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Hamas warns against Rafah raid

Netanyahu claims civilians have 'safe passage' amid foreign concerns over invasion

Amir receives Bhutanese King



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives at Seif Palace King of Bhutan Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck and his delegation during their official visit to the country on Feb 11, 2024. — KUNA

GAZA: Hamas warned the Zionist entity on Sunday that a ground offensive into Gaza's far-southern city of Rafah, crowded with displaced Palestinians, would imperil the release of captives held by fighters in the besieged territory. Foreign governments, including the Zionist entity's key ally the United States, and aid groups have voiced deep concern over Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's vow to extend operations.

Rafah, on the border with Egypt, has remained the last refuge for Palestinians fleeing the Zionist entity's relentless bombardment elsewhere in the Gaza Strip in its war against Hamas. "Any attack by the occupation army on the city of Rafah would torpedo the exchange negotiations," a Hamas leader told AFP on condition of anonymity.

The Zionist premier has told troops to prepare to go into the city which now hosts more than half of Gaza's total population, spurring concern about the impact on displaced civilians. Netanyahu told US broadcaster ABC News that those who urged the

Zionist entity not to go into Rafah were effectively giving Hamas a license to remain.

In an interview aired Sunday, Netanyahu insisted the Rafah operation would go ahead "while providing safe passage for the civilian population so they can leave". When pressed about where the population was supposed to go, Netanyahu said: "You know, the areas that we've cleared north of Rafah, plenty of areas there. But, we are working out a detailed plan."

Some 1.4 million people have crowded into Rafah, with many living in tents amid increasingly scarce supplies of food, water and medicine. Mediators have held new talks in Cairo for a pause in the fighting and the release of at least some of the 132 captives the Zionist entity says are still in Gaza, including 29 thought to be dead. Hamas' military wing on Sunday said two hostages had been killed and eight others seriously wounded in Zionist bombardment in recent days.

Zionist strikes have long hit targets in Rafah, and combat on Sunday seemed in-

tense several kilometers to the north in Khan Yunis city, where AFP correspondents heard regular explosions and saw plumes of black smoke. Gaza's health ministry on Sunday reported 112 deaths over the previous 24 hours, and Hamas authorities added there had been dozens of air strikes, including on Rafah.

The Zionist entity's relentless offensive in Gaza has killed at least 28,176 people, mostly women and children. US President Joe Biden, in his strongest criticism of the Zionist entity yet, described the Zionist response on Thursday as "over the top". Netanyahu told ABC News he appreciated Biden's "support for (the Zionist entity) since the beginning of the war," but that he did not "know exactly what he meant by that". Netanyahu also claimed Zionist forces have "killed and wounded... about 12,000 fighters" of Hamas.

The United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Oman and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) were some of the latest to

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NEWS IN BRIEF



Unstable weather to continue

KUWAIT: According to the Kuwait Meteorological Center, there is a possibility of rain throughout the early hours of Monday morning. After that, the probability of rain is expected to decrease, while the likelihood of fog is forecast to increase. The weather will remain partially cloudy with a chance of fog until Thursday, with chances of strong winds, rising dust and scattered rain. (See Page 3)

Kuwait, UAE sign tax deal

DUBAI: Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates sealed an agreement in Dubai aiming to avoid double taxation on income and prevent tax evasion, Kuwait's finance ministry said on Sunday. The agreement was signed during an Arab financial forum monitored by IMF experts and held ahead of the World Governments Summit, which takes place in Dubai on Monday. (See Page 2)

Teachers protest biometric system

KUWAIT: A number of teachers organized a sit-in at the ministry of education on Sunday to protest the start of the implementation of the biometric scan system in public schools. The teachers demand that they be excluded from the system that is enforced at all state departments to register staff attendance, citing the different nature of their work compared to other jobs in the public sector.

Zain launches 'Bede' fintech app in Bahrain

MANAMA: Zain FinTech, the financial services arm of Zain Group, a leading provider of innovative technologies and digital lifestyle communications operating in eight markets across the Middle East and Africa, announces the launch of its new fintech brand, Bede (in my hand). Commercially launched first in Bahrain as per the Central Bank of Bahrain guidelines, Bede is an innovative shariah-compliant fintech mobile app offering a seamless and convenient consumer microfinance service in just a few taps.

Bader Al-Kharafi commented, "The launch of the new fintech brand Bede, first in Bahrain is another milestone of the Board of Director's initiated '4Sight' strategy and vision to expand much-needed fintech services in Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and soon in Kuwait and Sudan. The expansion of innovative fintech services drives financial inclusion and advances the region's digital ecosystem, supporting the socio-economic visions of the countries we serve." (See Page 8)



MANAMA: Bahrain's Minister of Finance and National Economy Sheikh Salman bin Khalifa Al-Khalifa with Osamah Al-Furaih, Bader Al-Kharafi, Sheikh Ahmed bin Ali Al-Khalifa, Zain Group board members and other dignitaries.

4 UAE soldiers, Bahraini officer killed in Somalia

DUBAI: Four Emirati soldiers and a Bahraini officer were killed following an attack in Somalia, where they were training the Somali national army, the United Arab Emirates announced. The soldiers were "exposed to a terrorist act" while "performing their work duties in training and qualifying the Somali Armed Forces", the UAE's defense ministry said in a statement on Saturday, adding that three Emirati soldiers and a Bahraini officer were killed. A

fourth Emirati soldier, who was among two injured in the attack, "passed away upon arrival" in the UAE on Sunday, the official WAM news agency said, raising the overall death toll.

Kuwait on Sunday strongly condemned the attack, describing the incident as an act of "terrorism". Kuwait stands in solidarity with Abu Dhabi and Manama in the wake of this "horrific attack", according to a foreign ministry statement, emphasizing it is imperative to ramp up global cooperation to fight the "scourge" of terrorism, and extending its "deepest" condolences to the families of the soldiers who died.

HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent cables of condolences Sunday to UAE President

Sheikh Mohammad bin Zayed Al-Nahyan and Bahrain King Hamad bin Issa Al-Khalifa, expressing condolences over the "terrorist" attack. HH the Amir prayed to Allah Almighty to bless the victims' souls, wishing the wounded speedy recovery. HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Dhabi sent similar cables of condolences to the Gulf leaders.

The corpses arrived in the UAE capital Abu Dhabi on board a military aircraft, according to WAM, which carried footage of three coffins draped in Emirati flags being carried on a red carpet across the tarmac during a military ceremony. The UAE "continues to coordinate and cooperate with the Somali government in investigating the sinful terrorist act",

the defense ministry statement said.

A Somali military source told AFP that the gunman was a member of the Somali army who opened fire inside a training camp in the capital Mogadishu, killing and injuring an unknown number of people including soldiers from the UAE. "The shooting was carried out by a member of the army who stayed in the camp. He was killed in the shooting," said a senior Somali army official who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive security matters.

The attack was claimed by Al-Shabaab, a militant group aligned with Al-Qaeda that has waged a violent insurgency against Somalia's central government and its foreign backers for over 15 years. — Agencies

Sahel working to release English version of app

By Passant Hisham

KUWAIT: Acknowledging the challenges faced by non-Arab expatriates while accessing the Arabic-only unified government application Sa-

hel, Yousef Kazem, the app's official spokesperson, revealed to Kuwait Times plans for an upcoming English version release.

"We are certain that there is a large segment of society, especially non-Arab speakers, who need to easily access the e-services directly through the application. As we respect their concerns, we are currently working on introducing the English version in upcoming updates," Kazem stated, without giving a specific date for the release.

While the application's main purpose is to facilitate government transactions for all members of society, it has greatly hindered non-Arab speakers from accessing essential services through the platform, according to the expats who shared their experience with Kuwait Times.

"I don't see any difficulty in adding an English version to the application. In fact, we are the ones facing real difficulties dealing with the app," said Abhishek, a 41-year-old Indian

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Local

Burgan Bank revives iconic play 'Al-Sindbad Al-Bahri'

Part of multi-faceted National Day celebrations

KUWAIT: In celebration of Kuwait National Day, Burgan Bank announced that it is reviving an icon of classic Kuwaiti culture and a cross-generational favorite, "Al-Sindbad Al-Bahri", which was presented throughout the years by some of Kuwait's finest artists, including the esteemed Abdulrahman Al-Aql, Istiqlal Ahmad, Khaled Al-Obaid, Huda Hussein, Raja Mohammed, Mohammed Al-Saree', and Mohammad Al-Mesbah.

The modern remake of the 1978 children's play is set to take place between February 13 and 20 at Dasma Theatre, with an audience capacity of 500 people per show. This comes as part of Burgan's expansive social responsibility strategy and its unwavering efforts to preserve Kuwait's cultural heritage by presenting it in appealing formats that engage members of the community across all age groups.

Commenting on Burgan's latest theater mega-production, Hessa Hussain Al-Najadah, Senior Manager - Corporate and CSR Communications at Burgan Bank, said: "Kuwait National Day is a celebration and a reminder of who we are collectively as a nation and the values that we, Kuwaitis, stand for. This year, we are excited to be reviving a work of art that has inspired many generations and taught them valuable lessons to live by, in collaboration with Trend Production. In fact, Al-Sindbad Al-Bahri today resembles far more than merely a children's play; it stands as a symbol of national pride and genuine connection to the homeland no matter how far away we are from home."

Al-Najadah added "that through this theatre mega-production, Burgan Bank seeks to support and encourage aspiring Kuwaiti talents and shed light on their phenomenal capacity to present any piece of art in an innovative and transformative manner, which resonates with the Bank's overarching social responsibility program". On his part, the show's director Bader Al-Shuaibi said: "We are delighted to be collaborating with Burgan Bank



Bader Al-Shuaibi



Hessa Al-Najadah

once again following the great success that we achieved with the "Abra Cadabra" show and the inspiring level of crowd engagement that it sparked.

The show was adorned throughout with musical and performative acts as well as embedded valuable awareness messages that targeted children and teenagers simply and excitingly. This time, we are back with a bigger production of the "Al-Sindbad Al-Bahri" play, which is guaranteed to strike a nostalgic chord among the older generations of the audience, inviting them to relive the "good old days", while presenting the Kuwaiti society with a revamped version of this iconic piece of Kuwaiti cultural heritage."

Best known for its song, "Beladonahelwa" (Our Country is Beautiful), Al-Sindbad Al-Bahri marks the first children's play to be produced in Kuwait and the GCC, leading the way for numerous theatrical masterpieces that aim to inspire children and guide them toward values and virtue. With the modern remake of this iconic classic, Burgan Bank aims to engage the younger generations with the play as well as allow the older generations to relive one of their most nostalgic memories and hallmarks of the Kuwaiti childhood. Adding to the nostalgic experience, Burgan Bank announced that even the tickets' prices are reminiscent of the olden days, with different categories

that include KD 5, KD 7, KD 10, and KD 20. In modernizing this classic children's play, Burgan Bank resorted to the talented director Bader Al-Shuaibi in addition to a suite of young and beloved Kuwaiti talents, including Yagoub Abdullah, Talal Sam, Shaikha Al-Aslawi, Talal Bassem, Mansour Al-Bloushi and Al-Ghaliyah.

The modern reenactment of "Al-Sindbad Al-Bahri" is set to retain the core features of Sindbad's adventures across foreign lands and seas, however, adapting the story's details to resonate with today's children and teenagers while still being enjoyable to the older generations. Also considered central to the play is its music, including its most popular song "Beladonahelwa", which has taken on new life as an anthem on social media and which director Al-Shuaibi will be recording and releasing in his own voice.

The play will also feature several other musical acts, some of which are adapted from the original play while others are written exclusively for this new edition, such as "Shte'raf 'An Al-Na'am" (What Do You About Ostriches) and "Bye Bye Ma' As-Salama" (Goodbye Farewell). In addition to the engaging 70-minute show, the audience can also enjoy a range of fun activities and on-ground activations, such as face painting, a photo booth, and several giveaways that serve as a unique souvenir and a lifetime



reminder of the show.

In addition to the massive success of "Abra Cadabra", delivered in partnership with Trend Production, Burgan Bank also presented the exclusive one-night performance of "A Fantasy Journey and a Legendary Treasure Hunt with Burgan's Kanz" in 2023 as part of

its Kanz account mega draw inauguration and winner announcement. Burgan's continued contribution to the revival and advancement of arts and culture in Kuwait stands witness to its commitment to innovation, not only in the realm of banking and finance but also across its social responsibility endeavors.

Crucial role of Arab nationalism in Kuwait's modern education

By Khaled Al-Abdulhadi

KUWAIT: A lecture on the role of Arab nationalism in the modern education of Kuwait from 1911-1961 was held by Dr Talal Al-Rashoud, Assistant Professor of Modern Arab History at Kuwait University. The event was sponsored by Dr Saleh Al-Nafisi, Assistant Professor of Politics at Gulf University for Science and Technology, and hosted by Dr Thorsten Botz-Bornstein, Associate Professor of Philosophy at GUST.

The presentation demonstrated that although Arab nationalism is not given a prominent role in Gulf history, it was actually central to the emergence of a modern political entity in Kuwait in the 20th century. The process began in the 1910s and 1920s when Kuwaiti merchants and reformist ulama established the first modern school inspired by the Nahda, the Arab Awakening or enlightenment that flourished in the period before. Before then, the Arabian Gulf had been isolated due to British presence.

Al-Mubarkiya School was established by a number of merchants, including the Al-Ibrahim family, Al-Khaled family, Shamlan Bin Ali, Hilal Fajhan Al-Mutairi and Yousef Bin Eisa Al-Qena'ei, along with other families in Kuwait. They later established Al Ahmadiyya in 1921, headed by Yousef Bin Eisa Al-Qena'ei. At this time, the schools were different from traditional schools, including modern systems of teaching. By the 1930s, merchant-sponsored schools went down due to repression and neighbor blockades.

The merchants then formed the Red Book Group, which took up Arab nationalism, sometimes taking arms into Palestine and supporting their cause. In the late 1930s, after the dissolution of the council, Muhammad Amin Al-Husseini first visited Kuwait in 1924 and became a prominent contributor to education, bringing in further Palestinian teachers who expanded schools into modern institutions. Those who studied in Iraq applied the curriculum to Kuwaiti schools, bringing back Arab nationalist sentiment



Yousef Bin Eisa Al-Qena'ei

and transforming the education system into an up-down relationship.

On the other hand, the Egyptian curriculum was modernized, which was preferable to the British compared to the Iraqi nationalists of Iraq. Egyptian control strengthened nonetheless, extending the system. The Egyptian curriculum ran counter to Arab nationalism. However, the nationalist movement strengthened through the support of merchants.

In 1945, Egypt established a house for Kuwaiti students, allowing more Kuwaitis to take pan-Arab travels, and many of them became involved in protests. The Kuwaiti effendis who returned from Egypt during the 1950s established clubs and groups, turning the dominant ideology among the Muthaqfoon (the Civilized). Abdulaziz Al-Hussein, the first graduate of Egyptian schools, replaced him. He was the first to introduce suits to the public while still wearing his ghutra. Hussein promoted a successful national curriculum, growing into the modern educational system. After the Suez crisis, the nationalist movement grew even bigger.

The modern independent State of Kuwait provided a decentralized education system. The Muthaqfoon had the ability and mobility to stand up to the sheikhs, as Nasserist rhetoric dominated the curriculum in Kuwait, making English and Arabic schools provide more nationalist Arab sentiment. Education had been free since 1938; however, many



Photo shows (from right to left) Sheikh Abdullah Al-Saleh Al-Sabah, Hilal Fajhan Al-Mutairi and Shamlan Bin Ali.



Students leaving Mubarkiya School.

were busy with the diving season as they had to earn a living. People had to afford to live independently from working.

The education department was more independent in the 1950s, which is opposite to the current system, as Hussein had the confidence of the Amir and did not have a council that supervised it. They built schools, oversaw public parks and were able to implement progressive visions, as school lunches were seen as a way to provide a healthy food intake among students. Most institutions in the 1960s were nationalist in nature, yet they didn't have the freedom they had in the 1950s. Eid Al-Wahda oversaw celebrations with a pan-Arab flag, as girls became more involved in schools.

At this time, Jassem Al-Qatami, a prominent Arab nationalist and former MP, called for an end to tribal rules, leading to the government striking down all Arab nationalist movements. After 1961,

the movement declined, never regaining its previous strength. During the lecture, Dr Nafisi stated: "I would like to thank Dr Al-Rashoud for this wonderful lecture. He shed light on the fact that Kuwait was not reliant on foreign influences alone but had its own local activity," stressing that education played a role through the locals who had incentives to further expand education.

Dr Botz-Bornstein said: "Our concept is to establish global interconnections in the world, specializing in the Middle East as well as other regions. Our events are usually organized around history, politics, and sometimes culture." He added: "The lecture today was about Kuwaiti history, which is a continuation of the lecture we had in December. The period and subject Dr Al-Rashoud discussed are interesting topics that are really obscure, especially for non-Kuwaitis."

Dubai WGS kicks off with Kuwait's participation

DUBAI: Dubai's 2024 World Governments Summit (WGS) kicks off on Monday as one of the most important international platforms for envisioning the development of tools and policies that will shape the governments of the future. His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Saleh Al-Sabah previously received an invitation from the UAE's Vice President, Prime Minister, and Ruler of Dubai, Sheikh Mohammad Al-Maktoum, to attend the summit.

Kuwait's participation in the summit will be represented by the Director General of KUNA, Dr. Fatma Al-Saleh, and the Acting Director General of the Public Authority for Civil Information, Mansour Al-Methen. The Minister of Finance and Minister of State for Economic Affairs, Dr. Anwar Al-Mudhaf, will also participate in a specialized forum and the signing of an agreement to avoid double taxation.

This year's summit will witness wide international participation, with 120 government delegations and 85 international, regional, and intergovernmental organizations, including 23 ministerial meetings and roundtables, 200 speakers, 25 reports, and much more. WGS will take place under the theme of 'Shaping Future Governments' where the conversation will involve governments, international organizations, thought leaders, and private sector leaders from around the globe to encourage international cooperation and enable governments to identify innovative solutions for future challenges, further rippling to inspire and empower the next generation of governments.

The Arab interest is to expand the current summit with the participation of 100 Arab ministers. It is divided into ministers of finance, youth, sports, communications, industry, advanced technology, and health, as well as heads of government development agencies. — KUNA

Kuwait and UAE sign deal to avoid double taxation on income

DUBAI: Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) sealed an agreement during a key Arab fiscal forum in Dubai aiming to avoid double taxation on income and prevent tax evasion, Kuwait's finance ministry said on Sunday. The pan-Arab gathering looked into comparisons between state budget balance sheets among countries in the region, with Kuwait taking the opportunity to discuss its experiences on the matter, according to a ministry statement.

