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Sheikh Mishal and Sultan Haitham inaugurate \$9bn Al-Duqm Refinery

Largest investment project between Kuwait and Oman in petrochemicals sector



AL-DUQM, Oman: HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and Omani Sultan Haitham bin Tareq inaugurate the Al-Duqm Refinery on Feb 7, 2024, before being briefed about the operations of the refinery in the main control room. — KUNA photos (See Page 3)

MPs call for reforms, cooperation with govt, form antidrug panel

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Lawmakers on Wednesday called for political reforms, saying they are the key for forging other reforms in the country, also calling for maintaining a good level of cooperation with the government. But they warned the new government that approving legislation to improve the standard of living of Kuwaiti citizens is essential for achieving sustainable cooperation with the new government, formed last month.

MPs on Tuesday agreed at the request of the government to delay for one month debating and approving two legislation stipulating hiking financial benefits for citizens. The Assembly also voted to form a temporary committee for the defense of the society against drugs and elected three MPs as its members. MP Hamad Al-Matar, who proposed the committee, said 60 percent of cases in Kuwaiti courts relate to drugs, and many as 70 percent of students are affected in one way or the other by narcotics.

The Assembly also approved the annual budget of HH the Amir's office at KD 50 million. The amount covers spending of the Amiri Diwan and related wages and assistance. While debating the address made by HH the Amir to the Assembly, MP Abdullah Al-Mudhaf said political reforms are the main reforms needed by the country and without which no economic, social and developmental reforms can be accomplished.

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AL-DUQM, Oman: HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and Omani Sultan Haitham bin Tareq patronized Wednesday the official inauguration of Al-Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical Industries in Al-Duqm. The motorcade of HH the Amir and Sultan Haitham arrived at the refinery, with residents of Al-Wusta governorate welcoming them with folkloric performances.

They were received by Kuwait's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Oil Dr Emad Al-Atiqi, Oman's Minister of Finance Sultan bin Salem Al-Habsi and senior officials. A film was displayed about the project, considered the largest investment

venture in the refinery and petrochemicals sector. The film showed the vital role of Kuwait-Oman partnership in the journey of the refinery.

Head of Oman's investment authority Abdulsalam Al-Murshidi said the inauguration of Al-Duqm refinery is a continuation of history between Oman and Kuwait, both working in one place, "continuing this historic legacy for the future generations to be a guideline for prosperity and progress". He said the \$9 billion refinery was the largest investment project between two Arab Gulf countries in the refineries and petrochemicals sector.

Murshidi said Al-Duqm refinery was projected

to increase Oman's refining capacity to 500,000 bpd from 230,000 bpd. He said the project was completed despite economic and political challenges. "The determination overcame all obstacles and challenges," he said, adding the refinery and petrochemical industries are located in Al-Duqm economic zone, which has a unique location and is thus lucrative for investments.

Murshidi pointed out the establishment of facilities that will support the refinery and petrochemical industries, thanking Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC), Kuwait Petroleum International

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World in 'age of chaos' amid Gaza genocide

UNITED NATIONS: UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned Wednesday that the world is entering "an age of chaos" with a deeply divided Security Council unable to address critical issues such as the Zionist-Hamas war. With the war in Gaza entering its fifth month on Wednesday, Guterres warned that if the Zionist armed forces press on into the southern city of Rafah, it will "exponentially increase what is already a humanitarian nightmare with untold

regional consequences". Zionist forces have relentlessly bombed the Gaza Strip and carried out a ground invasion, displacing over a million people southward. "It is time for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire and the unconditional release of all hostages," Guterres said during a speech to the General Assembly presenting his 2024 priorities.

The war rages on unabated in Gaza, where the health ministry said at least 123 people were killed in the past 24 hours and AFP journalists reported more heavy bombing of southern cities. AFP TV footage showed frantic scenes of Palestinians running for their lives, many screaming, as gunfire rang out from advancing Zionist forces in a Gaza City neighborhood.

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GAZA: An injured man with a bandaged head looks on while standing next to the rubble and debris of a destroyed building in the aftermath of Zionist bombardment on Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on Feb 7, 2024. — AFP

Twin blasts kill 28 on eve of Pak election

PISHIN, Pakistan: At least 28 people were killed Wednesday in two separate bomb blasts outside the offices of election candidates in southwestern Pakistan, on the eve of a national vote marred by violence and allegations of

pre-poll rigging. More than half a million security officers were deploying ahead of Thursday's election, with authorities distributing ballot papers to more than 90,000 polling stations.

There have been multiple security incidents in the run-up to the vote, with at least two candidates shot dead and dozens more targeted in attacks across the country. "The aim of today's blasts was to sabotage the election," said Jan Achakzai, caretaker information minister for Balochistan province, where the blasts happened. "Despite today's

blasts, the election will take place tomorrow. People of Balochistan will come out tomorrow without any fear."

A first improvised explosive device (IED) blast killed 16 people near the office of an independent candidate in Pishin district, around 50 km from the city of Quetta and 100 km from the Afghan border. A second IED killed 12 people near the election office of a candidate for the Islamist Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-F (JUI-F) party in the city of Killa Saifullah — about 120 km east — according to Achakzai.

"The incident took place in the main bazaar of the city area, where the election office of the JUI-F was targeted," a senior police official told AFP. Achakzai said a total of 34 people were injured in both attacks. In July last year, 44 people were killed by a suicide bomber at a political gathering of JUI-F in northwestern Pakistan. While there was no immediate claim of responsibility for Wednesday's blasts, resource-rich Balochistan province — Pakistan's least populous — is home to several militant

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In my view

Prophet's ascension

By Hassan T Bwambale

On February 8th, 2024, Muslims across the globe will commemorate the auspicious event of Al-Israa Wal-Meeraj, famously known as Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) ascension. In its commemoration, February 8th, 2024 will be declared an official holiday in Kuwait and in many Muslim countries. Do you know why this day is so special? Following are the details: Al-Israa refers to travel by night from the Sacred Mosque in Makkah to the Farthest Mosque in Jerusalem, and Al-Meeraj refers to Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) ascension from Jerusalem to a place above the seventh heaven. This is a very important occasion for Muslims as it provides a glimpse into the unseen, among other things.

In life, there are physical unseen things such as atoms, radio waves, and electric current – among others – as well as spiritual unseen things such as angels, Satan, heaven, hell, and the soul – among others. We also believe in people we have never seen, such as prophets like Adam, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad (PBUH), to mention but a few.

At the age of 52, likely on the 27th of Rajab (the seventh month of the Islamic calendar), the ascension took place. That date was an important milestone for Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as well as for Muslims. It was during this meritorious event that the 5 daily obligatory prayers were legislated. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said what can be translated as: "Al-Burraq was brought to me; it is a white-colored, tall mount larger than a donkey and smaller than a mule. I rode on it until I reached Jerusalem.

Once there, I tied it to the very same ring (of the Jerusalem Mosque door) to which the prophets would tie their riding animals. I then entered the mosque and prayed in it, after which I left. Archangel Gabriel then came to me with a vessel of wine and another of milk. I chose the milk and Gabriel said, what can be translated as: "You have chosen uprightness."

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) rode on Al-Burraq with arch angel Gabriel, until they reached the first heaven where he met Prophet Adam (PBUH). On the second heaven, he met Jesus (Eisa) and Yahya (John the Baptist). He met on the third heaven Yousef (Joseph), on the fourth Idris (Enoch), and on the fifth Haroun (Aaron). In the six and seventh heavens, he met Mousa (Moses) and Ibrahim (Abraham) respectively.

There were some reasons as to why Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) met specifically with those 8 prophets and messengers during his sojourn in the heaven. The most prominent is that all of them are brothers in the sense that their Creator is one, and they all came with the same message: to worship only God (Allah), far from associating partners with Him, and to spread good morals and manners – among others.

Above the 7th heavens

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) finally reached a place where he heard the creaking of the pens used by the angels who copy from the Preserved Tablet. There, he heard the speech of Almighty Allah which does not resemble our speech in any way. Conversation took place between Almighty Allah (God) and the Prophet (PBUH). It is during this time that the five daily prayers were legislated. At first, they were 50 prayers, but Moses (PBUH) kept advising Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to ask for reduction, reasoning that his own people were given only two prayers a day but failed to perform them.

Makkan reaction

The Prophet's (PBUH) miraculous night journey ended up being a difficult test for certain people who had believed in his message – the test that some failed to pass. Some polytheists of Makkah approached Abu Bakr As-Siddeeq (the Prophet's bona-fide Companion) and said, translated as: "Will you not go to your Companion and listen for yourself what he is claiming (alluding to Prophet Muhammad)?"

He claims that he made a journey during the night to Jerusalem: the journey that takes us a month!" Abu Bakr (ra) replied, translated as: "Did he say so?" "Yes," Abu Bakr (ra) then said, "If he said so, I believe in him because I do believe more than that when he tells us regarding the revelation he gets from Almighty Allah." Because of the stance that Abu Bakr took during the trial and test that followed the Prophet's miraculous night journey to Jerusalem and then the ascension to above the seventh heaven, he was named "As-Siddeeq (the "Truth-Confirming One")."

Some lessons learnt from the night journey and ascension: (1) Every trial or tribulation is followed by some form of relief or reward. The three years that followed the seventh year of the Prophet's (PBUH) mission were replete with trials and tribulations that he and his nascent followers faced. First, he and his followers were besieged in a mountain pass that belonged to Abu Ta'lib. There, they almost starved, to the extent that they resorted to eating tree leaves.

Secondly, the Prophet (PBUH) lost in the span of few months his uncle Abu Ta'lib who was his protector from the evil of humankind, and his wife Khadijah who was his human source of comfort. That year was characterized as the year of sadness. Third, The Quraysh took advantage of Abu Ta'lib's death, taking it as a sign that they could persecute and harm the Prophet (PBUH) more severely than ever before. Fourth, the people of Al-Ta'if, to whom the Prophet (PBUH) had resorted for support and help, rejected his message and rather treated him in a hostile and despicable manner.

(2) The Prophet's miraculous night journey and ascension was a precursor of a new stage in his mission; it occurred shortly before his emigration to Madinah. That new stage in the Prophet's mission involved the establishment of a strong Muslim state in Madinah. Out of the billions of galaxies, could there be a planet where all our affairs go to for permanent recording and storage (Data Center)?

Confirmation of the existence of galaxies would shed more light on the elementary nature of matter as well as on the birth process of the universe. Were the cosmic pathways shown to our Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) during his ascension? Almighty Allah says, translated as: "By the sky with (its) numerous pathways" (Adh-Dha'riyaat – The Scattering Winds 51: 07)

Finally, Almighty Allah says thus regarding Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) night journey and ascension, translated as: "Glory to (Allah) who took His servant for a journey by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque whose precincts We did bless – in order that We might show him some of Our Signs. For He is the One Who hears and sees all things." (Al-Isra'a (the Night Journey) 17:01) – Courtesy of Kuwaiti Society for Cultural Dialogue

Conference addresses critical issues concerning visually impaired people

Asian Blind Union Conference kicks off

By Passant Hisham

KUWAIT: The opening ceremony of the Asian Blind Union Conference kicked off on Wednesday in cooperation with Kuwait Blind Association (KBA) and in the presence of 24 country representatives from across Asia. Scheduled to run for three days, the conference addressed critical topics and issues concerning visually impaired individuals.

In his opening speech, representative of the Minister of Social Affairs and Family and Childhood Affairs, Hamidi Al-Mutairi, praised the importance of the cooperation between Kuwait Blind Association and Asian Blind Union (ABU) in organizing such an event. He specifically highlighted the conference's noble purpose in aiming to help the visually impaired reach self-reliance and maintain independence in both personal and professional aspects by addressing the challenges that are hindering them in their daily lives.

President of ABU Santosh Rungta said the cost of excluding the visually impaired from participating in community work has proved to be higher than the cost of including them. Therefore, there has been a distinctive shift on global and national levels from



Yousef Kazem, the official spokesman of the digital government application (Sahel)

exclusion to inclusion that hasn't only benefited the blind community, but has also benefited the community at large, he pointed out.

He recognized this cooperation with KBA marks a crucial step in developing ABU's activities and starting a new chapter, ushering in an era of equality, opportunity, security and recognition of rights of persons with disabilities. Chairman of KBA Fayiz Al-Azmi expressed his pride in Kuwait for always taking the lead in recognizing the rights of the blind and other disabled persons, which is demonstrated by the laws that Kuwait has enacted in the past decades. He pledged to his fellows in ABU that Kuwait will provide unlimited support to help achieve sustainable development for all visually impaired people by integrating them into society.

General Secretary of KBA and Secretary of ABU

Turkish Embassy commemorates 1st quake anniversary

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: The Turkish Embassy in Kuwait organized a solemn event on Feb 6, 2024 to remember the victims of the devastating earthquakes that struck Turkey and Syria on the same date the previous year. The two earthquakes claimed the lives of approximately 55,000 people in a single day, while others suffered severe injuries and displacement. As part of the commemoration, attendees stood for a minute of silence to pay tribute to the souls lost in the tragedy.

"Today marks the first anniversary of the devastating earthquake that struck Turkey on the 6th of February, 2023. These were the largest earthquakes recorded in the past 500 years, impacting 11 cities and causing extensive damage across 70,000 square kilometers. The severity of the situation was compounded by harsh winter weather conditions, with many roads covered in snow and temperatures plummeting. These challenges made rescue operations even more difficult," Turkish Ambassador to Kuwait Tuba Nur Sonmez said.

"The Turkish government acted immediately and received international assistance, including aid from Kuwait delivered on the very next day. Kuwait also sent firefighters to support the relief efforts. We are grateful for the generosity and the quick response of



KUWAIT: Students read books in the libraries. School libraries are not only for the lending of books, they also organize informative lectures to benefit the student body as well as educational workshops. — KUNA photos

Libraries: Treasure troves for student development

KUWAIT: School libraries are fundamental for providing supplementary education for students, especially elementary school students, to help develop their reading and writing skills. Not only do school libraries reinforce the student's reading and writing capabilities, but they also provide them with research skills and adjust



(From left to right) President of ABU, Santosh Rungta, representative of the Minister of Social Affairs, Family Affairs and Childhood, Hamidi Al-Mutairi, Chairman of the board of directors of KBA, Fayiz Al-Azmi, General Secretary of the KBA and Secretary of ABU, Mansour Al-Enzi are pictured during the event. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Photo shows Asian countries' representatives and guests attending the conference.

Mansour Al-Enzi said this meeting is exceptional, since it accompanies workshops addressing diverse topics related to the visually impaired in the sectors of education, modern technology, social and psychological care and entertainment. Yousef Kazem, the official spokesman of the digital government application (Sahel), said the app's team, which aims to facilitate government transactions for all members of society on one platform, is extending its efforts to develop its services to be more accessible and user-friendly for visually impaired individuals.

Kazem added the Sahel team is working diligently to implement the Kuwaiti disability law by ensuring that visually impaired individuals are given equal rights like the rest of the community in facilitating their use of these digital products. He explained the team is working on introducing audio description technology for notifications and application services, in addition to working on linking the application with various state institutions to exempt people with disabilities from government transaction fees in accordance with Kuwaiti law, which stipulates this.



Turkish Ambassador to Kuwait Tuba Nur Sonmez and Representative of UNHCR to Kuwait Nisreen Rubaian

the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Sabah and the Kuwaiti people," she added.

"Kuwait's assistance is ongoing and various non-governmental organizations continue to support the affected communities as they face ongoing struggles. Some individuals, especially from Hatay, one of the most affected areas, have even sought refuge in Kuwait after losing their jobs, shops and possessions in the aftermath of the earthquake. The Kuwaiti aid workers demonstrated great discipline and readiness for their missions in both Turkey and Syria," Sonmez affirmed. "Over the past year, significant progress has been made in rebuilding and reconstructing heavily populated areas. The construction process has been efficient and is nearing completion," she concluded.

Nisreen Rubaian, Representative of UNHCR to Kuwait, noted: "UNHCR appreciates the timely and generous aid offered by Kuwait, while we also ap-

peal for continued support to ensure critical humanitarian needs can be met. We take this opportunity to be reminded of the generous support of Kuwait, being amongst the first countries to extend needed support. Kuwait contributed an amount of \$17 million through UNHCR to provide life-saving aid. This contribution comes as part of Kuwait's wider pledge of \$97.7 million to support people impacted by the earthquakes through the United Nations organizations and specialized agencies and other international humanitarian organizations."

Rubaian further elaborated on efforts in both Syria and Turkey. "In Syria, UNHCR has been delivering protection assistance — including psychosocial support — to more than 311,000 people affected by the earthquakes. It has also been providing shelter support, cash assistance and other aid to those affected. In 2023, UNHCR distributed relief items to more than 68,000 families across earthquake-affected areas in Syria. In government-controlled areas of Aleppo and Latakia, UNHCR and partners rehabilitated collective shelters, providing shelter to over 3,000 individuals. UNHCR provided cash assistance to people affected in Aleppo, Latakia, Hama, and Tartous governorates, benefiting more than 16,000 families," she said.

"In Turkey, in support of the state-led response, UNHCR has provided over 3 million relief items at the request of the government, including tents, containers, hygiene kits, bedding and warm clothing for refugees and local residents in temporary accommodation centers. It also supported protection activities for more than 500,000 individuals — including legal counseling, identification and referral of people with specific needs, psychosocial support and cash assistance," Rubaian added.

their behavior accordingly. Director of School Libraries Administration at the Kuwaiti Ministry of Education (MoE) Ahmad Al-Majdi, in a statement to Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), said that "a school library has an essential role in education."

School libraries are not only for the lending of books; they also organize informative lectures to benefit the student body as well as educational workshops. Libraries contribute to student skill acquisition of helpful information through qualified and recognized sources throughout all school levels, added Al-Majdi. He noted that school libraries in elementary schools total 283 libraries and play a massive part in aiding teachers with the right informative tools and resources

to benefit both the curriculum being taught and the student receiving the lesson.

Furthermore, Al-Majdi said the Library Administration launched the "A Writer in My Library" initiative, which aims to provide informative methodologies in the fields of both the arts and sciences. He explained that this initiative calls on students and teachers to develop rapport within school libraries, where storytelling, writing, and learning about history are highlighted topics. Additionally, Al-Majdi added that another project titled "School Library Criteria Classification" aims to create an educationally charged and competitive environment for students, as seen in the annual MoE's Arabic reading competitions. — KUNA

Al-Duqm an 'example' of Kuwaiti-Omani ventures

Refinery reflects Gulf's pioneering role in oil industry



AL-DUQM: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tareq of Oman take a group photo with top officials during the inauguration of Al-Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical Industries in the State of Al-Duqm, Oman. — KUNA photos



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tareq of Oman patronized the inauguration of Al-Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical Industries in the State of Al-Duqm, Oman.

AI-DUQM: Oman's Minister of Energy and Minerals, Salem Al-Aufi, said on Wednesday that Al-Duqm Refinery and Petrochemicals Industries Company is one of the biggest joint investments of its kind in the Gulf. Al-Aufi affirmed in a press release, following His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and Sultan of Oman Haitham bin Tariq's inauguration of the refinery, the economic significance of such a project for both nations. The refinery utilizes the latest advancements in technology to treat, refine, and produce high-quality products adhering to health and safety regulations.

The facility has achieved a 40% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, demonstrating its commitment to environmental sustainability. Al-Aufi further said that the facility will have the capacity to generate 230,000 barrels per day, with its primary output comprising sought-after commodities such as diesel, liquefied gas, naphtha, kerosene, and sulfur. These products are in high demand in the worldwide market. The Special Economic Zone of Duqm has successfully laid the foundation to now receive investments assuring its capability to produce and manufacture heavy materials, petrochemicals, and logistics, he concluded.

