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Amir fetes graduating cadets

New officers trained to face military and security challenges by harnessing tech



KUWAIT: HH the Amir, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and senior officials attend the graduation of the 23rd batch of cadet officers at Ali Al-Sabah Military Academy on Feb 12, 2024. — KUNA photos (See Page 3)

KUWAIT: HH the Amir, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, sponsored and attended on Monday the graduation of the 23rd batch of cadet officers at Ali Al-Sabah Military Academy. HH the Amir, upon arrival at the venue of the celebration, was greeted by Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Acting Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah, Defense Ministry Undersecretary Sheikh Dr Abdullah Mishal Al-Sabah, Kuwait Army Acting Chief of General Staff Maj Gen Dr Ghazi Hassan Jazzaa, Commander of Ali Al-Sabah Military Academy Brig Gen Khaled Shujaa Faihan and academy commanders.

The ceremony was attended by National Assembly Speaker Ahmad Al-Saadoun, HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, Chief of the Supreme Judicial Council and Head of the Court of Cassation Justice Dr Adel Majed Bouresli, senior state officials and a large crowd of the graduates' families and citizens. The ceremony started with the national anthem and Quranic verses, then the academy commander addressed the crowd with a speech, noting the national need for coping with rapid changes worldwide, calling to overhaul the educational system, promote scientific culture, creativity, innovation and setting

up an adequate environment for progress. In light of the rapid development in the military sector, namely production of state-of-the-art weapons, the academy has been keen on qualifying the cadet officers to cope with challenges of military and security tasks by means of harnessing "technology as a strategic option to serve the academic and training realms". The national military educational system has been overhauled, "turning into a distinguished example based on creativity, rationality, acquiring skills and expertise," he said. Following the speech, military personnel paraded, and the flag of the academy was swapped

among personnel. The graduates were then dismissed and military formations paraded. Names of the graduates were announced by assistant commander of the academy Brig Gen Fahad Khaled Faisal. HH the Amir then handed over the trophies to the excellent graduated officers and high-record students at the academy. The director of educational and legal affairs Brig Gen Yusuf Abdullah Idriss took the legal oath, then declared the end of the military parade amid the national anthem. HH the Amir was awarded a memento on the occasion before he departed the ceremony venue. — KUNA

UAE defends ties with Zionists, urges two-state solution

Lana Nusseibeh

DUBAI: A top Emirati diplomat on Monday defended her country's decision to maintain ties with the Zionist entity despite its mounting concern over the war in Gaza. The United Arab Emirates and the Zionist entity established diplomatic ties in 2020 as part of the US-brokered Abraham Accords, making it one of the few Arab countries to recognize the Zionist entity. Despite maintaining its ties with the Zionist entity since the Zionist-Hamas war began in October, the UAE has been at pains to express solidarity with Palestinians as anger mounted in the Arab world over the conflict.

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MASSACRE IN RAFAH

GAZA: Fears of a looming ground incursion grew Monday among more than a million Palestinians trapped in war-ravaged Gaza's crowded far south. With a dramatic overnight raid in Rafah city, Zionist special forces claimed to have freed two captives in a rare rescue mission. Fernando Simon Marman, 60, and Luis Har, 70, were allegedly freed amid an intense firefight and heavy airstrikes, then airlifted to a hospital where they were declared in good health. The overnight bombing in Rafah killed around 100 people including children, said the health ministry of the Hamas-run Gaza Strip. The Palestinian foreign ministry condemned what it called a "massacre" and accused Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of "a mentality of revenge". The Zionist entity has carried out a relentless bombardment and ground offensive in Gaza that has killed at least 28,340 people, mostly women and children. In Rafah, local Palestinian residents surveyed the large bomb craters and rubble left after the intense battle. One man walked with a pile of salvaged religious books from a bomb-damaged mosque. Another, 28-year-old Abu Suhhaib, said the fighting had made him feel "as if hell had opened". Weeks of talks towards a new ceasefire and hostage

Continued on Page 6



GAZA: A Palestinian youth cries over the body of his mother killed in Zionist bombardment at the Kuwait Hospital in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on Feb 12, 2024. — AFP

Qatar frees Indian ex-navy personnel

NEW DELHI: India's foreign ministry said Monday that Qatar had freed eight ex-navy personnel it had previously arrested and sentenced to death, reportedly for spying for the Zionist entity. The foreign ministry never gave details on the eight Indian nationals or their alleged crimes, and Qatar has not commented on the

case or made the charges public. But Indian media have reported that the men — among them former high-ranking and decorated officers, including captains who once commanded warships — were arrested in Doha in August 2022. In October, India said it was "shocked" after a Qatari court had sentenced them to death, but the sentence was reduced in December. The eight men were employees of Al Dahra, a Gulf-based company that offers "complete support solutions" to the aerospace, security and defense sectors, according to its website. The Hindu newspaper report-

ed the men were spying for a "third country", while the Times of India has said that "various reports claimed they were accused of spying for (the Zionist entity)". On Monday, New Delhi said the men had all been released. "The Government of India welcomes the release of eight Indian nationals working for the Dahra Global company who were detained in Qatar," the foreign ministry said in a statement. "Seven out of the eight of them have returned to India," it added, thanking Qatar's Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani for the decision "to enable the release and homecoming" of the detainees. — AFP

Amir's visit to Bahrain strengthens relations



File photo shows His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the King of Bahrain, King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa.



His Highness the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the King of Bahrain, King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa.



His Highness the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the King of Bahrain, King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa.

MANAMA: Kuwaiti Ambassador to the Kingdom of Bahrain, Sheikh Thamer Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah said on Monday that the upcoming visit of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to Bahrain would further strengthen the historical ties between the two nations. Sheikh Thamer told KUNA that His Highness the Amir's visit would be within the framework of enhancing cooperation and coordination in all fields, which serves the interests of both countries.

He noted that the relations were deep-rooted and harmonious as they go back generations and exceed all political and diplomatic rhetoric. Sheikh Thamer said that the visit of His Highness the Amir to the Kingdom of Bahrain and the expected meeting with King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa would surely add to another mile-

stone in the Kuwaiti-Bahraini ties.

His Highness the Amir will hold talks with Bahrain's King Hamad Bin Isa Al-Khalifa to boost ties between both countries. Kuwaiti-Bahraini relations have always been described as strong, as the two ruling families are linked together, which is a reflection of the strong relationship between their people. The history between both countries goes back and is known for the agreement and visions of their political leadership regarding their firm stance on regional and international issues based on a rational approach and the principle of dialogue.

The official visits aim to enhance bilateral relations in various fields of common interest, including trade, economy, cybersecurity, and others, noting that the most recent visit was when the Bahraini King offered his condolences on

the passing of the late Amir. Bahrain's honorable stand was evident during the Iraqi invasion in 1991, when their leadership and people stood with the Kuwaiti right by welcoming their citizens and providing them with all necessities, as well as contributing to the liberation of Kuwait.

In recent years, the two countries witnessed important events, including the signing of eight cooperation documents in April 2019, in fields of electronic commerce, customs affairs, exchange of information and news, environmental protection, culture, arts, agriculture, marine resources, and the development of trade relations. Kuwait and Bahrain also signed agreements in the field of education to enhance cooperation, enhance expertise, and benefit from experiences, while their universities attract students majoring in different fields from both countries. — KUNA



Kuwait Towers decorated with the Bahraini flag on the occasion of the Kingdom's National Day.



(From left to right) Iranian Ambassador Mohammad Toutouchi, Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Samih Issa Gohar Hayat and Zubaidullah Zubaidov, Dean of the Diplomatic Corps and Ambassador of Tajikistan cut the cake.



Iranian Ambassador Mohammad Toutouchi and Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Samih Gohar Hayat tour the Iranian exhibition on the sidelines of the ceremony — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Iran Embassy marks National Day, Islamic Revolution 'versary

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: The Embassy of Iran to Kuwait held on Sunday a reception on the National Day of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the 45th anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Revolution at Salwa Sabah Al-Ahmad Hall. Iranian Ambassador Mohammad Toutouchi underscored the Islamic Republic of Iran's commitment to fostering balanced relations with neighboring countries, emphasizing a pragmatic approach rooted in understanding the political dynamics of the region.

Toutouchi highlighted Iran's reliance on reconciliation and the shared religious and cultural bonds that serve to strengthen ties with neighboring nations. He emphasized the significance of looking beyond points of contention, instead focusing on the religious and popular commonalities that bind communities together, pointing out that Iran's relations with Kuwait transcend mere official interactions, citing deep-rooted connections forged through familial ties, intermarriage and a historical legacy of commercial exchanges. These enduring bonds have contributed to the development of robust and enduring relations between the two nations.

"The issuance of 100,000 visas to Kuwaiti citizens to visit Iran for tourism and medical purposes serves as tangible evidence of the enduring and

authentic ties between the two nations. This significant gesture underscores the depth of the relationship, demonstrating Iran's commitment to facilitating cultural exchange and fostering mutual understanding. By opening its doors to Kuwaiti citizens, Iran not only promotes tourism but also strengthens people-to-people connections, further solidifying the bonds of friendship and cooperation between the two countries," Toutouchi said.

The Iranian ambassador indicated that with the passage of 62 years of diplomatic relations between Iran and Kuwait, Iran found balanced relations existing between the two countries, and today they are in the process of investing in current experiences to create relations that are moving further. "We hope that at this stage, we will witness practical initiatives from both sides to strengthen bilateral relations," he added.

Toutouchi made a strong statement condemning the abhorrent Zionist aggression against Gaza and the tragic loss of thousands of Palestinian lives, highlighting these acts as war crimes exacerbated by the silence or even support of major countries. He underscored the urgent need for international solidarity in the face of such atrocities, especially considering the widespread global sympathy towards the plight of the Palestinian people. By calling attention to the ongoing violence and advocating for collective action, the ambassador emphasized the imperative of holding accountable those responsible for the atrocities and working towards a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Gaza.

Kuwait Times, Kuwait News welcome International British School students

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Kuwait Times and Kuwait News welcomed students from the International British School on Monday, inviting them to delve into the world of journalism. Public Relations and CSR Manager Jana Alnaqeeb, along with content creator Zainab Dashti, digital creator Yousef Abu Ghazaleh and Deputy Managing Editor Faten Omar guided the visitors through an insightful tour of the Kuwait Times building. During the visit, students had the unique opportunity to gain firsthand experience and insight into the intricate process of publishing a newspaper, from news gathering to final printing.

The tour provided an invaluable educational experience for the students, allowing them to interact with professionals in the field and gain a deeper understanding of the inner workings of journalism. Through engaging discussions and hands-

on activities, the students were able to explore various aspects of newspaper production and learn about the vital role of journalism in society.

As part of the tour, students had the opportunity to delve into Kuwait's rich history, offered by Abu Ghazaleh at Kuwait Times' archive room. Additionally, each student was presented with the first edition of Kuwait Times, established in 1961. This gesture not only provided a tangible link to the newspaper's inception, but also offered a glimpse into the historical context and evolution of journalism in Kuwait, enriching the students' understanding of Kuwait's cultural and journalistic heritage.

To conclude the visit, students engaged in an interactive game facilitated by Zainab Dashti at Kuwait Times' studio. The game focused on exploring various aspects of the digital era, prompting students to partici-



International British School students at the studio.

pate in a series of thought-provoking questions and discussions. Through this dynamic activity, students had the opportunity to deepen their understanding of the evolving landscape of digital journalism, discussing topics ranging from social media's impact on news consumption to the importance of digital in today's media landscape.



International British School students pose for a group photo with Kuwait Times and Kuwait News team.



Students of IBS pose for a group picture.

Local

Amir sponsors officers' graduation

Excellent cadets, high-record students receive trophies



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sponsors and attends cadet officers' graduation. — KUNA photos



Tears of joy — cadets caught in an emotional moment.



The cadets march as their families cheer them on.



Creators honored



This year's edition is named after the great late poet Abdulaziz Al-Babtain.



National musical performance.

29th Qurain Cultural Festival inaugurated

KUWAIT: Representing His Highness The Prime Minister, Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, and Minister of Information and Culture Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi inaugurated the 29th Qurain Cultural Festival Sunday at the Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Center. The festival will last until February 22. The minister said in an opening speech, "I am honored to represent the Prime Minister, Sheikh Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, to open the 29th Qurain Cultural Festival, which coincides with Kuwait's national celebrations."

He praised "the efforts of the Kuwaiti pioneers who celebrated today and received the State Appreciation Award for the year 2023 in recognition of their creative cultural, artistic, and media careers. The minister added that these pioneers and their contributions left a great imprint and a distinct impact through their works that influenced the cultural, intellectual, artistic, and literary movement, alongside the creators who won the State Encouragement Award in the fields of arts."

The minister noted the efforts exerted by the National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters (NCCAL), and their strategy is keen to develop and enrich intellectual production, disseminate rich knowledge, provide the appropriate climate for artistic and literary creativity, choose means of disseminating culture and fine arts, and strengthen ties and connections with Arab and foreign cultural organizations. The agenda of this year's festival includes 30 activities covering a wide range of cultures and arts.

"Celebration of 50 Years" is a two-day interactive show that highlights the achievements of NCCAL over the past five decades. Qurain Cultural Festival is keen to choose the personality of each version of the festival from creative people with clear fingerprints in the literary and cultural fields. In addition, this year's version is named after the great late poet Abdulaziz Al-Babtain, honoring his efforts and impact on the Arabic and foreign cultural fields.

A national musical performance entitled Echo of Poets, led by Maestro Dr. Amer Jaafar, and the performance of an orchestra from Uzbekistan led by Maestro Kamal Al-Din Oren Yaf, with the participation of artist Jassim Al-Nabhan, to tell the story of the pioneer poets in Kuwait and their echo in the Arab world, who influenced our lives with their words and pens.

The band also played musical pieces of Kuwaiti songs



with the participation of Kuwaiti choral voices and the distinguished participation of the Qatari Nahham Mansour Al-Muhannadi, who entertained the audience. It also played enthusiastic pieces in solidarity at the festival in support of the Palestinian cause. The show concluded with a Ku-

waiti patriotic song and the national anthem. The festival will include many events and activities during the period of the festival, and the public could enjoy the festival's events by booking tickets through the links in the NCCAL official account on Instagram. — KUNA

In my view

Salary increase is
the citizen's right

Dr Khalid Al-Saleh

Local@kuwaittimes.com

Oxford Business Group issued a report in 2017 on the challenges the Kuwaiti government faced in convincing members of parliament of its economic reform plan. The report focused on traditional solutions, often suggested by the West, such as examining salaries, attracting investment, developing communication systems, information technology and renewable energy. Additionally, it explored reviving the issue of taxing companies' profits by percentages up to 10 percent, increasing fuel prices, and phasing out subsidies, starting with electricity. The government warned that if the subsidy burden continued, its value might reach nearly \$25 billion by 2035.