With experts from the International Monetary Fund monitoring the talks, Kuwait's Finance Minister Dr. Anwar Al-Mudhaf and his UAE counterpart Mohamed Hussaini put their respective signatures on the agreement as part of broader financial cooperation between the Gulf Arab countries, it said. The talks come a day ahead of the World Governments Summit in Dubai, with Kuwait being represented through its state-run news agency, KUNA's director general, Dr. Fatma Al-Saleh, alongside acting Public Authority for Civil Information chief Mansour Al-Methen. — KUNA



Local

Reopening of visas brings joy and relief, sparks optimism

Some expats voice concerns over complications

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: The recent decision by Kuwait to re-open visit visas for expatriates has brought a wave of joy and relief and has sparked optimism and happiness among residents, where this move signifies a positive step towards reuniting families. Kuwait Times spoke with residents applying for visas at the residency affairs department to gain insight into the application process.

Muhammad Adel highlighted the imposition of new requirements in the visa application process, emphasizing the additional documentation now necessary. "We are now required to provide a birth certificate obtained from the embassy, which adds considerable time to the completion of the application," he explained. Additionally, he noted that one of the prerequisites is evidence proving the familial relationship, specifically requiring verification of maternal lineage from the embassy.

Adel commended the efficiency of the application process, noting the exceptional organization within the building for receiving applications. He expressed appreciation for the seamless flow, which facilitated a smoother experience for applicants. "I

will bring my mother for a visit. My mother was born in Kuwait, but due to some circumstances, she lost her residency three years ago. I am happy that visit visas have been opened at this time, especially before Ramadan, so that we can be reunited with the whole family. I believe that the timing of this decision is good not only for expatriates but also for the country, as its economy will improve after the number of upcoming visitors, as every person is obligated to spend financial sums on their family and relatives who will visit the country," he added.

Samira Hussein voiced concerns regarding the complications arising from submitting applications for a visit visa, citing a recent change where the duration of visits has been reduced to just one month, down from the previous three. She highlighted the challenge posed by the requirement to authenticate the birth certificate through both the embassy and foreign ministry, further exacerbating the difficulties in completing the application procedures. On the other hand, Hussein expressed joy about the reopening of visit visas, saying her children who studied in Egypt have not visited Kuwait since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Iman Hamoudi expressed her elation over the

reopening of visit visas for families, particularly because she has been separated from her 70-year-old mother for over a year now. Sharing her personal experience, she recounted applying for a visa for her mother, during which a residency affairs department employee assured her that flight reservations would be accepted only if booked with Kuwait Airways or Jazeera Airways.

Despite facing initial setbacks when attempting to apply last Thursday due to gender restrictions, she persisted and revisited the department, where officials confirmed the acceptance of her request after ensuring compliance with the updated requirements and laws. Meanwhile, Alia Khaile called for equality in the right of women to sponsor their children like men. "We were all happy with the visa reopening decision, but I was surprised to know that a working woman in Kuwait who meets all the conditions including the salary is deprived from bringing her children to Kuwait on a family visa due to the husband's lack of residency in Kuwait," she pointed out.

"After rejecting the family visa reunion, my hope was on visit visas, but again we were surprised today that women are not allowed to apply for visit

visas for their children younger than 4 years old. I hope His Excellency the minister lifts the injustice against women residing in Kuwait without their husbands. We deserve the company of our children. We demand equality," she pointed out.

Regarding the procedures, Khaled Sabry said: "My experience of applying for a visit visa was smooth. The birth or marriage certificate of the visiting person must be authenticated by the foreign ministry of the applicant's country, then Kuwait's, then the embassy. All visas are for only one month. We must attach a copy of a roundtrip ticket on Kuwait Airways or Jazeera Airways and it must be for after 10 days of applying, according to one of the employees. Lastly, you will have to sign a pledge."

Sabry remarked on the organized scheduling of submissions, which minimizes crowding within the premises, though typists may encounter some congestion. He concluded the pledge people sign asks the applicant to comply with several terms and conditions, like issuing roundtrip tickets, not converting the visit into any residency and committing to the visit period, while the visitor's medical treatment shall only be at private hospitals and clinics.

Kuwait witnesses heavy rainfall



KUWAIT: Emergency teams are working continuously to monitor critical sites and the roads amidst rainfall accumulation and sewage draining, the spokesperson of the Ministry of Public Works, Engineer Ahmad Al-Saleh, said on Sunday.

The country is witnessing thunderstorms in the southern and central parts. The teams are on duty, checking all the routes to ensure safety, Al-Saleh told KUNA. He reaffirmed that there were no water congestions on highways,



adding that the Public Authority for Roads and Transportation (PART) was handling all the complaints registered through the hotline 150. Kuwait Meteorological Center expected that the country would witness unsettlement of the

weather starting tonight as the chances of rainfall gradually increase, where it could vary in intensity from moderate to heavy, with chances of hail falling in some areas. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Cars drive through heavy rain in Kuwait City in stormy weather on February 11, 2024. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

KU celebrates diversity through 'The People's Forum' event

By Ghadeer Ghloom and KUNA

KUWAIT: "The People's Forum", a gathering of 77 countries, took place at Kuwait University (KU) on Saturday, with participants displaying their unique heritage and history. During the opening, Dr Mishari Al-Harbi, Acting Director of Kuwait University, said Kuwait University always seeks to embrace different cultures through cultural scholarships, student exchange programs and joint cooperation agreements with multiple international universities. Forty countries from five continents participated, aiming to be an incubator for knowledge and science in Kuwait. Dr Harbi emphasized Kuwait University is keen to provide support for activities and encourage multiplicity to promote values and principles, alongside its academic role.

Dr Jassim Al-Hamdan, Acting Dean of Student Affairs at Kuwait University, further elaborated that holding this forum means learning about the cultures and customs of countries through a group of fun activities and events throughout the day, praising the

role of scholarship students for participating in this event. He added Kuwait University has scholarship students representing 89 countries. "They have enriched the university's environment with their multiple cultures," he said, thus promoting the spirit of coexistence.

The event was spread from the Cultural Center at Kuwait University to the vibrant gardens, where a plethora of engaging activities were available, filling the atmosphere with creativity and cultural exhibits. Participants from every country presented their crafts and traditions, proudly introducing visitors to the elements that hold their national identity. One Kuwaiti exhibitor, Om Nasser Burbaie'e, proudly displayed her handmade crafts. "These crafts were meticulously crafted at Sadu House. I participate in Sadu House workshops that are specialized in knitting wool threads, transforming them into beautiful shapes such as characters, toys, children's blankets, gloves and many other items," she told Kuwait Times.

Moreover, participants from the Kuwait Center for Down Syndrome showcased



Visitors visit Kenya's booth.



Kuwait's booth

their remarkable talent for handcrafts, such as making accessories and engraving words onto metal. Khalid Mahmoud Abdulrahman, a member of the Kuwait Center for Down Syndrome, explained to Kuwait Times the process behind his handmade accessories, carefully selecting suitable color combinations.

Within the indoor exhibition area, a stage served as a platform for each participating country to showcase their traditional dance, making "The People's Forum" at Kuwait University a celebration of diversity, as nations came together to share information about their country and learn others' unique cultures.



Singers perform Kuwaiti traditional dance.



Lebanon's booth showcases the beauty of Lebanon.



Palestine's booth



United Arab Emirates' corner

News in Brief

Kuwait launches 'Aman'

KUWAIT: The official spokesman of the unified government application of electronic services, "Sahel" Yousef Kazhem, has announced the launch of the Communications and Information Technology Commission's "Aman" service to monitor phishing scams. In a statement, Kazhem said that the Aman (safety) service will appear to users through the commission's services list on the "Sahel" application, allowing people to directly report phishing scams. The goal is to allow application users to report any phishing attempt, whether through messages or fake calls, he said. The service also aims to monitor all forms of electronic fraud facing citizens and residents through various means, involving text messages or voice calls, he pointed out. The "Sahel" app cation was launched in 2021 mainly to enhance the efficiency and speed of public services within the framework of electronic transformation in Kuwait.

Assessing e-media content

KUWAIT: A ranking Kuwaiti official has called for assessing the content of the electronic media from a professional perspective with respect to false news and unreliable sources. There is a need for experts to examine the contents to ensure no breach of the norms, said Lafi Al-Subaiee, the assistant undersecretary of the press and publication at the Kuwaiti Ministry of Information. He was speaking to KUNA after a meeting of the Arab electronic media committee, an affiliate of the Arab League, held in Jordan. "The issue warrants commitment to non-deviation from professional media work where there should be no room for subjectivity," he said, while calling for integration between conventional and (the new) electronic media to ensure credibility. He indicated that he and his peers during the meeting discussed the role of the content producers vis-à-vis the speech of extremism, in addition to the hazards posed by some electronic games that foment violence. — KUNA

Photo of the day



KUWAIT: A paraglider flies over a camping area. The camping season is ongoing, and many people took the opportunity to escape to vast deserts and open air spaces away from the bustle of the city and closed commercial complexes. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

DGCA, German company ink KD 8 million contract



Kuwait Civil Aviation, German company sign KD 8 million multi-projects contract. — KUNA photos

KUWAIT: The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) signed on Sunday a contract with the German company Leonardo to execute three projects at Kuwait International Airport worth KD 8 million (about \$25.9 million). The three projects were related to the installation, operation, and provision of training, warranty, maintenance, and technical sup-

port services at the airport. DGCA's Acting Director General Emad Al-Jalawi told KUNA that the project's aim was to provide a weather data system at Kuwait International Airport, which provides maximum security and safety for air navigation.

On his part, DGCA's Deputy Director General for Planning and Projects Affairs, Saad Al-Otaibi,

told KUNA that the project consisted of a system for measuring the speed of wind and a system for detecting air turbulence in the last stages of landing. Al-Otaibi added that the first project was an early warning system for wind shear, the second project was a disturbance detection system, and the third project was a Doppler radar system. — KUNA

Municipality prepares for national celebrations

KUWAIT: Kuwait Municipality announced on Sunday the development of a field plan coinciding with the 63rd National Day and the 33rd anniversary of Liberation Day, through which it will provide mechanisms for general cleaning ahead of the national day celebrations. The municipality added in a press release that the field plan began on Sunday with the cleaning of all places and sites that will hold activities and events on the occasion of national holidays, which will continue throughout the month of February.

The plan includes the removal of any illegal structures on state property without a license or whose owners did not comply with the licensing requirements, indicating that the regulatory authorities in the municipality will intensify their inspection campaigns aimed at monitoring and controlling street vendors. Violation tickets will be issued, and legal action will be taken against those who are caught.

The hygiene management team in Hawally governorate has started a field campaign to ensure the readiness of the coastal strip at the beaches, Marina Mall,



and Green Island, in addition to distributing containers in the places that will witness the national celebrations. The campaign resulted in the cleaning of public facilities and the coastline. In addition, 350 cleaners and 22 sweepers have been deployed, along with 19 blowers, 18 trucks, and 205 containers. — KUNA

Kuwait Entrepreneurs Association launches new initiative

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Entrepreneurs Association announced the launch of an initiative entitled "We Dream for a More Beautiful Reality" to support national employment, contain new graduates, and support entrepreneurs. The President of the Association, Eng. Saeed Al-Mana, said that the initiative seeks to address obstacles and submit proposals to enable small and medium enterprises to be the alternative tributary to support the economy. This is done through cooperation with the Council of Ministers, its working committees, government agencies, unions, and associations of employers in civil society.

The aim is to encourage new graduates to launch their own projects and enter into competition in the private sector. Al-Mana added: "The most prominent thing we look forward to in this initiative is to ensure a safe future for business owners by providing a supportive

work environment for them and their projects, especially since their dreams and projects are the first and last financial source for them in the absence of government support. We look forward to developing the main axes of this initiative to correct and amend some of the most important obstacles facing the business environment in order to improve it."

He pointed out that the team identified 10 obstacles facing the business environment and small and medium enterprises. These include the continuous change in the decisions of the competent authorities, the lack of government decisions that help entrepreneurs to continue, maintain the stability of their work environment, protect them from unfair competition, and the absence of job security.

Al-Mana pointed out that the obstacles also include "the lack of industrial, agricultural, service, and storage land that can support business activities at reasonable prices, complications in the field of government procedures related to licensing procedures, and the length of the documentary cycle in the implementation of transactions in some entities." Al-Mana stated that the delay of government agencies in disbursing the dues of owners of small and medium enterprises was due to their limited participation in development projects.



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JERUSALEM: Zionist security forces stand guard as Muslim worshippers wait at a checkpoint near Lion's Gate to enter the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound before the Friday noon prayer, in Jerusalem on February 9, 2024. — AFP photos

Zionist checkpoints 'paralyze' Palestinians' lives in West Bank

Closures dramatically increase travel times across territory; illegal settlers not affected

RAMALLAH: To arrive at work in Jerusalem on time, Murad Khalid must be at the Zionist checkpoint by 3:00 am, despite living nearby in the occupied West Bank — a constant challenge made worse by the Gaza war.

The 27-year-old said he and other residents of Kafr Aqab neighborhood in Zionist-annexed east Jerusalem — located on the West Bank side of the barrier — are subjected to a "security check that may take an hour for each car" at Qalandia crossing.

Zionist movement restrictions have long made life difficult for the three million Palestinians living in the West Bank. But since the outbreak of the Zionist war on Gaza, traffic has become "paralyzed", said Palestinian Authority official Abdullah Abu Rahmah.

The number of checkpoints and barriers in the Palestinian territory has greatly increased since October 7, adding hours to already lengthy commutes and forcing residents to either wait at the checkpoints or take long detours.

Largely unaffected are the 490,000 Zionists living across the West Bank in settlements — considered illegal under international law — who can bypass Palestinian communities on roads built especially for them.

'Exhausting'

It used to take accountant Amer al-Salameen just half an hour to drive from his home in the city of Ramallah to his parent's village Al-Samou. But with the new restrictions, the journey has turned into an "exhausting, tiring, and uncomfortable" four hours, said the 47-year-old. "I used to visit my family every weekend with my wife and children. But today, I fear that something might happen on the road."

The Zionist entity, which has occupied the West Bank since 1967, has stepped up raids into Palestinian communities since Hamas's attack on the Zionist entity last October, which resulted in the deaths of more than 1,160 people, according to an AFP tally based on official figures.

The Zionist entity vowed to eliminate Hamas and launched a relentless military offensive that has killed at least 27,947 people in Gaza, most of them women and children, according to the Hamas-run territory's health ministry.

In the West Bank, more than 380 Palestinians have been killed by Zionist troops and settlers over the same period, according to the Ramallah-based Palestinian health ministry. Scores more have been arrested.

'Security for all'

The Zionist army told AFP the additional barriers are "in accordance with the assessment of the situation in order to provide security to all residents of the sector". Recently, an AFP team leaving Jerusalem at 8:00 am for the northern West Bank city of Tulkarem — normally a trip of just two hours — arrived there at 1:30 pm, following dirt roads through villages to get around the barriers.

The journey from Jerusalem to Jenin, also in the north, now similarly takes five hours instead of two. Immediately after the October attack, the Zionist army shut the road between the town of Huwara and Nablus, a major northern Palestinian city.

According to an AFP photographer, the army has also closed off the main entrances to most villages around Hebron in the southern West Bank, forcing residents to take dirt roads through other villages to access cities.

Student Lynn Ahmed says her usual one-hour drive from Tulkarem to Birzeit University, north of Ramallah, now takes more than three "due to closures and the destruction of some roads." Given such difficulties, Birzeit and other Palestinian universities in the West Bank have returned to remote learning.



A member of the Zionist security forces walks past Palestinian Muslims performing the Friday noon prayer on a street blocked by them in the east Jerusalem neighborhood of Ras al-Amud.

The Zionist entity first erected military checkpoints in the West Bank following the first Palestinian uprising or intifada in 1987, but the number increased after the start of the second intifada in 2000. Since then, earthen barriers, gates, or cement block around 700 roads across the West Bank, according to the Palestinian Authority's Abu Rahmah, who heads a team monitoring settler activity. — AFP



RABAT: Protesters lift a giant flag of Palestine during a demonstration in Rabat on February 11, 2024 in solidarity with Palestinians. — AFP

Thousands protest ties with 'genocidal' Zionist entity in Rabat

RABAT: Thousands of Moroccans on Sunday again took to the streets of their capital to call for an end to their country's ties with the Zionist entity, which they denounced for "genocide" in Gaza. In late 2020, Morocco established diplomatic ties with the entity under the Abraham Accords brokered by the United States which saw similar moves by the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain.

As part of the deal, Rabat received Washington's recognition of its claim to sovereignty over the disputed territory of Western Sahara. Since the Zionist war on Gaza began on October 7, several large-scale demonstrations in the North African kingdom have called for the abrogation of the normalization deal.

"Normalization is treason," and "Stop the massacre," read banners protesters carried in front of Morocco's parliament in the center of Rabat. AFP journalists estimated more than 10,000 people joined the rally, some of them carrying an immense Palestinian flag. The crowd size matched that of a similar November protest in Morocco's commercial capital Casablanca.

"We see 24 hours a day bombardments, children killed, nearly 30,000 dead and nothing stops it. The genocide continues," said Abdelhakim Ziani, 25, a medical student who joined the rally and wants an end to ties between Morocco and the Zionist entity. "We can't continue selling and buying from these genocidal people," he said.

The demonstration was organized by leftist parties and Islamist movements. Morocco has officially denounced what it said was "flagrant violations of the provisions of international law" by the Zionist entity in its war on Gaza but has not given any indication that normalization with the Zionist entity would be undone. — AFP

Iran marks revolution, demands expelling Zionist entity from UN

TEHRAN: Iran marked 45 years since its Islamic revolution with a ceremony Sunday in which President Ebrahim Raisi condemned arch foe the Zionist entity over the Gaza war and demanded it be expelled from the United Nations.

Since Iran's 1979 revolution that overthrew the US-backed Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the region's main Shiite Muslim power has had deeply hostile relations with the Zionist entity, the United States and Britain.

Tensions have spiraled further since the bloodiest ever Gaza war erupted on October 7 with the Palestinian militant group Hamas's attack on the Zionist entity, in turn sparking violence between Iran-backed militant groups and US forces.

Support for the Palestinian cause and harsh criticism of the United States — often dubbed the "Great Satan" in Iran — and the Zionist entity dominated ceremonies marking the anniversary. In Tehran, Raisi accused the Zionist entity of committing "genocide" in Gaza with the support of the United States and other Western countries.

Supporters chanted "Down with the United States", "Down with (the Zionist entity)" and "Down with the United Kingdom" at the square, where Iranian-made missiles and other military hardware were on display.

Raisi demanded that the "bombing of Gaza should be stopped as soon as possible" and declared that "the death of the Zionist regime has come", in his speech to thousands at Azadi Square in western Tehran. He asked about the Zionist entity: "How can a regime that has violated 400 statements and resolutions of international organizations adhere to UN covenants?" "We believe that one of the important steps that should be taken is the expulsion of the Zionist regime from the United Nations."