Pioneering role

Al-Duqm refinery reflects the Arab Gulf's pioneering role in the oil and gas industry, said Kuwait's Oil Minister Dr. Emad Al-Atiqi, on Wednesday. A "success story" is the best way to describe the inauguration of the refinery, Al-Atiqi, also Kuwait's Deputy Prime Minister and Chairman of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation's Board of Directors, said. His remarks came on the sidelines of the refinery's inauguration ceremony, held under the auspices and attendance of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and Sultan Haitham bin Tariq of Oman.

The oil minister extended appreciation for the diligent efforts exerted over the past few years to accomplish the venture. CEO of Kuwait Petroleum International, also known as Q8, Shafi Al-Ajmi, labeled the event a turning point contributing to the strength of the "ideal partnership" between the two nations. He told KUNA that the refinery is a prestigious place for both nations in the global oil scene. Due to its geographic location, the refinery facilitates the flow of trade between the Gulf area and international markets, namely in Asia and Africa.

The refinery, an enormous nine-billion-dollar industrial edifice, is co-owned by the two Gulf States. Around 65 percent of the 230,000 barrels refined in Al-Duqm are of Kuwaiti crude oil, and 35 percent are of Omani crude oil. The refinery is designed to operate and import all it requires from Kuwaiti crude oil if necessary. On his part, Deputy CEO of Q8 Imad Al-Hadlaq said the refinery employs the latest technologies to keep pace with international standards, especially relating to environmental aspects. It produces eco-friendly oil byproducts, including liquefied gas, naphtha, kerosene, and diesel, noted Al-Hadlaq, pointing out that since operation, it has successfully lowered greenhouse gas emissions by 40 percent. Al-Duqm is a joint venture between OQ and KPC, situated in southern Oman. Its strategic location serves international markets, especially as it aims to achieve excellence in refining oil and producing high-quality byproducts.

Meanwhile, Oman's daily newspapers highlighted the ongoing visit by His Highness the Amir. This visit marked a critical moment for bilateral relations, as His Highness the Amir and the Sultan attended the opening of the Al-Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical Industries, one of the biggest investment projects between the two Gulf countries.

Oman's Al-Watan newspaper said that the visit



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tareq of Oman arrive for the inauguration of Al-Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical Industries.

launched a new phase of the Kuwaiti-Omani relationships, given the shared interests and perspectives the two countries share. It added that the Kuwaiti-Omani relationship, which is a regional and national model to follow, has been strengthened due to the commonality between them, like the diplomatic sense that is built on wisdom, good neighborliness, and respect for states' sovereignty, as well as the aspiration of both countries to achieve greater prosperity and development.

Oman's Al-Masdar newspaper reported that the official and traditional reception ceremony given to

His Highness the Amir reflected the deeply rooted historical relationship. It was noted that the official talks between the two countries highlighted the close bond of kinship between Oman and Kuwait and reinforced bilateral cooperation. Al-Roya newspaper affirmed the importance of His Highness the Amir's official visit to the Sultanate of Oman, with Sultan Haitham bin Tareq having been at the airport to warmly welcome His Highness the Amir. It highlighted the exchange of medals between both leaders as evidence of appreciation for the distinguished achievements and efforts that bond the two countries. — KUNA



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Burgan Bank urges
staff to adopt a
healthier lifestyle

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank recently concluded the month-long 'Rock Your Habits' well-being program and challenge, which the Bank hosted at its head office as part of its mission to be an employer of choice and its comprehensive approach to human capital development. The program aimed to raise awareness about healthy living among the Bank's staff and encourage them to take small steps toward replacing unhealthy habits with healthier ones that lead to elevating their physical, mental, and emotional well-being.



Zahra Boarki

Throughout the four weeks of the program, 140 Burgan employees took part in a wide range of challenges, workshops, engaging activities, as well as one-on-one follow-up sessions that were led by Rola Aranky, dietitian, diabetes educator, sports nutrition specialist, and certified personal trainer; and Daniel Lorenzo, athlete, and fitness trainer.

Commenting on the wellbeing program, Ms. Zahra Boarki, Manager - Culture & Employee Engagement at Burgan Bank, said: "As a proudly certified Great Place to Work®, we are committed to creating new and different opportunities for our staff to lead healthier and more fulfilling lives. In addition to the positive impact that these initiatives have on their personal lives, they reflect very clearly on their professional performance and sense of belonging and community as well. In our pursuit of becoming the most modern and progressive bank in Kuwait, we spare no effort to fulfill our employees' need for holistic growth, which includes adopting healthy lifestyles that encourage them to be proactive and productive in the workplace and outside it."

Boarki went on to note that working in the banking industry inherently involves long hours of sitting down behind desks, admitting that life at Burgan Bank is no exception. However, by being mindful of this fact, the Bank aims to create a culture that constantly encourages and enables employees to make better and healthier choices. To ensure that the participants will commit to the new healthy habits encouraged throughout the program, workshops, and sessions were introduced with sustainable change in mind. Starting with the basics, week one of the program went over general topics on the well-being of the mind, body, and soul, in addition to incorporating a balanced diet, as well as shed light on obesity and its various risk factors. In line with the theme of the kick-off week, the first challenge was for participants to cut out junk food from their diets.

The second week of the program was dedicated to the topic of mindful eating, which dove a little deeper into the relationship between the human body and food, whereby participants gained a better understanding of their own bodies through body analysis and one-on-one sessions. They also learned about macronutrients (carbs, protein, and fats), where they will gain better knowledge in reading nutrition labels and accordingly build their meals and choose the best snack options for them. For this week, participants were challenged to mindfully opt for healthy snacks.

The third week progressed to more topics on owning dietary choices through preparing wholesome meals with more mindfulness of the ingredients that go into each meal. Rounding up the program, the fourth and final week focused on the importance of leading an active lifestyle that incorporates regular movement. Besides workouts, the workshops also focused on the details such as avoiding wrong postures during the long hours of work and how to improve joint mobility with simple exercises.

Stemming from the Bank's commitment to raising awareness among its staff about vital health-related topics, Burgan has organized several health awareness initiatives on breast cancer, diabetes, and parents' well-being. The Bank's call for health awareness also reflects its constant support for the sports culture, which manifests in orchestrating and sponsoring various sporting events for the Bank's employees and members of the community.

Kuwaiti artists
participate in 'Gulf
Ceramics' exhibition

MANAMA: Kuwaiti artists participating in the second "Gulf Ceramics" exhibition in Bahrain said on Tuesday that Gulf workshops and exhibitions stimulate creativity and talents by exchanging cultural knowledge and experiences. In a statement to KUNA, Kuwaiti potters said that it is a great opportunity to introduce the Kuwaiti Ceramic House, Al Ghaith House, and its activities and history. Dr. Jamila Al-Salem, a Kuwaiti pottery artist, said that the exhibition includes a variety of artworks and expressed her gratitude to the organizers for the opportunity to get to meet other pottery artists from the GCC.

She explained that during her participation in the exhibition, she presented pieces of art with modern contemporary features that reflect love, peace, and human feelings, expressing hope that one day her works would be known worldwide. Abdulaziz Al-Khabaz, another Kuwaiti pottery artist, praised the displayed pieces and the creativity of the participants.

Sri Lanka Embassy marks
76th Independence Day

Kandeepan Bala



Sri Lankan singers perform during the ceremony.



Traditional Sri Lankan dance.

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: The Embassy of Sri Lanka held a reception on Tuesday on the occasion of the country's 76th Independence Day. In his speech, Sri Lankan Ambassador to Kuwait Kandeepan Balasubramaniam praised the bilateral relationship between his country and Kuwait. "Sri Lanka and the State of Kuwait have shared long-standing relations since 1971. The footprints of pearl divers of Kuwait can be traced back to prehistoric days in Sri Lanka. Kuwait is home to over 130,000 Sri Lankan expatriates and the presence and contribution of our people has over the past years become a driving force of our multifaceted ties with this great nation," he said.

Ambassador Bala affirmed the large presence of Sri Lankans in Kuwait constitutes a strong link between the two nations, noting that in the recent past, they have been successful in diversifying the deployment of migrant workers from the traditional sectors to many fields of professional and skilled employment in Kuwait.

"I thank the corporate sector and business entities for their trust placed in and recognition of Sri Lanka's able, educated and trainable workforce. On the bilateral front, I am pleased to note two-way trade has posted some respectable figures over the years," he said. Regarding tourism, the ambassador revealed the number of tourist arrivals doubled last year, while migrant worker deployment has increased and diversified. Most importantly, the remittances from Kuwait continue to grow.

"The Kuwait Fund remains an important source



Sri Lankan Ambassador to Kuwait Kandeepan Bala and Dr. Noura Mohammad Al-Meshaan, Minister of Public Works and Minister of State for Municipal Affairs, cut the cake during the ceremony.

that supports several important infrastructure projects that contribute to the socioeconomic development of our society," he pointed out, affirming that Sri Lanka is committed to international cooperation and is actively involved in bilateral and multilateral engagements to address global issues like climate change, economic development, peace and security and upholding all the time its shared responsibility as a nation. Bala also congratulated Kuwaitis, as February marks the National and Liberation Days of Kuwait.

"I am happy to note that Sri Lanka assumed the lead-

ership of the Indian Ocean Rim Association a few months ago. We believe our independent, yet multi-aligned foreign policy has helped us navigate these difficult challenges and obtain the support of the larger international community. Eighteen months later, the progress we have made is inconceivable. Sri Lanka's inflation, which was 70 percent in September 2022, has come down to less than 5 percent, and if we continue these difficult yet prudent economic policy reforms, we honestly believe Sri Lanka is within touching distance of achieving its true potential," Bala pointed out.

EU member states' envoys
visit Tareq Rajab Museum

KUWAIT: European Union Ambassador to Kuwait, Anne Koistinen, along with Ambassadors of European Union Member States resident in Kuwait, embarked on a cultural journey at the Tareq Rajab Museum of Islamic arts in Jabriya, Kuwait. During the visit, they were briefed by its Director Dr. Ziad Rajab on the history of the museum and how it contributes to Kuwait's rich cultural and Islamic heritage.

The Tareq Rajab Museum, renowned for its vast collection of artefacts and exhibits displaying the heritage of the Arab and Islamic civilizations, provided an ideal setting for the Ambassadors of European Union Member States to explore the shared cultural narratives that have shaped the history of both the European Union and Kuwait.

Ambassador Anne Koistinen said: "The Tareq Rajab Museum is a remarkable place, which brings Arab and Islamic civilizations to the public in Kuwait. It was a

privilege to explore its exhibits alongside my European colleagues. The collection in the Museum also showcases the enduring cultural ties that bind the European Union and Kuwait, which in turn strengthen people to people contacts. I would like also to stress the importance of cultural diplomacy in fostering connections and building bridges between the people. Our shared history and heritage create a solid foundation for collaboration and understanding."

On his part, Dr. Ziad Rajab of the Tareq Rajab Museum stated: "It is always a pleasure to welcome the ambassadors of the European Union and to have the opportunity to show them the treasures of such a diverse and varied part of the world, a region that has much shared history and cultural experiences with Europe. From ceramics, textiles and glass, to metalwork and jewelry, there is much common history in technique, design and symbolism between the two regions. Our family is extremely



happy to welcome the EU ambassadors."

The ambassadors toured the museum's many sections, delving into the rich tapestry of art, history, and traditions that have defined the Arab and Islamic world. The

visit to the Tareq Rajab Museum serves as a testament to the European Union's commitment to promoting cultural exchange and collaboration with Kuwait and preserving shared cultural heritage.



Kuwait scientific foundation inks cooperation deal with Korean institute. — KUNA photos

Kuwait scientific
foundation and
KISTI ink MoU

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Korea Institute of Science and Technology Information (KISTI), aimed at enhancing scientific culture

and digital capacities and overhauling the education of sciences, technology, engineering, and mathematics. KFAS said in a statement on Monday that the MoU inking came in line with its vision for contributing to building digital potentials in data science, technology, high-performance computing, artificial intelligence, the internet, robotics, cyber security, and digital transformation.

The MoU stipulates that there is a possibility to establish joint programs for boosting digital skills among students and workers in various sectors as well as developing researchers' abilities in the State of Kuwait. Moreover, it sets the stage for cooperation in research and

overhauling enterprises related to AI and technologies, in addition to organizing workshops, devising programs in sciences and technologies, innovation, updating the content of education in sciences and technologies, engineering, and online mathematics.

The signing ceremony was attended by KFAS Director General Dr. Amina Farhan, the head of the Korean institute, Dr. Jaesung Kim, the Korean Ambassador Chung Byung-ha, and other leading figures from the two sides. The Korean Institute hosted, last year, a delegation of the Kuwaiti Foundation to partake in various scientific activities. — KUNA



Kuwaiti potter Dr. Jamila Al-Salem

Al-Khabaz participated with three paintings: the first was Dalmunia, which represented the link between Kuwait and Bahrain; the second was Kuwaiti clay, and the third was "ancient craftsmanship."

The Kuwaiti pottery artist, Taliah Al-Khars, said that she is keen on presenting art pieces inspired by Arabic calligraphy to preserve the existence of this art and that she uses safe materials out of honesty and sincerity in her work. The Bahraini pottery artist, Mohsen Al-Titun, the general coordinator of the exhibition, told KUNA that after the success of the first ceramic exhibition, the festival has expanded this year to attract artists from all Gulf countries.



Distinctive pieces of art by Kuwaiti artist Moayed Al-Thalith.

He pointed out that Bahrain, as a large and wide artistic arena, embraced a brilliant group of professional Gulf potters, noting that the exhibition is an opportunity for dialogue and exchange of ideas and experiences, and this is the main objective of its establishment. Dima Al-Quraini, an official from the Kuwaiti Ceramic House, which is under the National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters, participated in the exhibition and gave a lecture. Seven Kuwaiti pottery artists participated in the exhibition with distinguishable works of art: Dr. Jamila Al-Salem, Ali Al-Awad, Fawaz Al-Duwaish, Taliah Al-Khars, Abdulaziz Al-Khabaz, Moayed Al-Thalith, and Hassan Al-Najat. — KUNA



Three artistic paintings by Kuwaiti artist Abdulaziz Al-Khabaz.



Kuwaiti potter Ali Al-Awad



Prince William fills royal void

Chinese endure New Year travel rush for taste of home

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QAMISHLI: An aerial view of an oil spill in a stream in the countryside of Qamishli in Syria's northeastern province of Al-Hasakeh. — AFP

Oil slicks blamed on Turkish strikes blight Syria river

Pollution heaps misery on farmers already suffering from lack of fuel, drought

TAL BRAK, Syria: Farmer Nizar al-Awwad has stopped irrigating his land in northeast Syria from a local river polluted by an oil spill that residents and officials in the Kurdish-held area blame on Turkish strikes. "All the farmers in the area have stopped using the river for irrigation," said Awwad, 30, from a village near Tal Brak, in Hasakeh province.

"We'd be killing our land with our own hands if we used the polluted water," he said. "Farmers already suffer from a lack of fuel and drought — the polluted river has only added to our woes," Awwad added, standing near his wheat crops.

Oil pollution has been a growing concern in Syria since the 2011 onset of civil war, which has taken a toll on infrastructure and seen rival powers compete over the control of energy resources. Hasakeh province residents told AFP they noticed the oil slicks in the waterway, which feeds into the area's lifeline Khabour River, after Turkey bombed Kurdish-affiliated oil facilities, including stations and refineries, last month.

The spill has heaped more misery on farmers already struggling to make ends meet after 12 years of war, the growing effects of climate change and a grueling economic crisis that has triggered long

power cuts and fuel shortages.

Turkey said it hit dozens of targets in northern Syria and Iraq belonging to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and the People's Protection Units (YPG) after nine Turkish soldiers were killed in clashes with suspected Kurdish militants in Iraq.

'Turkish bombardment'

Turkey and many of its Western allies have blacklisted the PKK as a "terrorist" organization, and Ankara views the YPG as an offshoot of the group. But the YPG dominates the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces, the Kurds' de facto army in Syr-

ia's northeast who spearheaded the fight against the Islamic State jihadist group in the country.

Mohammed al-Aswad, who co-chairs the semi-autonomous Kurdish administration's water authority, said "Turkish bombardment" in northeast Syria, particularly on Rmeilan and Qahaniyah in the far northeast corner of Hasakeh province, "damaged oil installations and pipelines" and caused the pollution. Rudimentary traps set up by the administration have failed to limit the current spill.

AFP correspondents saw oil slicks on water, plants and riverbanks across a 55-kilometre (34-mile) stretch between

Tal Brak and the outskirts of Hasakeh city. While repairs to oil infrastructure were expected, authorities were advising farmers against letting livestock drink the polluted water, which could "threaten marine life and biodiversity" if it reached a dam along the Khabour river, Aswad said.

But farmer Ibrahim al-Mufdi, 50, said he had already stopped irrigating his crops with the river before the warning. "The sheep can't be drinking from the river," he said, expressing concern over possible fish contamination. "I just hope that the rain will keep falling so we don't have to irrigate from the river," Mufdi said. — AFP

Pakistan's comeback king Sharif seeks fourth term as PM

ISLAMABAD: Three-time Pakistan prime minister Nawaz Sharif, who has never managed to see out a full term, heads into Thursday's election on the brink of his biggest comeback to date. The "Lion of Punjab", as he is known to his fanatical supporters, is hotly favored to lead his Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party to victory and once again take charge of the nuclear-armed nation of 240 million people.

It is a far cry from Pakistan's last elections, in 2018, when less than three weeks before polling he was sentenced to 10 years in jail on graft charges and disqualified from holding public office. Granted special bail to seek medical treatment in Britain, Sharif chose not to return, pulling the strings from abroad as his brother took charge after Imran Khan was kicked out of office in 2022.

Often draped in a red Gucci scarf, Sharif's political fortunes have risen and fallen on his relationship with Pakistan's powerful military establishment — the country's true kingmakers. The 74-year-old is one of the nation's wealthiest men, with a fortune earned in the steel business, but is admired by supporters for his approachable "man of the soil" demeanor.

Nawaz first took power in 1990 with the blessing of the establishment, but was forced out three years later by corruption allegations — a theme that has dogged his career. Between terms in power, he has spent years in jail or in exile — forced and voluntary — in Saudi Arabia and London, where the Sharif family have extensive luxury properties, only to return to Pakistan each time with renewed zeal.

Stung by the nationalization of the family steel business — which he later regained control of — Sharif is a fiscal conservative and champion of economic liberalization and free markets. He oversaw the privatization of several key state enterprises — including banks and energy producers — in a process critics say was riven by corruption. He was also one of the key drivers of the \$60 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) that has underpinned relations between Islamabad and Beijing in the last decade.



LAHORE: Former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif (center) along with his daughter Maryam Nawaz (right) wave to supporters during an election campaign rally on January 29, 2024. — AFP

Military coup

He was premier when Pakistan announced in 1998 that it had become a nuclear-armed power, weeks after India did the same. During his various stints as prime minister he was accused of stacking courts with loyalist judges, tinkering with the constitution, and rigging provincial elections to shore up his party's power bases.

His second term lasted two years and ended in 1999 with him deposed in a military coup after plotting to sideline army chief of staff Pervez Musharraf. Sharif narrowly avoided the death sentence in a hastily convened trial before being sent into exile.

More than a decade later he was back in power in 2013, in part because of his brother's diligent performance as chief minister of Punjab, Pakistan's most populous province and its most powerful constituency.

But fresh graft allegations emerged when his children were named in the 2016 Panama Papers leak for holding offshore companies. He was later convicted over separate corruption allegations and disqualified from office for life — the third time that he failed to complete a full term.

