gives my family and friends the ability to come support me in some final tournaments. I think that will be really special," said the player from Florida. — AFP

Kelce aiming to match Swift's Grammy glut with Super Bowl win

LAS VEGAS: Travis Kelce says he wants to match girlfriend Taylor Swift's record-breaking Grammy exploits by bringing home some silverware of his own at this week's Super Bowl. The final countdown to the biggest event in the American sporting calendar got under way in Las Vegas on Monday with the traditional opening night media circus.

An estimated 30,000 fans packed into Allegiant Stadium — venue for Sunday's showpiece between Kelce's Kansas City Chiefs and the San Francisco 49ers — to salute players from both teams during staggered two-hour media sessions. Unsurprisingly, it was Kelce, the Chiefs' larger-than-life tight end whose relationship with pop icon Swift has captivated the NFL this season, who found himself center stage, surrounded by a large scrum of media from around the world.

Twenty-four hours earlier, Swift had made history by winning her fourth Album of the Year award at the Grammys, a record tally that saw her pull clear of icons such as Frank Sinatra, Paul Simon and Stevie Wonder. Kelce — who could win a third Super Bowl crown on Sunday — quipped that he was now under pressure to match his pop partner's achievements. "She's unbelievable," a relaxed Kelce said of Swift. "She's rewriting the history books. I told her I need to hold up my end of the bargain and bring home some hardware, too."



LAS VEGAS: Travis Kelce of the Kansas City Chiefs speaks during Super Bowl LVIII Opening Night at Allegiant Stadium in Las Vegas, Nevada. — AFP

"Taylor has an unbelievable fan base that follows her and supports her throughout her life and it has been fun to gather the Swifties and the Chiefs Kingdom and open them to the football world and sports world and it has been cool to just experience that."

On a mission

Kelce, meanwhile, admitted he is on a mission to clinch back-to-back Super Bowls with Kansas City following last year's win over the Philadelphia Eagles. Kelce and the Chiefs missed the chance to repeat in 2021 when they were beaten by the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, a year after downing the 49ers in Miami. "That has motivated me to get back to this point right here," Kelce said of the 2021 defeat. "You'll hear me say this a lot — but I've wanted this more than I've ever wanted to win a Super Bowl in

my life. "That tier of teams who have won it (back-to-back) have gone down as some of the greats."

Las Vegas is hosting the Super Bowl for the first time on Sunday and the Nevada gambling hub has clearly embraced the occasion judging by Monday's opening extravaganza. "They're the Mecca of the world for entertainment," Kelce said. "To be a part of the first one ever is pretty historical. I'm definitely I'm enjoying this right now."

On the next podium, a similar-sized crowd of media thronged around Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes, who like Kelce could win his third Vince Lombardi Trophy with a victory this weekend. The 28-year-old, regarded as the finest quarterback of his generation, pushed back at being mentioned in the same breath as NFL great Tom Brady, insisting comparisons to the seven-time Super Bowl winner were premature.

"I'm not even close to halfway, so I haven't put a lot of thought into it," Mahomes said of comparisons to Brady. "If you ask me that question in like 15 years, I'll see if I can get close to seven. But seven seems like a long ways away still."

While Mahomes eyes a possible third Super Bowl title, San Francisco counterpart Brock Purdy is playing in the NFL championship game for the first time. Purdy has reached the pinnacle of his sport despite being chosen with the 262nd and final pick of the NFL Draft in 2022, earning him the "Mr. Irrelevant" nickname.

"Do I think it's time to pick a new nickname? I'm okay with Mr. Irrelevant, it's all good," Purdy said. Purdy, meanwhile, says he will have no hesitation in ruining the script for Kelce and Swift on Sunday. Asked if he was prepared to leave Taylor Swift disappointed, he replied simply: "Yes." — AFP

Russian weightlifter refuses to give up on Olympic dream

TULA: Defiant weightlifter Oleg Musokhranov has told AFP "Russians never throw in the towel" as he contemplates sitting out the Paris Olympics later this year. Even though he will be 33 by 2028, the four-time champion of Russia is already looking ahead to the Los Angeles Olympics in 2028. "It is not the end of the world," he said. Musokhranov said he would only contemplate competing at this year's edition of the quadrennial sporting showpiece if "the Russian national anthem was played and the flag was present." Neither will feature at the Paris Games that run from July 26 to August 11 due to restrictions laid down by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) as a result of Russia's military operation in Ukraine launched in February 2022.