TEHRAN: This handout picture provided by the Iranian Presidency on February 11, 2024, shows Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi addressing the crowd in Tehran's Azadi (freedom) square, on the occasion of the 45th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution. — AFP

Drones, missiles on display

Crowds in Azadi Square held up portraits of the supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, as well as of the founder of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, and popular general Qasem Soleimani, who was killed in a US strike in January 2020.

Iran has been under crippling US sanctions since Washington's 2018 withdrawal from a landmark deal which granted it sanctions relief in return for curbs on its nuclear program. The United States has accused Tehran of "actively facilitating" attacks on US forces in the Middle East and of backing attacks on Red Sea shipping by Yemen's Houthi rebels, charges Iran has denied. Around Azadi Square, Iranian-made Qiam ballistic missiles, Shahed 136 drones and Si-morgh satellite launchers were on display. Western countries have accused Iran of supplying drones to Russia during the Ukraine war, which Tehran denies, and missiles to armed groups in the Middle East.

The celebrations come ahead of March 1 legislative elections, the first national vote since a large-scale protest movement shook Iran after the death of Mahsa Amini on September 16, 2022. Amini, 22, died after being arrested for allegedly violating the Islamic republic's strict dress code for women. — AFP

International

Senegal election protests turn deadly

Teenage student killed as clashes with security forces become increasingly violent

DAKAR, Senegal: A 16-year-old died following clashes in Senegal's Ziguinchor, the third fatality in unrest after President Macky Sall postponed this month's election, a hospital source and a local politician said Sunday. Sall's decision to push back the February 25 presidential vote has plunged Senegal into one of its worst crises since independence from France in 1960.

Protests pitting youths against the security forces have turned increasingly violent in a country seen as a haven of stability and democracy in West Africa, a region roiled by coups and unrest. Landing Camara, who was known as Diedhiou, died Saturday evening in hospital after being wounded in Ziguinchor. His identity papers showed he was 16, after the hospital source said he was 19.

The southern city is a stronghold of jailed opposition figurehead Ousmane Sonko, where youths and security forces clashed throughout the day. The teenager "took a projectile to the head and died of his injuries in intensive care", the hospital source in Ziguinchor told AFP on condition of anonymity. "There were several seriously wounded people during the protests and one died. He was hit in the head by a bullet," said Abdou Sane, coordinator of the opposition party Pastef in Ziguinchor.

Two other youths died following protests in the capital Dakar and northern city of Saint-Louis since Friday. In Dakar, a 23-year-old, was shot "in the stomach with a live round", his brother who was with

him told AFP. The circumstances around the death of a 22-year-old at a university campus in Saint-Louis remain unclear.

Calls to restore election date

The Saint-Louis prosecutor's office said it had opened an investigation into the death. The interior ministry issued a statement denying that security forces had been operating on the campus. The US Bureau of African Affairs shared condolences with the families and friends of the victims in a message on social media. "Saddened to learn of two lives lost", it said on X, formerly Twitter. "We urge all parties to act in a peaceful and measured manner, and we continue to call on President Sall to restore the electoral calendar, restore confidence, and bring calm to the situation."

Sall said he postponed the election because of a dispute between parliament and the Constitutional Council over potential candidates barred from running. He has said he wants to begin a process of "appeasement and reconciliation" and reiterated a commitment not to stand for a third term amid expressions of international concern.

Senegal's parliament backed the move on Monday and voted to keep Sall in office until his successor takes over, which is unlikely to be before early 2025. His second term had been due to end on April 2. Campaigners from the Aar Sunu Election group (Protect our Election) have called for fresh protests on Tuesday. — AFP



DAKAR: Protesters shout slogans and collect barrels and tables to burn during clashes with police on the sidelines of a protest against a last-minute delay of presidential elections in Dakar on February 9, 2024. — AFP

Sudan's Darfuris fear world has abandoned them

CAIRO: More than two decades after the outbreak of war in Darfur, fears are growing that the world has abandoned its people as a new conflict ravages Sudan and the perpetrators of atrocities act with impunity.

The vast western region of Sudan was still suffering from the carnage that started in 2003 when a new war erupted last April between the army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF). With the conflict has come a fresh litany of horrors including rampant sexual violence, ethnically motivated massacres and mass displacement. According to a report by United Nations experts, seen by AFP, the RSF and allied militias have killed between 10,000 and 15,000 people in the West Darfur city of El Geneina alone—at least five percent of its pre-war population.

Fighters "targeted the Massalit community" in what "may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity", the report said. The RSF, which emerged from the Janjaweed militia that former president Omar al-Bashir unleashed in Darfur, now controls four out of five state capitals in the vast region. Civilians have been left to face what one Sudanese researcher called "their worst nightmare".

"The marauders who terrorized them for decades — raped them, pillaged their lands and murdered them en masse for their ethnicity — now rule," she told AFP from another country, requesting anonymity to protect family members still in Sudan.

Refugee camp massacres

On October 31, the RSF took the Central Darfur state capital of Zalingei, allegedly committing atrocities including "mass murder, summary executions, arbitrary detention, sexual assault, torture and looting", human

rights defender Mohamed Bera told AFP from another country where he has sought refuge. "The same thing that happened to the Massalit in Geneina happened in Zalingei to the Fur," the ethnic group for which Darfur is named.

With a months-long communications blackout ongoing, the world has relied on local monitors like Bera's Awafy organization, whose volunteers risk their lives to get news out. According to an Awafy tally, at least 180 people were killed in a single attack on the Hasaheisa camp for internally displaced people (IDPs) near Zalingei, which the RSF said was "sheltering army soldiers".

UN experts who investigated the attack said at least 16,250 camp residents had again been "violently displaced". Across Darfur, "many of the already existing three million IDPs" have been uprooted for a second or third time, according to the UN.

One tribal leader told AFP at least four camps in western Darfur had been "burned to the ground". "These are the same memories, the same crimes as 2003, only more violent in some areas now," said Bera. Two decades after Bashir mobilized the notorious Janjaweed in Darfur, the region's civilians have become trapped in the crossfire between the former allies, with the Sudanese army no savior.

According to leading Sudan expert Alex de Waal, army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan has been "no less venal and brutal" than his erstwhile deputy, RSF commander Mohamed Hamdan Daglo. Sudanese monitors, experts and the United Nations say the people of Darfur have been either directly targeted by the army or abandoned as troops retreat. In at least three state capitals — El Fasher, Nyala and El Daein — UN experts determined the army was "not only unable to protect civilians but also used aerial bombing and heavy shelling in urban areas".

'Age of impunity'

In December, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken held both the RSF and the army responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity, referring to "haunting echoes of the genocide that began almost

20 years ago". Yet while foreign capitals have paid lip service to Darfur's bloody history, analysts say they lack the political will to stop it from being repeated. "We occasionally hear words of 'isn't this terrible,' but nothing more," veteran Darfur expert Eric Reeves told AFP, adding "Darfur was ignored for so long" that even a "re-acceleration of the genocide" has failed to trigger international action.

Jan Egeblad, secretary general of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), told AFP "we are living in an age of impunity" that will last as long as "Sudan is not seen as a strategic interest". The International Criminal Court launched an investigation, but ousted autocrat Bashir has never been brought to justice, despite being indicted on charges of crimes against humanity and war crimes in 2009 and genocide a year later.

Both Reeves and de Waal say a UN or African Union protection force would almost certainly be vetoed, in light of competing global interests and the failure of past Darfur peacekeeping missions. In El Fasher, the last state capital not under RSF control, civilians are paying the price, said veteran pro-democracy activist Amani Hamid Hassabo. "There's no one here: the international community, regional actors, they're nowhere to be found, while thousands waste away in shelters with close to nothing coming in," she told AFP.

The United Nations — which has limited its presence to day-long missions from neighboring Chad — says 80,000 people have flocked to El Fasher's makeshift shelters, while over half of Darfur faces "acute hunger". NRC country director William Carter describes the current response as "a drop in the ocean", with "famine-like conditions" rapidly worsening. In Zamzam camp, near El Fasher, at least one child dies every two hours. Doctors Without Borders said this week. People "have been almost completely abandoned", the charity added. El Fasher itself teems with competing militias, in what the UN calls "a fragile status quo". Despite the lack of international action, Hassabo continues to brave "stray bullets everywhere" to get an hour of internet connection, determined to get news to the outside world. — AFP

NATO chief, EU official denounce Trump's threat

BRUSSELS: NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg on Sunday warned against talk that "undermines security" after former US president Donald Trump threatened to encourage Russia to attack NATO members who were not fully paid up. "Any suggestion that allies will not defend each other undermines all of our security, including that of the US," Stoltenberg said in a statement.

Trump threatened Saturday, in the event he is re-elected in the United States, that he would not defend NATO members who had not met their financial obligations, and going further would "encourage" Russia to attack them. The former US president has regularly criticized allies of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization for underfunding the group.

European Council President Charles Michel earlier on Sunday also denounced his comments as "reckless". "The Transatlantic Alliance has underpinned the security and the prosperity of Americans, Canadians and Europeans for 75 years," said Michel on X, formerly Twitter. "Reckless statements on #NATO's security and (Article) 5 solidarity serve only Putin's interest" and "they do not bring more security or peace to the world", he added. "On the contrary, they re-emphasize the need for the #EU to urgently further develop its strategic autonomy and invest in its defense," he continued.

Article 5 stipulates that if a NATO country is victim of an armed attack, each member of the Alliance must consider the act as an attack against the whole group and take measures to provide aid to the country under threat. — AFP

Hamis warns against Rafah...

Continued from Page 1

raise the alarm over the plan for Rafah, Gaza's last major population center that Zionist troops have yet to enter. "The OIC strongly warned that the continuation and expansion of the (Zionist) military aggression is part of rejected attempts to forcibly expel the Palestinian people from their land," the 57-nation Jeddah-based bloc said on social media. It stressed "that such acts fall under genocide and would lead to a humanitarian catastrophe and collective massacre".

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have also rejected "forced" displacement of people from Rafah, evoking the trauma of Palestinians' mass exodus and forced displacement around the time of the Zionist entity's creation in 1948. Denouncing a "genocide" in Gaza, thousands rallied Sunday in Morocco's capital Rabat and called on their government to undo a 2020 normalization pact with the Zionist entity.

A French foreign ministry spokesman said "a large-scale (Zionist) offensive in Rafah would cre-

ate a catastrophic humanitarian situation" and could lead to "disaster". Earlier in the Gaza war the Zionist military called on residents to evacuate areas "for their safety". But Gazans, driven further and further south, have repeatedly said they can find no safe refuge from the fighting and bombing.

Farah Muhammad, 39, a mother of five displaced from northern Gaza, was at a loss to know what to do if troops move in to Rafah. "There is no place to escape," she said. German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said on social media platform X that "the people in Gaza cannot disappear into thin air".

Saudi Arabia called for an urgent UN Security Council meeting, while Britain's Foreign Secretary David Cameron said the priority "must be an immediate pause in the fighting to get aid in and hostages out". Netanyahu, whose coalition government includes far-right politicians, faces calls for early elections and mounting protests over his failure to bring home the hostages. "It's clear Netanyahu is dragging out the war. He has no idea what to do on the day after," one protester, Gil Gordon, said in Tel Aviv. Efrat Machikwa, a niece of captive Gadi Mozes, said Zionists "are with us, but we don't feel the government is". — AFP

Senior Hamas official survives Lebanon strike

BEIRUT: Zionist strikes on Lebanon Saturday killed two civilians and a Hezbollah member, officials said, while security sources told AFP a senior Hamas officer had survived an assassination attempt south of Beirut. A Zionist drone strike killed one person and wounded nine others in the southern border village of Hula, Lebanon's official National News Agency (NNA) said.

Zionist forces and the Lebanese movement Hezbollah, a Hamas ally, have traded near-daily fire since war broke out on Oct 7 between the Zionist entity and the Palestinian group in the Gaza Strip. A source close to Hezbollah told AFP the person killed in Hula was not a member of the group. Hula mayor Shakib Koteish said the fatality was a civilian killed when his home, facing a local mosque, was hit.

While the Zionist-Lebanon violence has been largely contained to the border area, a strike earlier on Saturday hit the coastal town of Jadra, about 40 km from the closest point in the Zionist entity. The second-farthest deadly attack from the border in four months of hostilities "was a failed attempt to assassinate a senior official in the (Hamas) movement", a Palestinian security

said, requesting anonymity for security concerns.

The NNA reported it was a Zionist drone strike. A Lebanese security official, also requesting anonymity, identified the target as Hamas recruitment officer Bassel Saleh. Shortly after the initial strike on Saleh's car, a second Zionist drone hit the same location, killing two people, the official said. Hezbollah said one of its members had died.

Saleh "survived but suffered burns on his back and was admitted to hospital", the Lebanese official said. The official added Saleh is "in charge of a recruitment unit in the West Bank", occupied by the Zionist entity since 1967. A Hamas official in Lebanon told AFP that no member of the group had been killed in the Jadra attack.

An official with the Lebanese Risala Scout association, which operates rescue teams and is affiliated with the Hezbollah-allied Amal movement, told AFP that two civilians had been killed. But Hezbollah later announced one of its members had been killed by Zionist fire. A source close to the group told AFP the man, Khalil Fares, was one of the two people killed in his town of Jadra.

An AFP photographer at the scene saw a damaged car and a charred motorcycle nearby, with bloodstains all over the site of the strike near the beach. On Saturday, the NNA reported several Zionist strikes on south Lebanon villages, with Hezbollah also claiming attacks on Zionist positions across the border. Hezbollah in a statement also said it "took control of a (Zionist) enemy Skylark drone". — AFP

Sahel working to release English...

Continued from Page 1

expatriate residing in Kuwait. Abhishek, who cannot speak, read or write Arabic, recounted that once, in order to complete just one transaction, he found himself taking screenshots of over 20 pages to translate them using Google Translate.

George, a 33-year-old Serbian expatriate, said completing government transactions in Kuwait has been extremely challenging for him, especially at facilities where employees don't speak Arabic at all. He said despite the existence of the Sahel app, which is supposed to simplify procedures for everyone, he finds it an extra burden. "In order to renew my civil

ID, driving license or visas for my wife and son, I literally have to take screenshots of the entire process and send them to my Arabic-speaking friends who translate them for me. It's truly a hassle," he added.

Natasha, another non-Arab expatriate, stated, "Sahel being available only in Arabic is seriously crippling." She emphasized the necessity of adding an English option to the app, considering that most major government transactions are conducted through it and that Kuwait's population includes a large number of non-Arabic speakers.

In response, the official spokesperson of the Sahel app acknowledged it is true the language barrier wasn't taken into account at the beginning of the app's release due to a lack of English language support in the official transactions themselves. However, over the past two years, the Sahel app team has been working on the translation process. Kazem added very soon they will prepare for the testing process of introducing the English language to the application.



GAZA: A man poses for a picture with his newborn baby on the rubble of a building destroyed in Zionist bombing in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on Feb 11, 2024. — AFP

International

Pakistan police clash with Khan supporters at protests

PTI leaders claim they would have won more seats if not for vote rigging

ISLAMABAD: Police fired tear gas to disperse supporters of jailed former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan Sunday after his party urged protests outside election offices where they said rigging had taken place in last week's national vote.

Clashes were reported in Rawalpindi city, south of the capital, and Lahore, in the east, while dozens of other protests were held across the country without incident. Police warned earlier they would come down hard on illegal gatherings. There were no immediate reports of injuries from the protests.

Independent candidates — most linked to Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party — took the most seats in the polls, skipping the chances of the army-backed Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) to win a ruling majority.

However, independents cannot form a government and the country faces weeks of political uncertainty as rival parties negotiate possible coalitions. PTI leaders claim they would have won even more seats if not for vote rigging. A nationwide election-day mobile telephone blackout and the slow counting of results led to suspicions the military establishment was influencing the process to ensure success for former premier Nawaz Sharif's PML-N. "Throughout Pakistan, elections were manipulated in a subtle way," PTI chairman Gohar Ali Khan told a news conference Saturday, calling on supporters to "protest peacefully" on Sunday.

Authorities warned they would take strict action, saying so-called Section 144 orders were in place — a colonial-era law banning public gatherings. "Some individuals are inciting illegal gatherings around the Election Commission and other government offices,"

a statement from Islamabad's police force said on Sunday. "Legal action will be taken against unlawful assemblies. It should be noted that soliciting for gatherings is also a crime," it said.

A similar warning was also issued in Rawalpindi, while dozens of police equipped with riot gear assembled near Liberty Market in Lahore. In Rawalpindi, AFP staff saw police fire tear gas at a crowd of dozens of PTI supporters after they refused orders to stop picketing an office used to collect constituency election results.

Another gathering of around 200 PTI supporters in Lahore dispersed quickly when police moved in with riot shields and batons. Local media said several people were detained in Karachi, in the south, when they refused orders to clear the area.

Uncertain future

Imran Khan's party defied a months-long crackdown, which crippled campaigning and forced candidates to run as independents, to emerge as the winners of Thursday's vote. Final results were announced Sunday, with independents winning 101 seats, PML-N 75, the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) 54, and the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) 17.

Ten minor parties mopped up the remaining 17 seats, with two remaining vacant. "The results have clearly indicated that no single party possesses a simple majority to establish a government," said Zahid Hussain, a political analyst and author. "The political future of the country from this point onward is highly uncertain."

Still, PTI leaders insist they have been given a "people's mandate" to form the next government.



PESHAWAR: Supporters of Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party block Peshawar to Islamabad highway as they protest against the alleged skewing in Pakistan's national election results, in Peshawar on February 11, 2024. — AFP

"The people have decided in favor of Imran Khan," party chairman Gohar Ali Khan told Arab News in an interview. A coalition between the PML-N and the PPP — who formed the last government after ousting Imran Khan with a no-confidence vote in April 2022 — still seems the most likely outcome.

Pakistan's military chief told feuding politicians on Saturday to show "maturity and unity". "The nation needs stable hands and a healing touch to move on from the politics of anarchy and polarization which

does not suit a progressive country of 250 million people." General Syed Asim Munir said in a statement. The military looms large over Pakistan's political landscape, with generals having run the country for nearly half its history since partition from India in 1947. The military-backed PML-N, founded by three-time prime minister Sharif, declared victory as the party with the largest number of seats, but to form a government he will be forced to cut deals with rivals and independents. — AFP

Argentina's president, Pope Francis meet face to face in Rome

VATICAN CITY: Argentina's top political and religious leaders — President Javier Milei and Pope Francis — met for the first time Sunday in Rome, amid the explosive economic situation in their native country. The two men with sharply diverging views on how to eradicate the poverty gripping Argentina met briefly before and after a papal mass, during the 53-year-old economist's first official visit to Rome as president.

Milei, a libertarian and free-market champion who once called the 87-year-old pope from Buenos Aires an "imbecile" who "promotes communism", attended the ceremony at St Peter's Basilica to canonize Argentina's first female saint.

Following the mass, Francis, in a wheelchair, stopped briefly to shake hands and share a few words with Milei amid the congregation, who gave the pontiff a hug. The Vatican said they also met briefly beforehand.