Less than a year into a seven-year prison sentence he was granted permission to travel to the United Kingdom for medical care and then declined to return. But with Khan falling spectacularly out of favor with the military, Sharif's fortunes began to change last year. — AFP

Khan missing from ballot but still on Pakistan's mind

ISLAMABAD: His name may not be on the ballot, but Imran Khan will be on the country's mind as Pakistan votes in an election this week that observers say is deeply flawed without his participation. The former international cricket star has been given three lengthy prison sentences in under a week and been banned from politics for 10 years — officially excluding him from an election it never looked like he would be allowed to contest.

Khan enjoyed popular support when he became prime minister in 2018, but he fell out with the military establishment that nurtured his rise and was booted from power in April 2022 by a no-confidence vote. He then waged a risky and unprecedented campaign of defiance against the military, but when his supporters trashed an army commander's HQ last May after his first arrest, it was the final straw.

He was detained again and has since fought nearly 200 court cases on charges he insists were trumped up to keep him from politics. His party says Khan — convicted of treason, corruption and breaking Islamic law with his third marriage — is at the center of a character assassination as the establishment tries to contain his popularity.

Faith healer Bushra Bibi, rarely seen in public, wedded former playboy Khan shortly before he was elected in 2018 after becoming his spiritual guide. She was convicted alongside Khan of graft and failing to adhere to "iddat", which dictates that a divorced woman must wait three months before remarrying, to leave no doubt about who the father is in the instance of a pregnancy.

Down but not out

Imprisoned and with his party severely hamstrung by the military establishment in Thursday's vote, it would be easy to write off the charismatic 71-year-old's political career. Khan won cricket matches from seemingly impossible positions as national captain, and Pakistan has seen dozens of politicians sen-



LAHORE: Former Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan gestures as he speaks during an interview. — AFP

tenced to lengthy prison terms — only to be overturned when they are back in favor.

Khan remains wildly popular, but the fate of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party he founded is uncertain without him at the helm. The performance of PTI candidates this week — who have had to stand as independents after the party was stripped of its cricket bat symbol — could be a clue as to how long Khan remains in jail. He was voted in by millions who grew up watching him play cricket, where he excelled as an all-rounder and led the nation to World Cup victory in 1992. PTI overtook decades of dominance by the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) — two usually feuding groups that joined forces to oust him.

Khan envisaged Pakistan becoming a welfare state modelled on the Islamic golden age of the seventh to 14th centuries, a period of cultural, economic and scientific flourishing in the Muslim world. But he made little headway in improving Pakistan's financial situation, with galloping inflation, crippling debt and a feeble rupee undermining economic reform.

He also went after his political opponents, with many prominent PPP and PML-N leaders jailed for corruption during his tenure. Some, including election front-runner Nawaz Sharif, have been released or seen cases against them evaporate since Khan left power. Rights groups decried a crackdown on media freedoms under his rule, with television news channels unofficially banned from airing his opponents' views. — AFP

International

Chinese endure New Year travel rush for taste of home

Millions travel to share meals, pay respects to elders in world's largest annual migration



SHIJIAZHUANG: People ride on a train at Shijiazhuang train station on February 6.



A couple rests on the floor as they ride a train from Beijing to Shijiazhuang.

SHIJIAZHUANG: On a crowded train laden with crimson-colored gifts for loved ones, IT worker Sun Jintao is heading from Beijing to spend the Chinese New Year holiday with his family for the first time in years. Hundreds of millions of people are streaming out of China's major cities this week in the world's largest annual migration, heading home to share meals, pay respects to their elders and deliver blessings for the upcoming Year of the Dragon.

State news agency Xinhua has said nine billion passenger trips will take place across the country over this year's Spring Festival holidays. "I haven't been home to spend Chinese New Year in three years," Sun, a 28-year-old Beijing resident, told AFP sitting on his

crowded berth in a sleeper car.

Previous years were overshadowed by the pandemic, he said — where strict COVID precautions made cross-country travel challenging. "It was a bit of a hassle," Sun explained en route to Handan, the slow train's final destination in Hebei province. "And last year I went to my partner's home," he said. "This year I have to go home no matter what."

As the train pulled out of the station in central Beijing, a magenta sun was just beginning to crop out behind a hazy layer of clouds. Many passengers who had been unable to book seats — tickets have sold out across the country — weaved between large suitcases in search of spots to spend the journey.

The air in the cabin was filled with

aromatic steam from instant noodle bowls and cigarette smoke trailing from standing areas between train cars, where a few men stood watching the pastoral expanse roll by.

'Celebrate the New Year'

For many the upcoming holidays are a rare chance to take time off work, a welcome respite from high pressure life in the city. Dong Hang, an 18-year-old native of Handan, told AFP he had moved to the capital to earn a higher salary.

He said he worked from four in the afternoon until four in the morning, six days a week, in a barbecue restaurant. "Beijing is considered a first-tier city, whereas ours is a third-tier or fourth-tier city, where monthly salaries aren't very much,"

he said as he finished a cigarette in the passageway between cars.

But this week he's taking a well-deserved break. "We have an old saying in China: 'Whether wealthy or poor, we all have to go home to celebrate the New Year,'" he said. "It's really nice to wrap dumplings together and then have a big family reunion dinner."

Dong is one of millions of young people who have flocked to China's largest cities in recent decades. That makes the annual Spring Festival public holiday a coveted window for families, separated for much of the year, to convene. "It's very exciting," Lian Caiping, a student working as an intern in Beijing, said. "I was so excited last night that I couldn't sleep, that kind of feeling."

'A taste of home'

Beijing Station is forecast to serve over 4.5 million passengers during this year's Spring Festival period, according to a state media report quoting a railway official. And the 40-day travel rush is expected to peak on Wednesday, when 192,000 people are set to traverse through the station, the report said.

Sun said he had struggled to relax the night before from the excitement of going home. "When I get back I'll prepare some things for Chinese New Year without stopping to rest, like buying food and drinks," he said. "I like to cook, so I'll buy some ingredients and show off my skills. Sun added he was also looking forward to tasting his mother's food. "It's a taste of the hometown, a taste of home." — AFP

US southern border global entry point for asylum seekers

WASHINGTON: As political and racial persecution grew worse in his native Mauritania, Barry looked for a way out. Scouring discussion groups on social media for tips on clandestine migration, he soon found that the longtime standby of risky sea voyages in leaky open boats to Europe wasn't the only option. There was the United States — via Mexico.

The journey of Barry — who asked only to be identified by his first name — by land from Mexico in July reflects the growing reality of the southern US border becoming a global way station for asylum seekers, rather than only Latin American migrants.

Barry bypassed not only Europe but also the United States' traditionally immigrant-heavy coastal cities, making his way to the midwestern capital of Columbus, Ohio — home to a suddenly growing Mauritanian diaspora. "I just want to get back my freedom of speech, my freedom of expression," the

former NGO and government worker said, citing crackdowns last year on activists and protesters by authorities in a West African country known for discrimination against its black citizens.

As rich countries struggle to adjust to an era of mass migration, authorities there often focus on lethal sea routes out of Africa to Europe and the long-standing flow north from impoverished Latin American countries.

But of the nearly 2.5 million crossings recorded by Customs and Border Protection in fiscal year 2023, 1.26 million people originated from outside of the usual source-countries Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador. That represents a 234 percent increase from 2021, when some 378,000 "other" country nationals crossed the southern border.

For Africans specifically, more than 58,000 crossings were recorded by the Border Patrol in 2023 — a 346 percent jump compared to the year before. About 15,000 of them were Mauritanians like Barry — more than the 13,000 Africans from the entire continent who had crossed the year before.

'Quasi-legal' routes

There isn't one specific driver for the arrival of tens of thousands of people from as far away as China, India and Russia on the Mexican-US border. Much of the

migration is at least initially legal: Barry flew to Turkey first, then South America, before making his way north overland. The ever-evolving routes are widely shared on social media — and, according to US border officials, via "pseudo-legitimate travel agencies" in West Africa.

In November, the United States sanctioned a Mexican charter plane operator known to carry Cubans and Haitians to Nicaragua, whose lax visa policies mean people often enter there before heading overland toward the United States.

Efforts by Europe to block routes across the Sahara and the Mediterranean — including by funding the Libyan coast guard to intercept migrants at sea — might be pushing more people toward the United States, some experts say. "You've seen the way they patrol that area, and now individuals are taking a different route," says Dauda Sesay, national network director for the US nonprofit African Communities Together.

Columbus, Ohio, has had a Mauritanian community for two decades, but they were originally composed of refugees, like the family of Houleye Thiam, president of the Mauritanian Network for Human Rights. She told AFP that the city's Mauritanian population has possibly doubled, from 4,000 to 7-8,000.

"You don't really know they're coming until they get here," said the 42-year-old, who sometimes wakes up



EAGLE PASS: A group of migrants are processed by Border Patrol after crossing the river illegally near the highway on February 4, 2024 outside Eagle Pass, Texas. — AFP

with 25 different voice messages on WhatsApp from people asking immigration questions. Meanwhile, immigration is increasingly roiling domestic US politics ahead of the November 2024 elections. — AFP

MPs call for reforms, cooperation with govt...

Continued from Page 1

"The country needs a new electoral system that translates the will of the people in the best way," he said. The lawmaker said fighting corruption should reflect the sovereignty of the nation and the law should be applied to all, adding that fighting corruption correctly will help rebuild trust between

the people and official establishments, adding many people have lost trust in government institutions and as a result seek assistance from MPs.

MP Fahad Al-Masoud said the Assembly should reiterate consolidating cooperation with the new government in order to jointly approve legislation serving the interests of the people and the nation. MP Hasan Jowhar said economic indicators show that Kuwait, like the rest of the world, is suffering from high inflation and because the government has not amended financial benefits for the people, MPs proposed legislation to achieve that.

ed — but it is the worst. Today's dysfunction is deeper and more dangerous." He said that unlike during the Cold War, when "well-established mechanisms helped manage superpower relations," those mechanisms are missing "in today's multipolar world." "Our world is entering in an age of chaos... a dangerous and unpredictable free-for-all with total impunity," he warned.

His remarks come amid devastating conflicts in Ukraine, Sudan, the Middle East and elsewhere, with millions of people displaced by the fighting and in need of assistance. "As conflicts proliferate, global humanitarian needs are at an all-time high, but funding is not keeping pace," Guterres said.

Against such a dark backdrop, Guterres encouraged world leaders to seize the opportunity of the "Summit of the Future," to be held in September in New York on the sidelines of the annual General Assembly to "shape multilateralism for years to come." On the heels of the COVID-19 pandemic, he called again for the development of an "emergency platform to improve the international response to complex global shocks."

The rapid development of artificial intelligence tools "is already creating risks" and will "affect all of humankind, so we need a universal approach to deal with it," he said. He called on the world to "move fast, be creative, and work together to ensure adequate guardrails and ethical standards, promote transparency, and build capacities in developing countries."

Guterres, who has made addressing climate change a priority since taking office in 2017, reiterated that the crisis "remains the defining challenge of our time" and called for humanity to "make peace with the planet". He said "humanity has waged a war we can only lose: our war with nature. It is a crazy fight to pick." — AFP

Sheikh Mishal and Sultan Haitham...

Continued from Page 1

(KPI) and Oman's OQ for their endless efforts that saw the completion of this mega project.

KPC CEO Sheikh Nawaf Saud Al-Sabah said the inauguration of Al-Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical Industries reflects the history between Kuwait and Oman. "The story with you my brothers did not start with Al-Duqm, but with diving ships when our grandfathers went on rough journeys looking for pearls," he said, and Allah the Almighty rewarded them following decades of struggle.

Al-Duqm refinery, he said, will be processing crude oil from Kuwait and Oman, thus honoring strategic objectives of KPC, according to which the corporation engages in investment opportunities with international partners to boost "our refining capacity in promising markets".

The aim, said Sheikh Nawaf, is to reach a capacity of 425,000 barrels per day by 2025. Thanks to

"cooperation of our brothers in Oman, we achieved this goal ahead of schedule," he added. He expressed gratitude to all workers who contributed to this success. He said challenges facing the oil and gas industry "are not easy", foremost being the transformation of energy, which requires safe and profitable operation of the refinery to make it an icon of innovation and excellence in the international refining industry.

HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal and Sultan Haitham raised the curtain on a memorial plaque which marked the inauguration of the refinery. His Highness the Amir and Sultan Haitham were accompanied by Chairman of OQ Group and Deputy Head of Oman Investment Authority Mulhem bin Bashir Al-Jurf to the refinery's main control room and were briefed about the operations of the refinery. HH the Amir was given a gift on this occasion.

In honor of HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal and his accompanying delegation, Sultan Haitham held a lunch banquet on the Royal Yacht Fulk Al Salamah in Al-Duqm on Wednesday. HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal later departed Oman on Wednesday, concluding his state visit. HH was seen off at the airport by Sultan Haitham and a senior delegation. — KUNA

World in 'age of chaos' amid...

Continued from Page 1

The Zionist entity's air strikes and ground offensive have killed at least 27,708 people, mostly women and children. Fear has grown among the more than one million Palestinians now crowded into Gaza's far south, around the city of Rafah on the Egyptian border, as the battlefield has crept ever closer.

"I am terrified that (the Zionist entity) will begin a ground operation in Rafah," said Dana Ahmed, 40, who was displaced from Gaza City with her three children and now lives in a tent in Rafah. She said she spent a sleepless night as the Zionist fighter jets roared through the sky and explosions shook the ground. "I cannot imagine what will happen to us," she said. "Where will we go now? The situation is catastrophic. I feel like I am living a horror movie." The Zionist army has pushed steadily south through the coastal territory, with the heaviest combat raging in the city of Khan Yunis in recent weeks.

In the speech, Guterres called for changes to the Security Council and international financial system, among other reforms, touting his "Summit of the Future" in September as a critical venue to address dysfunction "deeper and more dangerous" than ever. "The United Nations Security Council — the primary platform for questions of global peace — is deadlocked by geopolitical fissures," said Guterres, a former Portuguese prime minister.

"This is not the first time the Council has been divid-

Twin blasts kill 28 on eve of...

Continued from Page 1

groups fighting for a bigger share of its wealth, and has also been the target of attacks by the Islamic State group.

Pakistan's election has been blemished by allegations of pre-poll rigging following a crackdown on the party of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan, who won the 2018 poll but was booted out of power by a national assembly vote of no confidence four years later. Campaigning officially ended on Tuesday night and voting was due to begin at 8:00 am (0300 GMT) Thursday, closing at 5:00 pm. About 128 million of Pakistan's 240 million people are eligible to vote.

Nearly 18,000 candidates are standing for seats in the national and four provincial assemblies, with 266 seats directly contested in the former — an additional 70 reserved for women and minorities — and 749

places in the regional parliaments. "We must ensure security measures at every level," Sindh provincial police chief Rafat Mukhtar told a news briefing Wednesday in the port city of Karachi.

The Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies, an Islamabad-based think tank, said there had been a "staggering" rise in militant attacks in the past year with an average of 54 per month — the most since 2015, when the army launched a massive crackdown on militant groups. Whoever wins takes over a deeply divided country, observers say, with the economy in tatters.

Inflation is galloping at nearly 30 percent, the rupee has been in free fall for three years and a balance-of-payments deficit has frozen imports, severely hampering industrial growth. Pollsters have said the election has left the population at its most "discouraged" in years. "The political atmosphere ahead of Pakistan's first general election since 2018 is equally as glum as the economic one," the polling agency Gallup said. "Seven in 10 Pakistanis lack confidence in the honesty of their elections. While this ties previous highs, it nevertheless represents a significant regression in recent years." — AFP

International

Prince William fills royal void

Harry stays at hotel as family rift still 'very deep'

LONDON: With his father King Charles III undergoing cancer treatment and his wife recovering from surgery, Britain's Prince William found himself thrust back to the frontline of royal duties on Wednesday. The king's shock cancer diagnosis, announced on Monday, and Catherine's abdominal operation have left William, 41, shouldering a heavy royal burden.

Charles's eldest son and heir to the throne, William postponed public engagements to care for his wife, the Princess of Wales, and their three children after she was admitted to hospital on January 16. But on Wednesday he was back on duty, hosted an investiture ceremony at Windsor Castle, west of London, handing out honors for citizens recognized for their community work and other good deeds.

It had been three weeks since he last appeared at a major royal event. Later, he will attend a London Air Ambulance fundraising gala. Charles, who left London on Tuesday for his Sandringham residence in eastern England, will meanwhile hold his weekly meeting with Prime Minister Sunak by telephone for a change. "We have agreed with the palace in this specific instance to confirm that they will be speaking on the phone later," Sunak's spokesman said. Sunak made a brief reference to the king's cancer diagnosis in parliament. "I know the thoughts of the house and the country are with the king, and his family," he told the House of Commons.

"We wish his majesty a speedy recovery and look forward to him resuming his public-facing duties in due course," he added. William is also expected to take on some of his father's duties while he undergoes treatment, alongside Charles's sister Princess Anne and his wife Queen Camilla. Buckingham Palace has not specified the type of cancer the 75-year-old mon-

arch has, although it is understood not to be prostate cancer and Sunak has said it was "caught early".

'Very deep' rift

The diagnosis comes just 17 months into Charles's reign following the death of his 96-year-old mother, Queen Elizabeth II, on September 8, 2022. Adding to the drama, the king's estranged son Prince Harry flew back from his US home on Tuesday.

The pair had a 45-minute meeting at Charles's Clarence House residence in London before the king left for Sandringham. Harry's return has sparked speculation it could serve as a catalyst to heal family tensions that have blighted Charles's reign.

Harry and his brother William have reportedly not spoken in months because of bad feeling caused by Harry's public criticism of his family. Harry quit royal duties in 2020 and relocated to California where he now lives with his American wife Meghan and their two young children.

Harry has repeatedly aired his complaints about the way he feels he and his wife were mistreated during their time as working royals, culminating in January 2023 with his autobiography "Spare". The Press Association news agency reported that there were no plans for the brothers to meet while Harry was in the UK.

Royal commentator Richard Fitzwilliams described the rift between William and Harry, also known as the Duke of Sussex, and the rest of the royal family as "very deep". Reports said he had stayed at a luxury London hotel overnight following Charles's decision to block him from using his former home on the Windsor estate. It was not known how long Harry was due to stay in the country.



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

'Pressure' on William

Citizens expressed sympathy for William, who they noted now faced the double burden of maintaining his family life with extra official duties. "He's got a hard job because his wife is poorly at the moment, so that's an added pressure on poor William, but I'm sure that he will cope," pensioner Sue Hazell told AFP outside Buckingham Palace on Tuesday.

His wife Kate is expected to be out of action until at least March 31, her office has said. Of-

ficials have not given details of her surgery except to say it was not linked to cancer. Canadian tourist Sarah Paterson, a 44-year-old entrepreneur, said that William must be "beside himself" given the recent deaths of his grandfather and his grandmother, along with the health problems faced by his father and his wife. But she was "1,000 percent" confident that William would be a good stand-in, adding: "I think he'll probably be king sooner than he hoped." — AFP

Child protection key to fighting gender violence in Spain

MADRID: The shocking case of a man who killed his children to get back at his ex-wife has thrown the spotlight on Spain's child protection efforts, which are a central part of its legal battle against gender violence. Last week, Jose Antonio A was sentenced to life in prison for murdering his 11-year-old son with multiple knife wounds to cause maximum "psychological damage" to his ex-wife, the boy's mother in April 2022.