While such economic reports from international institutions persuade many people of the need for fiscal responsibility and opposition to perceived financial waste, especially when it affects citizens' pockets, including salary increases and expanding interest-free loans for retirees, some voices grow louder warning of a gloomy future for the next generations due to what they consider unjustified squandering.

On the other hand, the average citizen questions the concept of preserving wealth for future generations. This citizen, not well-versed in economic jargon or the terminology of future plans, possesses a deep understanding of his country and its leadership. Consequently, the citizen wonders about the guarantees in place to prevent the misappropriation of future billions, as happened with past funds. Questions arise about lands given in large sizes and entire areas now valued in billions, which ended up in the hands of individuals, seemingly unknown to Oxford experts. Current distributions of farms continue without attracting expert attention, despite ongoing discussions about financial waste.

The citizen contemplates when to believe economists and those aligning with them regarding curbing squandering. The belief may come if measures are applied uniformly. Instead of calling for a halt to salary increases, demand accountability from real estate owners who received grants over time. Addressing major financial embezzlements in state institutions is essential, as a single theft could equal the funds required for salary increases over a decade.

Directing anger at the citizen and expecting him to endure salary freezes for many years while certain groups benefit from financial policies is deemed unacceptable. Even if numerical games are used to justify actions, it remains unacceptable. The government successfully requested the postponement of a proposal to increase salaries, leading to a fracture in the Assembly's unity. Economists then warned against salary increases, emphasizing their potential danger to Kuwait's future, while neglecting to address the true squandering of state funds.

The hope is for the Assembly's unity to be restored to its previous strength, with members prioritizing the citizen's interests. The citizen's prosperity has dwindled, and essential provisions are on the verge of disappearing, including the ability to own a residence. Assisting the people of Kuwait should not diminish the "blessing" of state funds, which are, in essence, the people's funds. What diminishes the "blessing" are individuals among us solely focused on filling their safes through means known to the simple citizen but overlooked by Oxford experts.

Minister to overhaul
local cultural body

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Information Minister Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi said on Monday he plans to transform the work of a national cultural council by putting in place a program for structural changes within the body. The program, christened "Managing Change," a collaborative effort with Kuwait's Boubyan Bank, entails a "complete transformation" of the National Council for Culture, Arts, and Let-

Grand Mosque: An eye-catching
architectural landmark in Kuwait

Construction of the Grand Mosque started in 1979 and it was officially opened in 1986 - costing KD 14 million. — KUNA photos



Muqarnas known to Europeans as limescale sediments because they hang from the ceiling just as snow deposits hang in caves.



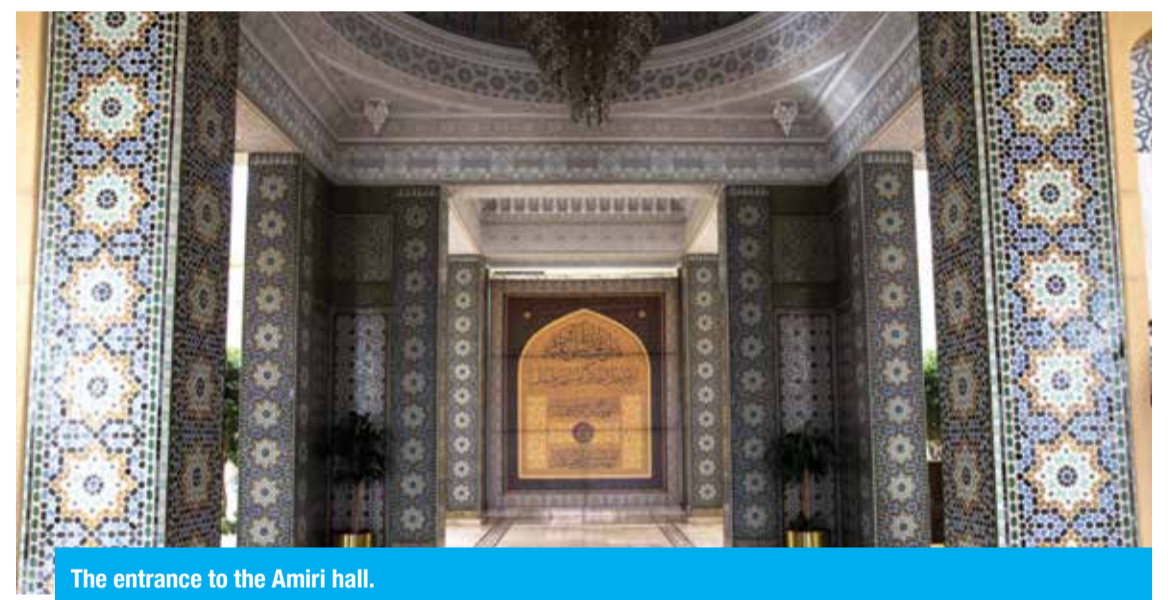
Inscriptions in Kufic calligraphy decorate some of the mosque's walls.

KUWAIT: The Grand Mosque, situated in the heart of the Kuwaiti capital, is a distinguished Islamic edifice with diverse ornamentations and artistic shapes, opposite the sea panorama. Skilled architects joined hands to build the large mosque in response to an order by the late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. Construction started in 1979, and the mosque was inaugurated in 1986. It is one of the largest mosques in Kuwait, occupying a 45,000-square-meter land plot opposite the Seif Palace.

It includes 20,000 uncovered spaces with water canals and green and tree-shaded patches. It can accommodate 70,000 people. The mosque includes three prayer halls: the main hall, the daily one, and the women's section, in addition to the Amiri Hall, said Ali Shedad, the mosque director, in an interview with Kuwait News Agency (KUNA). A huge dome is in the center of the 10,000 people's capacity. It is 43 meters above the ground. There is a dome in its center, adorned with Allah's Husna names in Kufi calligraphy and blended with Quranic verses spanning 80 meters.

The large dome is surrounded by Allah's Husna names. It is also surrounded by four small domes, decorated with engravings made from Moroccan gypsum, and four dangling chandeliers. Light seeps into the inner part of the mosque through 144 windows, in addition to the light emitted by the four large chandeliers, each of which contains 102 bulbs, in addition to the wall chandeliers. The large dome is surrounded by four 22-meter-high columns covered with Italian marble.

In the lower section, there are wooden oriel ventilation windows. The main prayer section in-



The entrance to the Amiri hall.

cludes several mihrabs (prayer niches) covered with Moroccan zellij (mosaic tilework) and Islamic engravings topped with Quranic verses. The mosque's 22 doors are made from Indian saaj wood and decorated with Quranic verses.

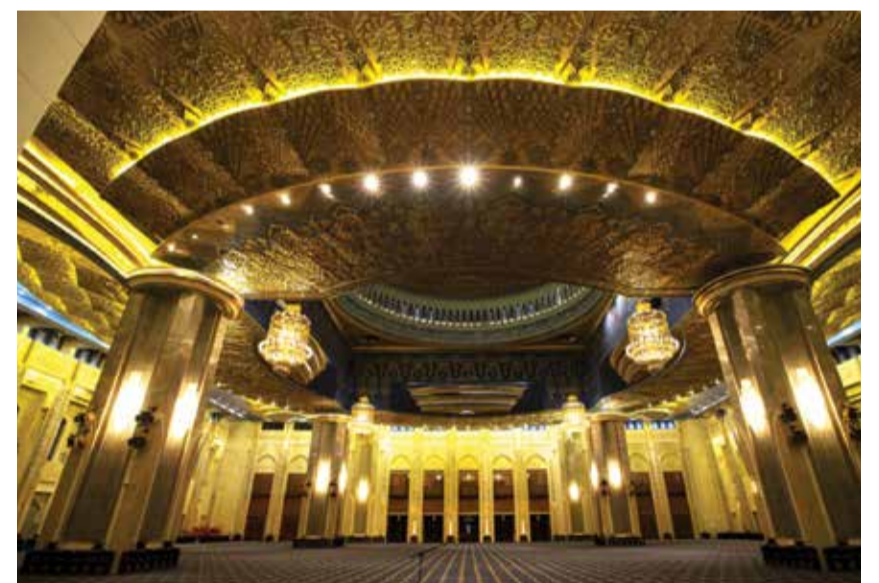
The women's prayer section, with surrounding mashrabiyyas, is located above the main one. It can accommodate some 1,000 worshippers. The daily prayer hall accommodates 500 individuals. The minaret is surrounded by four 72-m-high columns. The Amiri Hall, adjacent to the main prayer place, was built two years after completing the mosque's construction. The Amir receives well-wishers on religious occasions in this section. — KUNA



A dome rises in the middle of the main hall.



The Amiri Hall which was built for the Amir to greet people on Eid, designed in Moroccan character.



The main hall can contain 10,000 worshippers.

US Embassy launches
'You Are the Future
of Kuwait' campaign

KUWAIT: The US Embassy launched a campaign entitled "Ento Mustaqbalha" - "You are the Future of Kuwait" to celebrate Kuwait's National and Liberation Days on February 25-26. The campaign, which will run for two weeks, will highlight success stories and achievements of Kuwaiti graduates of US universities and exchange programs.

The embassy is committed to promoting and increasing cross-cultural understanding and educational exchanges to empower Kuwaiti youth and equip them with necessary skills for career success

and leadership opportunities.

Additionally, the embassy provides consular and college-application guidance to facilitate enrollment in educational and exchange programs, including via in-person outreach to schools and universities and virtual broadcasting on our social media platforms.

"The campaign comprises educational fairs, alumni networking receptions, TV and radio interviews with experts on studying in the United States and student visas, as well as private school visits. Through these initiatives, we hope to encourage more Kuwaitis to pursue their education at US universities and participate in our exchange programs. The US Embassy's EducationUSA team looks forward to welcoming students and parents at the February 14 - 15 Q8 EduEx Fair at Mishref Fair Grounds (Hall 8)," EducationUSA Advisor Rasha Zalzal said. — US Embassy

ters (NCCAL), the minister said during talks with officials from the local body.

The primary goal of the initiative is to bring to light the "exceptional talent" within the ranks of the NCCAL, the minister underlined, saying that such skills would further be honed and properly exploited when the program ultimately comes to fruition. When putting together a strategy for broad development within the NCCAL, it is only appropriate that such a plan be "assembled internally," he explained, pointing out that extensive discussions and meticulous planning preceded the start of the initiative.

Bringing about palpable change can only be

achieved when one ventures "out of their comfort zone," added the minister, citing "determination and change" as among the key attributes needed to achieve such a transformation, besides the will to succeed. Joining this initiative is tantamount to a "national and social obligation," said Boubyan Bank's chief executive Abdullah Al-Mehri, emphasizing that broad development within NCCAL is a step towards depicting national culture in a positive light. Once the program is completed, the national cultural body will "reap the rewards" of such an initiative, added the official, saying even the most "minute details" will be instrumental in the success or lack thereof of the endeavor. — KUNA

23rd ophthalmology
summit to kick off

KUWAIT: Director of Ophthalmology at the Ministry of Health, Dr. Ahmad Al-Foudari, said that the 23rd ophthalmology conference is due to launch on Thursday under the auspices of Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi. Dr. Al-Foudari said, in a press release on Monday, that 46 leading experts all around the world and our region in the field of ophthalmology would participate to discuss emerging trends in research and controversial topics in the diagnosis and treatment of eye-related diseases and disorders, pointing out that the event would continue for three days.

The conference would also deliver an excellent scientific program featuring keynotes, symposia, workshops, live debates, case presentations, and updates on topics including emergency eye surgery, cataract surgery, valve implantation related to ocular hypertension, and botox injections as a treatment for some eye-related diseases. He added that a wide range of topics, including cornea, eye socket, tear duct, strabismus, retina, and eye nerve-related topics, along with children's eye-related diseases, would be discussed. — KUNA



Dr Ahmad Al-Foudari



Two years of war: Ukrainian refugees face lasting exile

Hospitalized Pentagon chief hands duties to deputy

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RAFAH: People inspect the damage in the rubble of a mosque following Zionist bombardment on the southern Gaza Strip on February 12, 2024. — AFP

'Hell falling' after Zionists raid Rafah

Displaced Palestinians pack up scant belongings as Netanyahu vows 'continued military pressure'

RAFAH: Majed Al-Afifi was just 40 days old when he was killed, his uncle told AFP in Rafah where Zionist forces bombed multiple homes while rescuing two Gaza hostages. "We heard the bombing without warning," said Said al-Hams, 26, in Rafah refugee camp.

His nephew, a twin, "was born exactly 40 days ago and was killed", while their mother was wounded. The newborn is among around 100 people killed by Zionist forces overnight in Rafah, according to the health ministry in Gaza.

Dozens of Zionist strikes pounded Rafah, where some 1.4 million people have sought refuge during four months of Zionist invasion. While there was jubilation in the Zionist entity over the liberation of the two hostages, in Rafah people recounted a fearful night. "The situation was hell," said Abu Suhaib, who was sleeping dozens of meters from where Zionist forces struck. "We heard the sound of explosions,

like hell falling down on civilians," he told AFP.

The 28-year-old said he heard warplanes firing, shooting and a helicopter landing. A massive pile of rubble stands where multiple buildings were flattened by Zionist strikes, beside the remains of a four-storey house.

Witnesses said the residents of the house fled two months ago, after the Zionist military warned them it would be bombed. The aerial bombardment also left five vast craters, at least 10 meters wide and five meters deep, an AFP journalist said. "I can't tell you how we survived the night," said Abu Abdullah Al-Qadi, who was woken by the sound of shooting.

"They killed my cousin, they killed a lot of people with strikes," he told AFP, as dozens gathered by the destroyed buildings. "They stormed this building and it appears that they freed prisoners — and then they bombed it," said Qadi. "They bombed all the houses next to it," he added.

'A terrifying night'

The refugee camp sits in the heart of Rafah, where vast crowds have gathered after following Zionist orders to flee other parts of Gaza. Despite mounting international alarm at a possible ground invasion of the city, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed Monday that "continued military pressure" is the only way to free all hostages.

Palestinian militants seized about 250 hostages during their October 7 attack on communities and military bases in the Zionist entity's south, according to an AFP tally based on official Zionist figures. The Zionist entity says around 130 are still in Gaza, though 29 are thought to be dead.

The relentless offensive by the Zionist entity has killed at least 28,340 people in Gaza, mostly women and children, according to the latest health ministry toll. The October 7 attack resulted in the deaths of about 1,160 people, mostly civilians, according to an

AFP tally based on official figures.