An official audience comes Monday, when Milei also plans to meet with Italian President Sergio Mattarella and Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni. The meeting between the two men comes amid major political uncertainty in Argentina, where newcomer Milei is engaged in a controversial, massive deregulation of Argentina's economy by presidential decree.

Milei and Francis radically disagree over how to tackle poverty, which affects 40 percent of the

population of Argentina, where inflation soars over 200 percent. Francis has railed throughout his papacy against the inequalities generated by the free markets, calling for protection of the most vulnerable in society.

Milei, who calls himself an "anarcho-capitalist", won a resounding election victory in October on a wave of anger by Argentines furious with decades of economic crisis. Alternately labelled far-right, anti-establishment or libertarian, Milei has devalued the peso, cut state subsidies and scrapped hundreds of rules in deregulation efforts.

But the passage of his reform package hit a roadblock Tuesday when parliament sent it back to committee for a rewrite. Milei, on a visit to the Zionist entity, responded to the first crisis of his presidency by lashing out at opponents, calling them "criminals" and "traitors".

Invitation home

Relations between Milei and the pope have improved after the former Jorge Bergoglio congratulated the president on his election. Milei in turn invited Francis to pay a visit to Argentina, to which the pontiff has not returned since becoming pope in 2013.

Last year, Milei accused the pope of interfering in politics, and failing to condemn dictators such as Cuba's Fidel Castro. But the pope has brushed off the criticism as rhetoric in the heat of an election campaign. On Sunday, Milei sat with his entourage during the mass to canonize 18th century missionary Mama Antula, considered a human-rights pioneer from when Argentina was a Spanish colony. Like Francis, the consecrated Jesuit laywoman born Ma-



VATICAN CITY: This handout photograph taken on February 11, 2024 and released by the Vatican press office, Vatican Media, shows Pope Francis (right) greeting Argentine President Javier Milei (left) at the Vatican. — AFP

ria Antonia de Paz y Figueroa and beatified in 2016 dedicated herself to marginalized communities.

Zionist entity visit

While in the Zionist entity, Milei announced moves to shift his country's embassy to Jerusalem — sparking delight from his hosts but anger from Hamas. Milei is from a Catholic family but has expressed his fascination with Judaism and has been studying the Torah. He is traveling with his spiritual advisor, a rabbi. But Milei said he is not yet considering converting to Judaism, saying some aspects would be "incompatible" with his position as president, such as the mandatory Saturday Sabbath day of rest. — AFP

Portland: US liberal utopia loses its shine

PORTLAND: It's 9 am on a weekday, and real estate employee Erica Hetfeldt has just watched paramedics try to save the life of a man who has overdosed on the streets of Portland. "This is a tragedy," she says as three disheveled men smoke fentanyl near her office in a city that was once a byword for laid-back livability.

Portland is a Democratic Party stronghold, a liberal sentinel in Oregon on the US West Coast that for years stood for social justice, empathy and tolerance. But an experiment in decriminalizing drugs and a hands-off approach to policing has left some bemoaning the fate of a place now scarred by homelessness, addiction, graffiti and litter.

"You have no consequences for your public drug use... no consequences for breaking windows and trying to burn down public buildings," said Hetfeldt. "That 'no consequences' attitude has completely changed the face of our city in fewer than four years. It's been a spectacular nosedive."

'Shambles'

For decades Portland has been held up by its supporters as a proudly "weird" place, with a strong emphasis on sustainability and equality. Knitwear-clad hipsters delighted in its small-scale breweries, plentiful coffee shops, vegan food stores and thriving indie music scene.

It became such a shorthand for bohemian trendiness that a TV series called "Portlandia" gently mocked it as a place "where young people come to retire." But the last few years have not been kind. Portland's commitment to social justice was tested during the Black Lives Matter protests as the city was rocked by weeks of destruction, with authorities standing back as demonstrators wreaked havoc. (Supporters say right-wing agitators stirred up violence.)

That was coupled with the economic devastation of the pandemic and the effects of an ill-executed plan to decriminalize drugs that has left police doing little more than handing out leaflets to people zombied out on crack or fentanyl. Retail giants like Nike and Target have shuttered stores citing repeated thefts, while teleworking has hollowed out the downtown. Conservatives have seized on the city's misfortunes, with outlets like Fox News featuring horror-scapes from the city and blaming the Democrats who have controlled it for decades.

Former president Donald Trump dubbed it a liberal dystopia where the rule of law has vanished. "The city is in shambles to this day. The store owners don't even rebuild storefronts anymore," he told NBC last year. Restaurateur Lisa Schroeder says Portland's decline pains her. "We got to take care of the city," she told AFP. "We've got drugs on every corner. So now there's even more reasons for people to not come downtown." — AFP



PORTLAND: A pedestrian walks past an encampment of tents after crossing Hoyt Street in Portland, Oregon on January 24, 2024. — AFP



LAMPUNG: The logistics unit of the General Elections Commission ride motorbikes to deliver election materials by motorbike to remote polling stations.



Ox carts carry election materials of the General Elections Commission on the beach to deliver to remote polling stations. — AFP photos

Rebels, horses, cow carts: Indonesia gets ready for mega polls

BANDAR LAMPUNG, Indonesia: Indonesia will hold one of the world's biggest one-day elections next week — a mind-boggling feat that involves shifting votes by boat, plane and horseback across the vast archipelago of more than 278 million people.

On Wednesday, nearly 205 million will be eligible to vote in presidential, parliamentary and regional polls in just six hours of voting, with officials preparing for possible rainy season downpours, cyber-attacks and fraud. The election will be held across three time zones, beginning in easternmost province Papua where rebels are waging a deadly insurgency against the military. Behind India and the United States, Indonesia is the world's third-largest democracy.

It is only the fifth presidential election since the country emerged from autocratic rule less than three decades ago. "The logistics distribution and the voting will happen in the rainy season," general election commission chairman Hasyim Asyari told reporters last year. "We hope the worst won't happen."

Defense Minister Prabowo Subianto is running against former Jakarta governor Anies Baswedan and former Central Java governor Ganjar Pranowo for the top office. Beneath them, more than 19,000 seats will be up for grabs in around 2,700 electoral

districts for the regional vote, while 580 parliamentary seats will be contested by 18 parties.

Thousands of volunteers have been called on to organize ballot papers, and 800,000 polling stations will be manned by more than five million volunteers. Around 1.7 million overseas voters have already started casting their ballots.

Dragging ballot boxes

Officials have been distributing ballot boxes under armed guard to every corner of the 5,000-kilometre-long (3,106-mile-long) archipelago that is home to hundreds of ethnic groups and languages. In Sumatra's Aceh province, a provincial election official told AFP organizers were still deciding whether to use elephants to carry ballot boxes again after commandeering several tuskers for the task in the 2019 election.

Horses will be used in a southeast corner of Java island, where officials have prepared at least three trusty stallions to bring ballots to a remote village of just 160 people in case of bad weather. "The road is very difficult to reach so we have to use the horses," said Ahmad Hanafi, spokesperson for a local election commission in East Java. In Lampung province on Sumatra island, cows will be used in at least four villages to drag votes through mud tracks to and from polling stations, local election commission head Marlina, who like many Indonesians goes by one name, told AFP. "The logistics will be distributed by a cart pulled by a cow. This is the only possible mode of transportation we can use," she said.

Speedboats will take ballots from Jakarta to is-

lands off the Javan coast, while the military said warships have been enlisted to help deliver ballots. The risk of flooding is high, with more than 2,000 polling booths vulnerable in capital Jakarta alone, according to authorities. The megalopolis' election authorities have mooted relocating polls to higher ground, using mobile pumps or even rubber boats. They will also wrap ballots in plastic for protection. The fears are not unfounded. In neighboring Banten province last month, a storage facility was inundated by heavy rain, causing hundreds of ballots to be destroyed.

Village voting

In Papua, security will be tight in mountainous areas as separatists continue to carry out attacks against government employees and civilians. But armed rebels will not be the only election challenge in Papua, which shares an island border with independent Papua New Guinea.

Voters in remote areas of the mineral-rich region will use a communal voting system called Noken, in which a village head represents his community at the ballot box. It is a challenge to the concept of direct voting, and local officials have said the system is fraud-prone, in a country where vote buying is already rife. "People can't really say anything, they might have a different choice but ... the village uses the 'one command' system," said Papua cultural expert Marshall Suebu. Elsewhere the country's elite counter-terror unit has arrested dozens of suspects accused of plotting to disrupt the vote. The country's cyber security agency has created an election task force to protect the vote against hacking. — AFP

Business

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2024

Zain launches 'Bede' in Bahrain

The innovative fintech app offers instant Islamic personal finance solutions



MANAMA: Bahrain's Minister of Finance and National Economy Shaikh Salman bin Khalifa Al-Khalifa with Osama Al-Furaih, Bader Al-Kharafi, Shaikh Ahmed bin Ali Al-Khalifa, Zain Group board members, and other dignitaries.



Osama Al-Furaih, Bader Al-Kharafi, and Shaikh Ahmed bin Ali Al-Khalifa with board members.

MANAMA: Zain FinTech, the financial services arm of Zain Group, a leading provider of innovative technologies and digital lifestyle communications operating in eight markets across the Middle East and Africa, announced the launch of its new fintech brand, Bede (in my hand).

Commercially launched first in Bahrain as per the Central Bank of Bahrain guidelines, Bede is an innovative Sharia-compliant fintech mobile app offering a seamless and convenient consumer microfinance service in just a few taps. Applicants can download the app, receive instant, hassle-free approvals based

other key stakeholders, industry experts, and government officials, who witnessed first-hand the dynamic features of Bede.

Bader Al-Kharafi commented, "The launch of the new fintech brand Bede, first in Bahrain is another milestone of the Board of Director's initiated '4Sight' strategy and vision to expand much-needed fintech services in Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and soon in Kuwait and Sudan. The expansion of innovative fintech services drives financial inclusion and advances the region's digital ecosystem, supporting the socio-economic visions of the countries we serve."

hand", hence the customers' freedom to manage their financials, the way they desire, in their own hands. The brand's colors are inspired by a human approach which translates to a friendly and approachable personality. The primary colors are black and white with injected bright and playful colors which focus on the positive energy of banking and the human element of the brand that offers a clean and direct approach. With its brand slogan "When you get more, you do more", Bede believes in providing the tools and solutions that allow everyone a level playing field to be able to achieve and go as far as possible.

or manage their day-to-day expenses more efficiently. Through strategic partnerships with selected employers, Bede also extends its services to offer Islamic personal finance options to their employees, providing added convenience and accessibility.

The Zain FinTech umbrella

As the financial services arm of Zain Group and playing a key part of Zain's '4Sight' strategy by introducing and overseeing fintech services across the company's Middle East and African footprint, Zain FinTech focuses on rolling out innovative products



Bader Al-Kharafi at the launch ceremony.

Bader Al-Kharafi:

- Bede is Zain FinTech's brand, which is set to be rolled out across our footprint
- Introduction of Bede a key part of Zain's '4Sight' strategy in driving financial inclusion and contributing to the evolution of the region's digital ecosystem
- Sharia-compliant AI powered platform offers consumer micro-finance in minutes over a mobile app amongst a variety of financial services and products
- Bede stems from Arabic meaning of "in my hand", along with the slogan "When you get more, you do more"



Osama Al-Furaih, Bader Al-Kharafi, Yousef Al-Abdulrazzaq and Zaki Al-Busaidi during the event.

on their credit profile, thereby making accessing funds they require easier than ever. In due course, subject to local regulatory and commercial considerations across Zain's footprint, the range of services offered by Bede will extend from beyond consumer micro-finance to also include payments, remittances and credit cards.

The official launch event of the Bede brand in Bahrain marks a significant milestone in Zain FinTech's journey across its footprint and the Kingdom's digital landscape, with the aim to drive financial inclusion and revolutionize the growth of the regional fintech ecosystem.

The launch ceremony at the Ritz Carlton, Bahrain was attended by the Kingdom's Minister of Finance and National Economy Shaikh Salman bin Khalifa Al-Khalifa; Zain Group Chairman Osama Al-Furaih; Zain Vice-Chairman and Group CEO Bader Al-Kharafi; Zain Bahrain Chairman Shaikh Ahmed bin Ali Al-Khalifa; and Zain Group board members,

"Bede aims to allow everything to be made in the palm of one's hand, catering to consumers' lifestyles and emerging demands beyond basic telecom services. The introduction of a new fintech brand represents a major step in Zain's strategic aspirations to expand its regional leadership in the fintech arena supported by our footprint, customer base, and leading technologies."

Al-Kharafi thanked, "The Central Bank of Bahrain (CBB) for granting Bede a license and for its efforts to promote innovation in the financial sector in line with the Kingdom's 2030 economic vision. I also thank and recognize the efforts of the fintech teams at Zain and Bede, in realizing this opportunity and embracing a future where financial services are accessible, efficient, and inclusive for all."

The Bede name and logo

Bede stems from the Arabic meaning of "in my

More on Bede

The cutting-edge mobile app leverages advanced technology and innovative features to simplify the financial journey for those seeking convenient, ethical, and Sharia-compliant financial services.

Bede's end-to-end digital solution leverages the power of mobile apps for digital onboarding and eKYC as well as artificial intelligence for fast creditworthiness assessment of customers. Developed by FOO, a leading fintech solutions provider, the Bede app prioritizes the security and privacy of its customers to protect user data and transactions, ensuring a safe and reliable experience tailored to users' unique financial needs and goals. The impact of Bede in Bahrain will go beyond convenience and efficiency. It is designed with inclusivity at its core, ensuring that it is accessible and beneficial to everyone, whether the individual is looking to fund an emergency situation

and services related to payments, remittances, credit cards and micro-finance within the Zain ecosystem and beyond. Other entities championed by Zain FinTech include Zain Cash in Iraq and Jordan, and Tamam in Saudi Arabia. Zain aims to roll-out FinTech services in Kuwait and Sudan in the near future, subject to regulatory approvals.

Zain Fintech's affiliated B2B fintech solutions provider 'FOO' specializes in empowering businesses through innovative solutions, built entirely in-house, which optimize digital capabilities for clients across diverse industries and enables them to deliver an unparalleled user experience.

Innovation and investing in viable digital services such as the fast growing and much needed fintech sector is critical to Zain's sustained evolution and success in providing the communities it serves with appealing and much needed digital lifestyle services.

Climate change parches Morocco breadbasket

BERRECHID: Around this time every year, Moroccan wheat farmer Abderrahim Mohafid is usually preparing for his spring harvest, but this year his fields lay unusually bare. On the road leading up to his hamlet in Berrechid province, Morocco's historical breadbasket situated some 40 kilometers (about 25 miles) southeast of Casablanca, vast fields languish as the country grapples with its sixth consecutive year of drought.

"The harvest is already lost," said Mohafid, 54, as he glanced at his 20-hectare (nearly 50 acre) field where almost nothing has grown. "Wheat should already be at 60 centimeters." In a neighboring village, Hamid Najem found himself in the same predicament. His 52 hectares (about 128 acres) that have yielded soft wheat and barley in past years "are no longer good for anything", said the 50-year-old.

"We've never had such a tough year." More than 88 percent of Berrechid's vast agricultural lands are not irrigated, with farmers relying instead on rain, according

to Morocco's agriculture ministry.

Yet so far this year, the North African country has seen only about half the rainfall it did during the same period last year, Morocco's water minister Nizar Baraka told AFP. This has occurred in parallel with temperatures in Morocco increasing by an average of 1.8 degrees Celsius (3.2 degrees Fahrenheit) compared to the period between 1981 and 2010, he added. In recent weeks, Moroccan authorities have restricted the opening of hammams and car wash stations in several cities and prohibited the watering of golf courses or gardens with drinking water, as the country's dams are only at 23 percent capacity, compared to around 32 percent last year.

The successive years of drought are "compromising" this agricultural season, says Abderrahim Handouf, an agronomist. Fearing the effects of the prolonged water scarcity, farmers had already reduced the size of areas in which they sowed cereals, according to the expert.

In November, they had sown 2.3 million hectares compared to between four and five million hectares on average in previous years, he said. The situation, Handouf added, will have a "serious impact on the economy" of the country where a third of the population works in agriculture.

The sector also accounts for 14 percent

of Morocco's exports, with exported produce seen as more profitable than that sold in domestic markets. Mohafid said he hoped to make up for losses in previous seasons by adapting new sowing techniques, such as planting seeds without ploughing the field first, allowing the soil to preserve its natural humidity. "The harvest is already lost, but I hope it will rain in February and March at least to have enough to feed the livestock," he said. For some larger-scale farmers, the prospects aren't as gloomy, but irrigation has become essential.

Hamid Mechaal says he can count on irrigation to save his 140 hectares in the east of the province of Berrechid, where he grows wheat, carrots and potatoes. "With drought, we are forced to irrigate at 85 percent, whereas before, irrigation was only complementary," said the farmer.

Like 500 farmers in the region, he is supplied with a fixed allocation of 5,000 tons of water per hectare "to better manage" the coveted resource.

Morocco's agricultural model—tunnel-ventilated on exports for the past 15 years—is yet again faced with challenges at a time when the country sees "an absolutely declining water supply", said Mohamed Taher Srairi, an agronomist. It has nonetheless been focused on water-intensive crops, like carrots in Berrechid, he added. The



BERRECHID, Morocco: A farmer installs a drip system on a potato field in Berrechid, Morocco's historically wheat-rich province situated some 40 kilometers (about 25 miles) southeast of Casablanca, on February 7, 2024, amid sixth consecutive years of drought. — AFP

Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has similarly warned of a "disorderly intensification of irrigation" in Berrechid over the past two decades. "Between 2007 and 2017, carrot production, for instance, increased nearly 500 percent," it noted in a November report, noting that the Berrechid aquifer was "one of the most depleted in Morocco".

The North African country's needs

are estimated at more than 16 billion cubic meters of water, including 87 percent for the agricultural sector, but it has only had five billion cubic meters over the last five years, according to the water ministry. "Agricultural policy should be reviewed from top to bottom," said Handouf. "Today, I'm under the impression that the government is looking in one direction while reality is in the opposite direction." — AFP

Business

War on Gaza has devastating impact on Palestinian economy: IMF chief

Arab world plays a key role in a rapidly changing world: Georgieva

DUBAI: The International Monetary Fund expects the GDP growth in the Middle East and North Africa to reach 2.9 percent this year, higher than last year, but still below its October projections.

"This is largely due to short-term cuts in oil production, the conflict in Gaza and tight monetary policies" said IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva in her keynote speech at the eighth annual Arab Fiscal Forum in Dubai on Sunday. Georgieva said the Arab region plays an increasingly important role in a rapidly changing world. Among exporters, slow growth outside the hydrocarbon sector is another factor and declining oil demand will become an increasing headwind over the medium term, she said. Net energy importers, meanwhile, are held back by historically high debt and borrowing needs, and limited access to external financing.