The murder and trial was closely followed in Spain where it was presented as a case of "vicarious violence", or violence by proxy, in which a third party — most often a child — is hurt to cause the greatest pain to a partner or ex-partner. Jordi — who was online with his mum when the attack happened — was the one whom his ex-wife "loved most in the world", the 49-year-old father told a Valencia court last month.

The phrase vicarious violence first emerged in 2021 following a similar case in which a father murdered his daughters, aged one and six, in the Canary Islands. At the time, their mother described it as "the most monstrous act a person can commit" but expressed hope their deaths wouldn't be in vain, saying thanks to them, "we now know the meaning of vicarious violence".

Argentine therapist Sonia Vaccaro, who first coined

the phrase, said such violence often happens after a woman has separated from her partner. "It's a form of violence the abuser uses against a woman when he no longer has access to her, which generally happens when the woman gets divorced or separated," she told AFP. "He has to use an intermediary to hurt her."

1,400 children at risk

Vicarious violence can be extreme, involving the murder of a child, but it can often be expressed in more banal "day-to-day" behaviors such as not giving a child their medication, not taking them to their favorite sports club or sending them home in dirty clothes, she said. As well as gathering statistics on femicides, Spain's government also monitors vicarious violence. Figures showing 52 children have been murdered by their father, or by their mother's companion or ex-companion since 2013.

And in January, a total of 1,444 minors were at "risk of (vicarious) violence", a figure which has jumped almost 40 percent over the past year. For years, such incidents were not considered to be directly linked to gender violence. But in 2011, the country was shocked by a case involving the murder of two children shortly after their mother had left their father, Jose Breton. Breton claimed to have lost the children, aged two and six, in a park, but their burnt remains were found a year later on land belonging to his family.

In 2013, he was convicted for both murders. But a year later, he was acquitted on charges of causing psychological violence to their mother. "The justice system was saying: you are not a victim of anything,"

said Marisa Soletto, head of the Mujeres foundation, one of Spain's main feminist organizations. "There was no judicial element linking the murder of the children with the abuse of their mother."

'Can't be a good dad'

But that changed when Spain adopted the State Pact against gender-based violence in 2017, which suspended visiting rights if the child had witnessed any violence or the parent was serving jail time for such offences. That principle took shape as a legal reform in June 2021 and within six months, the number of suspensions had shot up by 329 percent, justice ministry figures show. That reform also banned any use in court of the parental alienation argument, whereby one parent seeks to poison the mind of a child against the other after a separation or divorce.

A controversial term, it has been used in custody battles in several countries with the father accusing his ex-partner of manipulating their child to block any chance of him seeing them. Despite efforts to strengthen Spain's legal framework, "many judges prefer to rely on their own interpretations, meaning the children just get thrown under the bus", says Teresa Peramato, the public prosecutor for gender-based violence.

Soletto said Spain needed "legislation that moves away from the stereotypical Napoleonic civil code" of 1804 which became the basis of many legal systems and enshrined the power of the man of the house over his wife and children. "An abuser cannot be a good father," she said, echoing a slogan that has been adopted by Spanish feminists. — AFP



TAGUM, Philippines: This handout photo by the Philippine Army shows Philippine soldiers transferring a landslide survivor from a helicopter to an ambulance. — AFP

7 dead in landslide at goldmining village in Philippines

MANILA: At least seven people were killed and 31 injured when a rain-induced landslide hit a gold-mining village in a mountainous region of the southern Philippines, officials said Wednesday. The landslide Tuesday night struck Masara in Davao de Oro province on Mindanao island, provincial disaster official Edward Macapili told AFP, destroying houses and engulfing three buses and a jeepney waiting for mine workers. Rescuers were digging through mud to find 48 people reported missing, including at least 20 people trapped inside the vehicles, officials said. At least 28 people were on board the vehicles when the landslide hit, but eight managed to escape unhurt through the windows before the mud engulfed them, Macapili said.

The buses and jeepney had been outside a gold mine operated by the Philippine company Apex Mining where they drop off and pick up workers. Initial reports said two buses were hit by the landslide, but Apex Mining said in a statement Wednesday afternoon that three 60-seater buses and a 36-person-capacity jeepney were impacted. A fourth bus had left before the mud swamped the area, the firm said, adding that 62 employees were safe while 45 were missing.

Landslides are frequent hazards across much of the archipelago nation owing to the mountainous terrain, heavy rainfall and widespread deforestation from mining, slash-and-burn farming and illegal logging. Science and Technology Secretary Renato Solidum said a number of huge earthquakes had destabilized the region in recent months.

"Every time there's a major earthquake we have to worry about multiple landslides every time the rains come," Solidum told a disaster briefing attended by President Ferdinand Marcos. Aerial video showed a deep, brown gouge down the side of a forested mountain that reaches the village below where a number of houses had been destroyed. Land above the landslide appears to have been cleared for crops.

Rescue teams from across the region have been deployed to help search the large area under mud, Macapili said. "We have equipment but we're mostly doing it manually because digging with backhoes is dangerous as you don't know if there are people trapped beneath the debris," he said.

Seven bodies have been pulled out so far, an official from the Maco municipal disaster agency said. Among the 31 villagers injured in the landslide, two were seriously hurt and were airlifted to a hospital in Davao city for treatment, Macapili said. "There was no sign that a landslide would occur because the rains stopped on Thursday and by Friday it was already sunny and hot," he added.

The official said an earthquake shook the village shortly after the landslide. The search effort was halted at midnight because it was too hazardous to continue, but resumed at daylight, he said. In a statement to the Philippine Stock Exchange, Apex Mining said it had reduced operations as it assists the rescue effort with equipment, personnel and food.

Meanwhile, hundreds of families from Masara and four nearby villages have been forced to evacuate from their homes and shelter in emergency centers. Rain has pounded parts of Mindanao off and on for weeks, forcing tens of thousands into shelters. — AFP

Girls go 'missing' as Albanians opt for selective abortion

TIRANA, Albania: When Lina discovered she was pregnant with another girl, she decided to terminate the pregnancy, after her husband grew increasingly violent over the prospect of having a fourth daughter instead of a boy. The decision was one that has become relatively common in her native Albania and across the Balkans, where a dominant patriarchal culture has pushed many families to pin their hopes on a son.

"When my husband learned that our fourth baby would still be a girl and that I would not be able to give him a boy, he became so violent he almost killed me," Lina, who used a pseudonym to hide her identity, told AFP through tears. "I was ready to risk my life not to give birth to this baby," the 40-year-old added.

She said she continues to suffer from genital lesions caused by the procedure, administered in unhygienic conditions three years ago. By even the most modest estimates Albania is "missing" thousands of girls, following years of sex-selective abortions that led to the termination of pregnancies by families hoping for male children. "When parents learn that the fetus is a girl, they choose, for various reasons, to abort rather than keep it," Manuela Bello, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) representative in Albania, told AFP. "Over the past ten years 21,000 girls have been missing in Albania."

For families that already have a daughter, roughly a quarter said they would choose to have an abortion rather than have another girl in the household, according to research compiled by the UN.

'Social imbalance'

Between 2000 and 2020, Albania ranked fourth in the world for the size of its difference between births of girls and boys — with an average of 111 males born for every 100 girls, UN figures show. An uptick in education has helped reduce the margin slightly in the past four years, including an awareness campaign by the UNFPA office in Albania.

Figures remain "higher than the biological average which is around 105 boy births for every 100 girls," explained Arjan Gjonca, a professor specializing in demography at the London School of Economics and Political Science. "But if the phenomenon persists and if there are no rapid legal measures ... the consequences in the near future could lead to social imbalance," warned Gjonca. Abortion is legal in Albania until the 12th week of pregnancy, with special permission from doctors needed for later-term terminations. Terminations linked to prenatal gender screenings are illegal. But the growing availability of a blood test which makes it easier to know the sex of a fetus much ear-



TIRANA: Albanian women tend to their new-borns at the Koco Glliozheni obstetrics and gynecology hospital in Tirana. — AFP

lier means it is harder to stop the practice. "It is increasingly difficult to prove that the pregnancy was interrupted because the fetus was a girl," said Tirana-based gynecologist Rubena Mosiu. Women in Albania are increasingly turning to the simple test, which is available during the seventh week of pregnancy and can tell the baby's gender with more than 90 percent accuracy. Permission from a doctor is not required for the screening.

'Bitter family history'

Despite a rise in awareness, deep-seated values can be hard to overturn. Across large swaths of the Balkans, a male child is believed to be "the pillar of the family", while girls are seen as a "burden or a weaker sex in an aggressive society", said Anila Hoxha, an investigative journalist and women rights activists from Tirana.

In neighboring Montenegro, sex-selective abortions remain a perennial issue, despite recent improvement to the country's demographic imbalance. "There is a direct correlation between patriarchal social norms and the preference of sons over daughters," said Maja Raicevic, who heads the Women's Rights Center in the capital Podgorica. Women's subordinate role in the family, along with their economic dependence on men because many do not inherit property, only fuels greater levels of inequality. In 2017, the center launched a campaign called "#Unwanted".

The program aims to dispel patriarchal notions by calling on Montenegrins "to ask themselves what values are taught that makes one sex desirable, while another does not even have the right to be born", explained Raicevic. Often the biggest challenges come from tensions within the family. Back in Albania, Maria — who spoke on condition of anonymity — said she confronted enormous pressure from her mother-in-law and brother-in-law after finding out she was pregnant with a baby girl. "They were very unhappy," she said during an interview with the UNFPA. — AFP

EU agrees first law combatting violence against women

BRUSSELS: EU member countries and lawmakers reached an agreement on Tuesday on the bloc's first rules to tackle violence against women, the European Parliament and officials said. The law seeks to protect women in the 27-nation European Union from gender-based violence, forced marriages, female genital mutilation and online harassment.

The European Commission, the EU's executive arm, first proposed the major legislation on March 8, 2022, to mark International Women's Day. "It's a clear message across the union that we take violence against women seriously," EU lawmaker Frances Fitzgerald told reporters in Strasbourg after the announcement.

"It is a directive that the women and girls all across the European Union have asked for over 30 years," another lawmaker, Evin Incir of Sweden, said. "For the first time ever, we criminalize widespread forms of cyber violence, such as non-consensual sharing of intimate images," Vera Jourova, European Commission vice president for values and transparency, said on social media.

The text criminalizes cyber stalking, cyber harassment and cyber incitement to hatred or violence across the European Union. It does not, however, include a common definition of rape, which proved to be the most controversial point in negotiations.

"We could not get consent-based definition of rape into this directive. So that is a very big disappointment," Fitzgerald said. Although the text does not contain a definition of rape, member states will aim to raise awareness that non-consensual sex is considered a criminal offence, the parliament said in a statement. The commission will have to report every five years on whether the rules need to be updated, it added.

The parliament and at least a dozen EU countries including Belgium, Greece and Italy had wanted to include a definition of rape. But a dozen other countries, including France, Germany and Hungary, opposed doing so, arguing the EU had no competence in the matter. The states in opposition argued that rape does not have the cross-border dimension, necessary for it to be considered a crime that comes with common penalties in the bloc. The parliament and the commission strongly disputed that position, insisting that rape could fall within the framework of "sexual exploitation of women", for which there is already a joint set of penalties. — AFP

Business

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2024

Qatar economy resilient to global shocks; reforms fuel growth: IMF

Real GDP growth in 2023 projected at 1.6% • WC-driven boom continues

WASHINGTON: Qatar has remained resilient to the recent global shocks and its economic outlook is favorable, said a report issued by the International Monetary Fund. According to its report, the country's output growth is normalizing as expected from the 2022 World Cup-driven boom. The nation's favorable medium-term outlook is supported by the significant expansion of LNG production in the NF and expected gains from the implementation of NDS3. Risks are broadly balanced. Maintaining prudent macroeconomic policy and intensifying reform efforts will support Qatar's resilience to shocks and accelerate its economic transformation, concluded IMF executive board following the Article IV consultation with Qatar. The board endorsed the staff appraisal without a meeting.

Qatar's decade-long efforts to diversify the economy culminated into the successful hosting of the 2022 FIFA World Cup. After very strong performance in 2022 on the back of World Cup-induced buoyancy and high hydrocarbon prices, growth has been normalizing, with real GDP growth in 2023 projected at 1.6 percent. Growth normalization is expected to continue in the near term, with non-hydrocarbon growth supported by investment in public projects, construction of the North Field LNG expansion project, and their spillovers to logistics, manufacturing, and trade. Visibility brought by the WC could continue to boost tourism. Medium-term growth is expected to average around 5½ percent, boosted by significant LNG production expansion and initial reform gains from implementing the Third National Development Strategy (NDS3), set to be released soon, the end-of-mission report said.

As global commodity prices decline and domestic demand normalizes, headline inflation will likely ease to below 3 percent in 2023, and further to around 2 percent over the medium term.

Amid high hydrocarbon prices, both fiscal and current account positions strengthened significantly in 2022, with surpluses reaching 10.5 percent of GDP and 26.5 percent of GDP, respectively. Both the

fiscal and current accounts will likely remain in sizeable surplus supported by elevated, albeit declining, hydrocarbon prices projected for the medium term, and Qatar's LNG production expansion, coupled with increasing demand from Asia and Europe.

Banks are well-capitalized, liquid, and profitable, with the capital adequacy ratio and return on equity at 19 and 14.6 percent, respectively, in the second quarter of 2023. Banks' nonresident deposits fell by more than one-third from the recent peak, partially replaced by higher public sector domestic deposits, reducing vulnerabilities amid tight global financial conditions. The NPL ratio continued to edge up to 3.8 percent but the provisioning coverage ratio is relatively high, close to 80 percent. Banks were resilient to the financial market turmoil from advanced economies in early-2023.

Structural reforms continue to progress, including to enhance protection and mobility of expatriate labor, improve the business environment, promote public-private partnerships, and further attract private investment through the residency program and broadened foreign ownership provisions. The pension scheme has been expanded to more Qataris in the private sector to promote private sector employment. Digitalization has continued to advance, and many climate initiatives guided by the National Environment and Climate Change Strategy and the Climate Change Action Plan are being implemented.

The upcoming NDS3 is expected to provide an ambitious reform agenda to guide the transformation toward a private sector-led, knowledge-based, more diversified and greener economy, as envisaged under Qatar's National Vision 2030.

Risks to the outlook are broadly balanced. Main downside risks stem from an unfavorable global environment. In particular, while the conflict in Gaza has had no visible impact on Qatar, if it is protracted or worsened, it could potentially affect Qatar through more volatile hydrocarbon prices (although higher prices could improve fiscal and external positions), lower tourism and investment, as well as more



IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva chairs the executive board meeting.

costly external funding for banks.

Domestically, more protracted or severe real estate market weaknesses could negatively affect the banking system and the broader economy. If downside risks materialize, Qatar has strong policy buffers to mitigate the negative impact. On the upside, accelerated reform efforts guided by NDS3 could further promote diversification and boost potential growth, the report said.

The fiscal strategy should balance discipline with growth in the near term and facilitate the transition to more diversified, private sector-led growth over the medium term. If downside risks to growth materialize and the ongoing growth slowdown sharpens, some fiscal space could be deployed through productive and efficient spending while maintaining broad fiscal prudence. In the medium term, fiscal strategy should aim at sustaining prudent and countercyclical policy, accelerating revenue diversification including via VAT introduction, enhancing current expenditure efficiency by rationalizing wage bill and gradually removing remaining subsidies, and reorienting expenditure from traditional infrastructure to reforms

that facilitate transformation to a private sector-led growth model. A medium-term fiscal framework anchored around maintaining intergenerational equity, complemented by greater fiscal transparency, will support the implementation of the fiscal strategy.

The authorities are encouraged to continue safeguarding financial stability. The QCB should continue its proactive supervision and regulation, supported by regular risk analysis and information sharing among the financial supervisors to help identify emerging vulnerabilities and guide regulatory actions. The authorities' plans to deepen domestic capital markets are welcome as well as measures to mitigate risks associated with banks' exposure to short-term foreign funding, which should be reviewed regularly. Equally important is to carefully balance opportunities and risks associated with the nation's fintech and green financing initiatives and put in place adequate regulations. Qatar's significant progress on the technical compliance with the FATF Standards is commendable, and the authorities are encouraged to implement the FATF action plan decisively.



LONDON: Dentists in England will receive cash to accept new patients amid a critical shortage of state-funded dental care, the UK's public health authority said on Wednesday.

Britain boosts dentists with cash to ease shortage

LONDON: Dentists in England will receive cash to accept new patients amid a critical shortage of state-funded dental care, the UK's public health authority said on Wednesday. The plan, backed by £200 million (\$235 million) of government funding, comes as the number of dentists providing care in the state-funded National Health Service (NHS) stands at its lowest level in a decade.

The British Dental Association says around 12 million people are currently looking for an NHS dentist providing free care as increasing numbers of practitioners turn their backs on the NHS in favor of more lucrative private practice. According to OECD data, the UK has 49 dentists per 100,000 inhabitants — the lowest rate among G7 countries.

"The health service will now introduce a wide range of practical measures to help make it easier for people to see a dentist, from incentivizing dentists to take on new patients, to supporting dentists to be part of the NHS in areas where access is challenging," NHS England chief executive Amanda Pritchard said. Under the plan public dentists will be given a "new patient" payment of between £15-£50 to treat around a million new patients who have not seen a public dentist in two years or more.

Around 240 dentists will be offered one-off payments of up to £20,000 for working in under-served areas for up to three years. New ways of delivering care in rural and coastal areas would be rolled out, including launching "dental vans", to help reach isolated communities. UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said the plan would help cut waiting lists and put NHS dentistry "on a sustainable footing for the long-term". The situation received widespread coverage in the British media this week when hundreds were shown queuing in the western city of Bristol after a dental practice said it would be taking on new NHS patients. Leading dentists said that the queues would be replicated around the country if more practices opened up their appointment books to NHS patients. — AFP

Tunisia votes to allow central bank to finance budget

TUNIS: Tunisia's parliament passed an amendment on Tuesday allowing the central bank to finance the public budget with an interest-free loan that experts say will have negative consequences on currency value and inflation. The Assembly of People's Representatives approved by a large majority of 92 votes out of 133 an amendment to an article that prohibited the central bank from financing the public treasury.

The new measure allows the central bank to lend the state 7 billion Tunisian dinars (\$2.2 billion) to be repaid without interest in 10 years after a three-year grace period. The loan is intended to partially fill the budget deficit of 28.7 billion dinars planned for 2024, including 16 billion covered by external borrowing from which around 10 billion are still missing. During the debate preceding the vote, Finance Minister Sihem Boughdiri Nensia said the funds were "not intended to finance

current expenses".

She said three billion dinars will help repay old foreign debt by the end of February, but "a part will be used to finance public investments". Opposition representatives called it an "easy solution" and said it was unreliable, while others said it was much needed as Tunisia's debt hovers around 80 percent of its GDP. In October 2022, the IMF agreed in principle to a loan of around 2 billion dollars, but President Kais Saied rejected it later on the grounds that the reforms it required in return were not sustainable for Tunisians.

Central bank governor Marouane Abassi, whose mandate expires in mid-February, warned his institution's loan would lead to "a decline in foreign currency reserves" with potentially negative effects on the Tunisian dinar. Economist Ridha Chkoundali advised not to exceed 2.8 billion dinars of the loan to have



TUNIS: A security official stands outside the parliament building in Tunis.

"less severe repercussions in terms of the value of the dinar".