Athletes from Russia and their allies Belarus will have to compete under neutral status. "For an athlete, it is hugely important to compete under your national flag and to have the national anthem," he said, speaking in late January on the sidelines of a competition in Tula, 200 kilometres (125 miles) south of Moscow. Russia has condemned the conditions set by the IOC as "discriminatory". They sparked a furious reaction from Russian weightlifting federation president Maxim Agapitov, who has ruled out his athletes competing. In a letter addressed to AFP, the 53-year-old former world champion derided the Paris Games as "a festival ridiculously and unfortunately branded as the Olympic Games".

'Satisfy those needs'

Agapitov is especially agitated because a generation of weightlifters of Musokhranov's vintage may now never experience an Olympics. He said the career of a weightlifter was "short" and it was "difficult" to remain at the top for several years.

"But it is possible," Agapitov added, adopting a more positive tone — he himself was 27 when he topped the podium in the -91 kilogramme category at the 1997 world championships in Chiang Mai, Thailand. Musokhranov agrees a lot of weightlifters at his age call it a day but he believes his form is good enough for him to plug on with an eye on Los Angeles in four years' time. "I feel as strong as ever. I have not lost my motivation with regards to training," said the father of two daughters.

Musokhranov's desire to carry on and experience an Olympics is understandable given his longstanding love affair with the sport — coming about by chance as aged 11 he waited for a friend to emerge from training. "Everything depends on your body and your hunger," said Musokhranov, who served a three-month doping suspension in 2013. "I am very hungry. The body has no alternative but to satisfy those needs," he added with a smile. Paris will certainly miss his showmanship. He dances onto the stage with a mischievous look in his eyes which he says is to put psychological "pressure" on his rivals. It certainly worked in Tula as a few minutes after speaking to AFP he had won the 61kg category at the Russia Cup. — AFP

Martin tops MotoGP Sepang day one as Bagnaia suffers crash

SEPANG: Spaniard Jorge Martin topped the timesheets on the opening day of the MotoGP pre-season test at the Sepang Circuit in Malaysia Tuesday to ensure a Ducati domination as world champion Francesco Bagnaia suffered an early crash. Riding a Prima Pramac machine, the 26-year-old Martin stamped his early dominance with a time of 1 min 58.904 sec on lap 15.

Last year's championship runner-up then bettered that two hours into the session by clocking the fastest lap time of 1 min 57.951 sec. His compatriot, 19-year-old sensation, Pedro Acosta came in second fastest with a time of 1 min 58.220 sec, with Yamaha's Fabio Quartararo completing the top three.

Italian duo Fabio Di Giannantonio and Enea Bastianini made it a good day for Ducati by finishing fourth and fifth fastest respectively. Martin, who was only a half a second adrift of the fastest Sepang lap, played down his time. "I think it's good to be fast,

better than to be slow for sure. But I didn't really look too much into the lap times, the most important thing to look at is about the performance and the handling," he said after completing 59 laps.

"Overall it was a nice day, I did a lot of laps so I am happy." Acosta, who will be making his debut in the premiere class this year, was elated with his performance over 60 laps. "I am just focused on growing up every day and try to improve every time I am on that bike," he said.

Two-time world champion Bagnaia, on a Ducati, crashed out on his first lap but the Italian recovered to finish 16th fastest. Six-time world champion Marc Marquez had to contend with technical issues on his Ducati bike but managed to finish ninth fastest.

Pre-Season MotoGP test times on Tuesday at the Sepang Circuit (5.543km): Jorge Martin (ESP/Ducati) 1 min 57.951 sec, Pedro Acosta (ESP/



SEPANG: Ducati Italian rider Francesco Bagnaia (R) sits beside team members during the first day of the pre-season MotoGP test at the Sepang International Circuit in Sepang on February 6, 2024. — AFP

KTMI) 1 min 58.220 sec, Fabio Quartararo (FRA/Yamaha) 1 min 58.228 sec, Fabio Di Giannantonio (ITA/Ducati) 1 min 58.325 sec, Enea Bastianini (ITA/Ducati) 1 min 58.357 sec, Maverick Vinales (ESP/Aprilia) 1 min 58.470 sec, Alex Marquez (ESP/Ducati) 1 min 58.542 sec, Marco Bezzecchi (ITA/Ducati) 1 min 58.605 sec, Marc Marquez (ESP/Ducati) 1 min 58.621 sec, Johann Zarco (FRA/Honda) 1 min 58.670 sec. — AFP