"Economically, the impact of the conflict has been devastating in Gaza, where activity dropped 80 percent from October through December compared with a year earlier — and in the West Bank, where the drop was 22 percent," she said.



Kristalina Georgieva

The Palestinian economy's dire outlook is worsening as the conflict persists and only a durable peace and political solution will fundamentally change it. The IMF will continue to provide policy advice and technical assistance to the Palestinian Authority and Palestinian Monetary Authority, she said.

Looking at neighboring economies, she said the conflict is weighing on tourism, a lifeline for many. "We are closely watching the fiscal impacts, which could be seen in areas such as higher spending on social safety nets and defense.

"Across the region and beyond, the impact is felt through rising freight costs and reduced Red Sea transit volumes — down by nearly 50 percent this year in our PortWatch data," she mentioned.

This exceptionally uncertain moment compounds the challenges of economies that are still recovering from previous shocks. And further widening of the conflict would aggravate the economic harm.

"But the Arab world can plant the seed of a better and more stable future in these challenging conditions. It can meet the reconstruction needs to come, strengthen resilience, and create the opportunities growing populations demand," she said.

Create fiscal space

She said fiscal space is the tree we must grow. "Like the UAE's national tree, the Ghaf, it must be resilient — enough to withstand shocks and keep bearing fruit. The first way to nourish the tree is by mobilizing revenues. Countries can expand tax capacity with stronger institutions, better-designed frameworks, and more robust revenue collection," she said.

Tax policy design is the key. Multiple countries have improved VAT systems. Some, like Morocco, have expanded personal income taxes — which are underutilized in the region — and made them more progressive. And 11 Arab countries have already joined the global minimum corporate tax agreement.

Diversifying away from hydrocarbon revenues is key for oil exporters — the UAE's federal corporate income tax rate of 9 percent became effective last year. Non-commodity exporters can reduce exemptions and limit preferential rates, as Tunisia has done.

And since up to 50 percent of the region's tax revenue comes from customs and other indirect taxes, Jordan and Saudi Arabia have been promoting electronic invoicing. Strengthening compliance can pay off big! "Second, we can grow the tree by eliminating regressive energy subsidies.

A paper we're launching here tomorrow shows that phasing out explicit energy subsidies could save \$336 billion in the region — equivalent to Iraq's and Libya's economies combined — including in oil exporting countries. In addition to savings, it discourages pollution, and helps improve social spending — a triple dividend," she said.

Egypt, Jordan, and Morocco have succeeded with comprehensive subsidy reform plans featuring robust public communications, appropriate phasing of price increases, and targeted cash support for the most vulnerable. The third way to nourish the fiscal tree is: improve the performance of state-owned enterprises. We have a saying at the IMF — it's not only what you owe, it's what you own. And Arab-world SOEs own a lot, with assets exceeding 50 percent, and even 100 percent of GDP in some countries.



RAFAH, Palestinian Territories: A picture taken from Rafah shows smoke billowing during Zionist bombardment over Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip on Feb 11, 2024. — AFP

Oman is addressing this problem head-on, instituting more robust governance, better accountability, and stronger financial management of SOEs — and they are planning some divestments, she said.

SOE debt dropped from 41 percent of GDP in 2021 to 30 percent in 2022. As new revenue and more efficient spending help our tree grow, it will bear more fruit. It will give you the fiscal space needed to maintain debt sustainability and build resilience against shocks in the short-term. Longer-term, it will help you to implement the new social contract we came together around in Marrakech — to accelerate the transformation of your economies for a future that is more inclusive and green, and more digital.

"Think of investments to prepare for AI, like upskilling workers and improving internet access in low-income countries. Or steps like developing a national strategy and clear regulations for AI, which landed the Emirates in the top tier of the IMF's AI Preparedness Index.

"Continued strong support from Gulf Cooperation Council countries is critical," she said adding the IMF has made available roughly \$64 billion in liquidity and reserves to the MENA region since the pandemic began, including \$8 billion in the last year. "Of that, \$1.6 billion is from our newest instrument—the Resilience and Sustainability Trust — to

help Morocco and Mauritania transition to greener economies," she added.

With the World Bank, the IMF provided \$4.5 billion in debt relief for Somalia. The IMF is ramping up capacity development throughout the region and its new office in Riyadh is strengthening its presence and partnerships with Arab institutions.

"It reminds me of a classic Arab proverb: "A tree begins with a seed." At a time of economic challenges, geopolitical tension, and war, it is so important that we plant seeds now — of growth and cooperation, of peace and prosperity," she said.

While uncertainties are still high, we can be a bit more confident about the economic outlook, because the global economy has been surprisingly resilient. Growth exceeded expectations in 2023, and global headline inflation is expected to fall in 2024. But we cannot declare victory prematurely. Medium-term growth prospects remain anemic at around 3 percent, compared to the historical average of about 3.8 percent. They could be boosted by factors like developments in artificial intelligence. But with roughly 40 percent of jobs exposed to AI — both globally and in the Arab world — its effects are uncertain. Countries that lack the infrastructure and skilled workforces to harness this technology could fall further behind, she added.



شركة الصفاة للاستثمار
AL SAFAT INVESTMENT COMPANY

KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON 07 FEBRUARY 2024

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Market	M. Cap (KD ml)	Last Close	WTD %	MTD %	YTD %	Quantity Traded	Value Traded	No. of Trades	P/E	P/B	% of Total M. Cap
Premier Market	34,262	7,961.59	0.5%	0.0%	6.5%	600,341,065	188,861,310	32,126	17.8	1.4	77.6%
Main Market	9,897	5,919.36	-0.9%	-0.9%	6.3%	447,622,139	83,828,282	25,372	12.7	0.8	22.4%
All Share	44,159	7,256.16	0.2%	-0.2%	6.4%	1,047,963,204	272,689,592	57,498	14.3	0.9	100%

Sector	M. Cap (KD ml)	Last Close	WTD %	MTD %	YTD %	Quantity Traded	Value Traded	No. of Trades	P/E	P/B	% of Total M. Cap
Banking	26,379	1,762.00	0.6%	0.3%	7.0%	132,026,465	61,731,966	10,470	17.4	1.2	59.74%
Basic Materials	421	746.50	-1.4%	-1.7%	0.1%	4,670,261	2,688,917	1,303	10.4	2.3	0.95%
Consumer Discretionary	1,057	1,538.19	-2.4%	-2.8%	-4.1%	29,036,267	9,983,369	4,081	13.2	0.9	2.39%
Consumer Staples	214	704.18	-0.5%	-0.1%	6.9%	2,446,254	1,367,214	194	15.1	1.3	0.48%
Energy	215	1,030.14	3.8%	0.7%	8.5%	8,542,278	902,009	539	10.4	0.8	0.49%
Financial Services	4,888	1,355.84	0.5%	-0.2%	11.8%	571,240,375	124,320,988	20,639	19.7	0.9	11.07%
Health Care	238	479.42	2.1%	-0.6%	-0.6%	21	9,660	1	12.9	1.0	0.54%
Industrials	3,481	1,005.61	2.9%	2.1%	10.8%	46,503,978	22,151,202	4,931	12.9	1.0	7.88%
Insurance	944	2,308.69	-2.4%	-2.2%	0.7%	10,412,363	2,407,035	1,935	9.2	1.1	2.14%
Real Estate	2,651	1,234.90	1.0%	0.9%	1.8%	202,140,723	29,974,169	8,422	18.4	0.6	6.00%
Technology	29	2,109.75	4.3%	4.7%	264.8%	19,414,503	5,479,590.68	829	NM	2.5	0.07%
Telecommunications	3,462	1,132.69	-4.2%	-4.9%	2.5%	14,916,401	10,593,753	3,639	10.3	1.4	7.84%
Utilities	180	431.58	-1.8%	-3.5%	-5.2%	6,613,315	1,089,368	515	12.7	1.4	0.41%

Top Gainers

Stock	last Close	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
PAPCO	89	30.88%	171,150	13,629	86
MENA	36	27.21%	42,425,244	1,526,496	1,438
UNICAP	113	25.70%	28,281,045	2,960,005	1,496
WARBACAP	168.0	21.74%	11,364,188	1,885,795	1,447
IFAHR	874	15.46%	3,028,791	2,626,203	1,155

Top Losers

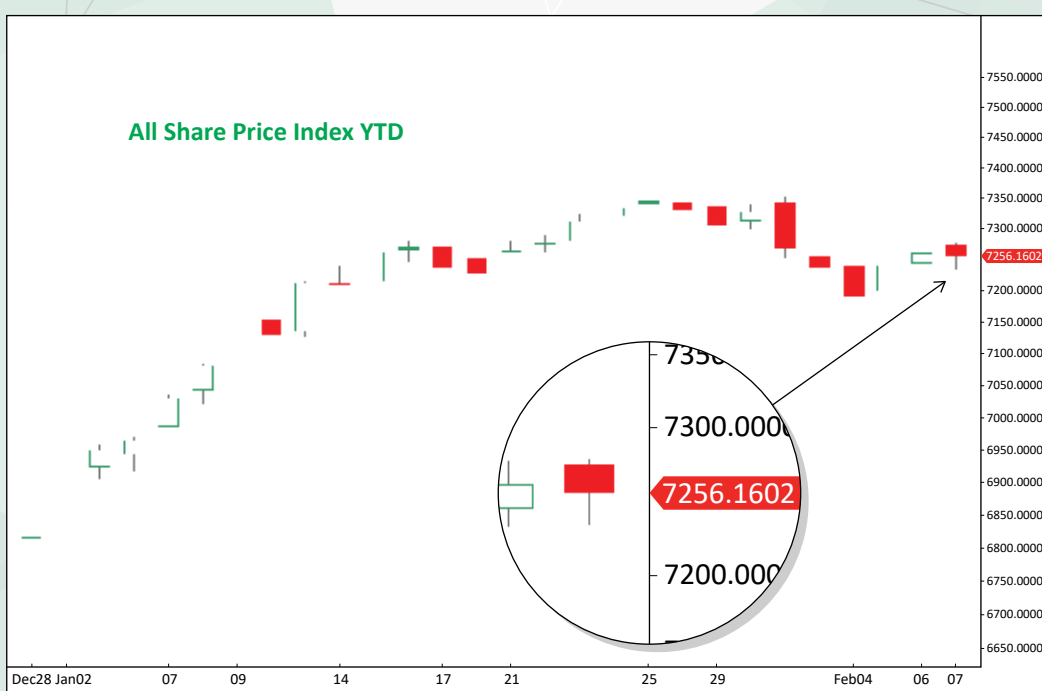
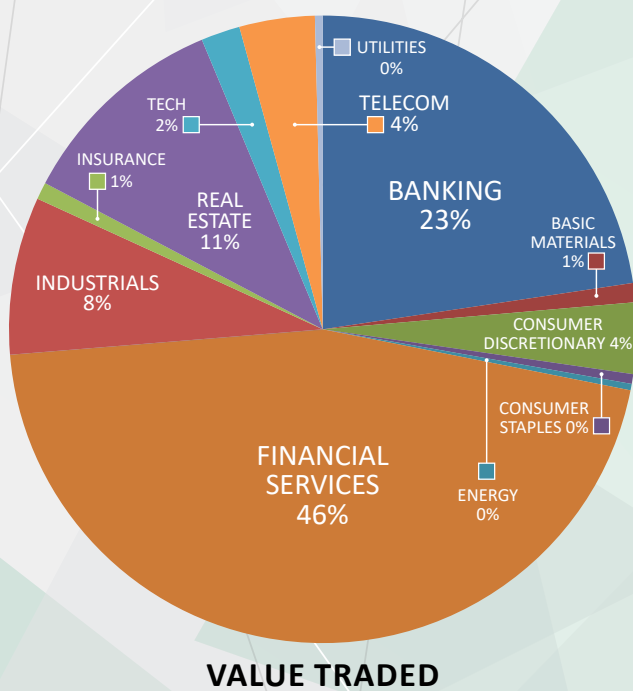
Stock	last Close	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
OOREDOO	1,262	-18.79%	3,203,803	4,315,051	1,411
ALAQARIA	29.0	-16.67%	843,922	24,886	50
JAZEERA	1,021	-11.83%	2,771,235	2,926,462	1,237
AINS	580	-10.08%	648,538	383,047	66
KUWAITRE	343	-9.50%	110	39.53	2

Top Volume

Stock	Last	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
KINV	206	4.57%	86,150,488	18,256,705	2,972
ARZAN	224	-2.18%	84,079,088	19,414,131	1,634
IFA	438	8.15%	72,155,839	30,263,203	2,070
NINV	296	9.23%	55,662,408	15,993,923	2,433
AAYAN	175	-5.91%	48,391,439	8,563,166	1,075

Top Value

Stock	Last	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
KFH	778	1.04%	39,835,076	30,776,140	4,126
IFA	438	8.15%	72,155,839	30,263,203	2,070
ARZAN	224	-2.18%	84,079,088	19,414,131	1,634
KINV	206	4.57%	86,150,488	18,256,705	2,972
NINV	296	9.23%	55,662,408	15,993,923	2,433



Market Summary:

- Premier volume increased 4% while value dropped 6%. Main market volume and value increased by 31% and 14%, respectively.
- The Premier index showed strength and bounced back, while the Main index is still volatile and yet to bounce back.
- Technically, the All Share index closed at 7256, with support levels at 7233, 7214, and 7178 and resistance at 7286. The Premier index closed at 7961, with support levels at 7945, 7916, and 7864, and resistance at 7997. The Main index closed at 5919, support levels at 5902, 5881, and 5865, and resistance at 5925.

Business

Gulf Bank wraps up GB Market

11 small to medium-sized businesses participated in the event



Participants engage in activities during the event.



Gulf Bank's corporate communications team poses for a group photo.

KUWAIT: In the midst of a bustling crowd and considerable public interest, Gulf Bank wrapped up its GB Market event, highlighting the involvement of approximately 11 businesses and initiatives exclusively owned by young Kuwaitis. These enterprises represented diverse sectors, including perfumes, jewelry, restaurants, and cafes. Participants were selected through competitions and voting by followers on Gulf Bank's social media platform, reflecting their preferences for specific stores and products.

Abdullah Al-Mulaifi, Assistant Manager of Corporate Communications at Gulf Bank, expressed satisfaction with the significant public participation throughout the event. This event effectively accomplished its primary goal of supporting young individuals and entrepreneurs, particularly those managing small to medium-sized businesses.

He further stated, "At Gulf Bank, we are committed to maintaining our distinctive role in supporting young entrepreneurs and owners of small to medium-sized businesses."

He noted that GB Market provides an outstanding opportunity for entrepreneurs and business owners to directly showcase their products, thus fostering the growth of these enterprises and enhancing their contributions to the national economy. Al-Mulaifi emphasized Gulf Bank's keenness to actively engage in events that cultivate the potential of youth, stressing that promoting sustainability in society and supporting youth initiatives are fundamental pillars of the bank's 2025 strategy.

He also noted that the event offered the

public a chance to explore products from their favorite stores, while having an enjoyable family day, filled with various entertainment options and prize giveaways.

Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the future. The Bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services,

Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience. Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining robust developments in sustainability at environmental, social and governance levels through diverse sustainability initiatives, strategically selected to benefit the Bank both internally and externally. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with various parties to achieve it.



Alibaba to make \$25bn in additional share buybacks

BEIJING: Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba Group will increase its share buyback program by \$25 billion, the company announced Wednesday, as it published disappointing quarterly results. In the quarter ending March 31, Alibaba posted sales of 260.3 billion yuan (\$36.7 billion), up five percent year on year, the firm said in a statement—but below analysts' forecasts.

The leading tech company faces fierce competition from rivals such as JD.com, Pinduoduo and Douyin, China's version of video app TikTok. Alibaba's quarterly net profit (October to December) came to 14.4 billion yuan, a drop of 77 percent year on year, the statement said.

"Our board of directors approved an increase of US\$25 billion to our share repurchase program, demonstrating our confidence in the outlook of our business and cash flow," chief financial officer Toby Xu said in the statement.

The buyback program will run until the end of March 2027, the group said. The firm's existing buyback program was already one of the largest in China, amounting to around \$9.5 billion last year alone, according to Bloomberg. Wednesday's unexpected announcement caused a stir in the markets, briefly sending Alibaba's US-listed shares up by more than five percent in trading before the open.

A pioneer in Chinese online shopping, the group is listed in New York and Hong Kong. Based in eastern China's Hangzhou, Alibaba is a key player in the country's digital sector and is considered a barometer of consumer spending in the world's second-largest economy.

China's economy is still struggling to recover from the country's strict zero-COVID health policy, abolished at the end of 2022. Alibaba's disappointing sales figures revealed Wednesday add to the uncertainty surrounding the group, which had a turbulent 2023, with a major restructuring program facing setbacks. In November, it announced the cancellation of a planned spin-off of its cloud computing business due to US restrictions on computer chips.

Citing national security concerns, the United States has said it wants to limit Chinese companies' access to cutting-edge technologies, notably by restricting exports of semiconductors to China.

US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said last month that Washington's curbs on advanced chips to China were about safeguarding security and not disrupting commerce, after Chinese Premier Li Qiang had denounced "discriminatory" trade barriers as a threat to the global economy—a clear reference to US actions. In addition to e-commerce and cloud services, Alibaba Group is active in the logistics, media, entertainment and artificial intelligence sectors. — AFP

Jeff Bezos sells off \$2bn in Amazon shares

WASHINGTON: Amazon founder Jeff Bezos has sold off about \$2 billion in shares of the online distribution giant, according to recent stock market filings. Bezos sold on Wednesday and Thursday some 12 million Ama-

zon shares, at between \$168-171 per share, according to documents sent to stock market regulatory authorities Friday. A previous stock market document, out Wednesday, reported his intention to sell, next July, 50 million shares of the group he founded 30 years ago, and of which he is today executive chairman.

Bezos's fortune is estimated by Forbes at \$195.5 billion, making him the third richest man on the planet, behind Frenchman Bernard Arnault,

CEO of the LVMH group and Elon Musk, the boss at Tesla, Twitter and SpaceX. Amazon most recently released financial results February 1, which far exceeded expectations. The tech behemoth achieved a sales turnover of \$170 billion and a net profit of \$10.6 billion, driven by faster deliveries and a particularly successful holiday season.

Amazon stock jumped more than 13 percent the next day on the New York Stock Exchange. — AFP

Boosted by military orders, Russia's economy grows 3.6%

MOSCOW: Russia's economy grew 3.6 percent last year thanks to a boost in military spending because of the offensive in Ukraine although long-term economic challenges remain, official data showed. The government Rosstat statistics agency published the figures in a statement. In 2022, gross domestic product (GDP) had contracted by 1.2 percent after the initial effects of

NBK hosts First Annual Meetup for 'Tableau' experts

KUWAIT: Underlining its ongoing commitment to increase employees' efficiency and qualify them with the most advanced solutions, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) hosted the First Annual Meetup for Tableau data analytics and visualization software, with the participation of Salesforce, the famous American cloud-based software company and developer of Tableau.