Aram Belhadj, another economist, said he was worried that authorities "are asking for an exception of 7 billion but there is no guarantee that in 2025, there will not be another exception, then a third, a fourth and a fifth". It also brings about a major risk of high inflation, which is already running at around 8 percent, because

"you will have a quantity of currency in circulation which has no counterpart in terms of goods and services", he added. "This will delay the necessary reforms," said Belhadj, calling for reducing state spending, restructuring loss-making public companies and improving the business climate to revive an economy whose 2023 growth was estimated at a meager 1.2 percent. — AFP

Spanish farmers block roads for second day

MADRID: Thousands of farmers used tractors to block roads across Spain for the second straight day Wednesday amid Europe-wide protests against cheaper imports and heavy regulation. Farmers gathered at dawn on dozens of roads, snarling traffic, mainly in Andalusia in the south and the northeastern region of Catalonia and Navarra in the north, according to the Spanish General Directorate for Road Traffic (DGT).

They have said they will converge on Spain's second city, Barcelona, capital of Catalonia, in front of the headquarters of the regional government. Tractors were used to block roads leading to the southern port of Malaga in Andalusia, authorities said. Spain's three main agricultural unions, Asaja, Coag and UPA, did not initiate the demonstrations which began on Tuesday. They have planned other protests this week, including Thursday in Salamanca in the northwest and Friday in the northern city of Bilbao.

Angry farmers have been protesting across Europe over rising costs, high fuel prices, bureaucracy and the environmental requirements in the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and its forthcoming "Green Deal". The three unions — who say the CAP is too complex and allows unfair foreign



Spanish farmers drive their tractors during a protest in demand of fair conditions for the agricultural sector, in Burgos, northern Spain, on February 6, 2024. — AFP

competition — held emergency talks on Friday with Agriculture Minister Luis Planas, who agreed to work on a response. Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez told parliament on Wednesday that he was "on the side of the farmers" and highlighted measures his government has adopted in recent years to support the sector, especially in the face of a long drought.

He vowed to simplify rules for the implementation of the CAP, and to improve laws aimed at preventing farmers from selling products at a loss. Spain is one of Europe's leading producers of fruit and vegetables. But its agricultural sector faces difficulties, largely due to a lack of rainfall that has plagued the Iberian peninsula for the last three years. — AFP

Business

IMF warns Maldives of foreign debt crisis

Fund calls for swift implementation of credible fiscal consolidation

COLOMBO: The strategically-placed Indian Ocean nation of the Maldives, which has borrowed heavily from China and shifted allegiance from India, is at high risk of "debt distress," the IMF warned Wednesday.

Beijing has pledged more funding for the Maldives since pro-China President Mohamed Muizzu took power in November. Muizzu thanked China last month for its "selfless assistance" for development funds after a visit to Beijing.

the IMF said "uncertainty surrounding the outlook remains high and risks are tilted to the downside." Muizzu's mentor, former president Abdulla Yameen, who ruled for five years until 2018, borrowed heavily from Beijing for construction projects.

That left it owing 42 percent of its more than \$3 billion foreign debt to China in 2021, according to the World Bank, citing the Maldives' finance ministry. Muizzu, who has requested that Indian troops operating three reconnaissance aircraft

to stay elevated, and the Maldives remains at high risk of external and overall debt distress. Amid elevated fuel prices coupled with continued strong import demands, the current account deficit in 2024 is projected to remain large, albeit gradually narrowing over the medium term. The Maldives is highly vulnerable to climate change risks, with potentially severe economic costs due to floods and rising sea level.

"With limited policy space and growing balance of payments pressures, swift implementation of a strong and credible form of fiscal consolidation, comprising holistic expenditure rationalization and domestic revenue mobilization, is needed. Reforming the state-owned enterprises (SOEs) is also warranted to reduce additional fiscal burdens. Strengthening fiscal institutions and public financial and debt management frameworks is critical to enhance the credibility and effectiveness of fiscal policy. In this regard, the authorities are taking a welcome step to develop an ambitious and home-grown fiscal reform agenda, including subsidy reforms that phase out existing subsidies and replace them with targeted direct income transfers, Aas-andha — healthcare reform, reprioritization and rationalization of public sector investment program (PSIP), and SOE reforms, and committed to urgently implement this.

"Monetary policy, in concert with other policy levers, can contribute more effectively to addressing macroeconomic vulnerabilities. Discontinuing use of the Maldives Monetary Authority (MMA) advances is a welcome first step. Monetary and macroprudential policies need to be tightened to ensure compatibility with the exchange rate peg, while encompassing fiscal-monetary policy coordination. Together with enhancing financial sector oversight and crisis management, the financial safety net needs to be strengthened.

"Given the Maldives' vulnerabilities to climate change and natural disasters, strengthening institutions to support climate adaptation and mitigation efforts will help enabling access to additional climate financing and delivering on the climate pledges. Looking ahead, improving the business climate, strengthening governance, and enhancing skill developments will also support strong, inclusive, and sustainable growth.

"The IMF team is grateful to the Maldivian authorities and other stakeholders for their hospitality and candid discussions. The team held meetings with Finance Minister Mohamed Shafeeq, governor Ali Hashim, and other senior government and MMA officials. The team also met with representatives from the private sector, bilateral donors, and development partners." — Agencies



Janet Yellen

Yellen: US commercial property concerns 'manageable'

WASHINGTON: US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen expressed concern Tuesday about the commercial real estate sector in the current environment of higher interest rates — but added that the overall situation should be "manageable."

Speaking before the House Financial Services Committee, Yellen noted that banking supervisors are looking to help institutions manage these conditions. She added that the Financial Stability Oversight Council (FSOC) — bringing together financial and state regulators — is focused on the sector. For now, interest rates stand at an elevated level while property owners are also grappling with work pattern shifts in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, with more office workers operating remotely. As commercial real estate loans come due, they will need to be "refinanced in a context where vacancy rates in some cities are quite high," Yellen said in testimony.

"It's going to put a lot of stress on the owners of these properties," she added. But she said: "I believe it's manageable, although there may be some institutions that are quite stressed by this problem." Banking supervisors are working closely with institutions they oversee to manage and collaborate with borrowers facing problems, Yellen said. For example, they are looking to ensure loan loss reserves are sufficient, and that liquidity is adequate.

In testifying on the FSOC's annual report, Yellen also stressed that Congress should pass legislation to allow for the regulation of stablecoins. These are a type of cryptocurrency designed to have a relatively fixed price, and are usually pegged to a real-world commodity or currency. "FSOC believes that it's critical for there to be a federal regulatory floor that would apply to all states," Yellen said. — AFP



The International Monetary Fund did not give details of the Maldives' foreign debt but said there was a need for "urgent policy adjustment". "Without significant policy changes, the overall fiscal deficits and public debt are projected to stay elevated," the IMF said after a review of the country's economy.


"The Maldives remains at high risk of external and overall debt distress". The archipelago, famed for its white sand beaches and where tourism accounts for nearly a third of the economy, has recovered economically from the COVID-19 pandemic.

But while a planned airport expansion and an increase in hotels are projected to boost growth,

in the Maldives leave by May 10, has vowed to strengthen his military to defend the country's vast maritime territory. Global east-west shipping lanes pass through the nation's chain of 1,192 tiny coral islands, stretching around 800 kilometers (500 miles) across the equator.

An International Monetary Fund (IMF) mission, led by Piyaporn Sodriwiboon, visited Male during Jan 23 – Feb 6, 2024, to discuss recent economic developments, the outlook, and the country's policy priorities in the context of the 2024 Article IV consultation.

"Without significant policy changes, the overall fiscal deficits and public debt are projected



شركة الصفاة للاستثمار
AL SAFAT INVESTMENT COMPANY

KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON 07 FEBRUARY 2024

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No.	Ticker	Sector	Price Movement & Performance										Valuation Multiples *				
			Open Price	Close Price	Week High	Week Low	Range	Volume	WTD Change	WTD %	YTD %	Support Level	Resistance Level	P/E	P/B	Yield	Beta
101	National Bank of Kuwait	Banking	975	972	985	957	28	11,986,892	-1	-0.10%	8.72%	958	974	14.3	1.78	3.5%	1.03
102	Gulf Bank	Banking	288	294	296	286	10	19,373,481	6	2.08%	4.63%	285	294	14.2	1.34	3.2%	1.29
106	Kuwait International Bank	Banking	161	158	161	156	5	28,219,571	-3	-1.86%	5.33%	156	160	16.4	0.60	2.3%	1.11
107	Burgan Bank	Banking	190	189	191	184	7	9,439,032	-2	-1.05%	9.88%	185	191	19.7	0.71	4.1%	1.37
108	Kuwait Finance House	Banking	770	778	781	758	23	39,835,076	8	1.04%	7.16%	764	778	20.2	1.95	2.2%	1.17
109	Boubyan Bank	Banking	619	624	624	608	16	5,459,782	5	0.81%	4.00%	616	644	33.3	2.46	0.9%	1.17
201	Kuwait Investment	Financial Services	200	206	227	199	28	86,150,488	9	4.57%	62.20%	200	215	12.0	0.95	2.3%	2.00
204	National Investments	Financial Services	270	296	303	269	34	55,662,408	25	9.23%	23.85%	296	310	95.8	1.37	9.4%	2.03
205	Kuwait Projects	Financial Services	108	107	109	106	3	23,681,880	0	0.00%	1.90%	107	110	26.8	0.61	0.0%	1.00
212	Arzan Financial Group	Financial Services	231	224	238	224	14	84,079,088	-5	-2.18%	6.67%	208	228	33.2	1.55	1.7%	1.17
222	Aayan Leasing and Investment	Financial Services	181	175	182	173	9	48,391,439	-11	-5.91%	0.57%	171	180	8.9	1.21	4.2%	1.58
252	Al Imtiaz Investment	Financial Services	54.2	55.4	56.4	53.3	3.1	2,908,634	1.2	2.21%	-1.95%	53	55.5	NM	0.37	0.0%	1.32
401	Kuwait Real Estate	Real Estate	242	242	248	239	9	39,533,224	0	0.00%	18.05%	237	245	19.6	1.63	1.2%	1.13
413	Mabaneer	Real Estate	770	784	784	747	37	9,959,424	14	1.82%	-7.00%	778	799	15.9	1.66	1.8%	0.96
418	The Commercial Real Estate	Real Estate	106	107	107	105	2	14,549,255	0.0	0.00%	4.90%	105	108	21.4	0.66	2.7%	0.62
501	National Industries	Financial Services	232	227	233	226	7	44,809,052	-5	-2.16%	11.27%	226	232	20.8	1.07	2.1%	1.65
505	Gulf Cable	Industrials	1,430	1,498	1,500	1,415	85	1,063,194	57	3.96%	14.35%	1,490	1,513	15.7	1.39	4.1%	1.03
506	HEISCO	Industrials	850	844	850	830	20	1,832,314	-6	-0.71%	2.93%	832	846	23.6	2.15	2.4%	0.90
514	Boubyan Petrochemical	Basic Materials	590	580	593	573	20	4,386,816	-10	-1.69%	-0.85%	580	604	12.5	1.21	10.3%	0.93
603	Agility	Industrials	573	603	603	571	32	21,942,023	27	4.69%	18.47%	566	583	18.3	0.87	0.0%	1.55
605	Zain	Telecommunications	517	515	522	512	10	8,693,978	-1	-0.19%	1.58%	512	528	10.3	1.79	6.7%	0.63
623	Human Soft Holding	Industrials	3,410	3,320	3,410	3,300	110	262,835	-16	-0.48%	-2.32%	3,315	3,350	9.9	3.68	11.5%	0.65
642	ALAFCO	Industrials	202	213	213	200	13	3,417,808	8	3.90%	18.33%	210	217	NM	0.92	0.0%	1.21
654	JAZEERA	Consumer Discretionary	1,158	1,021	1,190	955	235	2,771,235	-137	-11.83%	-26.49%	990	1,100	17.8	6.72	7.0%	1.32
813	GFH Financial Group	Financial Services	80.2	80.0	80.9	78.5	2.4	9,332,999	0.0	0.00%	4.85%	79.7	81.1	8.7	0.92	6.1%	1.37
821	Warba Bank	Banking	191	190	191	187	4	8,734,439	0	0.00%	2.15%	188	196	26.3	1.03	1.5%	1.11
823	Mezzan Holding	Consumer Staples	618	614	620	604	16	2,176,290	-4	-0.65%	6.78%	605	618	15.1	1.78	2.0%	0.50
824	Integrated Holding	Industrials	522	531	550	506	44	2,618,254	6	1.14%	4.12%	520	546	37.3	2.17	2.8%	0.71
826	Shamal Az-Zour	Utilities	168	164	168	163	5	6,613,315	-3	-1.80%	-5.20%	164	170	12.7	1.37	7.2%	0.21
827	Boursa Kuwait	Financial Services	2,035	2,000	2,035	1,970	65	836,164	-23	-1.14%	16.01%	1,971	2,035	25.9	6.58	4.3%	1.40
830	AL GHANIM	Consumer Discretionary	1,147	1,085	1,147	1,069	78	1,620,675	-49	-4.32%	2.75%	1,069	1,123	11.5	3.94	6.2%	0.73

* As of end of week closing

Business

TotalEnergies posts record annual profit at \$21.4 billion

French giant accused of 'shifting away from renewables'

PARIS: French group TotalEnergies reported on Wednesday the highest profit of its history for 2023, underpinned by performances in its liquefied natural gas and electricity divisions as it continues to invest heavily in fossil fuel production.

Net profit came in at \$21.4 billion, an increase of four percent over 2022. Its bottom line put the French energy conglomerate ahead of its global peers Shell, BP, Exxon-Mobil and Chevron which all reported lower earnings in the face of weaker energy prices.

But TotalEnergies' 2022 net profit had been weighed down by a huge exceptional charge — \$15 billion—from its withdrawal from Russia following that country's invasion of Ukraine. Once non-recurring items were stripped out, profits suffered a sharp downturn last year, with adjusted net profit falling 36 percent to \$23.2 billion.

In the fourth quarter alone, adjusted net operating income from business segments dropped 31 percent from the same period in 2022, to \$5.7 billion. Oil and gas prices dropped some 10 percent

on average last year from 2022 when spiking oil prices had boosted earnings at energy companies worldwide.

Chairman Patrick Pouyanné called the results "robust", saying in a statement they had been achieved in "an uncertain environment". Hydrocarbons had performed well, he said. Still, the 2023 net profit figure fell short of forecasts by financial analysts, who had been looking for a figure of up to \$23.7 billion. In reaction, the company's share price was down around 1.3 percent in mid-morning Paris stock exchange trading at 59.49 euros (\$64), having recovered somewhat from its 58.50 opening price.

TotalEnergies has pursued its diversification towards low-carbon electricity production, but continues to be criticized by environmental groups for its ongoing investment in fossil fuels because of their climate impact. The group announced in September that it would increase hydrocarbon production by an annual two to three percent over five years. Several court cases against the company are pending, including for its land acquisition practices

for controversial projects in Uganda and Tanzania slammed by environmentalists. TotalEnergies is pushing ahead with its Tilenga drilling project in Uganda and the 1,443-kilometre (897-mile) East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP) to transport crude to the coast in Tanzania.

Tilenga targets oil under the Murchison Falls nature reserve in western Uganda with a planned 419 wells, triggering fears for the region's fragile ecosystem among the people who live there and environmentalists. Drilling began in mid-2023 and production is slated for 2025.

TotalEnergies has argued that such projects are needed to meet world demand for energy, and points to its efforts to transition to low-carbon production, notably in solar and wind energy.

However there was "scant mention about renewables" in Wednesday's statement, observed Kathleen Brooks, research director at the XTB trading platform. "Oil majors are shifting away from renewables," she said.

They were, meanwhile, offering "sweeteners for shareholders" in the



PARIS: Total Energy headquarter and logo in La Defense area, near Paris.— AFP

shape of share buybacks and large dividend payouts, Brooks said. TotalEnergies proposed a 7.1 percent increase in its annual dividend paid out to shareholders for 2023, and bought back \$9 billion worth of shares. — AFP

News in Brief

Sainsbury's targets savings in tech drive

LONDON: British supermarket group Sainsbury's on Wednesday said it planned cost savings of £1 billion (\$1.3 billion) thanks to technology and automation, as it seeks to close the gap on UK sector leader Tesco. Sainsbury's did not specify if the savings would result in job cuts, as supermarkets increasingly use robotics for sorting food items in warehouses and self-service checkouts in stores. "We will unlock a further £1 billion of operating cost savings over the next three years, more than offsetting cost inflation," Britain's second-biggest supermarket said in a statement. "High-returning investments in technology and automation will drive big steps forward in efficiency," it added. — AFP

Finnair weighs passengers in Helsinki study

HELSINKI: Finnish carrier Finnair has begun weighing passengers with their carry-on luggage as part of a study aimed at better determining the weight of the aircraft before take-off, it said Wednesday. The weigh-ins will take place in February, April and May and are on a voluntary basis, it said. "Measurements began at Helsinki Airport this week on Monday... So far, more than 500 volunteer customers have participated in the weigh-ins," Finnair spokeswoman Kaisa Tikkanen told AFP. Finnair noted in a statement that flight balance calculations require airlines to know the "weight of the aircraft itself and the weight of fuel, checked baggage and cargo, onboard catering, water tanks, and of course customers." — AFP

Germany sells Deutsche Post shares

FRANKFURT: The German government has announced the sale of 50 million shares in mail and logistics giant Deutsche Post, allowing it to raise over two billion euros (\$2.2 billion) that will go towards modernizing the country's railways. The sale lowers the state's stake in Deutsche Post by four percent to 16.5 percent, public lender KfW said in a statement late Tuesday. The shares were offered at a price of 43.45 euros each. Chancellor Olaf Scholz's government has previously said it aims to boost state coffers by selling off stakes in some companies. Proceeds from the Deutsche Post sale are expected to help fund much-needed infrastructure upgrades at state railway operator Deutsche Bahn. — AFP

EU court backs Ryanair in aid case

BRUSSELS: A top EU court on Wednesday annulled again the approval of a pandemic state aid program for Dutch airline KLM, giving Irish rival Ryanair another victory. The General Court ruled that the European Commission "erred" in approving the Dutch government's financial aid for the Netherlands' flag-carrier KLM, which forms an alliance with Air France. The group received 3.4 billion euros (\$3.7 billion) from the Dutch state after the coronavirus pandemic grounded the aviation sector in 2020. The court said the commission "erred in defining the beneficiaries" by excluding the group's holding company and Air France as recipients of that aid. The commission, the EU's powerful anti-trust regulator, approved the aid in 2020, but the Luxembourg-based General Court annulled the decision the following year. — AFP

Miele plans up to 2,700 job cuts

BERLIN: German household appliance manufacturer Miele said Tuesday that it was considering axing up to 2,700 jobs, as low demand and rising costs forced the group to make cuts. The step was part of a plan to create "additional financial flexibility" of around 500 million euros (\$538 million) by 2026, the group said in a statement. Two-thirds of the savings would be made through "improvements on the sales side or reductions in material costs", Miele said. But the need for belt-tightening meant a "substantial reduction in personnel costs is also inevitable". Globally, up to 2,700 of the roughly 23,000 people employed by Miele could see their jobs cut or relocated, the group said. — AFP

US raises overcapacity concerns in economic talks with China

WASHINGTON: Key economic officials from the United States and China concluded a two-day meeting on Tuesday in Beijing, exchanging views on their domestic outlooks and speaking about worries such as overcapacity.

The talks come amid concerns about China's growth, as the world's second biggest economy struggles with a property sector crisis and prospects of sagging productivity. As Beijing pushes to boost its fresh growth drivers—dubbed the "New Three" industries including electric vehicles and batteries—there has been unease that the sectors could produce excessive capacity.

In the latest meeting of the economic working group, set up after US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen visited Beijing last year, officials shared views on domestic macroeconomic outlooks, said the US Treasury Department and Chinese Ministry of Finance in separate statements. Both sides also discussed cooperation on shared challenges like debt issues in low-income economies, and agreed to meet again in April, the Treasury said.