Fearing an onslaught by ground forces, dozens of families already displaced by the war started packing up their scant belongings on Monday. "It was a terrifying night," said Alaa Mohammed, from northern Gaza, dismantling a tent in western Rafah.

"What happened at night foreshadows something big happening in Rafah. It seems that the (Zionist) army will enter Rafah as they announced," said the 42-year-old. The family is planning on travelling to the Deir al-Balah area of central Gaza, an earlier focus for Zionist troops after they destroyed swathes of the north.

Mohammed started gathering their blankets and mattresses, after a sleepless night, while relatives went in search of transport. "A lot of families around me undid their tents like us," he said. "I hope we can find a car or a truck. We called more than one driver we know, but all of them are busy." — AFP

Red Sea crisis puts Yemen peace process on hold

DUBAI: As Houthi attacks roil the Red Sea and Western air raids target the rebels, moves to end Yemen's long-running war are at a standstill, threatening further woe for a country on its knees. As recently as December, painstaking negotiations were gaining ground and the United Nations said the warring parties had agreed to work towards "the resumption of an inclusive political process".

The Iran-backed Houthis have been fighting a Saudi-led coalition since March 2015, months after they seized the capital Sanaa and most of Yemen's population centers, forcing the internationally recognized government south to Aden.

Hundreds of thousands of people have died in the fighting and from indirect causes such as disease and malnutrition. More than 18 million Yemenis need "urgent support", according to the UN's humanitarian agency OCHA. Hostilities slowed considerably in April 2022, when a six-month, UN-brokered ceasefire came into effect, and they have remained at a low level since. But Houthi attacks on Red Sea shipping and American and British retaliation have thrown the peace process "up in the air", said Farea Al-Muslimi, a research fellow at Chatham House's Middle East and North Africa Programme.

The Houthis, who say they are acting in solidarity with the Palestinians in Gaza, have launched dozens of attacks on ships in the vital maritime route since November. Seventeen of their fighters were killed in recent reprisal strikes, according to the insurgents. "Peace in Yemen requires international and regional commitments different than those that exist now," Muslimi said. "The path to war had been closed, but now the door to hell has reopened."

'No longer on table'

Top Houthi official Hussein al-Ezzi this month acknowledged "obstacles" on the path to peace, which he blamed on the US, Britain, and the Yemeni gov-

ernment. But "Riyadh and Sanaa have the courage to overcome these difficulties", he told a press conference, without elaborating.

However, Majid Al-Madhaji, of the Sanaa Center for Strategic Studies think-tank, said that with the flare up in the Red Sea, "a peace plan no longer has a place on the discussion table". In December, the UN special envoy for Yemen, Hans Grundberg, said there was progress towards a roadmap that would resolve key issues such as agreeing to pay civil servants working under the Houthis, and resuming oil exports.

However, the Saudi-backed Yemeni government is now angling for an "opportunity to reverse the balance of power" in its favor, said Madhaji. Last month, the deputy leader of the government's presidential council even called for foreign backing for a ground offensive to back up the US-British air strikes against the Houthis. In mid-January, Washington redesign-

ated the Houthis a terror group, having lifted the designation in 2021 to aid humanitarian efforts and promote diplomatic endeavors.

But "the idea that we (the US) would now build up the anti-Houthi forces to the point where they could renew the fighting, I think is simply not in the cards", said Gerald Feirstein, a former US ambassador to Yemen. "We're not going to go down that route," he told AFP. The US is "under a great deal of pressure not to do anything that's going to undermine the (peace) negotiations," Feirstein added.

General Joseph Votel, former head of US Central Command, also downplayed the possibility of "a major fight", saying Washington has more pressing issues, not least the Zionist war on Palestine. "Resolving the situation in Gaza, and restoring some type of deterrence with Iran to me would be much higher priorities," the retired general said. — AFP



SANAA: A sign depicting a cutout of the Bahamas-flagged cargo vessel Galaxy Leader, which was seized by fighters of Yemen's Houthi movement in late 2023, is raised by a protester during a pro-Palestinian rally. — AFP

UK sanctions four 'extremist settlers' in West Bank

LONDON: Britain on Monday announced sanctions on four "extremist (Zionist) settlers" accused of committing human rights abuses against Palestinians in the West Bank, following a similar move by the United States earlier this month.

The curbs follow what the UK called "unprecedented levels of violence by extremist settlers in the West Bank" over the past year by some residents of illegal Zionist settlements and outposts there. The sanctions represent a rare move by London and Washington against Zionists, as war rages with Hamas in the Gaza Strip. The transatlantic allies' steadfast support for the Zionist military action in the territory has drawn heavy criticism both internationally and among sections of their domestic populations.

Announcing the new curbs — which comprise UK asset freezes alongside travel and visa bans — British Foreign Secretary David Cameron said that "(the Zionist entity) must also take stronger action and put a stop to settler violence". He added: "Too often, we see commitments made and undertakings given, but not followed through." Cameron said "extremist (Zionist) settlers" are threatening Palestinians, often at gunpoint, and "forcing them off land that is rightfully theirs," branding the behavior "illegal and unacceptable".

"Extremist settlers, by targeting and attacking Palestinian civilians, are undermining security and stability for both (Zionists) and Palestinians," he added. Two of the individuals sanctioned — Moshe Sharvit and Yinon Levy — have in recent months used physical aggression, threatened families at gunpoint, and destroyed property, Cameron's foreign ministry said. Their actions are "part of a targeted and calculated effort to displace Palestinian communities," it added. London also targeted Zvi Bar Yosef, who it said had set up an illegal outpost in the West Bank in 2018 which has been described by local Palestinian residents as a "source of systematic intimidation and violence". — AFP

International

Hospitalized Pentagon chief hands duties to deputy

Austin admitted to critical care weeks after keeping cancer diagnosis, hospital stay secret

WASHINGTON: US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin was admitted to a critical care ward with a bladder issue after he transferred his duties to his deputy Sunday, the Pentagon said, as he battles prostate cancer. Deputy Secretary of Defense Kathleen Hicks "assumed the functions and duties" just before 5:00 pm (2200 GMT), Pentagon spokesman Pat Ryder said in a statement, adding that the White House and Congress had been informed.

Austin was "admitted into the critical care unit at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center for supportive care and close monitoring," the Pentagon said in a later statement, citing his doctors. The latest health scare came weeks after it emerged that Austin, 70, had kept previous hospital stays secret and had not immediately informed US President Joe Biden of his cancer diagnosis, sparking criticism as the United States faces crises in the Middle East and Ukraine.

Austin effectively vanished from the public eye for treatment for prostate cancer in December and again in January after suffering complications from the procedure. This time, the public was alerted

around two hours after he was sent to the hospital on Sunday afternoon.

Austin "was transported by his security detail" to the hospital, Ryder said in the earlier statement. Ryder noted initially that the defense chief brought along classified communications systems and would be retaining "the functions and duties of his office."

However, the announcement that Hicks would instead be taking over came just a few hours later. "At this time, it is not clear how long Secretary Austin will remain hospitalized," said the latest statement, attributed to Dr John Maddox and Dr Gregory Chesnut of the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Maryland. "The current bladder issue is not expected to change his anticipated full recovery. His cancer prognosis remains excellent."

Low profile

Austin apologized this month after coming under heavy political fire for keeping the previous hospital stays secret. "I should have told the president about my cancer diagnosis," he told journalists on February 1. At the time, he said he was still in recovery, suffer-



ARLINGTON, United States: US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin delivers remarks during a meeting on February 7, 2024. — AFP

ing from leg pain and using a golf cart for transportation inside the Pentagon.

The undisclosed absences — as well as this current hospital stay — come at a time when the United States faces a spiraling crisis in the Middle East, with

American forces in Iraq and Syria facing near-daily attacks from Iran-backed militants in retaliation for Washington's steadfast support of the Zionist entity.

The top US defense official is also a key figure in attempts by the Biden administration to maintain support for Ukraine's fight against Russia's invasion, as Republican members of Congress refuse to authorize new funding for military aid to Kyiv.

Various Republican lawmakers previously called for Austin to be sacked but Biden, while lamenting the Pentagon chief's lapse in judgment, has said he remains confident in his defense secretary. Austin has gained a reputation as a largely apolitical public servant who is most comfortable with US troops.

A commanding presence at well over six feet tall, he is an intensely private person who eschews the spotlight, which he said played into his decision to keep the cancer diagnosis secret. But he acknowledged that "taking this kind of job means losing some of the privacy that most of us expect. The American people have a right to know if their leaders are facing health challenges that might affect their ability to perform their duties, even temporarily." — AFP

Organ donation: Relieving pain, reviving hope

RIYADH: Najlaa Al-Sudairi, a consultant in international media relations, never thought that she would one day embark on two different journeys: donate an organ to one of her closest relatives and wait for a donor to save her beloved daughter. These two experiences turned her life upside down. More than two decades ago, Sudairi, who was leading a normal life like any other girl, found herself compelled to make a life-saving decision at a young age.

She decided to donate her kidney to her sister, Seetah Al-Sudairi, who was suffering from kidney failure. Despite her fear of hospitals and doctors, and her limited understanding of organ transplantation, Seetah's struggle with dialysis and the hardships she endured day after day made Najlaa opt for the only choice that would put an end to her sister's tragedy: donate a kidney. "When I underwent examinations at the hospital, all my previous fears vanished completely, and I began to live with hope, envisioning my sister Seetah leading a normal life.

And that is exactly what happened," Najlaa said. "The operation was successful, thank God, and I felt an indescribable sense of fulfillment for relieving my sister's suffering. Witnessing her full recovery filled me with immeasurable joy," she added. After all these long years, fate decided last year that Najlaa would have to go through another bitter experience: having to wait for a donor to save her daughter Sultanah, whose liver functions had failed.

Sultanah's condition was critical, and her health deteriorated significantly. While desperately searching for a donor to save her daughter's life, Najlaa endured unimaginable agony and pain every time she helplessly looked at her beloved daughter. However,

the Most Merciful granted Sultanah, who could die any time, a brand new life. Abdullah Al-Tamimi, a liver cirrhosis patient, described his experience with organ donation as "life after death." Suffering from organ failure, he was frequenting hospitals, clinging to life. As his condition worsened, a liver transplant became necessary to save him.

"I am a man who is satisfied with Allah's fate and decree, and my concern was not so much for myself but for my family, who needed me. I constantly prayed to Allah to take care of them after I go," Abdullah said, recalling the bleak times. "After going through utter darkness, a glimmer of light shone upon my life and the lives of my family. Allah blessed me with recovery after I received the liver of a brain-dead patient through the Saudi Center for Organ Transplantation," he said with visible relief.

The Saudi Center for Organ Transplantation (SCOT), a Beacon of Hope for Patients in Need of Organ Transplant. The history of organ transplantation in Saudi Arabia dates back to 1979, when the first kidney transplant was performed at Prince Sultan Military Medical City. It is, however, the establishment of the National Kidney Center, through an initiative by King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud when he was governor of the Riyadh Region, that marks the actual beginning of the organ donation and transplantation program in the Kingdom.

A Royal Decree was issued establishing the National Kidney Center. Another decree changed its name to SCOT. SCOT regulates the practice of organ donation and transplantation in the Kingdom. It sets policies and procedures for donation, standards and conditions for licensing transplant operations, monitors and evaluates facilities, registers and follows up on cases of patients with organ failure before and after transplantation, informed about cases of brain death, and supervises waiting lists and determines the priority of those who are eligible.

Over the past 40 years, organ donation and transplantation has grown significantly throughout the Kingdom, with transplant centers spread across the

country and performing various types of organ transplants, such as kidney, heart, liver, lung, pancreas, intestine, and tissues such as bones and corneas. The Kingdom ranks second globally in organ donation among living people, according to the Global Observatory on Donation and Transplantation statistics for 2022.

The center launched the Athar electronic platform to digitize donation procedures and the organ supply chain, employ Artificial Intelligence (AI) to match issues between donor and potential recipient, get easy access to therapeutic procedures, and equal opportunities in obtaining services, and calculate performance indicators on the donation and organ transplantation journey. The platform also enables electronic connectivity and integration with health information systems, and follows up on the status of donation from the time a case is reported until the completion of the donation procedures, in a digital form, providing a value-added service to donors.

The first phase of the platform was launched on January 7, 2024. Regarding the sequence of case follow-up at SCOT, clinical organ transplantation coordinator Dr Khaled AlRuiqi said that it starts with the reception of a report from a hospital that has a potential brain death case. Once the report is received, the follow-up process commences with the involvement of attending and monitoring doctors who oversee the diagnosis of brain death and ensure its accuracy.

In Saudi Arabia, diagnosing brain death is a meticulous process. According to SCOT, Brain Death Diagnosis by Neurological Criteria National Committee Chairman and head of Neurology Division at Security Forces Hospital Dr Faisal Al-Suwaidan, who explained that it is not sufficient to prove only brain stem death, as is done in some countries. Instead, a complete brain death must be established with 100 percent accuracy to avoid any errors or shortcomings in the diagnosis.

This is achieved by following the Saudi protocol for diagnosing brain death, which is renowned for its stringent guidelines. The protocol is regularly updated with the latest scientific data on diagnostic

tools, ensuring that confirmation and certainty can be obtained within the necessary time frames. In addition, advanced tests are utilized to demonstrate the cessation of blood circulation to the brain and the absence of electrical activity in brain cells. The tests conducted in the Kingdom hospitals are compulsory and not optional, unlike in some countries.

This highlights the unwavering commitment of officials and doctors to ensuring that there are no errors in the diagnosis of brain death. Once the diagnosis of brain death is confirmed, arrangements are made for the family to meet with the medical team at the hospital. The dialogue with the family is attended by intensive care doctors who are fully prepared to address any concerns or questions. SCOT ensures the safety of organs throughout the entire process, from case follow-up to obtaining approval from the family for donation.

Additionally, it prioritizes the safety of the organ recipients after transplantation. This is crucial because the ultimate goal of transplantation is to enhance the quality of life for patients with organ failure. SCOT Organs Procurement Manager Ahmad Jaafari said that one of SCOT's key responsibilities is to conduct laboratory tests and examinations on potential organ donors. This ensures that the organs are safe and functioning properly. Once this is established, SCOT selects the most suitable patient or beneficiary who is in urgent need of transplant.