In the two-day event, Tableau experts delivered specialized workshops to elevate creators' skills in the growing community of hundreds of Tableau users, including workshops on advanced visual analytics and design thinking. It also shed light on harnessing the value of data assets using AI-powered analytics and automated workflows. This training comes in line with NBK's consistent efforts over the past years to invest heavily in Data Analytics and processing to understand customers' needs and behaviors.

Business users of all levels can now answer their own questions and generate insights by automating data preparation and easy-to-use visual analytics dashboards. Business lines were also able to see, in real-time, how other departments have been streamlining their analytics and benefiting from time and cost savings.

Popular tools like tableau are increasingly being adopted across the industry in Kuwait, signifying a shift towards empowering business users to discover data visually. This event exemplifies the Group Data Office's commitment to a culture of self-service analytics and enabling domain experts to leverage their knowledge with the help of analytics tools like Tableau.

Speaking on this, Sudhakar Nibhanupudi, Chief Data Officer at National Bank of Kuwait said: "Hosting this event reflects NBK's commitment to invest heavily in enhancing collaboration and excellence of its employees, in addition to qualifying talents and competencies with professionally refined skills in Data Analytics."

"It is the strategy of Group Data Office to enable data-driven decision making by businesses and self-service analytics is an integral part of this strategy," he added. "This event aligns with NBK's commitment to continuously upskill employees with the aim of maintaining an edge in the rapidly evolving technical landscape," he noted. NBK pays paramount attention to developing the capabilities of its employees, harnessing all its resources to progress their career by providing training and development programs, in



cooperation with globally renowned educational institutions. In addition, NBK consistently supports its employees in building their careers within the bank, reflecting its conviction that

continuous developing and upskilling of its employees is instrumental to sustaining its excellence in the rapidly evolving technical landscape in the banking industry.

NBK MONEY MARKETS REPORT

US services sector picks up, labor market resilient

KUWAIT: Growth in the US services sector picked up in January amid an increase in new orders and a rebound in employment. However, suppliers fell behind, resulting in input prices rising to an 11-month high. The Institute for Supply Management said its non-manufacturing PMI increased to 53.4 last month from 50.5 in December, indicating growth in an industry which accounts for more than two-thirds of the economy.

The data is in-line with the prior week's employment figures which revealed acceleration in January's job growth and wages by the most in nearly two years. The unemployment rate has remained below 4 percent for two consecutive years — the longest stretch in more than 50 years. Meanwhile, wage growth is running ahead of the 3-3.5 percent range that policymakers view as consistent with the Federal Reserve's 2 percent inflation target. Overall, January's powerful job report eliminated prospects of a rate cut next

month, and the odds of a May cut were lowered.

More labor data revealed the number of Americans filing new claims for unemployment benefits fell slightly more than expected last week, illustrating underlying labor market strength despite a recent surge in layoffs mostly in the technology industry. Initial claims decreased by 9,000 to 218,000 in the week ending February 3rd, according to the Labor Department. Continuing claims dropped to 1.87 million in the week that ended on January 27th. While the labor market has proved remarkably robust in recent months, powering consumer spending, recent high-profile job-cut announcements from companies across the tech industry may signal slower demand for workers in the coming months.

Consumer prices in China slid deeper into deflationary territory last month, suffering the biggest drop since the global recession in 2009. The country's Consumer Price Index dropped by 0.8 percent y/y in January, marking the steepest fall since September 2009 and marks a fourth consecutive month of decline. The National Bureau of Statistics attributes the weak figure to the strong demand in January 2023 for the Lunar New Year when CPI rose 2.1 percent. This year the Lunar New Year falls in February, causing distortions to the base. Beijing is currently struggling to revive both consumer and investor confidence as it faces many challenges, including a real estate slump,

stock market meltdown and weaker exports. Nevertheless, many analysts believe consumer prices are likely to rise from February onwards.

'Uncertain' outlook

The Reserve Bank of Australia held its policy interest rate steady at 4.35 percent in a widely anticipated decision which followed 13 consecutive rate hikes since 2022. It noted that goods inflation was lower than forecast, but that services inflation remained high, with overall inflation at 4.1 percent.

RBA Governor Michelle Bullock held a press conference after the meeting stating that the country was on track to get inflation within the bank's 2 percent to 3 percent target band by 2025, and to reach the midpoint of that range by 2026. Bullock added that while there were "encouraging signs," the RBA remains "vigilant" to upside risks that would make it difficult to achieve its target. In its statement announcing its decision, the RBA said it didn't exclude further rises. "We're not ruling in or out anything," Bullock said. "We are focused on bringing inflation down. We still think the risks are balanced but, as you would know, the further out we go with our forecasts, the more uncertainty there is around them."

Kuwait

Kuwaiti dinar USD/KWD closed last week at 0.30780.

Western sanctions imposed on Moscow after it sent troops into Ukraine.

The 2023 result shows the economy has largely absorbed the effect of the sanctions, finding ways around them by changes in supply lines and trade partners and through government intervention. Economic activity was supported by favorable energy prices, easy credit conditions and strong domestic demand because of the defense sector, as well as rising salaries to attract workers in sectors experiencing labor shortfalls. And, despite a major increase in federal spending, public deficit has remained contained at 1.9 percent of gross domestic product, the finance ministry said. — AFP

Lifestyle

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2024



A reveler of the Gavioes da Fiel samba school performs during the second night of carnival at the Sambadrome in Sao Paulo, Brazil, early. — AFP photos



Revelers of the Gavioes da Fiel samba school perform during the second night of carnival at the Sambadrome.



Revelers of the Mocidade Alegre samba school perform during the second night of carnival at the Sambadrome.

Party but don't touch: Rio works to make carnival safer for women



Revelers of the Mocidade Alegre samba school perform during the second night of carnival at the Sambadrome.



A reveler of the Mocidade Alegre samba school performs.

Avoid being alone in a crowd, opt for canned drinks over potentially drugged cocktails, scan a QR code to access emergency resources — as Rio enters carnival season, there has been a flood of advice on how women can stay safe. The “cidade maravilhosa,” or wonderful city of Rio, on Friday officially inaugurated its emblematic festival, becoming the scene of countless street parties, the traditional “blocos” that can draw hundreds of thousands of people.

But there is a dark underside to all the joyful dancing, partying and music: a surge in cases of sexual harassment and rape. A recent survey by the Locomotiva Research Institute found that 73 percent of women in Brazil fear being sexually harassed during the public celebrations.

The January poll of 1,500 people found that 50 percent of women surveyed said they had suffered some form of aggression in previous carnivals. The simple explanation: alcohol and machismo, Erica Paes, a women's safety specialist, told AFP.

“Men believe they have rights and power over the woman's body,” said Paes, who is also a world champion in Mixed Martial Arts (MMA). She created and coordinates the state government's Empoderadas (Empowered) program, which recently redoubled its efforts to inform women on how to stay safe and — if they are the victim of violence — where to find help. “Awareness today is women's best protection, so they know that they could be victims of violence and that they have someone to turn to for help,” Paes said.

Information is power

In December, Brazil approved the “No Is No” law, which established a mandatory protocol in entertainment spaces to protect victims of abuse, encourage complaints and preserve possible evidence. The law was inspired by the “No Callern” (“We won't keep quiet”) protocol in Spain's Catalan region, which made it possible to bring Brazilian soccer player Dani Alves to trial after he was accused of raping a woman in a Barcelona nightclub. He has denied the charges.

“Let's spread life-saving information and reinforce the idea that after someone says ‘No,’ it's harassment,” Joyce Trindade of the Women's Secretariat in Rio prefecture

said in a statement. Her group is responsible for the “Carnaval+Seguro” (“Carnival+Security”) campaign. This year there will be care stations in key locations for women who are attacked or feel endangered. And QR codes in four languages, with information on how to find help, are posted in many public places.

Empoderadas team members will also be present on some buses, trams and subway cars, which can be extremely

crowded during carnival. One important rule they offer: If you're going to drink, be sure it is with a group of friends. “Unfortunately, danger sometimes awaits,” said Paes. The Brazilian government has launched its own respect-women campaign. In northern Rio, excitement is growing around

the traditional Loucura Suburbana block party. Among hundreds of partygoers are about 10 women, dressed in purple and glitter, who hand out stickers and fans bearing slogans like “Respect the Girls” and “No Means No.” For some, that is not enough.

“The campaigns still don't reflect the seriousness of the situation for women in carnival,” Danielle Ribeiro, a 38-year-old bloco participant, told AFP. “It's better than



Revelers of the Tom Maior samba school perform.

nothing, but it doesn't solve the problem,” said Ribeiro, a historian. She said there need to be more places where women can report abuse, and tougher penalties for harassers. Men “need to find another way of behaving at the carnival,” she said. — AFP

nothing, but it doesn't solve the problem,” said Ribeiro, a historian. She said there need to be more places where women can report abuse, and tougher penalties for harassers. Men “need to find another way of behaving at the carnival,” she said. — AFP



Revelers of the Tom Maior samba school perform.



A reveler of the Mocidade Alegre samba school performs.



A reveler of the Mocidade Alegre samba school performs.



Revelers of the Academicos do Tatuape samba school perform.



Revelers of the Academicos do Tatuape samba school perform.

PARADES, PARTIES, PAGEANTRY: WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT RIO'S CARNIVAL

After weeks of sweaty, pulsating street parties, the Rio Carnival reaches its crescendo this Sunday with its main event, in which samba schools compete in dazzling parades. Here are things to know about the Rio Carnival:

The Sambodrome

Rio de Janeiro vibrates with Carnival fever throughout February, but the main event is the parade of samba schools through the massive “Sambodrome” venue. For two nights, the schools — community organizations deeply rooted in Brazil's vibrant samba culture — try to out-strut, out-shimmy, and out-shine their competitors in massive parades.

These feature elaborate, massive floats, fantastical costumes, and intricate choreography by performers dancing to the beats of a specially composed samba. Each parade can include up to 3,000 participants who move up the 700-meter (2,300-foot) long avenue flanked by up to 70,000 spectators. This year 12 schools will compete for the coveted title of Carnival champion.

Much like football teams, each school has its fervent fans. There are also different divisions in which schools rise and fall — and getting to the main competition in the Sambodrome is no easy feat. Rio de Janeiro alone has 120 schools. Those who make it are called the “Special Group.”

They put on a million-dollar production, with up to 75 minutes to seduce the jury with their story told in music and dance. Themes often revolve around social and political issues or key historical events. Tickets to the event cost between \$14 and \$400.

Street Carnival

For most revelers, the real Carnival happens far from the iconic Sambodrome, in hedonistic street “blocos.” These parties, whose name refers to the neighborhood blocks they are held on, are thronged by thousands, some of whom dance in place, while others move through the streets following bands performing live music.

Drums, costumes and flowing alcohol — even when the party starts early in the morning — are the name of the game. Blocos mostly have themes and there are some for all tastes. Loucura Suburbana (Suburban Madness) and Zona Mental are for patients and workers from mental health hospitals. The “Sergeant Pepper” bloco plays Beatle songs. Besame Mucho (Spanish for kiss me a lot) plays samba versions of famous tangos and even the infectious tune “Despacito.” This year there will be some 600 blocos in the city.

Serious business

Behind the pleasure-fueled festivities lies some serious money. This year the Rio Carnival received its largest-ever cash injection from the state government, 62.5 million reais (\$12.5 million), 40 million of which went to the samba schools. The Rio prefecture allocated them another 40 million reais. Carnival will bring in about \$1 billion to the local economy, according to official statistics. This is 18 percent more than in 2023. The whole of Brazil will see its economy boosted by \$1.8 billion.

Other cities party too

Rio may be the most emblematic of Brazil's Carnival extravaganza, but many of the country's cities come to a standstill. Authorities estimate some 15 million people will take to the streets in the economic powerhouse Sao Paulo, which boasts 500 blocos. In the southeastern city of Belo Horizonte, some five million people will party, while another three million will join in on the fun in northeastern Recife. It is that city which holds the Guinness Record for the biggest bloco, which brought together 2.5 million people last year. — AFP

Lifestyle

Spain cinema faces #MeToo moment at Goya awards



Award winners pose for pictures after the 38th Goya Awards ceremony in Valladolid.



Spanish film director Juan Antonio Bayona poses on the red carpet.



Spanish actress Ane Gabarain receives the Best Supporting Actress award for her role in "20,000 especies de abejas" (20,000 species of bees).



American actress Sigourney Weaver delivers a speech after receiving the International Goya Award for her career at the 38th Goya Awards ceremony.



Chilean director Maite Alberdi receives the Best Latin-American Film award for "La memoria infinita" (The eternal memory).



Spanish actor David Verdaguer poses for pictures after receiving the Best Leading Actor award for his role in "Saben aquell".



Spanish actress Janet Novas poses for pictures after receiving the Best New Actress award for her role in "O como" (The rye horn).



Spanish actress Ane Gabarain poses for pictures after receiving the Best Supporting Actress award for her role in "20,000 especies de abejas" (20,000 species of bees).



Spanish film director and screenwriter Estibaliz Urresola Solaguren poses for pictures after receiving the Best New Director award for "20,000 especies de abejas" (20,000 species of bees).

Spain's cinema elite gathered in the northern city of Valladolid Saturday night for the Goya film awards ceremony, with allegations of sexual assault directed at an independent Spanish filmmaker overshadowing the event.

Two weeks after three women told El Pais newspaper they had suffered sexual violence at the hands of filmmaker Carlos Vermut, the story was still making news. Vermut, in interviews with El Pais, has denied any wrongdoing. One of the presenters at the ceremony, actor Ana Belen, acknowledged Saturday that the issue was going to be "present" at the four-hour event, which honored films directed by J. A. Bayona and Justine Triet.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, arriving for the awards, told journalists: "We have to change many things. Violence against women is structural violence." On Friday, US star Sigourney Weaver, who was honored at the event, addressed the affair at a news conference.

"I'm very sorry to hear about this case, and my heart goes out to the women," said the three-time Oscar nominee. "It is women who speak up about this situation and abuses, that are making it safer for all women to work in this industry."

Weaver, 74, was presented with a lifetime achievement award for a string of films, including the "Alien" franchise and "Gorillas in the Mist". The award for best film went to Bayona's "Society of the Snow", about an amateur Uruguayan rugby team whose plane crashed in the Andes Mountains in 1972. Triet's "Anatomy of a Fall" won the prize for best European film.

'A serious problem'

On Friday, Spain's Culture Minister Ernest Urtasun pledged to open a unit to tackle such abuse allegations within the sector. "We have a serious problem with sexual assault and violence within the world of culture and we as institutions need to take action," he told La Sexta television. The Spanish Film Academy has also said it would fight against such abuses in the industry.

"Sexual violence and abuses of power have no place in the world of cinema or in Spanish society as a whole," said the academy, which runs the awards. A rising star in Spain's independent cinema, the 43-year-old director - whose real name is Carlos Lopez del Rey - won two top prizes at the 2014 San Sebastian film festival for "Magical Girl", his second feature.

Citing the three women, El Pais said the alleged assaults happened between May 2014



Cast members celebrate on stage after receiving the Best Film award for "La sociedad de la nieve" (Society of snow).

and February 2022. The report sparked anger in a country that has taken a leading role in fighting sexual violence. Interviewed by the newspaper

three times, Vermut said he had not been "aware of having exercised sexual violence against any woman." Since the emergence in 2017 of the

#MeToo movement, a string of major figures from the world of cinema have been accused of sexual violence. — AFP

Denzel Washington and Spike Lee to reunite for 'High and Low'

Frequent collaborators Denzel Washington and Spike Lee are reuniting to adapt a classic movie by legendary Japanese filmmaker Akira Kurosawa, Apple announced. Crime thriller "High and Low" will begin production in March, and will be the fifth film directed by Lee and starring Washington, after acclaimed hits such as "Malcolm X." No release date has yet been set for the new movie, which will be released in theaters by indie distributor A24, before streaming globally on Apple TV+.

The original "High and Low," released in 1963, told the story of a wealthy businessman who believes his son has been kidnapped. In a case of mistaken identity, it emerges that his chauffeur's son has been kidnapped instead, leaving the businessman facing the dilemma of whether to still pay the ransom. Kurosawa, widely regarded as one of the greatest and most influential filmmakers of all time, directed classics such as "Rashomon" and "Seven Samurai."

His film "Ikiru" was recently adapted into English for 2022 Oscar-nominated drama "Living" — a film which transposed events from the original's Japanese setting to 1950s London. Apple did not provide any details on the setting for the new English-language reinterpretation, co-written by Lee.



Denzel Washington and Spike Lee

Lee recently received an honorary Oscar for a film career including "Do the Right Thing" and "She's Got a Way to Go," and won a competitive Oscar for writing "BlacKkKlansman" in 2019. Washington has two Oscars, for "Glory" and "Training Day," and was nominated for Lee's "Malcolm X." The pair have also collaborated on "Mo' Better Blues," "He Got Game" and "Inside Man." — AFP

Activists throw soup at Monet painting in Lyon museum

Protesters hurled soup at a Monet painting on Saturday in a museum in southeast France, the latest action by a campaign group that pulled a similar stunt on the Mona Lisa last month. The Musee des Beaux-Arts in France's third largest city said in a communique that the attack on Claude Monet's "Le Printemps" (Spring) took place at 3:30 pm local time Saturday. The 1872 painting was protected by glass, but will still undergo a close inspection and restoration, the museum said. The museum said it would file a complaint for vandalism, adding that two activists were arrested. Riposte Alimentaire ("Food counterattack") claimed the attack in a posting on X, with a woman identifying herself 20-year-old Ilona saying "we have to act now before it is too late." The same group, which calls for a sustainable supply of healthy food for all, also claimed January's soup attack on the Louvre museum's Mona Lisa painting, which was also behind glass.

The two militants who carried out the attack on Leonardo da Vinci's iconic work were condemned by a Paris court to carry out volunteer work for a charity association. Riposte Alimentaire calls itself a "French civil resistance movement which aims to

spur a radical societal change for the environment and society".

"We love art," the movement says, "but future artists will have nothing to paint on a burning planet." In a posting on X, Lyon's mayor, who is from an ecological party, said he "regretted the action" but said that "in the face of climate emergencies, anguish is legitimate. We will respond with determined actions."

It wasn't the first time a Monet painting has been targeted by ecologist activists. In October 2022, protesters from the German branch of Last Generation flung mash at "Les Meules" (The Haystacks) in a museum in Potsdam. It too was protected by glass. In June 2023, activists in Stockholm smeared red paint and glued their hands to the glass covering of another of the French impressionist's works, "The Artist's Garden at Giverny". — AFP





Outstanding Directorial Achievement in Theatrical Feature Film winner British-US director Christopher Nolan for "Oppenheimer" poses in the press room with Russell Holmlander (left), Lesli Linka Glatter, President of the DGA (second left) and directors Daniel Kwan (second right) and Daniel Scheinert (right) during the 76th Directors Guild of America awards at the Beverly Hilton in Beverly Hills, California. — AFP photos



Outstanding Directorial Achievement in Theatrical Feature Film winner for "Oppenheimer" British-US director Christopher Nolan poses in the press room during the 76th Directors Guild of America awards.