"US officials also frankly raised issues of concern, including China's industrial policy practices and overcapacity, and the resulting impact on US workers and firms," said the Treasury Department.

The department added that Yellen "looks forward to a return visit to China this year." According to a survey of businesses by the American Chamber of Commerce in China released this month, overcapacity is becoming a concern in certain sectors. In an interview broadcast over the weekend, former US president Donald Trump, — frontrunner for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination—said he might impose a 60 percent or higher tariff on Chinese goods if elected again.

In its statement, the Chinese Finance Ministry said Beijing "expressed concern over the US additional tar-

DR Congo deal to export copper via US-backed corridor

CAPE TOWN: Two firms, Singapore-based Trafigura and Canada's Ivanhoe Mines, signed a major deal on Wednesday to export copper along a US-backed rail route from the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The corridor to the Angolan port of Lobito has been part-funded by Washington as part of its efforts to help Western companies compete with China for access to African minerals. Trafigura announced that Ivanhoe's Kamao-Kakula mine in the DRC would be assigned capacity on the route at the Mining Indaba, an annual industry summit in Cape Town, South Africa.

After an initial 10,000 tons of copper products in 2024, as the line comes into service, the mine would be able to ship between 120,000 and 240,000 tons per year to the Atlantic port. Trafigura's chairman and CEO Jeremy Weir said the industry hopes "to grow the volumes on the corridor so that it becomes the leading rail transport link in sub-Saharan Africa." Ivanhoe Mines' founder and co-chair Robert Friedland thanked the Trafigura-led Lobito Corridor consortium and the governments of Angola and the DRC. Lobito, he said, is "fast becoming one of the most important trade routes for vital copper metal in the world" and would unlock access to minerals in other parts of central southern Africa.

The Lobito Corridor is not just an economic opportunity for poor land-locked African countries like the DRC and Zambia attempting to get their minerals to oil-rich Angola's ports.

It is also a playing piece in the geopolitical battle between the United States and its allies and China, which is securing access to African mines with promises of infrastructure investments.

Last month Washington's top diplomat, Secretary of State Antony Blinken, visited Angola to tout the US counteroffer, including its massive investment in the Lobito Corridor.

"This project has genuinely transformative potential for this nation, for this region and, I would ar-



BEIJING: US and Chinese flags are seen before a meeting between US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing on July 8, 2023. -- AFP

iffs on China, two-way investment restrictions, as well as sanctions and containment against Chinese companies" during the latest talks. The economic group, alongside a financial working group, met for the first time in October and later, ahead of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in San Francisco last November. The groups report directly to Yellen and Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng.

Meanwhile, China has removed the head of its top financial regulator, state media reported Wednesday, after markets in the world's second-largest economy have been among the worst-performing globally in recent months. Beijing has become increasingly worried about the sell-off on markets in Shanghai and Hong Kong, which has wiped trillions off valuations, and has unveiled a string of measures to try to staunch the rout. And on Wednesday, state broadcaster CCTV said the top leadership of the ruling Communist Party removed Yi Huimin from his position as chief of China's Securities Regulatory Commission (CSRC), the country's top financial regulator. That came a day after, according to Bloomberg, leader Xi Jinping was due to meet with regulators to discuss efforts to lift the markets. — AFP

KIB offers services during Israa and Miraj holiday

KUWAIT: Kuwait International Bank (KIB) announced that it will continue to provide its online banking services around the clock during the Israa and Miraj holiday. The bank aims to meet the needs of its customers, whether inside Kuwait or abroad, during the break. The bank will be closed for business during the official holiday on Thursday, Feb 8, 2024, and normal working hours will resume on Sunday, Feb 11, 2024.

KIB highlighted its commitment to serving its customers and enabling them to follow up on their financial affairs and complete their banking transactions with efficiency and without disruption. The Bank indicated that it will continue to provide its banking services through all its digital platforms 24/7 during the holiday, including the KIB Mobile smartphone application that allows customers to perform most basic banking operations, in addition to the Live Chat and KIB Online services on the Bank's website www.KIB.com.kw. Customers can also reach KIB via its call center, at 1866866 for local calls and at +965 22957300 for international calls, or through its WhatsApp account registered with the local bank number 1866866 for general inquiries about products and services.

KIB also emphasized the readiness of the Bank's ATMs to accommodate the expected increased demand for cash withdrawals during the holiday, both in terms of providing sufficient liquidity and the number of machines available in different areas in Kuwait.



TENKE, DR Congo: A general view of processing facilities in Tenke Fungurume Mine, one of the largest copper and cobalt mines in the world, in southeastern Democratic Republic of Congo. — AFP

gue, for the world," Blinken said. Washington has vowed to fund 1,300 kilometers (800 miles) of rail and to work with multinational lenders to expand the project to Tanzania, connecting the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. The route will transport resources critical to the global economy, including copper and cobalt, both vital in the production of solar panels and electronics like smartphones.

Trafigura's consortium has a 30-year contract to run the Lobito railway and minerals port and potential financing of \$250 million from the US International Development Finance Corporation. "The investment will enable the renovation of sections of the railway line and associated infrastructure, in addition to securing more than 1,500 wagons and 35 locomotives," the firm said.

Currently stretching about 1,700 kilometers (1,050 miles), the railway was completed a century ago by British investors seeking African copper. The Angolan section of the line was closed during

the height of the country's 1975-2002 civil war and remained in disuse afterwards due to damage.

Rebuilt by a Chinese company, it reopened in 2015 but traffic has struggled to take off.

When the revamp was announced last year, only about one train every two weeks ran over it, according to Vecturis, a Belgian railway operator and part of the consortium. The Congolese stretch dates back to colonial times and is even more poorly maintained, with derailments more than daily.

Mining firms currently transport metals via truck on long and costly journeys to other often congested ports in Tanzania, Mozambique and South Africa. The consortium, which also includes Portuguese construction firm Mota-Engil, hopes the revamped railway will slash transit times from the DRC to Lobito to under 36 hours. The governments along the route hope the new export line will supercharge their economies by scores of billions of dollars over the decades to come. — AFP

Business

Al-Ablani: NBK Group HR continued building a diverse and future-ready workplace in 2023

Support to educational infrastructure, women's empowerment initiatives and sustainability vision

KUWAIT: 2023 marked another year of excellence for National Bank of Kuwait (NBK), by achieving strong growth and receiving prestigious awards, fostering its leading position in regional and international markets. Group Human Resources, being at the heart of NBK system, played a pivotal role in achieving success this year by accomplishing many goals, all of which supported the provision of a dynamic work environment and unlimited learning opportunities, in addition to an atmosphere that encourages innovation.

Commenting on this year's recap, Emad Al-Ablani, GM – Head of Group Human Resources at National Bank of Kuwait said, "During the past year, we succeeded in achieving all of our interim goals, which aimed to continue promoting a diverse and inclusive workplace, as well as attracting and developing national talent."

"Over the course of 2023, Group Human Resources team led initiatives to automate and optimize human capital management processes and utilize data to provide analytics to improve decision-making, in addition to developing the educational infrastructure and expanding career development programs. To this end, the bank invested KD 1.6 million in training programs organized in partnership with globally renowned universities and institutes," Al-Ablani mentioned.



A group photo of the executive management during the launch of the NBK Tech Academy.

ship roles. The cohort included 21 participants and achieved impressive success and powerful impact in the business community in Kuwait. Moreover, NBK organized a series of masterclasses for employees, covering several important topics, including innovation and leadership, effective communication and negotiation skills, as well as the NBK High-Fliers program.

Training and development

During 2023, Training and Development Department continued to develop the educational infrastructure by promoting an open and comprehensive training process group-wide, in addition to expanding and digitizing the capabilities of the new design of training, both general and functional, to ensure sustainable and effective knowledge management that opens long-term career prospects for all employees within the group.

During the year, NBK employees received a total of 190,000 training hours, with 3,000 participants. The Training and Development Department offers an advanced training process accessible to all employees, regardless of location or job title. The bank's educational platform, Hub NBK Learning, provides a wide range of learning content spanning various behavioral and managerial topics. One key advantage of this platform is that it allows managers to directly observe the learning process and access the learning dashboard for their respective teams. Additionally, it provides supplementary training materials to assist managers in supporting their employees' learning journeys.

Furthermore, Group Human Resources' Training and Development Department completely revamped "Moody's Credit Curriculum" program to keep pace with the latest changing business needs and trends. The duration was increased from 2 to 5 months, including around 1 month in the training halls, and 23 hours of e-learning courses, in addition to integrating workshops on the practical application of skills across the program to expand trainees' knowledge and skills.

Talent acquisition

Guided by the firm conviction that building a dynamic workforce is instrumental to sustain its future growth and foster a sustainable economy, NBK continued its historic role in attracting, recruiting and upskilling national talent.

During the year, NBK hired 403 new recruits, 85.4 percent of them are Kuwaitis, with Kuwaitization ratio reaching 76.7 percent. In addition, the percentage of Kuwaitis in managerial positions increased to 69.2 percent of total managers.

NBK is an employer of choice that offers equal opportunities and embraces diversity in the workplace. In addition, NBK's recruitment strategy is based on attracting, training and developing young national talent through the best-in-class programs to help them build a successful career that qualifies them to take on future leading roles in the bank. This makes NBK the private sector employer of choice for Kuwaiti fresh graduates.

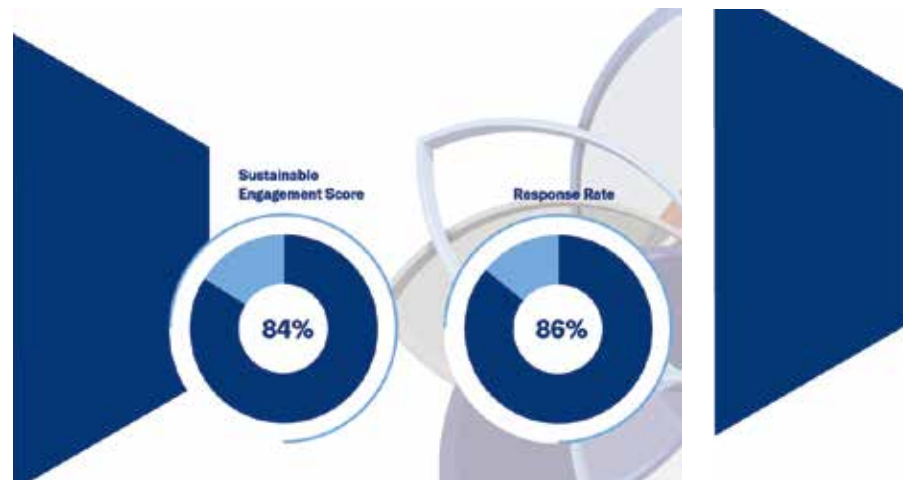
Within its endeavors to uphold a high Kuwaitization rate, NBK participates in many career fairs, which reached eight career fairs in 2023. It also continues to prioritize hiring national talent, and making recruitment in some fields exclusive for Kuwaitis, in addition to partnership with many universities to provide training and development to national talent.

NBK's participation in career fairs during 2023 represented a unique experience

and revolutionized recruitment by making it more dynamic and suitable for the Millennials at the bank's pavilion through NBK VirtuGate using the high-tech Augmented Reality (AR) technology to provide an experience that fully simulates the work environment at NBK HQ.

NBK also follows a unique approach to ensure equal opportunities, by offering all employees, with no exception, equal opportunities,

as reflected in the female employment ratio standing at 44.3 percent of total workforce, and 29.7 percent of senior management positions.



with the newborn child. NBK stands among the select few organizations in Kuwait with a unique work environment, akin to international peers by continuously providing employees with exceptional career development opportunities. This includes training programs and practical experience, which aim to help fresh graduates to navigate their way into the labor market and develop their skills and expertise through partnerships

with leading international educational institutions to emerge as qualified leaders of developing the banking sector in the future. This ultimately results in increasing employees' loyalty and giving the bank the edge in a competitive labor market.

Prestigious awards

In 2023, NBK's efforts were recognized with 5 prestigious awards, including 3 awards from MIED magazine for its distinguished efforts in initiatives supporting women's empowerment and sustainable development of human resources. NBK also received the Bronze Award for Excellence in Diversity and Inclusion by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) for NBK Rise program.

Additionally, the bank received the coveted Brandon Hall Group Bronze Medal

Employee wellbeing

Reflecting its firm belief that employees are its most valuable resource, NBK places substantial emphasis on supporting employees and improving their physical and mental health. In this context, and to foster a healthy work environment, NBK provides a fitness gym equipped with the latest exercise equipment, which is open for employees, before, after and even during working hours for their convenience under the supervision of high-class trainers, aligning with the bank's initiatives to raise health awareness and promote a healthy lifestyle.



NBK revolutionized career fairs in Kuwait by introducing the high-tech augmented reality.

NBK also provides a well-equipped clinic managed by Wara Hospital, which provides medical checkups, tests, and on-site visits by specialized doctors, as well as frequent awareness sessions to educate employees on various topics related to physical and mental health.

Furthermore, NBK provides many programs and activities focusing on employee wellbeing and care, and promoting a healthy lifestyle. It also allows flexible working hours and paternity leave, during which the new father is allowed to stay at home to bond

for its excellence in the "Best Advance in Compliance Training" category, acknowledging its outstanding training and development programs.

Social responsibility

Reflecting its dedication to delivering on its social responsibility towards all segments, particularly people with special needs, NBK organized an awareness seminar on banking transactions and methods of communication with people with hearing disabilities, in cooperation with the Kuwait Sports Club for

the Deaf (KSCD) – Girls, which is the first of its kind in Kuwait.

The bank also organized a training program for officers responsible for overseeing the Anti-Fraud and Money Crimes Unit in the Ministry of Interior. This initiative demonstrates its dedication to enhancing collaborative endeavors in combating electronic fraud, in line with the "Let's Be Aware" banking awareness campaign.



- NBK pursued its historic role in attracting, recruiting and upskilling national talent
- The bank raised the slogan "More Than a Workplace" to promote employee wellbeing
- It fostered a unique work environment to increase employee loyalty and differentiate itself in a competitive labor market
- NBK stands among the select few Kuwaiti organizations with a unique work environment akin to international peers
- The bank revolutionized career fairs in Kuwait by introducing the high-tech Augmented Reality
- The bank's efforts were recognized with 5 prestigious awards in women's empowerment initiatives and sustainable development of human resources
- Launching "NBK Tech Academy," the first academy in Kuwait focusing on digital and data technologies
- Developing the educational infrastructure by promoting an open and comprehensive training process group-wide
- Expanding and digitizing new design capabilities for general and functional training to ensure sustainable and effective knowledge management
- The bank invested KD 1.6 million in training programs to support employee career development
- Employees received 190,000 total training hours, with 3,000 participants
- Participation in "Your Voice Matters 2023" employee engagement survey exceeded the global average response rate
- Placing Kuwaitization as a top priority by participating in 8 career fairs to attract national talent
- NBK follows a unique approach towards ensuring equal career advancement opportunities for all employees



Emad Al-Ablani

"In 2023, we worked to foster a work environment raising the slogan "More Than a Workplace" to promote employee well-being, in addition to working tirelessly to support the bank's sustainability vision with many measures including intensive training programs with 3,000 training hours on sustainability awareness, sustainable finance, and climate risk management," he noted.

"The strategic priorities of Group Human Resources are to build a bank that is always ready for the future by implementing many tools and plans, including the introduction of a new comprehensive concept for workforce management in response to customers' changing needs and to promote corporate culture among employees," he indicated.



Talent development

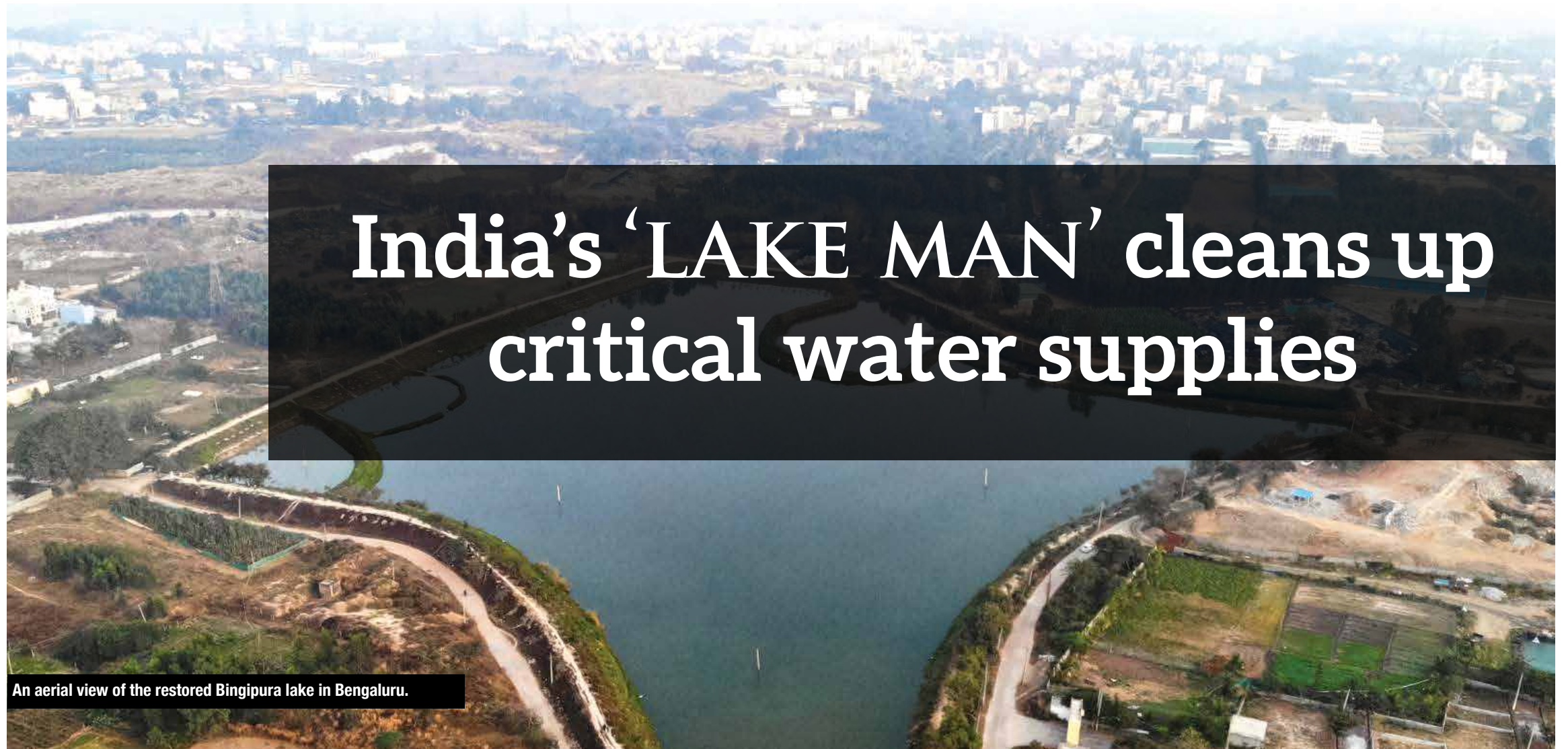
Talent management has effectively contributed to maintaining the path of human resources development and providing career development opportunities for employees aspiring to leadership roles by organizing many lectures and workshops in partnership with globally reputable universities.

The group also continued its initiatives to increase employee engagement, including the interactive "Your Voice Matters 2023" employee engagement survey, which saw the participation of more than 5,000 employees, scoring a response rate of 86 percent. The survey aimed to further improve work environment, and was followed by workshops to implement and discuss its results.