The center is responsible for coordinating with the hospitals where the donor is located and ensuring the arrangement of operating rooms upon the arrival of medical teams. Should the case be outside Riyadh, coordination is made with the Saudi Medical Appointments and Referrals Centre (SMARC) at the Ministry of Health to secure aircraft equipped to transport medical teams to the city where the donor is located or to one of the Gulf countries. In terms of the time elapsed between organ removal and transplantation, the process happens "exceptionally quickly," according to Jaafari. Following the removal, organs are meticulously preserved and transferred with great care. — KUNA

MASSACRE IN RAFAH...

Continued from Page 1

release deal have brought no results yet, and Netanyahu has vowed to send ground troops into Rafah where about 1.4 million displaced Palestinians are living in shelters and tent camps. They are hemmed into an area near the Egyptian border as the battlefront moves ever closer from the north.

Aid groups and foreign governments — including the Zionist entity's key ally the United States — have voiced deep concern over the potentially disastrous consequences of expanding operations in Rafah. Dozens of captives were freed by Hamas during a one-week truce in November that also saw the release of 240 Palestinian prisoners held in Zionist jails. Hamas' military wing said Sunday that two captives had been killed and eight wounded in recent Zionist bombardment.

United States President Joe Biden last week called the Zionist entity's military response in Gaza "over the top", which on Monday prompted European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell to say: "Maybe you should provide less arms in order to prevent so many people" being killed. Washington provides the Zionist entity with billions of dollars in military aid.

British Foreign Secretary David Cameron urged

the Zionist entity to "stop and think seriously before it takes any further action" in Gaza. Volker Turk, the UN's human rights chief, warned that "an extremely high number of civilians" would likely be killed or injured in a full Zionist incursion into Rafah.

Netanyahu has said the Zionist entity would provide "safe passage" to civilians trying to leave Rafah. The EU's Borrell, like Gazans themselves, wondered where they can go. "They are going to evacuate — where? To the moon?" Borrell said. Iman Dergham, displaced from Khan Yunis city to Rafah, said that "wherever we go there's bombing. Martyrs and wounded are everywhere."

Another resident, Ibrahim Abu Jaber, survived the bombing on Monday but asked: "What if the actual invasion took place?" He fears "the martyrs will be in the thousands."

Renewed talks for a pause in the fighting have been held in Cairo, with Hamas open to a fresh ceasefire including more prisoner-hostage exchanges, but Netanyahu has dismissed some of the group's demands as "bizarre". A Hamas leader told AFP on condition of anonymity that a Zionist push into Rafah "would torpedo the exchange negotiations".

The Zionist army said Monday that two more soldiers had been killed inside Gaza, bringing the military death toll to 229 since ground operations began in late October. Hamas' armed wing said it had "finished off" 10 soldiers in Khan Yunis, the southern Gaza city several kilometers from Rafah, where heavy fighting has occurred. — AFP

Netherlands ordered to stop F-35 parts delivery to Zionists

THE HAGUE: The Netherlands must stop delivering parts for F-35 fighter jets used by the Zionist entity in the Gaza Strip, after a Dutch court Monday ruled there was a "clear risk" the planes would be involved in breaking international humanitarian law. The Appeals Court in The Hague sided with a group of human rights organizations that argued the parts contributed to violations of law by the Zionist entity in its war with Hamas.

"The court therefore orders the State to put an end to the further export of F-35 parts to (the Zionist entity) within 7 days," said the ruling. "There is a clear risk that serious violations of humanitarian law of war are committed in the Gaza Strip with (the Zionist entity's) F-35 fighter planes," added the judge. The US-owned F-35 parts are stored at a warehouse in the Netherlands and then shipped to several partners, including the Zionist entity, via existing export agreements.

In December, the District Court in The Hague had said that supplying the parts was primarily a political decision that judges should not interfere with. "The considerations that the minister makes are to a large extent of a political and policy nature and judges should leave the minister a large amount of freedom," the court ruled at the time.

UAE defends ties with Zionists, urges...

Continued from Page 1

Speaking at the World Governments Summit, an annual gathering of business and political leaders in Dubai, Lana Nusseibeh applauded cooperation between the UAE and the Zionist entity.

"Because of that cooperation... we have a field hospital in Gaza and we have a maritime hospital docking in the Al-Arish port," in Egypt, said Nusseibeh, the UAE's ambassador to the UN. For the "residents of Gaza, it's not enough. What we need... is a humanitarian ceasefire and a two-state solution," she added. "Will we get that by talking to the people who agree with us? No. We will get that by talking to the people who disagree with us and the UAE will always be proud of doing that."

In recent days, the UAE joined several Arab Gulf states in warning the Zionist entity against launching

But the appeals court overturned this ruling, saying the Netherlands "must prohibit the export of military goods if there is a clear risk of serious violations of the humanitarian law of war". "(The Zionist entity) does not take sufficient account of the consequences for the civilian population when conducting its attacks," said the court. The attacks in Gaza "have caused a disproportionate number of civilian casualties, including thousands of children".

Dutch authorities had said it was not clear whether they even had the power to intervene in the deliveries, part of a US-run operation that supplies parts to all F-35 partners. Government lawyers also argued that if the Dutch did not supply the parts from the warehouse based in the Netherlands, the Zionist entity could easily procure them elsewhere.

Export licenses were granted in 2016 for an unlimited time, but the court ruled the situation had radically changed since then and the government had to take that into account. "The fact that the licenses are concluded for an unlimited time does not mean that the State can close its eyes to what happens afterwards," said the court.

The International Court of Justice in The Hague, which rules on disputes between states, has said the Zionist entity must do everything possible to prevent genocidal acts in Gaza. "That ruling "strengthens our confidence in a positive ruling in our case", said PAX Netherlands, one of the rights groups involved in the appeal. "This positive ruling by the judge is very good news. Especially for the civilians in Gaza," said Michiel Servaes, head of Oxfam Novib, another group involved in the appeal. — AFP

an offensive on the city of Rafah in the extreme south of the Gaza Strip, where around 1.4 million people have sought refuge. "The UAE is extremely worried at this point," Nusseibeh said. "Any military operation in Rafah would have unacceptable consequences," the diplomat added.

Nusseibeh, who organized an unofficial visit for UN envoys to the Rafah crossing last year, called for a two-state solution, arguing that it is critical for the reconstruction of Gaza. "You cannot deny the Palestinian right to statehood, and that is an Arab consensus," she said. "There must be an irreversible progression to the two-state solution for regional partners to be on board with the reconstruction (of Gaza)".

Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has shown no interest in reviving negotiations toward a Palestinian state. Nusseibeh added that the UAE had committed billions of dollars to development projects in both Gaza and the Zionist-occupied West Bank over the past three decades. But "we cannot keep refunding and then seeing everything that we have built, destroyed," she said. — AFP



GAZA: People stand around craters caused by Zionist bombardment in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on Feb 12, 2024. — AFP

International

Two years of war: Ukrainian refugees face lasting exile

Many refugees deciding to permanently settle in new countries as conflict rages at home

VIENNA: Iryna, Maryna, Katya — three generations from one family — fled their home in southern Ukraine just after the war started, hoping to return quickly. But two years later, these hopes are fading.

Just a few days ago, a fresh attack blew off the roofs of many buildings in their home city of Mykolaiv. “Ukraine’s future is not clear. I think that the war will not stop, even in one or two years,” said Maryna Troshchenko, 43, while showing photos of the damage sent by relatives still living in the port city.

Troshchenko, her mother and her daughter, who all now live in Vienna, are among six million Ukrainian refugees, marking the biggest exodus since World War II, according to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Germany and Poland host the largest populations, with about one million Ukrainian refugees in each country. Incessant bombings and a lack of progress on the front make their return in the short term increasingly improbable.

‘Started from scratch’

After months of housing problems and rejected CVs, Troshchenko finally landed a job in a supermarket, enabling the trio to move into their own apartment this year. “I started from scratch” at the bakery department before being promoted to head cashier, said the former purchasing director who did not speak a word of German when she arrived. “We are happy to have been able to accomplish so much in two years,” the divorcee added.

Her daughter, Katya, 17, has managed to obtain her Ukrainian school graduation certificate while attending a Viennese high school, from where she is eyeing to graduate next year. Katya’s grandmother, Iryna Si-

monova, 64, meanwhile has been able to find a volleyball team to practice her favorite sport and has made friends. But tears stream from her eyes as soon as she thinks of her home country as she recalls leaving behind her mother, who at 87 refused to join them.

‘Build a future’

At refugee help organization Diakonie in Austria, workers note that many Ukrainian refugees have decided to try to settle after being paralyzed by the “dilemma of waiting” to return home. “For a long time, it was very difficult for them to decide how to proceed further,” Sarah Brandstetter, deputy at Diakonie’s Ukrainian refugee advice center, told AFP. “Two years later, the situation has changed — people are now planning to stay in the country. They have their children here in schools. They want to build a future for themselves,” she added.

But the struggle continues for mothers of young children who find themselves alone to take care of them. The initial surge of solidarity is also running out of steam in some places. In Austria — which hosts some 80,000 Ukrainian refugees — “the increase of energy costs and high inflation was a game changer”, according to Christoph Riedl, a migration and integration expert at Diakonie. In neighboring Germany, anti-migration discourse is also on the rise amid a spike in the number of asylum-seekers from outside of Europe, weighing heavily on reception capacities.

Demographic challenge

Until March 2025, under EU rules, Ukrainians are eligible for temporary protection, a status allowing them access to the labor market, housing, and social



VIENNA: Mother Maryna Troshchenko (left) from southern Ukraine with her daughter Katya Troshchenko (right) and grandmother Iryna Simonova pose for photos in their apartment. — AFP

and medical assistance. But what is next, experts wonder. Riedl said the EU should agree now on a lasting status. “When a conflict lasts for two or three years, people change their minds. It’s a reality check. They integrate, they have a new life,” he told AFP.

Faced with a real demographic challenge, Ukrainian authorities fear the massive exodus — and in contrast to other nations want refugees to be able to return. “We find a somewhat specific situation in Ukraine — a country at war, which also wants to maintain the great-

est possible connection with its population,” Philippe Leclerc, UNHCR Director for Europe, told AFP.

Katya Troshchenko too insists on the importance “for young Ukrainians to come back to rebuild Ukraine, to build a new, modern country, which will be in EU too”. However — still traumatised by the nights in air raid shelters at the start of the war — she is “afraid” to return. “I don’t want to see how it’s absolutely ruined by Russians, and I don’t want to see my ruined childhood,” she said. — AFP

Uncertainty ahead for Pakistan after indecisive election

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has weeks of political uncertainty ahead following its indecisive election, analysts said Monday, with dozens of constituency results facing challenges in court and rival parties negotiating possible coalitions. Independent candidates loyal to jailed former prime minister Imran Khan took most of the seats in Thursday’s polls, scuppering the chances of the army-backed Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) from securing a ruling majority.

Khan’s Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) defied a months-long crackdown that crippled campaigning and forced candidates to run as independents to emerge as the winners of the vote. There were widespread allegations of vote-rigging and result manipulation after authorities switched off the nation’s mobile phone network on election day, ostensibly on security grounds, and the count dragged on for more than 24 hours.

“Three potential challenges are linked to the legitimacy of the elections through prolonged legal proceedings, protests and potential for violence,” said Pakistan-based political analyst Amber Rahim Shamsi.

Despite independents winning 101 seats in the national assembly, a government can only be formed by a recognized party, or coalition of parties, so they would have to join another group to become an effective bloc.

Desperately needed reforms

A coalition between the PML-N and the Pakistan People’s Party — who formed the last government after ousting Khan with a vote of no confidence in April 2022 — still seems a most likely outcome. “In the short-



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 on February 12, 2024. — AFP

term, any coalition birthed through a highly controversial election in a highly charged political environment will find it challenging to enact unpopular reforms that Pakistan desperately needs,” Shamsi told AFP. At least half a dozen minor parties won just one or two seats in the election and would welcome the addition of the independents to their ranks.

That would give them access to an additional 70 seats reserved for women and religious minorities and allocated according to election results — although it has never been done on this scale before and faces legal challenges. “The courts have a very delicate role at this moment,” said legal expert Osama Malik.

“They will (also) need to decide whether to order recounts in various constituencies. However, recounts in multiple constituencies could also delay the calling of parliament so the courts have to be wary of that as well.” PTI leaders insist they have been given a “people’s mandate” to form the next government. “The people have decided in favor of Imran Khan,” party chair-



KABUL: Abdul Karim (left) and Abdul Zahir (center), two former prisoners held at the US detention center in Guantanamo Bay, gesture after arriving at the Kabul airport on February 12, 2024. — AFP

2 ex-Guantanamo prisoners return to Afghanistan

KABUL: Two former prisoners held at the US detention center in Guantanamo Bay until 2017 were welcomed home to Afghanistan on Monday, more than 20 years after they were arrested. They were among hundreds of suspected militants captured by US forces during the United States’s “War on Terror” and held in the secretive prison in Cuba.

Abdul Karim and Abdul Zahir landed in Kabul early on Monday from Oman, where they had been transferred in 2017 and held under house arrest, said Zahir’s son Mohammad Osman and airport staff. “With the grace of God and efforts by the leaders of the Islamic Emirate, he has returned to the country,” Osman said, referring to Afghanistan’s Taliban authorities.

US authorities faced accusations of torture and abuse against prisoners at the Guantanamo Bay facility, where many were held without charge or the legal power to challenge their detention. Most of the military prison’s inmates have been released over the years, including senior Taliban leaders. “I am very happy. When I woke up in the morning, I felt like it was Eid for me,” Osman said.

The returnees were whisked to a VIP area away from media and a jostling crowd of supporters, some clutching bouquets, who had gathered for their arrival. Karim and Zahir both told media outlet Hurriyat they were overwhelmed with happiness at their return. “Praise be to Allah, I returned to my country in such a time when there is an Islamic system and peace all over Afghanistan,” Karim said.

Zahir arrived at the controversial prison in 2002, the year it opened in the wake of the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States, according to Afghan Interior Ministry spokesman Abdul Mateen Qani and US documents. Karim arrived in 2003, having been detained and held in Pakistan before he was handed over to US custody. Both men had been under surveillance without the right to travel for seven years in the Gulf kingdom of Oman, Qani said in a post on social media site X on Sunday.

“Due to the efforts of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, the imposed restrictions will be lifted and they will return to their homeland,” he said.

Billboards welcoming the two men back to Afghanistan were erected en route to the airport ahead of their arrival and a heavy security presence was deployed on Monday morning. One Afghan prisoner remains in detention at Guantanamo Bay, Muhammad Rahim, whose family called for his release in November.