Outstanding Directorial Achievement in Dramatic Series winner Peter Hoar for The Last of Us "Long, Long Time".

Christopher Nolan wins top directors award for 'Oppenheimer'



Michael Apted Award for Outstanding Directorial Achievement in First-Time Theatrical Feature Film winner Celine Song for "Past Lives".



Outstanding Directorial Achievement in Variety/Talk/News/Sports - Regularly Scheduled Programming winners Michael Mancini and Liz Patrick for Saturday Night Live "Pedro Pascal / Coldplay".



US actor Mark Ruffalo and US actress stand with Greek director Yorgos Lanthimos holding the nominee medallion as he is nominated for Outstanding Directorial Achievement in Theatrical Feature Film for "Poor Things".



Outstanding Directorial Achievement in Movies for Television and Limited Series winner Sarah Adina Smith for Lessons in Chemistry "Her and Him" poses in the press room with actors Eva Longoria and Matt Bomer.

"Oppenheimer" was named the best film of the year by Hollywood's directors on Saturday, boosting expectations that Christopher Nolan's long wait for success at the Oscars could soon be over. The British director—who is renowned for making commercially successful, complex blockbusters, but has not always received love from awards voters—won the top prize at the Directors Guild of America (DGA) Awards in Los Angeles.

"The idea that my peers would think I deserve this means everything to me," said Nolan, of his film about the invention of the atomic bomb. Nolan had been nominated four times previously for the top accolade from the DGA, but had failed to win for "Memento," "The Dark Knight," "Inception" or "Dunkirk." He will now be hoping he can break a similar losing streak next month at the Oscars, where he has lost all five of his previous nods.

Nolan lavished praise on his filmmaking team for bringing his hugely ambitious visions—including a jaw-dropping replica of the first atomic bomb test—to life over the course of his career.

"People say 'Christopher Nolan destroyed a real plane' and 'Christopher Nolan blew up a building,' or whatever," he said. "Sorry, chaps! It's all down to you and your teams. And you were never more on your game than making 'Oppenheimer.'"

Eighteen of the past 20 DGA winners have gone on to also win the Oscar for best director that same year. This year's Academy Awards take place on March 10.

The other directors nominated by the DGA for its top prize this year were Martin Scorsese ("Killers of the Flower Moon"), Greta Gerwig ("Barbie"), Yorgos Lanthimos ("Poor Things") and Alexander Payne ("The Holdovers"). Nolan will go head-to-head with Scorsese and Lanthimos again at the Oscars, but notably not Gerwig, whose apparent snubbing by the Academy as direc-



US film director Martin Scorsese holds the nominee medallion as he is nominated for Outstanding Directorial Achievement in Theatrical Feature Film for "Killers of the Flowers Moon".

tor of blockbuster feminist satire "Barbie" caused outrage.

Gerwig did not address the Oscars controversy Saturday, saying only that recognition "in the company of my heroes" at the DGA gala meant "more to me than I can ever say." Comment on that was left to Jonah Hill, who walked on stage and earnestly began: "Before we begin, it would be irresponsible not to acknowledge the recent tragedies."

"Of course, I'm referring to the fact that 'Barbie' only got eight Academy Award nominations." The DGA prize for best movie from a first-time filmmaker went to another Oscar best picture nominee—Celine Song's "Past Lives."

'Power' Best documentary went to "20 Days in Mariupol," which portrayed in harrowing detail the arrival of war to a Ukrainian city



Outstanding Directorial Achievement in Comedy Series winner Christopher Storer for The Bear "Fishes".

that became one of the Russian invasion's bloodiest battle sites—all captured by video journalists under siege. "Today, my hometown was bombed and seven people got killed, three of who are children. So it is a sad day," said director Mstyslav Chernov.

"At the same time, I recognize the power of cinema... when those people run from the bombs that are falling on them, they sit in the basements, to cope with their fear, they watch films. "Cinema not just leaves these stories in history for next generations... it also helps us all to cope with a sometimes unbearable world." The DGA Awards also honor television. "The Last of Us" won the prize for best drama series episode, and "The Bear" won in comedy.—AFP



US producer Taylor Hackford stands with US director Alexander Payne holding the nominee medallion as he is nominated for Outstanding Directorial Achievement in Theatrical Feature Film for "The Holdovers".



Canadian actor Ryan Gosling stands with US director Greta Gerwig holding the nominee medallion as she is nominated for Outstanding Directorial Achievement in Theatrical Feature Film for "Barbie".



Outstanding Directorial Achievement in Variety/Talk/News/Sports - Specials winner Paul Miller for "Carol Burnett: 90 Years of Laughter + Love".



Outstanding Directorial Achievement in Documentary winner Ukrainian filmmaker Mstyslav Chernov for "20 Days in Mariupol".



Frank Capra Achievement Award recipient US producer Janet Knutsen.



Outstanding Directorial Achievement in Reality Programs Niharika Desai for Rainn Wilson and the Geography of Bliss "Happiness is a Bottle of Cod Liver Oil".

Sports

Maxwell blasts unbeaten 120 as Australia beat Windies in 2nd T20

Hosts won the first clash in Hobart and sealed the series in Adelaide

ADELAIDE: Big-hitting Glenn Maxwell slammed a 50-ball century as Australia beat the West Indies by 34 runs in the second Twenty20 international to seal the series in Adelaide on Sunday. The 35-year-old was in ominous touch, blasting eight sixes and 12 fours in a blistering 120 not out from 55 deliveries.

It propelled Australia to 241-4 and the visitors could only muster 207-9 in reply, led by skipper Rovman Powell's battling 63. "It was good fun, that's for sure. Always good batting here, we saw in the Big Bash how good the wickets were during the tournament," Maxwell said.

"The wicket was nice and true. I have always relied on my hand speed and it worked for me today. I give myself the best chance always and nice to play a positive knock." The hosts won the first clash in Hobart by 11 runs, with one match to play in Perth on Tuesday.

West Indies opener Johnson Charles hit a giant six off the first ball he faced in the run chase, knowing his team must come out swinging. A wicket maiden by Josh Hazlewood stymied the threat, with Brandon King caught on the ropes for five.

Nicholas Pooran then took apart the next over from Jason Behrendorff, smacking three sixes in a row, but he didn't last, spooning to midwicket on

18 as left-arm quick Spencer Johnson picked up a wicket in his first home international.

Marcus Stoinis removed Shai Hope (0) and Charles (24) in his first over to leave them on 62-4. Johnson collected his second of the night to remove Sherfane Rutherford (0) and Stoinis got his third in Andre Russell (37 off 16), before Powell's 36-ball knock proved in vain.

"The boys showed courage, they started aggressive but we keep losing wickets and in the middle we failed to get big partnerships," Powell said. "But credit to the Australian guys, they bowled well." Earlier, Australian opener Josh Inglis lasted just six balls before being caught in the deep trying to hit Jason Holder out of the ground.

Skipper Mitchell Marsh whacked an enterprising 29 to propel the hosts to 58-2 off their power-play, but he tried one slog too many and was well caught at mid-on by Holder off Alzarri Joseph, with David Warner following soon after for 22.

That brought Maxwell to the crease and he was looking for the boundary with every delivery, finding it frequently with a range of magnificent shots to reach a half-century off 25 balls. He shared an 82-run partnership with Stoinis (16) before being joined by fellow big-hitter Tim David (31 off 14) in a 95-run stand that saw him bring up his fifth T20 century. — AFP



ADELAIDE: Australia's Glenn Maxwell plays a shot during the second Twenty20 international cricket match between Australia and West Indies at the Adelaide Oval in Adelaide on February 11, 2024. — AFP

Taylor takes one stroke lead in Phoenix Open

LOS ANGELES: Canadian Nick Taylor held a one stroke lead over American Sahith Theegala when darkness halted play in the third round of the PGA Tour's weather-disrupted Phoenix Open on Saturday. The pair had completed six holes of the third round at TPC Scottsdale after getting through their second rounds earlier in the day.

Doug Ghim and Andrew Novak were both two shots off the lead while three-times major winner Jordan Spieth reached the turn at two-under for his round, moving him three behind Taylor. The leaders will have 30 holes to get through on Sunday with organizers hoping the risk of frost in the morning does not add any further delays to the schedule.

A 3 1/2-hour rain delay on Thursday put the tournament behind schedule and frost on Friday added to the disruption. Theegala had fired a seven under-par 64 to top the leaderboard after the second round but then returned to bogey the first two holes of his third round.

A birdie at the par-3 fourth, steadied him but Taylor took advantage to edge back in front, draining a 48 foot putt for birdie on the par-4 fifth. Taylor had equalled the course record on Friday with his 11-under-par 60 and while he wasn't able to recapture that form in his second round, making bogey on the 10th and 17th to shoot 70.

The Canadian finished second in this event last year, missing out to Scottie Scheffler by two shots, before going on to win the Canadian Open in June. "I feel like I just have good vibes here after last year. I played great last year and just got beat I felt like," he said.

"I wasn't probably expecting to shoot a 60 or something crazy low the first day, but I figure I have good energy here now, and a lot of years in a row I didn't. I wouldn't say it's unfinished business, but I'm definitely in good position to try to finish it off," he added.

Theegala was one of the few players to have finished his first round on Thursday and so did not play at all on Friday. "I felt like I had a 12-hour day the first day, nothing yesterday, and then another 12-plus-hour day today. So ready for another 10-, 12-hour day tomorrow," he said.

"It's been a weird week, and I'm actually really exhausted right now. It's not often you play two days of—not necessarily even a lot of holes but just a lot going on," he said.

Fun atmosphere

There was no shortage of energy around sold-out TPC Scottsdale, with the traditional raucous crowds at the "stadium" par-3 16th. With the partying crowds roaring every great shot or putt but booing and jeering missed putts and off-target approaches, the noise at the hole has become synonymous with the Scottsdale event.

"Just hearing the cheers is pretty epic. A bunch of guys with my name and my face on shirts out there. The officer was telling me people got too drunk. But it was all in good fun, and hopefully everyone stayed safe," said Theegala.

"It's a blast. There's definitely some people that aren't the best drunks, but for the most part it's all positive, and it's a fun atmosphere. "You do have to block some of it out at certain times. That's for sure. But still kind of in full embrace mode," he added. — AFP

Johnson charges late to win LIV Golf Vegas title

LAS VEGAS: Dustin Johnson sank a 15-foot birdie putt on his penultimate hole and salvaged par at the last to win the LIV Golf Las Vegas title on Saturday by one stroke. The 39-year-old American birdied three of the last six holes to fire a one-under par 69 in cold and windy conditions and finished 54 holes at Las Vegas Country Club on 12-under 198.

That was good enough to give the 2020 Masters and 2016 US Open winner a one-stroke victory over countrymen Talor Gooch and Peter Uihlein with American Matthew Wolff fourth on 10-under.

"It's a great win," Johnson said. "I knew it was going to be tough with the conditions. A lot of really good players were right around the lead so I knew I was going to have to play well if I wanted to win."

England's Paul Casey, Northern Ireland's Graeme McDowell and American Jason Kokrak shared fifth on 201 with Spain's Jon Rahm, the reigning Masters champion, eighth on 202. Johnson, a 24-time winner on the PGA Tour, took his third LIV Golf League triumph, his other titles in the Saudi-backed series coming at Boston in 2022 and last year in Tulsa, both in playoffs.

Johnson answered a bogey at 11 with a birdie at 13, then birdied the par-5 15th to grab the lead alone at 11-under. Uihlein sank an 18-foot birdie putt at the 17th to match him and Gooch, who took a double bogey at 10 to fall back, birdied four of his final six holes, the last at the first hole, to share the lead as well.

That set the stage for Johnson's dramatic go-

ahead putt at 17, but the tension was far from over. Johnson's tee shot at 18 landed in the right rough, but he blasted out and onto the green 20 feet from the hole. He rolled his birdie attempt close to the hole and tapped in for the title.

"You knew it was going to be a grind from start to finish," Johnson said. "Making a clutch birdie there on 17 to give me a one-shot lead coming to 18 and hit a great (second) shot at 18 so I just had the two-putt for victory."

Johnson, who shared the 36-hole lead with Bryson DeChambeau at 11-under, opened with a birdie at the par-5 first but stumbled in the middle of the round with bogeys at the sixth, ninth and 11 before hitting his birdie binge late.

Smash, captained by five-time major winner Brooks Koepka, won the LIV Vegas team title on 33-under, defeating Johnson's 4Aces squad by seven strokes. Smash had Gooch, McDowell and Kokrak in the top seven individually. — AFP



Arab Sailing Championship 2024 concludes

KUWAIT: The Arab Sailing Championship 2024 that was organized by the Sailing Committee (rowing, Kayak, kite board) of Kuwait Sea Sport Club concluded on Saturday by awarding the winners of the cham-

ampionship that was under the umbrella of Public Authority for Sport and the Arab Sailing Federation.

The tournament results were as follows: Khalifa Al-Rumaithi from UAE won first place of the Optimist category, Malak Al-Dousary from Bahrain second and Tameem Suleiman from Oman third. Meanwhile, women winners in the same category were Malak Al-Dousary from Bahrain first, Mayar Fayez from Libya second.

In the juniors optimist, Khalifa Al-Rumaithi from UAE first Abdulrah-

man Al-Bahri from UAE second and Abdullah Sadeq from Bahrain third.

In the men's ILCA 6 category, Oman's Motasim Al-Farisi first, Dawood Abdullah from Bahrain second, Saud Al-Masoud from Kuwait third.

In the men's ILCA 7, Abdullah Al-Janahi from Bahrain won first place, Hussein Al-Jabiri from Oman second and Hamza Al-Ali from UAE third.

In the women's ILCA 6, Dhuha Al-Bishr from UAE first, Ameena

Shah from Kuwait second and Eman Al-Qamati from Tunisia third.

The closing ceremony was held at the club premise in the presence of PAS Director General Yousuf Al-Baidan, President of the Arab Federation Khalifa Al Khalifa, Chairman of Kuwait Sea Sport Club Fahad Al-Fahad along with several ambassadors.

75 players from UAE, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, Jordan, Iraq, Algeria, Tunisia, Sudan, Libya, Palestine and Kuwait participated in the tournament. — KUNA

Relief for Galthie as France survive, Scotland cry foul

EDINBURGH: France coach Fabien Galthie hailed his players for battling through adversity in a 20-16 victory over Scotland on Saturday after a week of stinging criticism back home. Les Bleus were on the end of a 38-17 thrashing by Ireland to open the Six Nations, which captain Gregory Alldritt described as a "car crash" performance.

The display was not much better at Murrayfield as both sides were booed by the 67,000 crowd as the game descended into a scrappy kicking contest in the second half. But France emerged victorious in controversial fashion after 20-year-old Louis Biele-Biarrey produced a moment of magic to score a brilliant individual try 10 minutes from time.

Scotland thought they had snatched victory with the last act of the game when Sam Skinner looked to have forced the ball down on the French line. However, referee Nic Berry ruled no try on the field and a lengthy TMO review failed to find conclusive evidence to overturn the decision.

Victory saved Galthie from overseeing three consecutive French defeats for the first time since 2018. Les Bleus appear to be still suffering a hangover from a heartbreaking quarter-final defeat to South Africa at last year's Rugby World Cup on home soil.

For the first time since taking charge in the wake of the 2019 World Cup, Galthie's position is being questioned. But a hard-fought victory kept alive France's hopes of winning back the Six Nations title



EDINBURGH: Scotland's scrum-half Ben White (R) runs to the line tackled by France's wing Louis Biele-Biarrey (L) and France's centre Jonathan Danty (C) in the build-up to the first try during the Six Nations international rugby union match between Scotland and France at Murrayfield Stadium in Edinburgh, Scotland. — AFP

should Ireland's expected cruise towards a second consecutive Grand Slam falter.

"We recalled the values of the game," said Galthie. "We enjoyed ourselves. This is a sport of combat, you have to be combative. One has to accept that there are times of adversity. "We dealt with that this week. We lose together, we suffer together, we win together."

'Tighter unit'

Alldritt was forced off injured early in the second half, but France's younger generation helped turned the game around. Biele-Biarrey produced the one moment of real quality in the second half by collecting his own kick through to score from 21-year-old Nolann Le Garrec's pass.

"It is one of the best wins of my time with France," said Alldritt. "We experienced a tough week. We circled

the wagons and became an even tighter unit.

"We wanted to do this today for ourselves, and we did that." The visitors were trailing for the vast majority of the match after Ben White scored Scotland's only try early on. Three penalties from Finn Russell kept the scoreboard ticking over for the Scots, but Gael Fickou's first half score to reduce the deficit for France proved to be crucial.

"It wasn't an easy match, we were in difficulty but we never gave up," said Fickou. "There were positives and negatives but we are very satisfied to have won this match. "The goal was to be in the game until the last 15 minutes and we were there. They pushed us back, but the state of mind was remarkable." France now go into a two-week break with tensions around the camp eased before the visit of Italy to Lille on February 25. — AFP

Sports

Bellingham brace helps leaders Madrid crush title rivals Girona

‘Today we beat the world record for centre-back injuries’

MADRID: Jude Bellingham struck twice as leaders Real Madrid took control of La Liga with a punishing 4-0 win over second-placed Girona on Saturday, opening up a five-point cushion. Vinicius Junior drove home the opener and then set up Bellingham for the second as Carlo Ancelotti's side dominated the Catalan minnows, leaving the surprise title contenders reeling.

Bellingham tapped in the third after the break from close range but limped off with an ankle problem early in the second half. Rodrygo kept the goals flowing with a fine individual effort as the record 35-time Spanish champions taught Girona, in the top flight for only the fourth year in their history, a compelling lesson. Victory leaves Madrid 11 points clear of champions Barcelona, third, who host Granada on Sunday.

"Jude is a star, he scores a lot of goals and I hope he can keep going," Vinicius told Real Madrid TV. "Jude has been the best this season, we're doing things well and we're happy because we're a family." Real Madrid coach Ancelotti reserved high praise for Vinicius, a constant thorn in Girona's side. "When he plays like this and with this attitude, he's the best in the world, in my personal opinion," said the Italian.

Madrid's triumph was convincing, with swagger but also sweat to keep the league's top goalscorer side quiet, despite significant injury absences. Ancelotti started with a makeshift central defensive pairing of Dani Carvajal and Aurelien Tchouameni, with all four of the club's specialists in the position out.

"Today we beat the world record for centre-back injuries," joked Ancelotti. Girona were without the suspended Daley Blind and Yangel Herrera, as well as coach Michel Sanchez, watching on helplessly from a high vantage point as his team were dismantled.