2023 also saw the launch of "NBK Tech Academy", which is the first of its kind in Kuwait, focusing on digital and data technologies. It is a professional training program to prepare and qualify young Kuwaiti talents to join the banking sector. NBK Academy was established in 2008, and after 28 successful waves and more than 190 active graduates.

This year also witnessed the graduation of the first cohort of NBK RISE, a Global Women Leadership initiative designed to elevate talented women to more significant leader-





India's 'LAKE MAN' cleans up critical water supplies

An aerial view of the restored Bingipura lake in Bengaluru.

Ancient lake systems once provided Bengaluru with critical water supplies, but the Indian tech hub's breakneck expansion left many waterways covered over or used as dumps. In the rush to modernize, the city once known for its abundance of water largely forgot the centuries-old reservoirs it depended upon to survive, with the number of lakes shrinking by more than three-quarters.

eval Chola dynasty, who turned low-lying areas into shallow reservoirs that provided water for drinking and irrigation.

The lakes stored the heavy monsoon rains and helped to replenish groundwater. But of the 1,850 that once dotted the city, fewer than 450 remain today. Many were destroyed to make room for high-rise towers, while canals were filled in with concrete - meaning heavy rainfall now sparks flooding and is not stored for the future.

Nearly half of Bengaluru depends on water sucked from intensive groundwater boreholes that often run dry in the summer heat, according to the city's Water, Environment, Land and Livelihoods (WELL) Labs research centre. Many residents already rely on expensive water trucked in from afar, and the problem is likely to get worse as climate change pushes global temperatures higher and alters weather patterns.

"We're dependent on a precarious groundwater table, and that is going to get even more precarious as you have a more unreliable rainfall," said WELL Labs chief Veena Srinivasan.

"We already don't have enough water to drink," she added, noting that "the water sources that we do have, we are polluting". Fixing lakes can ease the problem, though the city still needs a large-scale urban water management plan, she said.

Malligavad, trekking out to visit more than 180 ancient lakes, said he saw the "simple cost" they had taken to construct. They did not use expensive materials but only "soil, water, botanicals (plants) and canals", he said.

He persuaded his company to stump up around \$120,000 to fund his first project, the restoration of the 14-hectare (36-acre) Kyalasanahalli lake. Using excavators, Malligavad and his workers took around 45 days to clear the site back in 2017. When the monsoon rains came months later, he went boating in the cool and clean waters.

Natural process

The restoration process is simple, Malligavad said. He first drains the remaining lake water and removes the silt and weeds. Then he strengthens the dams, restores the surrounding canals and creates lagoons, before replanting the site with native trees and aquatic plants.

After that, he says: "Don't put anything into it. Naturally, rain will come and naturally, an ecosystem will be built." His initial success eventually led him to work full-time in cleaning lakes, raising cash from company corporate social responsibility funds. So far, he has restored more than 80 lakes covering over 360 hectares

"If the lake was not built, the hardship would not go away," Masood said. "We would have to go further away for water." Malligavad said his work has carried some risk - he has been threatened by land grabbers and real estate moguls, and was beaten by a gang wanting him to stop.



Restored canal adjacent to the arid Doddathogur lake in Bengaluru.

But after experts warned the city of nearly 12 million - today dubbed "India's Silicon Valley" - would not be able to meet its water needs with existing resources, mechanical engineer Anand Malligavad decided to take action.

"Lakes are lungs of the earth," said the 43-year-old, known to some as the "lake man" for his campaign to bring scores of them back to life. "I tell people if you have money, better to spend it on lakes. Decades later, it will serve you."

Water shortages are a chronic problem in India, which has nearly a fifth of the world's population but only four percent of its water resources, according to government think tank NITI Aayog.

Malligavad's first target was a trash-filled and dried-out site he passed on his way to work at an automotive components maker. "I thought instead of inspiring people... let me start doing it," Malligavad said. "Let it start with me."

'Simple cost'

He began by studying the skills used during the centuries-long rule of the medi-



An aerial view of the arid Doddathogur lake in Bengaluru.



A man bathing in the restored Bingipura lake in Bengaluru. — AFP photos



A boy playing cricket on the arid Doddathogur lake in Bengaluru.

in total, and expanded into nine other Indian states. The renewed reservoirs help supply water to hundreds of thousands of people, according to Malligavad.

Bengaluru resident Mohammed Masood, 34, often fills giant drums of water from one such lake. He said he typically uses a water tanker, but supplies can be uncertain and expensive.

But the sight of people enjoying a restored lake gave him his "biggest happiness", he told AFP. "Kids are swimming and enjoying it," he said, beside a restored lake. "More than this, what do you want?" — AFP



An aerial view of the arid Doddathogur lake next to buildings in Bengaluru.



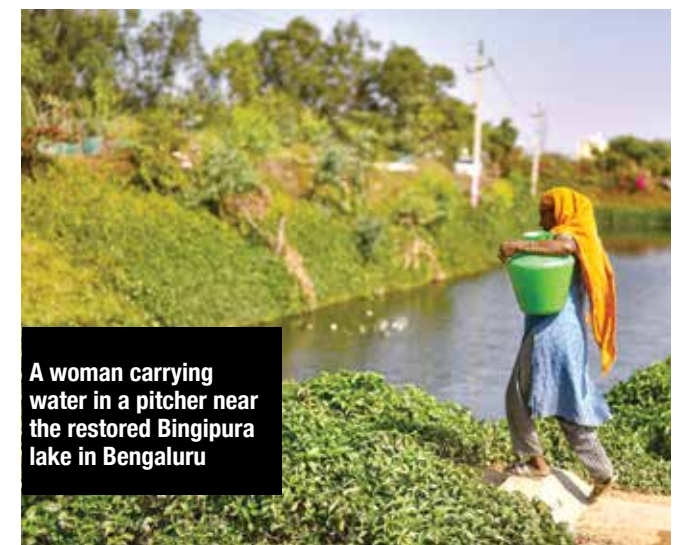
Mechanical engineer Anand Malligavad, known as "lake man" for his campaign to bring scores of lakes back to life, near a staff gauge used to measure water levels installed at the arid Doddathogur lake in Bengaluru.



Photo shows caked mud and vegetation on the arid Doddathogur lakebed in Bengaluru.



Children playing on the arid Doddathogur lake in Bengaluru.



A woman carrying water in a pitcher near the restored Bingipura lake in Bengaluru



Workers collecting litter dumped at the arid Doddathogur lake in Bengaluru.



Artist and sculptor Sami Mohammed giving a SADI lecture.

Workshop with master weavers Umm Mohammed, Umm Abdullah and Mutaira.

Sheikha Altaf Al-Sabah giving a SADI lecture.

Huda Abdulmoghni and Zainab Dashti at Studio Khemiae.

The SADI artists at the cyanotype workshop in Studio Khemiae.

Sadu House to open its doors for 2024 SADI art exhibition

By Zainab Dashti

The anticipated SADI art exhibition organized by and held at Sadu House will see its doors open on Monday, Feb 12 at 7 pm. The Sadu Art and Design Initiative (SADI) is a 3-month ambitious program that invites five up-and-coming local artists to immerse themselves in a series of workshops and lectures that dive deeply into the history, process and cultural importance of Al Sadu weaving. The artists, armed with the knowledge they have gained, would then create an art piece in line with the year's theme, which will then be exhibited on the opening night of the exhibition. This year's theme is 'Materiality of the Desert', and this year's SADI artists are Zainab Dashti, Mohammed Khesroh, Maha Al Shimmari, Ahmed Al Saffar and Fatemah Dashti.



SADI artist Zainab Dashti



SADI artist Maha Al Shimmari



SADI artist Mohammed Khesroh



SADI artist Ahmed Al Saffar

Al-Sadu is the name given to the traditional weaving that was practiced by bedouin women in pre-oil Arabia. It is regionally recognized by its symmetrical patterns, bold symbolism, simplicity, elegance and traditional colors that include red, black, white and brown. Along with hosting workshops and events, Sadu House promotes and preserves the art of Sadu weaving through the annual SADI exhibition.

Launched in 2016, the aim of the program is to "encourage creati-



SADI artist Fatemah Dashti

ty and innovation in contemporary textile and design". This year's program manager is Sahar Almuscati, who was assisted by Rawan Alotaibi, and with curator Saphiya Abu Almaati hosting the open studio hours guiding and critiquing the artists.

This year's theme, 'Materiality of the Desert', is described by Sadu House as how bedouin women used the natural desert materials around them and "through skill, good use and sound adaptation, were able to employ into abundant means to survive and thrive in their harsh environments".

The program invites the selected artists to find their own interpretation of the theme to create their own unique pieces. The artists are "challenged to build the knowledge and curiosity to bridge past and present, practicality and expression, as well as constraint and innovation".

At first "I couldn't speak the truth due to chaos and fear... I apologize to

taira, who shared their memories, experiences and expertise in Sadu weaving. Masirah Al-Enezi, Vice Chairperson of Al Sadu Society, gave workshops on the step-by-step process of making a traditional Sadu piece that left the artists equipped with the knowledge and exact techniques of the weaving itself.

Master weaver Mutaira joined by Sheikha Bibi Al-Sabah held a dyeing workshop demonstrating the traditional process of mixing and boiling the natural materials of the desert to dye the wool used for weaving. The artists learned how to combine the raw ingredients of madder, pomegranate peels, dry lemon, alum, salt and turmeric to create natural colours. Photographer Huda Abdulmoghni and Abdulaziz Shaheen held a cyanotype printing workshop in Studio Khemiae, where the artists learnt to use a cyanotype mixture to create pictures using sunlight that were later developed using solutions of tea and coffee.

Along with workshops there were a series of insightful lectures that included guest speakers, such as artist and sculptor Sami Mohammed, who along with Sheikha Altaf Al-Sabah delved into the history and symbolism of Al-Sadu. Anthropologist Dr Mohammed Al-Haddad gave a lecture on the use of Sadu from its primitive origins to its potential contemporary uses.

Architect and artist Fareed Abdal spoke about connecting and integrating the traditions, process and materials of Al-Sadu with the modern age. Graphic designer Dr Sarah Al-Falah delved into the creative process itself and the importance of constraints in creativity.

Sadu House is in Kuwait City on the Arabian Gulf Street and is currently run by the Al-Sadu Weaving Cooperative Society, a non-profit organization that is dedicated to preserving the artistry and history of traditional bedouin Al-Sadu weaving. SADI continues to attract the attention of local art and culture enthusiasts in its ninth year since its inception.



Anthropologist Dr Mohammed Al Haddad giving a SADI lecture.



Architect Fareed Abdal giving a SADI lecture.



Maseerah Al Enezi giving a museum tour in Sadu House.



Dr Sarah Al Falah giving a SADI lecture.

Ukraine-born Miss Japan gives up crown amid affair scandal

The Ukraine-born winner of the Miss Japan pageant has relinquished her crown after a report emerged of an affair she had with a married doctor. Karolina Shiino's nomination in January first sparked debate after some right-wingers questioned the title being awarded to a naturalized Japanese citizen. A scandal then erupted over her private life when weekly magazine Shukan Bunshun reported on her extra-marital relationship — taboo for beauty pageant contestants, who are held to squeaky-clean moral standards.

Japanese entertainment personalities who have affairs, dabble in drugs or suffer other scandals also often find themselves shunned by their fans and employers. The Miss Japan Association said Monday that it had accepted a request from Shiino to return the crown for "personal reasons", adding there would be no Miss Japan for 2024. Shiino said she wanted to "deeply apologize" to those involved, including the man's wife, on the same day her management agency said she had confirmed the affair.

At first "I couldn't speak the truth due to chaos and fear... I apologize to

those who believed in me and supported me," the 26-year-old said on Instagram. "I take the situation seriously and have relinquished the Miss Japan Grand Prix title," wrote the model, who moved to Japan around the age of five.

In a statement Monday, Shiino's agency said she told them she had begun seeing the man believing him to be divorced, but continued the relationship after learning he was still married. Miss Japan, first held in 1950, is awarded for "Japanese-style beauty" consisting of "inner beauty, beauty in appearance and beauty of actions," its website says.

After Shiino's nomination attracted attention online, people quickly weighed in on social media. "It doesn't matter if she is Jewish-Ukrainian or not, but I can't accept her character... Why is she Miss Japan?" one user wrote on X, formerly Twitter. Others wrote in support of Shiino on her Instagram post. "You have Japanese spirit. I don't think such (a) personal private thing should be a reason for you to step down but this is Japan," said a reply with nearly 350 likes. — AFP



Karolina Shiino, a model who became a naturalized Japanese citizen from Ukraine, poses with the trophy of the Miss Japan crown in Tokyo. — AFP

Sports

New Zealand hammer South Africa by 281 runs in first Test

Rachin Ravindra named man of the match for his 240 in NZ's first innings

MOUNT MAUNGANUI: Black Caps seamer Kyle Jamieson claimed four wickets on Wednesday to drive New Zealand to a 281-run win over South Africa with a day to spare in the first Test. Dogged resistance from the tourists ended with their dismissal for 247 at Mount Maunganui as the Black Caps notched their second-biggest Test victory by runs.

New Zealand are a step closer to a maiden series win over South Africa after 17 previous failed attempts, dating back to 1931. Given their struggles at Bay Oval, the vastly inexperienced Proteas will need a dramatic turnaround to win the second and final Test, starting on Tuesday in Hamilton.

Captain Neil Brand was one of six South African debutants and conceded his team were well off the pace. "It's very deflating," he said. "We were completely outplayed by a very good New Zealand team. I tested on this wicket. Guys got in, then got themselves out, which is disappointing. Hopefully we can compete more in the second Test."

The tourists were forced to name a depleted tour squad with most first-choice players involved in their domestic Twenty20 competition. New Zealand took control with 511 in their first innings and never looked like losing when the tourists were dismissed for 162.

The hosts declared at their overnight 179-4 before play began on Wednesday, leaving South Africa to chase an unrealistic target of 529. Jamieson ensured they never came close, taking 4-58 and pro-

ducing key double-strikes at the start of the second and third sessions on Wednesday. The most crucial wicket was that of David Bedingham, who raced to a career-high 87 off 96 balls before he mistimed a pull shot to midwicket soon after tea. It ended a 105-run stand with Keegan Petersen, who also failed to control a Jamieson short ball on 16.

The day's response had begun disastrously for the tourists, when both openers departed inside the first four overs. Brand was bowled for three by a late inswinger from his New Zealand counterpart Tim Southee while Edward Moore went for a duck after driving a Matt Henry delivery to cover.

A resolute 63-run stand for the third wicket was broken by Jamieson, who snared Raynard van Tonder at first slip for 31 before Zubayr Hamza's attempted pull shot on 36 flew gently to mid-on. Spinner Mitchell Santner extracted turn to wrap up the tail and finish with 3-59, matching Jamieson's six scalps for the match. Rachin Ravindra was named man of the match for his 240 in New Zealand's first innings. "This rates highly for me, because of the time spent out there and the different people I batted with and the partnerships we managed to put down," Ravindra said after only his fourth Test appearance.

"That makes it a bit more special. It's extremely pleasing we got the job done." Kane Williamson also shone with the bat, scoring a century in each innings to continue a brilliant run of Test form. — AFP



MOUNT MAUNGANUI: South Africa's Raynard van Tonder (R) plays a shot past New Zealand's Rachin Ravindra (L) as Tom Blundell (C) looks on during day four of the first cricket test match between New Zealand and South Africa at the Bay Oval in Mount Maunganui on February 7, 2024. — AFP

Bumrah, first Indian pacer to top ICC rankings

NEW DELHI: India's pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah on Wednesday rose to the top of the International Cricket Council's Test bowling rankings, becoming the first-ever fast bowler from the country to achieve the feat. The 30-year-old played a key role in India's series-equalling victory over England last week, with a match haul of nine wickets.

Bumrah replaced his teammate, off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin, at the top of the ICC table. While Bumrah climbed three places to reach the top, Ashwin dropped to third. South African pacer Kagiso Rabada held on to second place despite being out of action in the ongoing Test series in New Zealand.

Before Bumrah, only three Indian bowlers have been at the pinnacle of ICC's Test bowling rankings: Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja, and the legendary left-arm spinner Bishan Singh Bedi, who passed away last year. The previous highest-ranking Indian pace bowler was Kapil Dev, who held the second rank for a brief period between December 1979 and February 1980. Left-arter Zaheer Khan was number three



VISAKHAPATNAM: (L-R) India's Shubman Gill, Yashasvi Jaiswal and Jasprit Bumrah gesture at the end of the second Test cricket match between India and England at the Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy Cricket Stadium in Visakhapatnam. — AFP

from October to November 2020.

In the latest round of rankings, Indian opener Yashasvi Jaiswal leapt 37 places to become the 29th-ranked Test batsman, on the back of his double century against England. New Zealand captain Kane Williamson, who led his team to victory against South Africa Wednesday with a century in each innings, continued to dominate the Test batting rankings. — AFP



The victorious female shooting team with Duaij Al-Otaibi.

Head of KASC lauds achievements of female shooters

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: President of Kuwait and Arab Shooting Confederations (KASC) Engineer Duaij Khalaf Al-Otaibi lauded the achievements of female shooters who participated in the Arab Women Clubs Games being held in Sharjah, UAE. The shooters won one gold, one silver and two bronze medals.

Al-Otaibi was at Kuwait International Airport along with Secretary General of Arab and Kuwait

Shooting Federations Obaid Munabi Al-Osaimi and shooters' families to receive them upon their return from Sharjah. He said the achievements are the result of hard work and dedication, in addition to the support of the Public Authority for Sport for shooting.

He thanked HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for his care of the sport which contributed to making many achievements locally, regionally and internationally.

Meanwhile, Al-Osaimi said the shooters winning this number of medals adds much to the women's sport in Kuwait and dedicated the win to HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, government and people of Kuwait.

Shooters Ghazlan Al-Hindi said the competition was highly competitive and her achievement was due to hard preparations and serious training by Kuwait Shooting Sport Club on daily basis.

Rui Pinto of Football Leaks gives hard disks to Euro investigators

PARIS: Rui Pinto, the Portuguese whistleblower behind the "Football Leaks" revelations, has turned his hard disks over to French and European investigators even as he fears his life is "totally stuck". The information could open up a whole new raft of potentially damaging revelations for football in Europe.

"I am sure that there are still many things that have not been investigated," Pinto said in an interview with AFP and other French media. Since the leaks were first published online in 2015, the salaries of superstars Lionel Messi and Neymar have been revealed and the world learned of a rape allegation lawsuit against Cristiano Ronaldo that was dismissed by a US judge.

Accusations also emerged that European champions Manchester City used a complex strategy to get around Financial Fairplay rules. The club deny any wrongdoing. The revelations he has overseen have come at a high personal cost to Pinto, 35, who was arrested in Hungary in January 2019 and given a four-year suspended prison sentence in a Portuguese court last year for attempted extortion and unauthorized entry into computer systems.

Last week, Pinto was questioned by French anti-corruption investigators near Paris, with magistrates specializing in financial crimes also in attendance. That interview was in relation to a French investigation into the original Football Leaks revelations that was opened in late 2016.

Also around the table were investigators from Germany, Belgium and other countries. In an interview with AFP and other French media at the offices of his French lawyer William Bourdon, Pinto set out the reason for his presence in France — he wanted "for the first time to give French and foreign authorities full and unrestricted access to the data" he had collected until his arrest five years ago.

Far greater

The information that investigators can now access is far greater than that made available to European Investigative Collaborations, the media consortium which has published the Football Leaks revelations so far.