The US government has said for years it is working to reduce the number of detainees and eventually shut down Guantanamo Bay, which lies on the island of Cuba but is under US jurisdiction. — AFP



Two girls stand next to a burnt car at the Bungha Central Mosque in Mangu on February 2, 2024, following weeks of intercommunal violence and unrest in the Plateau State (left). Red Cross officials inspect the damage at the burnt Cocin Church building in the photo on the right. — AFP photos

Torched church, mosque mark trauma in Nigeria

JOS, Nigeria: The charred yellow arches and rubble-strewn floor of Mangu’s large central mosque mark the ferocity of violence unleashed last month in the northern Nigerian town. On the other side of Mangu, the burned-out shell of the Cocin Kwahagas Lahir church shows Christians were not spared either.

Corrugated sheets flap in the wind where the church roof once was, and a white plastic chair lies toppled in the grey ash carpeting the floor. For years, the town mostly escaped the intercommunal violence that often erupts in north central Plateau State. Mangu’s Muslims and Christians belonged to the same tribe, the same families, lived on the same streets and shopped and traded in the same markets.

But in late January, the small farming town was ravaged by attacks and reprisals as assailants raided rival districts with guns and machetes. Neighbor turned on neighbor and churches, mosques and schools were destroyed, according to a Red Cross report and residents.

At least 25 people were killed in the Mangu violence

which erupted on the same day as an attack on a predominantly Christian village nearby, where 30 people died. The violence followed string of Christmas attacks in a neighboring district that left almost 200 people dead. Two weeks after the day of violence, many in Mangu were still in shock over how the town turned against itself and few have clear answers on why religious harmony was shattered. Standing in the torched remains of his family home, Jabira Rabio said an armed mob attacked his community on the outskirts of the town, firing gunshots and moving to another community and torching homes. “We just fled with our clothes. All the belongings were burned in my house,” the livestock seller said. His home’s burned pink walls now surround floors covered in ash. A few smashed plates, his son’s scorched marriage outfit and a charred piece of red carpet are all that remain. “We can’t say what happened. It happened so suddenly. We’ve always coexisted peacefully,” he said.

Across Mangu, conflicting accounts emerge: Some say groups of masked, armed men surrounded districts and torched homes, others say residents beat neighbors in retaliation and set churches and mosques on fire.

Sitiation on the division between Nigeria’s mostly Muslim north and predominantly Christian south, Plateau State has struggled for years with intercommunal and ethnic strife. In rural areas, Fulani Muslim herders clash with ethnic Mwanghavul farmers, who are mostly

Christian, in an increasing dispute over land, water and cattle grazing. Mangu is a mostly ethnic Mwanghavul town, but both religions live side by side.

Safer neighborhood

In the Lahir district, the Cocin church was torched and dozens of nearby Christian homes also burned down, residents said. Many of them left for a more predominantly Christian neighborhood. “Most of the Christians from my area vacated to this area. I feel safer here, it’s mostly Christian,” said Gideon Timothy, 33, a music producer.

“They are so many reasons, farmers and herders, maybe just for the land, it could be so many things, but now it turned into ethno-religious. People are burning churches. It really surprises me. I never expected that.” According to an internal Red Cross report seen by AFP, more than 8,000 people were displaced by the fighting in Mangu and areas around the town. Victims had gunshot and machete wounds, it said. Many of those have relocated to other areas in the town to stay with family. Some Muslims were at another mosque seeking help. Atika Bello fled the home where she lived for 25 years in Mangu’s old market area when gunshots broke out on the first day of violence. She hid in her mother’s house with five of her children. “There were gunshots and we just prayed and prayed and prayed throughout the day and there was no security,” she said.—AFP

Business

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2024

Gaza war, Red Sea attacks imperil global economy: IMF, World Bank

Zionist entity's war on Gaza has already hit MENA economy: Georgieva



DUBAI: International Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva (left) and World Bank Group President Ajaypal Banga (right) speak during panel discussions at the World Governments Summit in Dubai on Feb 12, 2024. — AFP photos

DUBAI: The IMF and World Bank warned on Monday that the Gaza war and the related attacks on shipping through the Red Sea pose threats to the global economy. The Zionist entity's war on Gaza raging since October has already hit the Middle East and North Africa region's economy, said the International Monetary Fund's managing director Kristalina Georgieva.

Its knock-on effects could impact the world the longer the fighting drags on, Georgieva told the World Governments Summit, an annual gathering of business and political leaders in Dubai.

"I fear most a longevity of the conflict because, if it goes on and on, the risk of spillover goes up," she said. "Right now we see a risk of spillover in the Suez Canal," she said, as Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels have attacked Red Sea shipping leading to the crucial maritime passage.

The Houthis say they are targeting what they consider Zionist entity-linked shipping in solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza, pushing some cargo carriers to take longer and more expensive routes to avoid attacks. The UN Conference on Trade and Development warned late last month that the volume

of commercial traffic passing through the Suez Canal had fallen more than 40 percent in the previous two months. Georgieva said that if there are other "consequences in terms of where the fighting goes, it could be more problematic for the world as a whole".

On a personal note, she added that "as a woman, as a mother, grandmother... I pray for peace". The Gaza Strip has been under intense Zionist assault for over four months.

Despite the war-related uncertainties, Georgieva said the IMF is "very confident that the world economy is now poised for this soft landing we have been

dreaming of". "I expect to see by mid-year interest rates going in the direction inflation has been going for the last year now," she said, when asked about interest rates being cut in leading economies.

Also speaking at the summit, World Bank President Ajay Banga said that "what's going on in Gaza, but also the challenges of Ukraine... and the Red Sea" are among the top challenges to the global economic outlook. "When you add these variables to what is already turning out to be probably the lowest growth of the last 55 years... that's something we have to keep a close eye on," he said. — AFP

Gas booming for UN COP29 host Azerbaijan

PARIS: Following the UN's COP28 climate talks in oil-fuelled Dubai, the COP29 conference is headed for the historic cradle of oil, Azerbaijan, which is in the midst of a gas boom. The former Soviet republic of 10 million people brimming with hydrocarbons is on track to increase its gas production by 35 percent in the next 10 years, contrary to efforts to contain global warming.

Despite the last COP in the United Arab Emirates ending with an unprecedented call to "transition" away from fossil fuels, an analysis by the NGO Global Witness based on data from Rystad Energy shows that the upcoming COP29 host aims to hike its gas production from 35 billion cubic meters (bcm) in 2024 to 47 bcm in 2034. The forecast covers actual production figures, estimates from approved developments, as well as confirmed reserves not yet being exploited. They exclude condensate, a liquid form of gas.

"Azerbaijan is ramping up its gas

production when the world urgently needs to kick its fossil fuel habit," Patrick Galey, senior investigator at Global Witness, told AFP. The country, a member of OPEC+, has a long history with hydrocarbons, which make up half of its economy.

In the 13th century, the explorer Marco Polo wrote of black gold gushing from the ground. But today, it is gas that is surpassing its declining oil fields. In the 2030s, gas is expected to represent more than half of fossil fuel production in the country, according to Rystad Energy data reported to AFP. Its exports to Turkey, Europe, Georgia and Iran have already multiplied threefold since 2015.

Baku's expanding gas production is fuelled mainly by the Shah Deniz project, one of the biggest gas fields in the world, discovered in 1999 along the Caspian Sea and operated by BP, while other projects like Umid-Babek and Absheron will increase their output. The Absheron field, which began production in July, is operated by J-cap, which includes national oil and gas firm Socar, as well as France's TotalEnergies and Adnoc, the national Emirati firm that was cause for controversy at the last COP.

The UAE, host of COP28, had des-



Azerbaijan, the former Soviet Republic of 10 million people is brimming with hydrocarbons. — AFP

ignated Sultan Al Jaber, the head of Adnoc, to preside over the UN conference, a choice which angered NGOs and certain countries. The scene is set to be similar in 2024 with COP being presided over by the former Socar executive, Mukhtar Babayev, minister of ecology and natural resources. The country is a "small player" compared to major oil giants like the United States, Russia and Saudi Arabia, but it plays an important role "for Southern Europeans at least", said Swapnil Ba-

bele, an analyst at Rystad Energy.

To replace Russian gas, Europe turned to Azerbaijan, whose share of imports grew from 2 percent in 2021 to 4 percent in 2023, according to Eurostat. After Azerbaijan's seizure of the Armenian Nagorno-Karabakh enclave, these supplies were criticized by MEPs, who lamented the EU's timid reaction to Azerbaijan's offensive and called for the suspension of negotiations on the gas agreement signed in 2022. — AFP

Chile on European hunt for investors in green technology

PARIS: Chile is embarking on a European hunt for investors in solar, wind and green hydrogen technologies as it looks to decarbonize copper mines and other industries reliant on fossil fuels. Marcos Kulka, CEO of H2Chile, a hydrogen association of 102 public and private companies, travelled to Europe to outline his government's energy strategy amid negotiations of an EU-Chile trade and investment deal.

Kulka told AFP that, "given the resources it has", Chile can become carbon neutral by 2040 - 10 years earlier than the global net-zero target set in the Paris Agreement on climate change.

Speaking on the sidelines of the Hyvolution energy trade show in Paris this month, Kulka said 24 percent of the reduction in emissions in Chile will come from hydrogen and its derivatives. Hydrogen, which emits only water vapor when consumed, is touted for potential use in high-polluting heavy industries such as steel, metals, cement, and chemicals, as well as in shipping and transport.

But producing it at mass scale is a major challenge, as costs remain high and the infrastructure is lacking so far. It is considered a "green" fuel when it is produced by using electricity generated by renewable energy to split water molecules. Hydrogen can also be made through a more controversial method using natural gas, so-called "blue hydrogen" which needs to be paired with carbon capture equipment to be considered climate-friendly. The International Energy Agency said last month that only seven percent of projects announced worldwide to use renewables to produce hydrogen this decade are expected to come online by 2030. But Kulka said Chile "could become one of the cheapest hydrogen producers in the world".

The country plans to shut down its coal-fired plants by 2040 and replace them with renewable energy sources which will themselves be deployed to produce green hydrogen. Chile is the world's top exporter of copper, a crucial metal for the energy transition as it conducts electricity. But the mines are also emitters of greenhouse gases as their operations rely on fossil fuels. To reduce copper's carbon footprint, the country can count on solar power near copper mining areas in the north and wind in the south, Kulka said. He said Chile needs \$60 billion in investment by 2050 for its green hydrogen plans.

The low cost of renewable energy has drawn interest from Austria Energy, French energy giants Engie, TotalEnergies and EDF, and a clutch of German, Dutch and Norwegian companies that want to import green hydrogen in Europe. For now, however, Chile's installed green hydrogen capacity remains low at barely two megawatts, with a goal to reach 25 gigawatts by 2030, Kulka said. Current global installed capacity stands at 1.1 GW, according to the Hydrogen Council. — AFP

Indian farmers ready for mass protests over crop prices

NEW DELHI: Indian police erected barricades and banned public gatherings Monday ahead of threatened protests by thousands of farmers demanding minimum crop prices in a bid to stop them from marching on parliament.

Long convoys of tractors gathered on borders between the capital New Delhi and neighboring Haryana state, with police using a fearsome blockade of metal spikes, barriers and cement blocks to close key highways.

Farmers have called for a "Delhi Chalo", or "March to Delhi", echoing protests in January 2021 when farmers breached barricades and marched into the city on Republic Day. Farmers in India have political heft due to their sheer numbers, and the threat of renewed protests comes ahead of national elections likely to begin in April.

Two-thirds of India's 1.4-billion population draw their livelihood from agriculture, accounting for nearly a fifth of the country's GDP, according to government figures. "Farmers from across the country are prepared to march on Delhi starting Tuesday if

the government doesn't meet our demands," Swaran Singh Pandher, leader of a nationwide farmers' association told AFP. As well as a fixed minimum crop price, other demands include pensions and the writing off of loans.

Police in Delhi have banned public gatherings of more than five people. Protests by farmers against agricultural reform bills in November 2020 lasted for more than a year, forming the biggest challenge to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government since it came to power in 2014.

Tens of thousands of farmers then set up makeshift camps, with at least 700 people killed during the protests. In November 2021, a year after protests began, Modi pushed through parliament the repeal of three contentious laws that farmers claimed would let private companies control the country's agriculture sector. Government ministers are expected to meet with farming leaders on Monday to talk the protesters down. Thousands of Indian farmers die by suicide every year because of poverty, debt and crops affected by ever more erratic weather patterns caused by climate change.

Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM), a key farmers' association, expressed its "strong discontent and anger" at police action to block protests, but said it was not taking part in the planned march on Tuesday. It instead called for strikes on Friday to press for their demands. "The efforts to suppress the people's protest will be in vain", SKM said in a statement. — AFP

Russian exports to Europe down two-thirds in 2023

MOSCOW: Russian exports to Europe dropped by more than two-thirds in 2023, as the EU drastically cut its purchases of Russian oil and gas, Russia's customs agency said Monday. EU countries have halted the vast majority of their energy purchases from Russia in a bid to heap economic pressure on Moscow over its military offensive against Ukraine.

Russian exports to Europe dropped 68 percent in 2023 to \$84.9 billion, the Interfax news agency cited Russia's federal customs agency as saying. Exports to Asia — which has replaced Europe as the country's main energy client — were up 5.6 percent to \$306.6 billion, the agency said. After it was hit with Western sanctions, Moscow stopped publishing a vast array of economic statistics, including trade data with individual countries.

Separate Chinese customs data showed two-way trade between the two countries hit a record \$240 billion last year, amid growing economic, trading and political ties between Beijing and Moscow. Russia's Central Bank also said last week that holdings of Chinese yuan in Russian bank accounts exceeded U.S. dollars for the first time ever, as Russia's financial system embraces the Chinese currency in the face of sanctions on its access to the dollar. — AFP

Business

Gulf Bank records a net profit of KD 71.2m in 2023, an increase of 15.2% over 2022

Board recommends distribution of a cash dividend of 12 fils per share and 5% bonus shares

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank KSCP ("Bank") announced its financial results for the year ended 2023. The bank reported a net profit of KD 71.2 million, an increase of 15.2 percent compared to the year 2022.

Gulf Bank recorded an operating profit before provisions and impairments of KD 103.4 million for the year 2023, an increase of 9.0 percent compared to the year 2022.

Earnings per share were up 13.2 percent to 21 fils and the Board of Directors is recommending a distribution of a cash dividend of 12 fils per share, representing a 57 percent cash payout ratio, in addition to 5 percent bonus shares, for shareholders' approval at the Annual General Meeting to be held in March 2024.

The increase in the net profit was mainly driven by KD 8.2 million or a 5.8 percent increase in net interest income, a 2.5 percent or KD 1 million improvement in non-interest income, and a decline of 4.7 percent or KD 1.4 million in total provisions and impairments.