Classifieds

Clinics & Hospitals

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khalidiya	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, Manal Sayed Maqbool, holder of Indian Passport No. V6131787 having permanent address in Tamil Nadu, India, 600030, residing in Kuwait at present hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as (given name) Kristina Lillian and (surname) Vijay. (#5156 7-02-2024)

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, Reuel Chanan Vijay Kumar, holder of Indian Passport No. V7779497, having permanent address in Tamil Nadu, India, 600030, residing in Kuwait at present hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as (given name) Reuel Shawn and (surname) Vijay. (#5156 7-02-2024)

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



AL-RAYYAN: Jordan's players celebrate after defeating South Korea at the end of the Qatar 2023 AFC Asian Cup semi-final football match between Jordan and South Korea at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium in Al-Rayyan, west of Doha, on February 6, 2024. — AFP

Jordan stun S Korea to reach Asian Cup final for first time

Iran and Qatar play on Wednesday for other spot in Saturday's final

DOHA: Jordan powered past Son Heung-min's South Korea 2-0 on Tuesday to reach their first Asian Cup final and a showdown with Iran or hosts and holders Qatar. Playing in the semi-finals for the first time and ranked 64 places lower, Jordan were full value for their victory over Jurgen Klinsmann's shell-shocked side. South Korea's talisman Son endured a frustrating night and his country's wait for a first Asian Cup since 1960 goes on.

Jordan had more of the chances and deservedly went ahead soon after the break, Yazan Al-Naimat scoring his third goal of

the tournament after South Korea gave the ball away cheaply. They had been in a losing position in four of their matches in Qatar, but there was no way back this time for the Koreans when Mousa Al-Tamari sliced his way through the South Korean defence 13 minutes later.

South Korea simply could not handle the pace and power of the attacking duo of Naimat and Tamari. Son stood with his hands on his hips at the final whistle in disbelief. Jordan fans were in the majority among the crowd of 43,000 at Ahmad bin Ali Stadium, a 2022 World Cup venue,

and jeered and whistled loudly whenever South Korea had the ball.

Jordan were the underdogs — despite the teams drawing 2-2 in the group phase — but they shaded an entertaining first half in which they racked up 12 attempts at goal to South Korea's four. On 17 minutes South Korean goalkeeper Jo Hyeon-woo was forced into a decent save from Noor Al-Rawabdeh after good work from Montpellier's Tamari.

Jo kept out a fierce drive from Naimat after the South Korean defence opened up, before Tamari blazed over the bar. On

the half-hour referee Mohammed Abdulla Hassan from the UAE awarded Klinsmann's side a penalty after a collision in the Jordan box between Seol Young-woo and Yazan Al-Arab, but changed his mind after consulting the pitchside monitor.

Lee Jae-sung pinged a header onto the post — South Korea's first proper chance — then Naimat slalomed his way through three weak Korean challenges before drawing a close-range stop from Jo. Hwang In-beom skied a golden chance way over the bar with just the goalkeeper to beat on the stroke of half time.

Skipper and Tottenham ace Son, who scored the extra-time winner over Australia in the quarter-finals, had yet to stamp his authority on the semi-final and his side were behind on 53 minutes. Park Yong-woo gave the ball away, Tamari ran towards goal and slipped in Naimat, who popped a cool finish over the advancing Jo.

South Korea could not cope with the rampaging duo and on 66 minutes Tamari drove to the edge of the box before unloading past an exposed Jo. Iran and Qatar play on Wednesday for the other spot in Saturday's final. — AFP



Abdulaziz Emad wins taekwondo bronze

ABU DHABI: Kuwait's Abdulaziz Emad won the bronze medal on Monday in the 11th edition of the Fujairah International Taekwondo Championship. Emad said in remarks to Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that this achievement will only motivate him to continue training and prepare for upcoming tournaments and push for more success.

He also praised the support from the Kuwait Taekwondo Federation and the efforts of the coaches and the associated agencies that played a role in this achievement. Emad dedicated his medal to Kuwait, the coaches, and everyone who supported him throughout this challenge while encouraging every young athlete to follow their dreams. — KUNA

Foden hat-trick hauls Man City within two points of EPL lead

LONDON: Pep Guardiola said Phil Foden is enjoying his best season at Manchester City after the England international's hat-trick beat Brentford 3-1 on Monday to leave the Premier League's top three separated by just two points.