The office of France's financial crimes investigators confirmed that "work on exploiting (the data) can now start". It hailed Pinto's "essential cooperation" and said his assistance would help "relaunch procedures that are already under way or lead to new procedures being opened".

The Portuguese said the hard disks contain information about some of Europe's leading football clubs, sports federations and companies. Pinto said: "I am sure that there are still many things that have

not been investigated."

He cited "an interesting example" concerning the French interior ministry, referring to documents that bolstered suspicions of fiscal irregularities in the world record 222-million-euro (\$239 million) transfer of Neymar from Barcelona to Paris Saint-Germain in 2017.

The list of revelations also includes the "Luanda Leaks", an investigation published in 2020 about Isabel dos Santos, the once fabulously rich daughter of former Angola president Jose Eduardo dos Santos, who ruled Angola for 38 years.

"What I've just handed over is far greater than the first data that was shared. It doesn't just concern Football Leaks and Luanda Leaks," Pinto claimed. In the interview, Pinto returned again and again to the "harassment" he had been subjected to by the Portuguese justice system. He said his home country had done nothing to exploit the data from his leaks, contrasting it with the "respectful" welcome he had received in France.



PARIS: Portuguese whistleblower and founder of "Football Leaks" Rui Pinto (L) speaks with his lawyer William Bourdon (R) during a meeting with journalists, in Paris. — AFP

More charges in Portugal

In France, where in November he was given a six-month suspended prison sentence for hacking the emails of Paris Saint-Germain executives, Pinto will no longer be prosecuted, his lawyer said.

In Portugal, however, Pinto still faces a number of criminal investigations. Rui Pinto has appealed against his four-year conviction from last year, but prosecutors have already prepared new charges against him.

The only bright spot is that he was able to meet the investigators in Paris because other elements of the Portuguese investigations were dropped in November, allowing him to cooperate with other countries. While he waits to see what investigators in France and other European partners produce from the data, his lawyer said he fears he risks "judicial persecution in perpetuity". Pinto himself said: "My life is totally stuck. I am not even allowed to apply for a job." — AFP



LA COURNEUVE: (From L) Zainaba Said Anzum, Valerie Pecresse, Stephane Troussel, Tony Estanguet and Patrick Ollier pose for a photograph as they attend the inauguration of the Marville aquatic centre, which swimming pool will host Water Polo training sessions during the Paris 2024 Olympic Games. — AFP

US Olympics team 'excited' by open-air Paris Games parade

PARIS: US athletes will take part in the opening ceremony of the Paris Olympics on the river Seine, with the American Olympics team "excited" and also confident in French security, a top US official said. Teams are set to sail down the river through the centre of Paris for the parade at the start of the Games on July 26, the first time the ceremony has taken place outside the main athletics stadium.

Planning security over six kilometres (four miles) of river for the flotilla of boats has been a major headache for organizers and police, with the number of spectators reduced by around half. "We expect that the security will be up to the standards to make sure that our athletes and everyone in the whole delegation are safe," Rocky Harris, chief of sport and athlete services for the United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee (USOPC), told AFP on Tuesday.

He confirmed that US athletes were planning to

board one of the more than hundred boats that are set to be used by sports delegations. "We are excited about the opening ceremony. It is really going to showcase Paris and the excitement around the Games," he added.

Rather than security, "the main concern we had was around athletes standing for seven or eight hours", he explained. Around 300,000 spectators with tickets are set to line the banks of the Seine, according to the latest estimate, with many others expected to watch from balconies and buildings that overlook the waterway.

France was on its highest alert for terror attacks between October and January after a suspected Islamist burst into a school in northern France and stabbed a teacher to death. The country has been consistently targeted by Islamic extremists over the last decade, while the Zionist entity's war against Hamas in Gaza has raised tensions internationally.

Harris was in Paris visiting a renovated sports centre in Eaubonne, northern Paris, that will serve as a training base for the roughly 850 American athletes that are expected for the Olympics from July 26-August 11 and the Paralympics from August 26-September 8. "We're very confident that they're going to be ready in every way," Harris said when asked about preparations for the Games. — AFP

Sports

Jonathan Tah strikes late to send Leverkusen to German Cup semis

Win will be a crucial confidence boost for Leverkusen

LEVERKUSEN: Jonathan Tah scored in the 90th minute to send Bayer Leverkusen through to the German Cup semi-finals with a 3-2 win at home over Stuttgart on Tuesday. League leaders Leverkusen twice came from behind against an impressive Stuttgart side, securing victory in the dying moments for the third time in their past five matches.

With the match headed for extra time, midfielder Florian Wirtz curled in a superb cross for Tah to head home and clinch a memorable victory. Leverkusen manager Xabi Alonso toasted the victory, telling reporters "sometimes we win with control, structure and stability, but today we won with heart, soul—and that is also very important."

"To score like that gives us lots of energy and positive hope for what's to come," goalscorer Tah told Germany's ARD network. The win will be a crucial confidence boost for Leverkusen ahead of Saturday's home date with Bayern Munich, who sit two points behind them in the league.

Tah however sought to quash trophy talk, saying "what makes us strong is that we're focusing on the here and now and on the tasks we have at hand, not what could happen at the end of the season." Stuttgart goalscorer Waldemar Anton said "to lose like that hurts enormously, we had the game in our grasp."

With Leverkusen and Stuttgart two of only three quarter finalists from the top division, this season's German Cup represented a real chance of silver-

ware, particularly with Bayern, Borussia Dortmund and holders RB Leipzig already eliminated.

Stuttgart, who sit third in the table this campaign having needed to win a two-legged playoff to stay in the Bundesliga last season, opened with a flurry. Anton shrugged off centre-back Edmond Tapsoba to head in from a corner and give the visitors a deserved lead after just 11 minutes.

Unflappable for much of the season, the early goal took the steam out of Alonso's side, who struggled to handle Stuttgart's intense pressing. Leverkusen finally broke through early in the second-half with a stunning long-range shot from Germany midfielder Robert Andrich.

Stuttgart scored next to cut the home side's momentum, again pressing Leverkusen into an error when trying to play out from the back, before Chris Fuehrich curled the ball home. Alonso sensed a first loss in 30 matches this season and brought on Amine Adli, fresh from Africa Cup of Nations duty for Morocco. The forward repayed his coach's faith, collecting a Wirtz assist and scoring three minutes after coming off the bench.

With a punishing 30 minutes of extra time on the horizon, Wirtz found Tah unmarked in front of goal, keeping the unbeaten side's dream of a treble alive. Tah was full of praise for his manager after the match, saying "he always finds the right words, the right moments to be sensitive to what we're doing well and what we aren't." — AFP



LEVERKUSEN: Bayer Leverkusen's German midfielder #08 Robert Andrich (2nd L) shoots and scores the 1-1 equalizer during the German Cup (DFB Pokal) quarter-final football match between Bayer 04 Leverkusen and VfB Stuttgart in Leverkusen, western Germany on February 6, 2024. — AFP

From Asian Cup final to EPL? Jordan's coach hopes so

DOHA: Jordan coach Hussein Ammouta hopes their surprise run to the Asian Cup final will spark broader development in the country's football and propel Jordanian players into the Premier League. Second-half goals from the impressive attacking duo of Yazan al-Naimat and Mousa al-Tamari sent Jordan into the final for the first time with a 2-0 win over South Korea.

South Korea's coach Jurgen Klinsmann and skipper Son Heung-min admitted that Jordan, the lowest-ranked team left in the tournament, fully deserved their semi-final victory on Tuesday. "The players delivered a heroic performance," the Moroccan Ammouta said after taking Jordan into the final for the first time at their fifth Asian Cup.

They will face either Iran or the hosts and reigning champions Qatar. No matter what happens on Saturday, the widely admired Ammouta says their landmark achievement must be the spark for something longer lasting in Jordanian football.

"We need to invest in infrastructure, in the training and formation of our players to reach higher levels," he said. "We need to pay attention to age categories." Ammouta says that change is already afoot, citing the example of the impressive Tamari, who together with Naimat terrorised South Korea's shell-shocked defence.

Tamari, who set Naimat up for the opening goal on 53 minutes before slicing through the Korean defence for a second 13 minutes later, left Jordan's domestic league in 2018. First came a move to Cy-



AL-RAYYAN: Jordan's fans cheer during the Qatar 2023 AFC Asian Cup semi-final football match between Jordan and South Korea at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium in Al-Rayyan. — AFP

priot giants APOEL, before leaving for Belgian football two years later with Oud-Heverlee Leuven.

Last summer, after 10 goals and nine assists for the top-flight Belgian side, Tamari sealed a free transfer to Montpellier in France. Tamari is the only member of Jordan's Asian Cup squad playing in Europe and Ammouta says for the national side to build on their success in Qatar more need to follow in his footsteps.

"What you saw today was the fruit of several years of work," Ammouta said after the South Korea

triumph. "We have Mousa al-Tamari in the French league and hopefully we will have four or five Jordanian players in the French league or the English Premier League.

"When you look at Japan or Korea you see players who are playing abroad and they have great value to their national teams. "This is what we should start planning for—how will we produce players who will play in the world's biggest leagues?" "This a building block that's part of a bigger plan." — AFP

behind the Inter Miami bench. The moment came around 15 minutes into the second half, when the World Cup-winning Argentine replaced David Ruiz, sending the ecstatic crowd into a moment of roaring frenzy that was followed by passionate cheers at his every touch.

In the 79th minute, he dribbled solo into the Kobe box and fired in a close-range shot that was saved by goalkeeper Shota Arai. Vissel had also showed promise especially early in the match with former Japan international striker Yuya Osako hitting the post 15 minutes into the game. A minute later, Osako struck the woodwork again. Kobe won the penalty shootout, with Messi no taking part.

Hong Kong controversy

The game drew a sharp comparison from Sunday when Messi and the team's co-owner David Beckham were booed by tens of thousands of fans in Hong Kong after the star did not play in a friendly.

During a press event in Tokyo on Tuesday, Messi said his leg injury was improving but refused to say whether he would play in the Tokyo game.

Tickets for the Japan leg of the US Major League Soccer (MLS) club's globe-trotting pre-season tour cost between 10,000 yen (\$68) and 200,000 yen (\$1,346) with "special experience" packages priced even higher.

On Sunday in Hong Kong, a crowd of nearly 40,000 who paid for similarly expensive tickets were involved in angry scenes after Messi stayed rooted to the bench during his side's 4-1 win against a Hong Kong select XI.

The Hong Kong government demanded an explanation from the match's organisers, who had sought public funding for the event.

The organisers said they had withdrawn the government grant request after Messi's no-show. Miami's win in Hong Kong was their first in five pre-season matches. They drew 0-0 in El Salvador, lost to fellow MLS side FC Dallas and then twice to club sides in Saudi Arabia. Messi came on as a substitute six minutes from the end of the game in Saudi Arabia last Thursday. They have one more friendly, at home to Argentina's Newell's Old Boys next week, before the new MLS season starts on February 21. — AFP

Knives out for Klinsmann after 'shameful' exit

DOHA: Jurgen Klinsmann's position as South Korea coach came under intense pressure on Wednesday after what local media called a "shameful" and "humiliating" Asian Cup semi-final defeat to Jordan. The Koreans crashed out 2-0 to a team ranked 64 places below them in the world and they failed to muster a shot on target despite boasting Son Heung-min in attack.

The German Klinsmann, who came into the tournament vowing to win South Korea's first Asian Cup in 64 years, said after the deserved defeat on Tuesday that he would not quit. He was backed publicly by some of his players, primarily the captain Son, who said the 59-year-old coach will become "even stronger".

But the reaction of fans and media was scathing, saying the Jordan collapse was just the latest example of questionable tactics and team selections. Most of all, Klinsmann's army of detractors arrowed in once more on the way he wears a ready-made smile, even in defeat.

"While the players showed their disappointment and forced smiles, Klinsmann's face was filled with laughter," said the Sports Hankook website. "It was a scene that was extremely perplexing to comprehend, considering he is the coach of the Korean national team."

A World Cup winner as a player for Germany, Klinsmann was never a very popular choice in South Korea following his appointment a year ago. Asked by AFP on Tuesday if he would quit, Klinsmann said: "I am not planning to do anything." He said he would analyse the tournament and talk to Korean football officials, but "apart from that, I am not thinking of anything". — AFP



AL-RAYYAN: South Korea's German coach Jurgen Klinsmann speaks to midfielder #07 Son Heung-min after losing to Jordan at the end of the Qatar 2023 AFC Asian Cup semi-final football match between Jordan and South Korea. — AFP

Classifieds

Clinics & Hospitals

Clinics

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

Change of Name

I, Bohra Shabbir Husain s/o Haider Ali, here by declare that I have changed my name as Shabbir Hussain Asif s/o Haider Ali so, from now and in future i will be known by my new name Shabbir Hussain Asif s/o Haider Ali. Add: 5, Saifee Nagar Khatiwala Tank Indore (MP) 452014. (#5157 8/2-2024)

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, 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, 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)

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Qatar beat Iran 3-2 in thriller to reach Asian Cup final

Match-winner Ali scores to lead Qatar to victory



DOHA: Qatar's players celebrate their win in the Qatar 2023 AFC Asian Cup semi-final football match between Iran and Qatar at al-Thumama Stadium in Doha on February 7, 2024. — AFP

DOHA: Hosts and holders Qatar squeezed into an Asian Cup final showdown with Jordan after beating Iran 3-2 with an 82nd-minute winner in a frenetic semi-final on Wednesday. Almoez Ali struck in Doha to send Qatar into their second straight final, further exorcising the demons of their first-round exit at the 2022 World Cup.

Qatar lost all three of their World Cup games on home soil just over a year ago, the worst record of any host in the competition's history. But that was all a distant memory as they celebrated in front of over 40,000 fans after a breathless encounter at Al Thumama Stadium.

Sardour Azmoun gave Iran the lead in the fourth minute before Qatar equalised soon after when Jasssem Gaber's shot went in via a heavy deflection. Qatar's Akram Afif then notched his fifth goal of the tournament with a wonderful strike minutes before half-time, only for Iran to equalise through an Alireza Jahanbakhsh penalty early in the second period.

Match-winner Ali scored an Asian Cup-record nine goals to lead Qatar to their first title in 2019 but he had managed only one heading into the semi-finals of this year's tournament. His late strike was worth the wait for Qatar, and ended Iran's bid for a first Asian title since 1976.

Iran had Shojae Khalilzadeh sent off in second-half injury time, before Jahanbakhsh hit the post in the final minute. The game had barely begun when Azmoun gave Iran the lead with a well-taken finish, hooking the ball over his head and into the net.

Mehdi Taremi should have made it two when Jahanbakhsh teed him up in front of goal soon after, and Qatar made them pay with the equaliser in the 17th minute. Afif pulled the ball back for Gaber, whose shot on goal deflected off Iran's Saeed Ezatollahi and looped up over goalkeeper Alireza Beiranvand.

Iran were incensed that no foul had been given in the build-up. The equaliser gave Qatar new ener-

gy but Afif failed to take advantage in a one-on-one with Beiranvand just after the half-hour mark. Afif made no mistake in the 43rd minute, curling home a superb strike after jinking his way into the box.

Iran regrouped at half-time and drew level just six minutes after the break. A VAR check ruled that Qatar defender Ahmed Fatehi had blocked a goal-bound shot with his hand, and Jahanbakhsh made no mistake from the penalty spot. The action continued at break-neck speed and Ali restored Qatar's lead when he controlled a shot from Abdulaziz Hatem and turned it past Beiranvand. There was more than a hint of offside about the goal but it was allowed to stand. — AFP



Kuwait wins 17 medals at 12th Sharjah Para Athletics Forum

ABU DHABI: Kuwait's team have added two additional medals at the end of 12th Sharjah Para Athletics Forum, raising the total medals to 17 medals on Tuesday. Kuwait's Faisal al-Rajhi won the two medals Tuesday after coming second in the 1500-m and 5000-m wheelchair running competitions.

Speaking to KUNA in a statement, President of Kuwait Disabled Sport Club Shafi al-Hajri expressed pride for this achievement made by Kuwaiti athletes, dedicating the progress to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. He said that the Kuwaiti team are preparing for the coming championship due in Dubai, hoping for further progress.

Kuwait's team won five gold, eight silver and four bronze medals in the three-day competition, which kicked off Sunday and ended Tuesday. Up to 290 male and female athletes from 38 countries took part in the forum. — KUNA

Fury reveals five-fight plan

LONDON: Tyson Fury has set out an ambitious five-fight plan, including a long-awaited bout against fellow British boxer Anthony Joshua, as the world heavyweight champion dismissed talk of retirement. WBC champion Fury's unification bout with Oleksandr Usyk, the holder of the WBO, WBA and IBF

belts, had been due to take place in Riyadh later this month. But the eagerly anticipated contest was postponed until May 18 in Saudi Arabia after the British fighter suffered a deep cut above his eye in training. Fury expects to have a rematch with Ukraine's Usyk regardless of the outcome of their first fight, before facing former world heavyweight champion Joshua in one or two bouts and then Francis Ngannou, whom he beat in October.

"I keep hearing talk of people saying I should retire or I'm going to retire soon or whatever," Fury

Halep appears before CAS to appeal four year doping ban

LAUSANNE: Former world number one Simona Halep appeared before the Court of Arbitration for Sport on Wednesday to appeal her four-year doping ban in what is expected to be a three-day hearing. The 32-year-old Romanian was suspended last September by the International Tennis Integrity Agency (ITIA) after two separate doping infractions.

The two-time Grand Slam singles champion tested positive for roxadustat after the US Open in 2022 and was charged with a separate second anti-doping breach last year relating to irregularities in her athlete biological passport.

Halep, smiling and surrounded by her legal team, was seen entering CAS headquarters at the Palais Beaulieu in Lausanne, Switzerland but made no statement. The CAS ruling will be delivered at a date yet to be announced. Halep has protested her innocence and refused to accept the ITIA decision which will keep her from playing professional tennis again until October 6, 2026.

The winner of the 2018 French Open and 2019 Wimbledon singles titles says she wants to "clear her name" and has claimed experts found she had accidentally taken a contaminated supplement. But the ITIA said while the tribunal accepted Halep had taken a contaminated supplement, they also "determined the volume the player ingested could not have

said on his Instagram feed on Wednesday, showing stitches above his eye. "I ain't retiring—I've got two fights with Usyk for the undisputed, twice."

Fury, yet to face Joshua, added: "Then I'm going to fight AJ (Joshua) at least once, maybe twice, if there's a rematch—if he wants one after the first battering I give him. "Then I'm going to fight Ngannou again.

"That's just the start. There's five fights for you to whet your appetite. I ain't going nowhere. I'm 35 years old and in the prime of my life." Fury has



LAUSANNE: Former world number one tennis player Romania's Simona Halep (R) arrives at the Court of Arbitration for Sport in Lausanne on February 7, 2024, for her appeal against a four-year doping ban. — AFP

resulted in the concentration of roxadustat found in the positive sample".

Roxadustat is a substance that can be used legitimately to treat anaemia. But it is also on the World Anti-Doping Agency banned list as it is considered a blood-doping agent, which increases haemoglobin and the production of red blood cells.

The biological passport system is designed for the long-term monitoring of an athlete's blood indicators with the aim of identifying irregularities that could indicate doping. — AFP

won 34 fights with one draw since turning professional in 2008.

His most recent fight was a controversial victory over former UFC mixed martial arts world champion Ngannou, making his professional boxing debut. Fury was knocked down but won on a split points decision. Two-time former world champion Joshua is set for a non-title fight with Ngannou, also in Saudi Arabia, on March 8. The last undisputed heavyweight boxing champion was Lennox Lewis, when he beat Evander Holyfield in 1999. — AFP