As for asset quality, the non-performing loans (NPL) ratio stood at 1.2 percent as of Dec 31, 2023, compared to the prior year level of 1.1 percent. Additionally, the Bank continues to have significant non-performing loans coverage ratio of 466% including total provisions and collaterals.

Total credit provisions ended 2023 at KD 312 million whereas IFRS 9 accounting requirements (ie, ECL or expected credit losses) were KD 187 million. So, the bank has very healthy excess provisioning level of KD 125 million, above and beyond what is required by the IFRS 9 accounting requirements.

Compared to 31 December 2022, total assets increased by 4.7 percent to KD 7.2 billion, loans and advances climbed by 1.3 percent to KD 5.2 billion, and shareholders' equity increased by 13.4 percent to reach KD 817 million. In addition, total deposits increased by 6.9 percent to reach KD 5.4 billion for the year ended 2023.

Looking at the bank's regulatory capital ratios as of Dec 31, 2023, Tier 1 ratio was 15.8 percent, that is 3.8 percent above the regulatory minimum of 12 percent and

the Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR) was 18.0 percent, that is 4.0 percent above the regulatory minimum of 14 percent.

Strong performance

Commenting on the results, Jassim Mustafa Boodai, Gulf Bank's Chairman said: "Our 2023 performance demonstrates excellent results with Gulf Bank delivering strong and consistent net profit growth momentum. Our strong balance sheet fundamentals and resilient asset quality profile position us very well to achieve our strategic aspirations." Boodai added "We remain focused on generating consistent and sustainable long-term value to all our stakeholders."



Gulf Bank Chairman Jassim Mustafa Boodai

its position as a trusted financial partner. In addition, the launch of the latest version of the Gulf Bank mobile application during the year provides customers with a seamless user experience while incorporating advanced security features to safeguard customer data and financial transactions.

Value creation

During the year 2023, Gulf Bank has successfully completed a capital increase of KD 60 million. The proceeds of the capital increase aim to strengthen the Gulf Bank's capital base, enhance regulatory capital ratios, and enable the pursuit of future growth opportunities

Positive credit outlook

Gulf Bank continues to be well recognized in terms of its creditworthiness and financial strength internationally. During the year 2023, Moody's Investor Services has affirmed the 'A3' long-term deposit ratings of Gulf Bank and changed the outlook to "Positive" from "Stable". This upgrade is an acknowledgement of Gulf Bank's sound capitalization, improving profitability and strong asset quality. In addition, Fitch Ratings affirmed the Bank's Long-Term Issuer Default Rating at 'A' with a 'Stable' Outlook and a Viability Rating of 'bbb-'. The Bank has also an affirmed Long-term Foreign Currency Rating of 'A+' with a 'Stable' Outlook from Capital Intelligence Ratings.

Card Program in Kuwait" award for 2023 during the Mastercard MENA East Business Forum, for the Gulf Bank Mastercard Prepaid Card. In addition, Gulf Bank was awarded two awards for "Best Training and Development" and "Excellence in Diversity and Inclusion" by the Middle East and North Africa Human Resources Management Summit 2023 signifying Gulf Bank's outstanding efforts in enhancing its employees' skills and achievements in promoting sustainability principles within the workplace. Furthermore, Gulf Bank was awarded "The Prestigious Excellence in Data Innovation" award by the 2023 Finnovex Awards Summit in recognition of its excellence in leveraging data to drive transformative change and create new opportunities in the banking industry.

Appreciation

Boodai concluded his remarks by stating: "On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to thank our shareholders for their ongoing trust, and our employees for their commitment and dedication. I would also like to thank the Regulatory Authorities for their continuous support. Finally, I want to thank our customers for their loyalty, and reiterate our commitment to offering them the best banking experience."

- Our 2023 performance demonstrates excellent progress to our diversified and client centric business model approach, delivering a strong and consistent net profit growth.
- The operational success of Gulf Bank during 2023 and prior years reflects our strong brand presence and branch network in Kuwait.
- We remain focused on generating consistent and sustainable long-term value to all our stakeholders.

Operational excellence

The operational success of Gulf Bank during 2023 and prior years reflects its strong brand presence and branch network in Kuwait. Boodai added: "The Bank is reaping the benefits of its Kuwait focused strategy and making tremendous strides towards its key strategic priorities centered around digital transformation and customer centricity. The aim of our strategy is to improve customer experience, accelerate business development and drive operational efficiencies." One of the key milestones during the year 2023 was the implementation of phase 1 of the new core banking system. This achievement represents a major leap in the Bank's digital transformation journey and will enable Gulf Bank to streamline operations and optimize processes to further solidifying

aligned with the bank's long-term strategy. The total capital increase was approximately seven times oversubscribed. The significant oversubscription reflects shareholders' confidence in Gulf Bank's potential capabilities.

Invest GB

Furthermore, the bank has obtained the final necessary regulatory approvals to license Gulf Capital Investment Company, known as "Invest GB" to operate officially as a wholly owned investment subsidiary. The investment subsidiary services will complement the Bank's core business while enhancing customer offerings predominantly for its private and the corporate banking clients. The consolidated investment activities will positively enhance the fees and commission income of the Bank in the future.

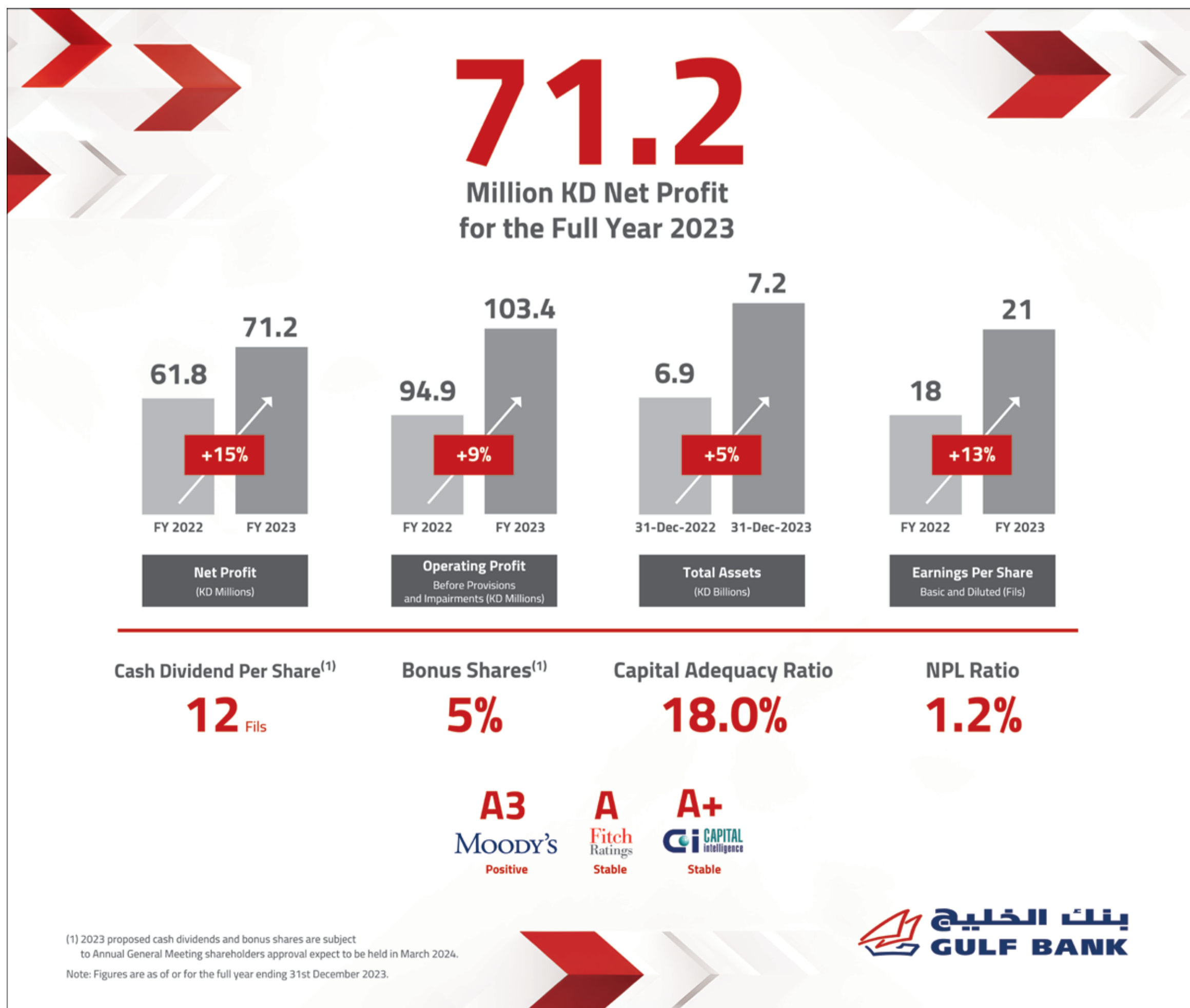
Commitment to sustainability

Sustainability is an important and complementary part of Gulf Bank's strategy. On Gulf Bank's commitment towards sustainability, Boodai commented: "We believe that integrating sustainability and ESG considerations into our practices and activities will enable us to further strengthen our customer experience, offering sustainable products and services for the market, and positioning us as a key leader of sustainability initiatives amongst local and regional financial institutions. We remain committed towards our stakeholders, community, and the overall Kuwaiti economy."

Recognition

During 2023, Gulf Bank was recognized by several prestigious organizations. Gulf Bank was awarded with "Best Prepaid

- Key positive indicators:**
- 2023 net profit of KD 71.2 million, an increase of 15.2% over the year 2022.
 - 2023 earnings per share were up 13.2% to reach 21 fils.
 - 12 fils proposed cash dividends and 5% bonus shares.
 - Total assets grew by 4.7% to reach KD 7.2 billion.
 - Non-performing loan ratio for the year end 2023 was 1.2%, with a strong non-performance loan coverage ratio of 466%.
 - Tier 1 ratio was 15.8%.
 - Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR) was 18.0%.
 - 13.4% increase in shareholders' equity to reach KD 817 million.
 - 7 times capital increase oversubscription.



Business

NBK and Zain sign MoU with KFAS to launch digital program to empower Kuwaiti youth

The initiative equips youth with vital skills needed in labor market

Sulaiman Barrak Al-Marzouq

- The partnership is geared towards addressing the digital skills gap crucial for the Kuwaiti labor market.
- We are dedicated to equipping our local workforce with the digital proficiencies essential for thriving in an increasingly technology-driven global landscape.



KUWAIT: Dr Ameenah Farhan, KFAS Director General, Sulaiman Barrak Al-Marzouq, Deputy CEO of National Bank of Kuwait - Kuwait and Nawaf Al-Gharabally, Acting CEO of Zain Kuwait, during the signing ceremony.

Nawaf Al-Gharabally

- Zain strives to provide Kuwait's youth with an empowering environment that fuels their passion for tech innovation to support sustainable growth efforts.
- We're committed to fostering digital communities and collaborative ecosystems to drive innovation and capacity building.



Dr Ameenah Farhan, Sulaiman Barrak Al-Marzouq, Nawaf Al-Gharabally, Waleed Al-Khashti and Emad Al-Abilani along with NBK and Zain teams.

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) and Mobile Telecommunications Company – Zain Kuwait have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS), with the goal of initiating a training program designed to develop and empower young national talent. This program aims to provide participants with the essential skills necessary to fulfill labor market demands, particularly in the fields of digital transformation, data knowledge, and artificial intelligence.

The agreement was signed at KFAS's headquarters, in the presence of Dr Ameenah Rajab Farhan, KFAS Director General Sulaiman Barrak Al-Marzouq, Deputy CEO of National Bank of Kuwait – Kuwait, and Nawaf Al-Gharabally, Acting CEO of Zain Kuwait.

The MoU details a cooperative effort to exchange expertise and knowledge for the purpose of advancing and improving digital skills among the youth, equipping them with the essential qualifications needed for the labor market. Furthermore, it encompasses the planning and implementation of educational initiatives, activities, and events specifically targeted at the young participants, in collaboration with the Korea Institute of Science and Technology Information (KISTI).

The agreement involves KFAS, supported by NBK and Zain, forming strategic alliances with global academic and research institutions renowned for their expertise in digital technology capacity building. This collaboration aims to aid in designing and delivering training programs, activities, and events both within Kuwait and internationally.

This unique initiative is designed to engage young

individuals in the programs, activities, and events that will be provided to them in a competitive format, ensuring equal opportunities for recent graduates and entry-level professionals. The training program aims to develop digital skills and capabilities of individuals to use advanced digital tools, including artificial intelligence, cloud computing, coding, big data, robotics, and cybersecurity. This initiative aims to enable participants to effectively leverage and implement these tools in the professional workplace.

The program's objective is around fundamental concepts, incorporating interactive hands-on activities and project-based learning. It also features mentoring and coaching to support participants throughout their learning journey. The curriculum is multi-modular, offering both in-person and virtual modules, with sessions taking place in Kuwait and South Korea.

During this event, Sulaiman Barrak Al-Marzouq, Deputy CEO of National Bank of Kuwait - Kuwait, remarked, "We are delighted to formalize this agreement, showcasing the dedication of private sector organizations to their societal obligations in training and preparing our youth for a labor market currently undergoing significant changes and advancements, primarily influenced by artificial intelligence, robotics, and data knowledge".

Al-Marzouq further noted that the main goal of this collaboration is to help close the digital skills gap in Kuwait and to equip Kuwaiti talent with the digital skills and competencies required to thrive in an increasingly technology-dependent world. Furthermore, Al-Marzouq emphasized NBK's commitment to actively contribute to the developmental journey of the current generation of Kuwaiti youth through

various sponsored initiatives. He highlighted the importance of providing proper guidance to fully harness the energy and capabilities of young Kuwaitis, thereby bolstering sustainable development efforts. NBK firmly believes that joint private public sector initiatives to provide the young generation with the required knowledge and skills are instrumental to individual as well as social wellbeing and prosperity.

NBK also recognizes the importance of investing in the human capital, and to this end, it has recently launched NBK Tech Academy, the first of its kind academy focusing on digital and data technologies. The Academy provides a professional training program to qualify young Kuwaiti talents in areas including FinTech, Data Analytics, Ethics in Technology, Cyber Security, Fundamentals of Digital Payments, Digital Innovation, Artificial Intelligence, Scripting and Programming, Fundamentals of Codifications, and Finance for Non-Finance Professionals.