"When you face opponents of such a level, it lets

you see what your reality is, a bit," admitted Michel, who said his team were still having an "incredible" season despite the result. They started well against Madrid but conceded early in a thorough 3-0 home defeat in September, and committed the same mistake again at the Santiago Bernabeu.

This time Vinicius broke the deadlock in only the sixth minute, cutting in from the left and bending a vicious strike beyond Paulo Gazzaniga and in at the far post. Bellingham, who started the match level with Girona's Artem Dovbyk on 14 goals as the league's joint top scorer, doubled Madrid's lead. The England international rounded Gazzaniga and then stroked home from a tight angle after a superb Vinicius pass sent him hurtling in on goal.

'A perfect game'

Bellingham tapped in his 16th of the season in La Liga early in the second half after Gazzaniga could only tip Vinicius' shot into his path. It was his last contribution. Ancelotti quickly withdrawing him afterwards for an ankle injury which he iced.

Madrid face RB Leipzig in the Champions League on Tuesday and will hope he is fit, after Bellingham reached 20 goals in 29 games across all competitions. However Los Blancos have plenty of other firepower if he needs to rest.

Rodrygo rattled in the fourth after darting into the area as Girona collapsed — and perhaps their unlikely title bid has too. "All games are (important), but this one was a bit more so," Rodrygo told Real Madrid TV. "I'm very happy, it was a special moment for me, my 50th goal ... it was a perfect game for us."

Joselu hit the post with a penalty with the last kick of the game as Madrid dominated from start to finish, with Vinicius, Bellingham and midfielder Eduardo



MADRID: Girona's Brazilian midfielder #16 Savio Moreira (R) falls down during the Spanish league football match between Real Madrid CF and Girona FC at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium in Madrid. — AFP

Camavinga shining. Girona defender Yan Couto was in tears at the end after a particularly difficult evening in the hands of Vinicius.

"They went ahead with a great goal, we had to row against the tide," said Girona winger Cristian Portu. "Today it all went badly and they had a great game."

Elsewhere Ante Budimir's goal earned Osasuna a 1-0 win at Real Sociedad, who face Paris Saint-Germain in the Champions League on Wednesday. Las Palmas snatched a 2-0 win over Valencia with late goals from Alex Suarez and Marc Cardona while Alaves drew 1-1 with Villarreal. — AFP

City, Real lead contenders as CL knockouts begin

PARIS: Manchester City and Real Madrid will both be in action when the UEFA Champions League knockout stages begin this Tuesday, and it is the last two winners of European football's greatest prize who appear the strongest contenders to go all the way this season.

Pep Guardiola has been busy playing down City's chances of repeating their remarkable treble triumph of last year, when they retained the English Premier League title and won the FA Cup before claiming their first ever Champions League crown. "We have 99.99 per cent possibility that we are not going to win the treble because it has never, ever, ever been done," Guardiola said this week when asked about the prospect of retaining all three trophies.

Yet City seem to be finding their very best form again just at the right time, and they head to Denmark for Tuesday's last 16, first leg against FC Copenhagen on a run of 10 straight wins in all competitions. Copenhagen are into the knockout phase of Europe's elite club competition for just the second time, and first since 2011. They held City at home in last season's group stage and beat Manchester United 4-3 earlier this season at their Parken Stadium, so Tues-

day's game will perhaps not be straightforward for the reigning champions.

But Guardiola's team will surely be far too strong over two legs, and Madrid should also have too much for RB Leipzig, who they face in Germany first. Led by Jude Bellingham and Vinicius Junior, Carlo Ancelotti's side are in superb form in La Liga despite being hampered by a cascade of injuries in defence.

The draw for the last 16, made in December, was somewhat underwhelming, even if the meeting between last season's runners-up Inter Milan and Diego Simeone's Atletico Madrid has the makings of a cracker. It will also be fascinating to see how Barcelona fare against Napoli as the Catalans head into their final months under Xavi Hernandez before their legendary former player departs as coach at the end of the campaign.

Given Napoli's own difficulties in following up their stunning run to the Serie A title last season, Barcelona will be hopeful of advancing to a first Champions League quarter-final since 2020. That year they beat Napoli in the last 16 before a stunning 8-2 hammering by Bayern Munich in Lisbon.

Bayern themselves travel to face Lazio reeling from a 3-0 loss to Bayer Leverkusen which leaves their decade-long grip on the Bundesliga title looking more fragile than ever. Harry Kane and his teammates will hope that the return to continental competition brings out the best in them, especially with the increasing prospect that the England star's first season in Germany might end without a major trophy. — AFP



ASK win boys basketball championship

KUWAIT: The American School of Kuwait (ASK) team won the 2024 Varsity Boys Basketball Championship in the Near East Sports and Activities Conference (NESAC) competition, featuring teams from the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Lebanon. ASK teammates Abdulaziz Almusallam and Adam Asadallah were declared the co-winners of the 'Most Valuable Player' award at the end of the tournament.

Leverkusen thump Bayern

LEVERKUSEN: Xabi Alonso's Bayer Leverkusen took control of the Bundesliga title race on Saturday, thoroughly outclassing Bayern Munich in a 3-0 home win to go five points clear at the top of the table. Munich-born defender Josip Stanisic, on loan from Bayern, scored the opener in the 18th minute and Alex Grimaldo added another early in the second half. Jeremie Frimpong grabbed a third in injury time, scoring on the counter after Manuel Neuer came up for a Bayern corner, with Leverkusen rounding off an emphatic victory in style as they chase the club's first German title.

Bayern had few answers against an energetic and skilful Leverkusen side, fluent in attack, and kept tight control of star striker Harry Kane in defence. With 13 games remaining this season, five-time runners-up Leverkusen now have a golden chance to break Bayern's 11-year reign in the Bundesliga and shed their unwanted 'Neverkusen' moniker.

"From minute one until minute 90, we had our foot on the pedal," Leverkusen midfielder Robert Andrich told Sky. Alonso told reporters "when you have players willing to make sacrifices, the team gets better." A visibly frustrated Thomas Mueller lamented Bayern's dismal performance.

"Leverkusen were taking risks, looking for solutions and playing football," he said. "We're playing from A to B, B to C — and nobody plays freely or takes risks." Bayern came into the game under an unusual amount of pressure despite sitting just two points behind Leverkusen.

The game was delayed by 10 minutes due to ongoing protests against the German football association's decision to allow increased foreign investment, with fans throwing tennis balls and other objects onto the pitch as the players jogged to keep warm.

Despite the delay, Leverkusen showed none of the nerves seen among recent challengers for Bayern's crown, sticking to their high-risk, high-reward approach despite a tight press from the visitors. Amine Adli had a half-chance and blasted straight at Neuer early, but it would be Stanisic who gave Leverkusen the lead against his parent club. Stanisic beat new Bayern full-back Sacha Boey and tapped in a fine Andrich assist from close range, for first Leverkusen goal. Winners all 16 times they have taken the lead this season, the goal foreshadowed a period of Leverkusen dominance reminiscent of their best under Alonso, with Florian Wirtz and Jonathan Tah forcing last-ditch stops.

Not content to protect their lead, Leverkusen came out firing after the break and soon doubled their lead. Summer signing Grimaldo collected Nathan Tella's pass and blasted past Neuer five minutes into the second half. — AFP

PSG defeat Lille without Mbappe

PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain came from behind to beat Lille 3-1 in Ligue 1 on Saturday, extending their lead to 11 points as Kylian Mbappe was rested ahead of next week's Champions League tie against Real Sociedad.

Luis Enrique opted against taking any risks with the league's top goalscorer Mbappe, who was an unused substitute at the Parc des Princes after suffering an ankle injury in the French Cup win over Brest in midweek. "We didn't want to take any chances with him. It made no sense," Luis Enrique told Canal Plus.

"If it had been a final he would have been there. It was smart on both our parts not to make him play." "He will be there on Wednesday (against Real Sociedad) without any doubt," the Spaniard added. In the absence of the France captain, who could be entering his final few months at PSG, the hosts fell behind in the sixth minute when Yusuf Yazici turned in after fine work down the right from Tiago Santos.

Ousmane Dembele helped bring PSG level four minutes later by stealing the ball from Lille centre-back Alessandro and squaring for Goncalo Ramos to stroke into an empty net. Alessandro was again at fault shortly after as he sliced Fabian Ruiz's cross into his own goal while attempting to clear, handing the French champions the lead.



PARIS: Lille's French midfielder #10 Remy Cabella (R) stretches to control the ball ahead of Paris Saint-Germain's Spanish forward #11 Marco Asensio (L) fight for the ball during the French L1 football match between Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) and Lille LOSC at the Parc des Princes stadium in Paris. — AFP

Lille goalkeeper Lucas Chevalier kept his team in the game with saves from Marco Asensio, Nordi Mukiele and Randal Kolo Muani, but PSG eventually struck again in the final 10 minutes. Bradley Barcola burst free down the left and slid the ball across goal for Kolo Muani to tap in, completing an encouraging victory before next Wednesday's visit of La Real in the first leg of their last-16 encounter. — AFP

Classifieds

Clinics & Hospitals

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804

Industrial Shuwaikh

Qadsiya	24814764
Dasmah	22515088
Bneid Al-Gar	22532265
Shaab	22531908
Qibla	22518752
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22459381
Mirqab	22451082
Sharq	22456536
Salmiya	22465401
	25746401

Hospitals

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

Change of Name

I, RAJAK ABDUL SAMAD, Holder of Indian Passport No. L9689719 Having Permanent Address Dx-17, Irani Wadi, Opp Sqarters Cly Chincholu Gate, Malad East, Mumbai, Maharashtra-400097, India Residing In Kuwait At Present, Hereby Declare That Henceforth My Name Will Be Read As Under: Given Name SAYYED ABDUL FAZAQ ABDUL SAMAD. (#5158 11/2/2024)

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 Khataiwala Tank Indore (MP) 452014 (#5157 8/2/2024)



LONDON: Players compete for the ball in the West Ham goalmouth during the English Premier League football match between West Ham United and Arsenal at the London Stadium, in London on February 11, 2024. — AFP

Arsenal hit West Ham for six

Set a new club record for Premier League away win

LONDON: Declan Rice scored on his return to West Ham as Arsenal smashed David Moyes' men 6-0 in a statement of intent in the Premier League title race on Sunday. Bukayo Saka struck twice, while Leandro Trossard and centre-backs William Saliba and Gabriel Magalhães were also on target in a ruthless display from Mikel Arteta's men as they set a new club record for a Premier League away win.

Victory takes the Gunners back to within two points of Premier League leaders Liverpool and behind Manchester City only on goals scored. The wheels of Arsenal's challenge for a first league title

in 20 years appeared to be coming off when they lost at home to the Hammers amid a run of one win in seven games either side of the new year.

However, they have bounced back emphatically since a two-week winter break to lay down the gauntlet to perennial title challengers City and Liverpool at the top of the table. West Ham had beaten the Gunners twice this season, also dumping them out of the League Cup in November.

But they were outclassed to up the scrutiny on Moyes, who is out of contract at the end of the season. Arsenal's title challenge last season began to wobble

when they blew a 2-0 lead at the London Stadium last season.

This time there was never any doubt of the outcome once Saliba headed home Rice's corner to open the floodgates on 32 minutes. Saka missed a penalty in that draw last April, but made no mistake from the spot after he had been brought down by Alphonse Areola.

Rice led West Ham to Europa Conference League glory in his final game for the club before moving to north London for a fee in excess of £100 million. The England international was given a clear demonstration of why he had to make the

move to fulfil his ambition of more silverware as another wicked Rice delivery was nodded in by Gabriel.

Trossard pilled on the West Ham pain in first-half stoppage time as he cut inside to fire brilliantly into the top corner. That goal was the trigger for many of the home support to leave for the afternoon as the second half was played out in front of vast swathes of empty seats.

Moyes made two changes at half-time to try and stop the bleeding as Kalvin Phillips and former Arsenal defender Konstantinos Mavropanos were introduced. By the visitors cut loose again with two goals

in two minutes just after the hour mark.

Saka's first had been his 50th Arsenal goal and he cut inside to fire home in trademark fashion on his left foot. Rice then rubbed salt in West Ham wounds with a stunning finish into the top corner from outside the box. The 25-year-old refused to celebrate out of respect for his former teammates and supporters.

But after Arsenal were criticized by some members of the media for going overboard in their celebrations of a 3-1 win over Liverpool last weekend, there was even more for Arteta and his players to get excited about. — AFP



ABIDJAN: DR Congo's forward #20 Yoane Wissa fights for the ball with South Africa's defender #3 Terrence Mashego during the Africa Cup of Nations (CAN) 2024 third place play-off football match between South Africa and Democratic Republic of Congo at Felix Houphouët-Boigny Stadium in Abidjan. — AFP

S Africa beat DR Congo to finish third at AFCON

ABIDJAN: Captain and goalkeeper Ronwen Williams was the hero again as South Africa beat the Democratic Republic of Congo 6-5 on penalties in the Africa Cup of Nations third place play-off on Saturday. After a 0-0 draw following 90 minutes in Abidjan, Williams saved spot kicks from Chancel Mbemba and Meschack Elia to give Bafana Bafana the bronze medal in the Ivory Coast. Before Elia had his kick saved, Siyanda Xulu converted to give South Africa what proved the decisive lead in the shootout. Williams saved four shootout kicks last weekend to help South Africa get past Cape Verde after a goalless quarter-final.

DR Congo will regret many misses chances during regular time in a lively match while South Africa maintained a perfect record in third place play-offs having beaten Tunisia on penalties 24 years ago. South Africa made three changes to the team beaten in a penalty shootout by Nigeria after an incident-packed semi-final three days ago.

Nkosinathi Sibisi, Thapelo Morena and Mhlali Mayambela came in for suspended Grant Kekana and injured duo Mthobi Mvala and Percy Tau. DR Congo retained only two of the side that lost to hosts Ivory Coast in the other semi-final — captain and centre-back Mbemba and midfielder Samuel Moutoussamy. But eight of the nine who were dropped sat

on the bench, leaving French coach Sebastien Desabre with multiple options should he wish to make changes.

Threatening

Although the Congolese had less of the ball in the opening half at Stade Felix Houphouët-Boigny in the Ivorian economic capital, they were the more threatening team in the attacking third. Physically imposing Silas Mvumpa came close to breaking the deadlock after just eight minutes, but as he tried to round Williams in the area, the goalkeeper snatched the ball.

Simon Banza worked his way into a dangerous position close to the South African goal midway through the half, only to deliver a weak shot that posed no danger. Despite some neat build-up play, it took South Africa 43 minutes to get a shot on target, and the effort from Mayambela went straight to goalkeeper Dimitry Bertaud.

As the match reached the mid point of the second half, Congo continued to look the side more likely to break the deadlock. When Williams fumbled the ball and lost possession, the ball went across the goalmouth and Silas fired wide when he should at least have hit the target.

So should Mbemba, who had ventured forward for a free-kick, but he blazed over when the ball fell invitingly into his path close to goal. Substitute Fiston Mayele also wasted a chance. A captivating tournament concludes on Sunday in another Abidjan stadium with the Ivory Coast facing Nigeria in the final with a seven million dollar prize on the line. The countries met at the group stage last month in the same venue and the Super Eagles won 1-0 thanks to a William Troost-Ekong penalty. — AFP

Curry lifts Warriors over Suns, Mavs silence Thunder

LOS ANGELES: Stephen Curry drilled the game-winning three-pointer in the Golden State Warriors' thrilling 113-112 NBA victory on Saturday over former teammate Kevin Durant and the Phoenix Suns. Curry made nine three-pointers on the way to 30 points, but the 35-year-old star saved his best for last.

In a back-and-forth battle that featured 22 lead changes, the Warriors trailed 112-110 with 3.3 seconds remaining when Curry caught an awkward inbound pass from Brandin Podziemski, turned and unleashed a long trey that put Golden State ahead with seven-tenths of a second remaining.

It was just one more signature moment for Curry, a four-time champion and two-time NBA Most Valuable Player with the Warriors, who are struggling this season to maintain their status as Western Conference contenders.

Devin Booker scored 32 points to lead the Suns, with his turnaround jump shot with 35.6 seconds left to play giving Phoenix a 112-110 lead. Durant added 24 but on the Suns' last-gasp inbound play he couldn't get a shot up. Elsewhere the Dallas Mavericks, fueled by 32 points from Luka Doncic and 25 from Kyrie Irving, routed the high-flying Oklahoma City Thunder 146-111, notching a fourth straight victory to match their longest winning streak of the NBA season.

Daniel Gafford added 19 points and nine rebounds as he made his Mavs debut along with P.J. Washington — both acquired at the trade deadline. Doncic found both newcomers for alley-oop dunks in the first quarter, when Dallas took a 47-30 lead.

Doncic outshined Canadian Shai Gilgeous-Alexander in a battle between the league's top two scorers. Doncic, the NBA scoring leader, added eight rebounds and nine assists, and had the luxury of resting in the fourth quarter.

Gilgeous-Alexander scored 25 points with six rebounds and five assists, but the Thunder — who

came into the contest just a half-game behind Minnesota for the Western Conference lead — trailed by as many as 41 and dropped a second straight contest.

Irving added eight assists, delivering the 4,000th of his career in the second quarter. Mavs coach Jason Kidd was delighted to see both Gafford and Washington mesh seamlessly with their new teammates, indicating they provide just what Dallas need as they try to climb from eighth in the West.

"I thought Gafford was great on both ends," Kidd said. "P.J., he just let the game come to him. The pace was high (and) we didn't have to run anybody's minutes up. Just a lot of good stuff." As the Thunder faltered, the Los Angeles Clippers moved into second place in the West with a tougher-than-expected 112-106 victory over the league-worst Detroit Pistons.

Paul George scored 15 of his 33 points in the fourth quarter as the Clippers battled back from a 13-point deficit early in the third quarter. Kawhi Leonard added 24 points for the Clippers, who had seized a quick 12-2 lead in front of home fans only for the Pistons to hit back.

Cavs win 9th straight

Detroit led by five going into the final period, but the Pistons couldn't contain the Clippers down the stretch. The Cleveland Cavaliers pushed their winning streak to nine games with a 119-95 victory over the Raptors in Toronto.

Jarrett Allen scored 18 points and pulled down 15 rebounds and eight Cavaliers players scored in double figures. The Philadelphia 76ers, trying to keep their playoff aspirations on track despite the injury absence of NBA Most Valuable Player Joel Embiid, halted a four-game losing streak with a 119-113 victory over the Wizards in Washington.

Tyrese Maxey scored 28 points and Buddy Hield added 23 in his second game since joining the Sixers in a trade. The Orlando Magic, fueled by 36 points from Franz Wagner, rallied late in regulation and beat the Chicago Bulls 114-108 in overtime.

In Charlotte, the Hornets snapped a 10-game losing streak with a 115-106 victory over the Memphis Grizzlies. Miles Bridges scored 25 points and new arrival Vasilije Micic added 18 points and nine assists. — AFP