City move alongside Arsenal on 49 points, two behind Liverpool, but Guardiola's men have a game in hand to move out in front. The defending champions became the first side in Premier League history to win four consecutive away games despite falling behind in all of them.

Neal Maupay fired the Bees in front against the run of play, but there was little doubt over the outcome once Foden levelled in first-half stoppage time. Kevin De Bruyne and Erling Haaland then teed up the England international to complete his second career hat-trick after the break. "He's a guy with a sense of goal," said Guardiola after Foden took his tally for the season to 14.

"I think he is playing his best season since we are together. The incidence of goals and assists, of playing in this central position, are unbelievable." City's rivals for the title may rue not opening up an advantage while De Bruyne and Haaland were sidelined by injury in recent months as they look primed to become the first side to ever win four consecutive English top-flight titles.

Djokovic, Nadal to play 'Kings Slam' in Saudi Arabia

RIYADH: Novak Djokovic and Rafael Nadal will headline a new exhibition tournament in Saudi Arabia, organizers said, as debate swirls about tennis' push into the conservative country. The Serb and the Spaniard, with 46 major

Flekken inspired

Brentford goalkeeper Mark Flekken started the night as statistically the worst goalkeeper in the Premier League for percentage of shots saved. However, the Dutchman was in inspired form to frustrate the champions in the opening 45 minutes as he made nine saves before the break.

Brentford had barely posed any threat before they went in front on 21 minutes as City's run of just one Premier League clean sheet since October goes on. Flekken got the assist on top of his heroics at the back as from his goal-kick, Ivan Toney blocked off Nathan Ake, allowing Maupay to run clear and score for the fifth consecutive game. Haaland had a huge chance to mark his first start for two months with a goal moments later, but could not beat Flekken when sent clean through on goal.

In total City had 17 efforts on goal with 10 on target in the first half and finally made their final one count. Ethan Pinnock headed De Bruyne's cross straight into the path of Foden, who controlled on his chest and swept the ball low into the corner.

Eight minutes into the second period a De Bruyne delivery this time picked out the head of Foden directly to head past Flekken. Brentford rallied and had their chances to get back on level terms as Ruben Dias produced a vital block to turn Christian Norgaard's shot behind.



LONDON: Brentford's Dutch goalkeeper #01 Mark Flekken watches as his teammates defend from Manchester City's Dutch defender #06 Nathan Ake during the English Premier League football match between Brentford and Manchester City at the Gtech Community Stadium in London. — AFP

"Those are the chances we need to take if we want to beat them - the best team in the world," said Brentford boss Thomas Frank. "It's difficult no matter what you do against City. We did a lot of things right and there were key moments where we didn't have the quality or they showed their quality."

City made sure of an 11th victory in their last 12 games 20 minutes from time. Haaland may not have got his goal, but the

Norwegian played his part with a perfectly weighted pass for Foden to bear down on goal and slot coolly past Flekken. Defeat leaves Brentford still just three points above the relegation zone.

Arsenal's 3-1 victory over Liverpool on Sunday kept the Gunners in the race for their first league title in 20 years. But that result also played into City's hands and they remain the team to beat as the business end of the season approaches. — AFP

titles between them, will be joined by Wimbledon champion Carlos Alcaraz and Australian Open winner Jannik Sinner at the 6 Kings Slam.

World number three Daniil Medvedev and seventh-ranked Holger Rune will also play the event in Riyadh in October, oil-rich Saudi Arabia's latest foray into the sport. Women's greats Chris Evert and Martina Navratilova last month criticized the flow of Saudi money into women's tennis, as officials consider staging the end-of-season WTA Finals there.

"We did not help build women's tennis for it to be exploited by Saudi Arabia," read the headline for their joint opinion piece in the

Washington Post. But Tunisian star Ons Jabeur hit back, saying "people should be more informed about what's happening in Saudi", where a number of economic and social reforms are in progress.

Rafael Nadal, who has hinted this may be his final season, signed up as a tennis ambassador for Saudi Arabia, whose efforts to improve its international reputation through sport are often branded "sportswashing". As well as hosting F1 and top-level boxing, and signing a swathe of football superstars for its domestic league, Saudi Arabia will also hold a number of big events in the next decade including the 2034 World Cup. — AFP