Nawaf Al-Gharabally, Acting CEO of Zain Kuwait, commented: "Through this partnership, we will explore collaborative avenues in digital transformation, with a focus on nurturing the tech innovation skills of our youth. Our shared vision is to cultivate digital communities and foster a collaborative ecosystem that fosters innovation and empowers capacity building."

Al-Gharabally added: "This collaboration aligns seamlessly with our strategic initiatives, bolstered by our existing MoUs with various entities, all aimed at investing in and empowering local talents, particularly within the areas of technology and digital proficiency. Over the years, Zain has proudly trained thousands of ambitious young men and women, reinforcing our commitment to

the nation's sustainable growth.

He continued: "At Zain, our strategic vision revolves around creating an empowering environment for our youth, equipping them with the skills necessary to navigate the opportunities presented by today's digital landscape. Technology undeniably underpins people's personal and professional lives, ushering in a new generation reliant on tech innovation to navigate evolving career pathways."

Al-Gharabally concluded by saying: "Promoting a digital culture among young people is of paramount importance today, given the pivotal role technology plays in achieving digital transformation objectives. That's why Zain is steadfast in reinforcing strategic partnerships, recognizing the indispensable role of technologies such as AI, managed cloud services, cloud computing, and digital applications in shaping today's business landscapes." This step reflects Zain's unwavering efforts to support and grow the innovation ecosystem in the local community, and comes as an extension to the MoU signed between Zain and KFAS last October. The agreement saw the two partners join forces to accelerate capacity building, upskill national talents in the private sector, grow research & development in innovation, enable social enterprises, and empower local entrepreneurs. This partnership also goes in line with Zain's Innovation Nation initiative, under which all of Zain's innovation and entrepreneurship programs fall, especially within science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) areas. The initiative mainly targets the youth, and centers around a number of pillars, including entrepreneurship, investment, startup acceleration, supporting inventors, fostering innovation, and more.



US Ambassador to Kuwait Karen Sasahara, General Manager of New Balance Stuart Henwood, Chairman and CEO of AAW Faisal Ali Al-Mutawa and Deputy CEO of AAW Khalid Faisal Al-Mutawa during the ribbon-cutting ceremony.



New Balance branch at Capital Mall.



The grand opening ceremony of the New Balance store in Assima Mall.

AAW celebrates grand opening of New Balance store in Assima Mall

KUWAIT: Ali Abdulwahab Al-Mutawa Commercial Co (AAW) and New Balance announced the launch of the New Balance store in the heart of Kuwait City, in the Assima Mall. The event was attended by the US Ambassador to Kuwait Karen Sasahara, the General Manager of New Balance, Stuart Henwood, Chairman and CEO of AAW, Faisal Ali Al-Mutawa and Deputy CEO of AAW, Khalid Faisal Al-Mutawa.

In commemoration of the opening, New Balance embraced the Sadu design tradition, highlighting and supporting local artisanship in collaboration with "Sadu House". The opening celebration featured activities and entertainment that showcased the essence of Kuwaiti heritage. The store was decorated

with traditional Sadu pieces, and offered an Arabic calligraphy corner, oud player, and a customized sand drawing performance that blended elements of both New Balance and Kuwaiti craftsmanship.

The New Balance Assima marks AAW's second franchised store in Kuwait, with the first one being in 360 Mall. Located on the ground floor of the Assima Mall, the New Balance store offers a diverse range of modern sports and lifestyle footwear and apparel, specializing in running, and catering to men, women, and children. The New Balance products are renowned for their functionality, appealing to all age groups, from athletes and enthusiasts to fans of a sporty and modern lifestyle.

New Balance was founded in Boston, Massachusetts, USA in 1906, with the goal of demonstrating responsible leadership and establishing a global brand that is a source of pride for partners and communities alike. It always strives to empower people through sports and craftsmanship, to create positive change in communities around the world.

Bachchan launches Kalyan Jewellers' Ayodhya showroom

AYODHYA, India: Kalyan Jewellers, one of the largest and most-trusted jewellery brands recently announced the launch of its 1st showroom in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, India which was inaugurated by the company's brand ambassador Amitabh Bachchan. The launch celebrations marked the momentous milestone of the company's 250th showroom globally. T S Kalyanaraman, Managing Director of Kalyan Jewellers along with the Executive Directors – Rajesh Kalyanaraman and Ramesh Kalyanaraman were present at the inauguration. The brand new showroom promises a luxurious shopping experience with an extensive array of exquisite jewelry designs in a world-class ambience.

The city of Ayodhya came to a standstill as crowds jostled to catch a glimpse of the iconic superstar. Addressing the enthralled crowd, brand ambassador Amitabh Bachchan said, "I am thrilled and honored to be part of the grand celebrations marking the launch of Kalyan Jewellers' 250th showroom globally. With a rich legacy spanning over three decades, Kalyan Jewellers has consistently redefined the jewelry industry through pioneering initiatives. It fills me with pride to be associated with this iconic brand for over a decade. The jewelry brand is firmly grounded on the pillars of trust, transparency, and customer-centricity. I am confident that the patrons here will warmly embrace and wholeheartedly support this distinguished jewelry brand."

Talking about the 250th showroom launch, Ra-

mesh Kalyanaraman, Executive Director of Kalyan Jewellers said, "As we inaugurate our 250th showroom, we extend gratitude to our customers, partners and employees, who have been an integral part of this three-decade long journey that has been marked with trust and transparency. Their unwavering support has been integral to our remarkable three-decade journey, characterized by principles of trust and transparency. This significant milestone not only reflects our commitment to crafting exquisite jewelry but also emphasizes our dedication to fostering enduring relationships with patrons nationwide. At Kalyan Jewellers, we have made significant advancements in building a holistic ecosystem, ensuring a service-backed shopping experience for our patrons. As we move ahead, our customer-centric approach remains key to our continued growth, building upon the very essence that defines our brand."

Kalyanaraman further added, "Considering the prominence of Ayodhya, we have introduced curated designs as part of our temple jewelry collection – Nimah. This enhanced Nimah collection, is a celebration of our rich heritage, cleverly reimagined through contemporary designs, adorned with precious stones. The revamped collection pays an ode to the timeless narratives of Indian mythology. We believe this upgraded collection will seamlessly complement our existing brand portfolio, resonating widely, especially among our clientele."

The showroom will stock Kalyan's popular house brands, including Muhurat (wedding jewelry line), Mudhra (handcrafted antique jewelry), Nimah (temple jewelry), Glo (dancing diamonds), Ziah (solitaire-like diamond jewellery), Anokhi (uncut diamonds), Hera (daily wear diamonds), Rang (precious stones jewellery), and the recently launched Lila (colored stones and diamond jewelry).



Kalyan Jewellers inaugurates its 250th showroom in Ayodhya.

Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait announces strong financial performance in 2023

Bank reports a 40% increase in net profit to KD 45.2 million

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) is pleased to announce strong financial results for the financial year 2023. The bank has demonstrated outstanding performance, reflecting its resilience and dedication to customers and stakeholders.

Key financial highlights

ABK reported a net profit of KD 45.2 million, representing a 40 percent increase in comparison to 2022. This is in addition to a rise in earnings per share (EPS) of 46 percent from 13 fils to 19 fils, reflecting the bank's strong profitability and shareholder value creation.

Operating profit also witnessed an increase of 7 percent, reaching KD 97.1 million. Total assets stood at KD 6.28 billion, indicating ABK's healthy financial position and robust balance sheet.

ABK has also maintained steady growth in loans and advances, which amounted to KD 4.25 billion, a growth of 5 percent, while customer deposits stood at KD 3.83 billion, affirming the Group's reputation as a trusted financial partner. Moreover, the bank's non-performing loan (NPL) ratio stood at 1.33 percent, with NPL coverage at 445 percent, capital adequacy ratio (CAR) at 16.74 percent, and shareholders' equity at KD 619.55 million, further underscoring ABK's financial stability.

In response to the impressive results, Talal Behbehani, Chairman of ABK, expressed his satisfaction, stating, "The growth of our net profits by 40 percent in 2023 reflects our success in navigating the evolving banking sector. We have executed concise and comprehensive plans to strengthen our competitive position in Kuwait and the regional markets where we operate, including Egypt and the United Arab Emirates."

Emphasizing ABK's commitment to innovation and customer-centric initiatives, Behbehani discussed the ongoing implementation of the bank's transformation strategy aimed at enhancing operational processes across all divisions.

This approach includes the development of innovative banking services, products, and solutions tailored to meet customers' dynamic needs.

Behbehani expressed the Group's commitment to delivering enhanced value to all stakeholders, highlighting the Board's proposal to distribute cash dividends of 9 percent equivalent to 9 fils per share, as well as bonus shares of 5 percent equivalent to 5 shares for every 100 shares. These recommendations are subject to the approval of the Annual General Assembly.

significant confidence the Group enjoys across various facets of its operations.

Seizing opportunities

Looking ahead, Behbehani affirmed, "ABK remains committed to seizing distinctive opportunities within Kuwait, as well as other markets. The Group is prepared to engage in financing major development projects in alignment with New Kuwait Vision 2035."

Closing his statement, Behbehani expressed gratitude to all regulatory entities, including the Central Bank of Kuwait,

the Group's commitment to leveraging cutting-edge banking technologies. Moreover, the Group plans to roll out additional digital branches in the future, aimed at providing seamless service to customers round the clock.

Regional presence

Expanding its regional presence, Al-Sumait emphasized that the Group has bolstered its footprint in Egypt. This expansion includes opening four new branches equipped with state-of-the-art technologies, aligning with the

Environmental, social and governance (ESG)

The Group understands the increasing significance of ESG principles for investors and all stakeholders. As such, it has integrated them into its operations to contribute to sustainable development and long-term growth.

Corporate social responsibility

The Group has emphasized its prominent role in corporate social responsibility, encompassing support, sponsorship, and implementation of initiatives, activities,



ABK Chairman
Talal Mohammed Behbehani

We have executed concise and comprehensive plans to strengthen our competitive position in the Kuwaiti and regional markets where we operate



ABK's Acting Group CEO
Abdulla Al-Sumait

Our financial indicators for 2023 underscore the ongoing expansion witnessed in the Group's operations. This showcases our ability to adapt to economic shifts and effectively tackle local, regional and global challenges

Furthermore, Behbehani emphasized that the proposed distribution of dividend and bonus shares reflects the Group's strong financial solvency. He noted that the past year witnessed several pivotal measures aimed at bolstering the Bank's position, including a successful increase in capital by KD 100 million through a subscription process that garnered substantial interest, exceeding the required amount by approximately 3.3 times from shareholders and investors.

Strong ratings

Behbehani affirmed that the Group has upheld its investment grade ratings from global rating agencies. Notably, ABK secured an A rating from Fitch and A2 rating from Moody's, reflecting the

Boursa Kuwait, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the Capital Markets Authority, and the central banks in Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, for their steadfast support.

Continued growth

On his part, Abdulla Al-Sumait, Acting Group CEO at ABK, affirmed, "Our financial indicators for 2023 underscore the ongoing expansion witnessed in the Group's operations. This showcases our ability to adapt to economic shifts and effectively tackle local, regional, and global challenges." Al-Sumait affirmed the Group's sustained efforts in implementing digital transformation plans. Particularly, the inauguration of the first hologram-powered digital branch in the Kuwaiti market signifies

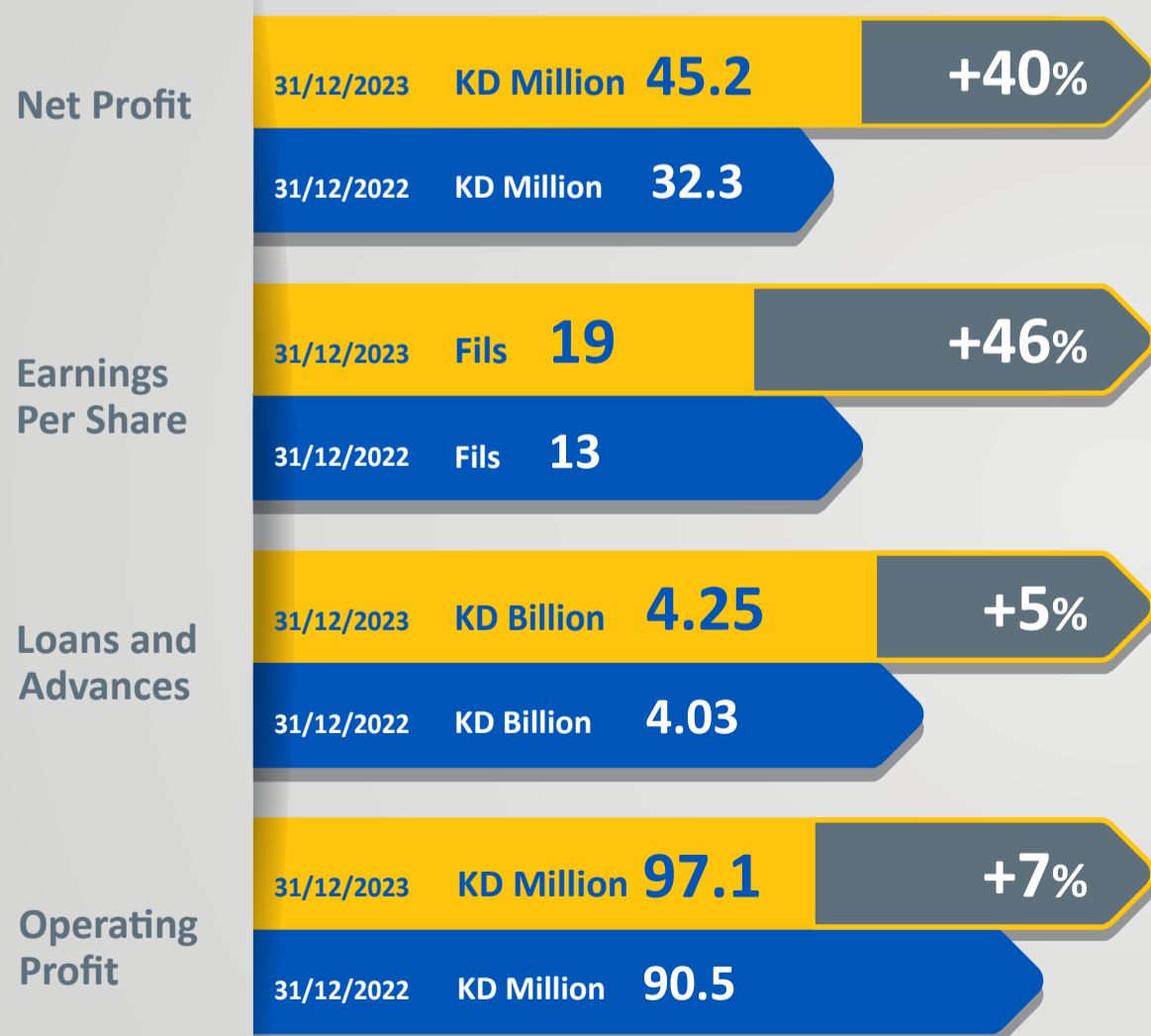
the Group's strategy to fortify its presence and cater to customers across Egypt. Our geographical footprint is instrumental in driving revenue, facilitating loan distribution, and gathering deposits. This success underscores the trust garnered from international companies and investors, reflecting the Group's growing influence and credibility in the global financial landscape.

In recognition of 2023's accomplishments, Al-Sumait commended all employees, emphasizing their pivotal role in the Group's success. He emphasized, "At ABK, we consistently focus on enhancing the capabilities and skills of our workforce and recognize the positive impact this development has on both employees and the overall operations of the Group."

and events across various domains. Furthermore, it actively participates in university job fairs to promote education and support students, along with an array of sports activities.

The bank also maintains its commitment to supporting the Central Bank of Kuwait and Kuwait Banking Association's 'Let's Be Aware' financial awareness campaign. This initiative aims to enhance financial awareness and banking literacy within the community. ABK's exceptional financial performance in 2023 not only demonstrates its resilience, but also highlights its unwavering commitment to delivering sustainable growth and value for its stakeholders. As ABK continues to strengthen its position in the market, it remains dedicated to driving innovation and meeting the evolving needs of its customers across regions.

2023 Financial Results



MOODY'S A2 FitchRatings A





Tommy Hilfiger walks the runway at the Tommy Hilfiger fashion show during New York Fashion Week - February 2024: The Shows on February 9, 2024 in New York City.



Jon Batiste performs on the runway at the Tommy Hilfiger fashion show during New York Fashion Week. — AFP photos



A model walks the runway for Tommy Hilfiger's Fall/Winter 2024 collection.

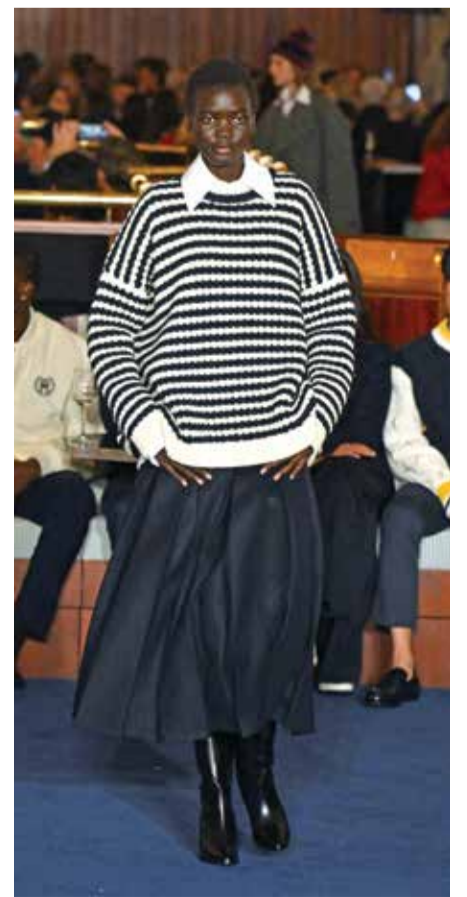
TOMMY HILFIGER PAYS TRIBUTE TO NY AS CITY'S FASHION WEEK KICKS OFF



As his red, white and blue mainstay prepares to turn 40, Tommy Hilfiger paid tribute to New York as a leading character in his journey to the design big-time as the city's fashion week got underway. To a hip-hop and disco-heavy soundscape curated by DJ Questlove evocative of the city's recent past, Hilfiger showcased a strong campus look set off by book bags, varsity ties and nearly ubiquitous baseball caps. Under Rafael Guastavino's tiled vaulted ceilings in New York's Grand Central station oyster bar, 72-year-old Hilfiger dazzled Manhattan's glitterati with a stream of blazers and chunky knitwear over crisp cotton button-up shirts with wide 90s collars. "We're coming out of the baggy era," said one fashion observer after seeing the offerings of fitted skirts and flared trousers that were less flared than those of past Autumn-Winter collections.

Such was the appeal of Hilfiger's return to contention in the Big Apple after missing last year's fashion week, one gatecrasher in a beige overcoat was bundled out by security. Organizers promised "A New York Moment," which pulled into the station when Jon Batiste of Stay Human came out sporting a preppy sports jacket with leather arms, going on to sing his hit "FREEDOM" to a cheering crowd.

He was followed by Hilfiger himself who was greeted rapturously and wore a jacket emblazoned with the words "Empire State" — New York's nickname — and the names of the eponymous city's five boroughs. Outside, and in honor of the railway setting, station staff in train conductor's hats kept the crowds at bay as homebound commuters busted past the full-to-capacity show. — AFP



Models walk the runway for Tommy Hilfiger's Fall/Winter 2024 collection during New York Fashion Week.



US singer-songwriter Taylor Swift and Kansas City Chiefs' tight end #87 Travis Kelce embrace after the Chiefs won Super Bowl LVIII against the San Francisco 49ers at Allegiant Stadium in Las Vegas, Nevada.



US singer-songwriter Usher performs during Apple Music halftime show of Super Bowl LVIII between the Kansas City Chiefs and the San Francisco 49ers at Allegiant Stadium in Las Vegas, Nevada.--AFP photos



Usher delivered a Las Vegas-appropriate set heavy on glitz, choreography and nostalgia as he headlined Sunday's Super Bowl halftime show, but it was new music from Beyoncé and the Taylor Swift cam that grabbed the most attention. Swift was the night's most-watched fan as she cheered on her boyfriend Travis Kelce, the tight end for the Kansas City Chiefs, from a luxury box with a coterie of famous friends.

Swift's relationship with the charismatic Chiefs star has been a boon to television ratings, her every move offering headline fodder. Beyoncé was also in attendance with her hip hop mogul husband Jay-Z -- and announced a new album during a commercial she did with Verizon, in which she repeatedly tries to "break the internet." The ad closes with the line: "Drop the music."



US singer-songwriter Usher (left) and US singer-songwriter Alicia Keys perform during Apple Music halftime show of Super Bowl LVIII.

Moments later on Instagram, Beyoncé announced with another clip that her eighth studio album is due March 29. The post didn't give a title but simply said "Act II"; her blockbuster album "Renaissance" had been branded "Act I." Shortly thereafter the Beyhive had two brand new songs to listen to: the twangy "Texas Hold 'Em" and "16 Carriages" implied Beyoncé's new volume of work might be country-heavy, in a nod to her Texas roots. The announcement came one week after Swift used the Grammy awards to promote her forthcoming studio album "The Tortured Poets Department," out April 19. America's megastars



Beyoncé, Swift command conversation as Usher helms halftime

US singer-songwriter Alicia Keys performs on stage.

Beyoncé and Swift both had major summer tours last year, boosting local economies at every turn.

'Yeah!'

But while it was Bey and Tay who overshadowed the night, it was Usher who helmed the stage. The slow jam king held his own as he captured the magic of his late-1990s, early-aughts fame with a 13-minute, career-spanning medley including hits like "Love In This Club" and "OMG." It wasn't his first time at the Super Bowl -- Usher appeared as a guest of the Black Eyed Peas in 2011 -- but it was the first that he headlined.

His show paid homage to Michael Jackson, who with his 1993 set transformed the halftime gig into one of music's most-watched -- and most-coveted.

At one point Usher donned a single glove, a clear nod to the groundbreaking pop artist. From gyrating among dancers clad in feathers, velvet and gemstones to roller-skating as a marching band took the field, the 45-year-old Usher gave an electric performance that was also an ode to Black culture and music.

The roller skating bit was a recreation of the viral highlight in his Las Vegas concert residency, and saw will.i.am of the Black Eyed Peas join him onstage. "Hey mama, we made it, and now this is for you," he told the camera before launching into the sultry smash "Love In This Club."

Alicia Keys appeared midway through at a futuristic red piano, playing a few bars of her own hit "If I Ain't Got You" before removing a cape to reveal

her sparkling red catsuit. Keys and Usher then performed their duet "My Boo" to the delight of fans and social media. It wouldn't be an Usher show if he didn't eventually lose his shirt, which he dropped for "U Got It Bad."

That song featured a surprise guest in the form of H.E.R., the enigmatic artist whose sizzling guitar solo was among the show's highlights. Usher played in perhaps the most predictable song of the night, his banger "Yeah!" which featured appearances from Lil Jon and Ludacris. It was all-in-all a crowning achievement for Usher, who just released a new album, "Coming Home," and had talked about his halftime show as marking the transition to the second half of his career.--AFP



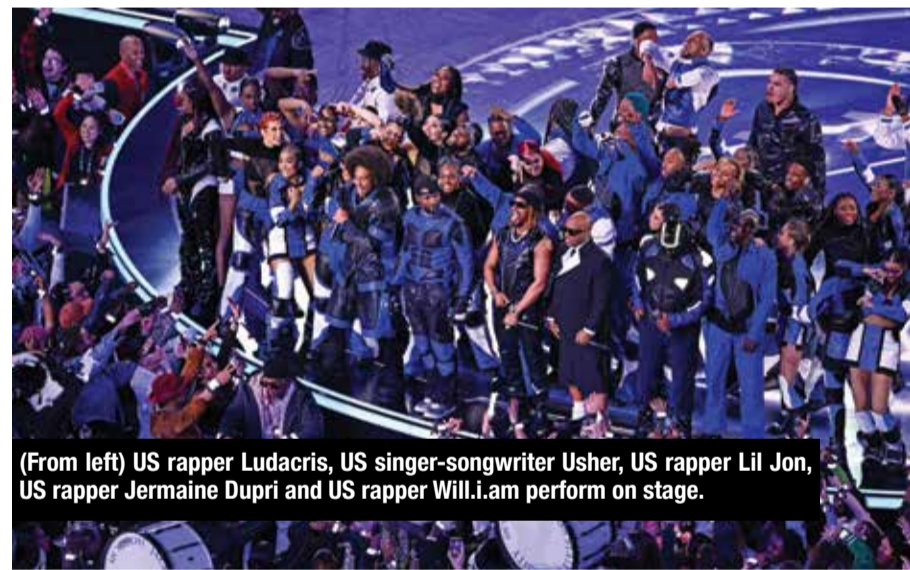
US singer-songwriter Usher performs on stage.



US rapper Lil Jon performs on stage.



US singer H.E.R. performs on stage.



(From left) US rapper Ludacris, US singer-songwriter Usher, US rapper Lil Jon, US rapper Jermaine Dupri and US rapper Will.i.am perform on stage.

Academics hold 'Swiftposium' as Tay Tay heads to Australia

Whether it is her relatable pop songs, connection with millions of fans worldwide or role as a feminist icon, the power of Taylor Swift is now too large for academics to ignore. So much so that the University of Melbourne held a "Swiftposium" on Monday to discuss the Grammy-winning artist's influence across a range of disciplines before "The Eras Tour" arrives on Friday. "It's just so incredible to see how many different ways you can unpack Taylor Alison Swift," explains Jennifer Beckett, University of Melbourne senior lecturer in media and communications.

The billionaire American is only 34 but can boost the economy of a city just by turning up. "She's amassed such an enormous and, I think, unprecedented amount of power and influence in the industry, economically, her business models are intense," Beckett said. "There's a lot that we can learn from her, but we also need to think critically. "Do we need to be worried about some aspects of it? Should she be more vocal in her support for certain groups of people or issues? Is that something we should be expecting now that she has this level of power?" she said.

Swift's role as poet, feminist icon

and canny businesswoman will also be discussed. The Melbourne symposium echoes a course at Belgium's Ghent University last year that examined whether Swift is "a literary genius."

'Trained and controlled'

One of the quirkier elements to emerge from the Melbourne conference

is that academics believe the beats of her songs could also help in the resuscitation of hearts. The Bee Gees song "Stayin' Alive" has been taught for years as a rhythm to follow in cardio-pulmonary resuscitation, and academics have now identified Swift's songs that hit the right beats per minute and may better engage younger generations.

"You used to be taught CPR to 'Stayin' Alive' but that's just not vibing with Gen Z and millennials," Beckett said. "Swiftomics", examining the economic effect of Swift's tour on cities, urban planning, public transport, restaurants and hotels is also being discussed. Sociologist Georgia Carroll, a keynote speaker, has studied how Swift encourages fans to splurge on her merchandise.

"She rewards fans that spend money with attention... It's very trained and controlled," she said. Fans that critically examine Swift are also shunned of attention, Carroll said, yet they remain steadfastly loyal. "Fans view her a lot more as the friend next door than they do as a billionaire superpower, which is the reality of what she is," Carroll said.

Brittany Spanos, another "Swiftposium" speaker and a writer at "Rolling Stone", says Swift has excelled at engaging with fans on social media to "make them feel very seen and connected with her". "She's been one of the smartest artists in terms of using that as a marketing tool," Spanos said. "It's been a huge part of her identity and how she connects with people."--AFP



Fans of US singer Taylor Swift, also known as Swifties, gather for a Fanposium where fan video presentations, a panel discussion and Q&A and a bracelet-making event were among the events in Melbourne. — AFP photos



Rolling Stone writer Brittany Spanos speaks during the Taylor Swift "Swiftposium" at the University of Melbourne.



Delegates take part in a bracelet-making event during the Taylor Swift "Swiftposium".

Sports

Boston Celtics hold off Miami Heat in bruising NBA clash

Oklahoma snap two-game skid with victory over Kings

LOS ANGELES: The Boston Celtics, fueled by a near triple-double from Jayson Tatum, held off the short-handed but determined Miami Heat 110-106 in an NBA clash that turned testy in a tense fourth quarter on Sunday.

League leaders Boston, who blew out the Heat last month, found the going tougher this time as the Heat cut a 15-point third-quarter deficit to two with less than two minutes remaining. Boston star Jaylen Brown and Miami's Duncan Robinson exchanged heated words after tangling early in the final period, with Brown assessed a flagrant foul.

But the Celtics — stunned by the Heat in the Eastern Conference finals last season — kept their heads down and polished off Miami. Tatum scored 26 points with 10 rebounds and nine assists. Kristaps Porzingis added 25 points, Brown scored 20 points and Jrue Holiday chipped in 15 for the Celtics, who made 16-of-39 three-point attempts. Tyler Herro scored 22 of his 24 points in the second half. His three-pointer with 1:49 remaining pulled the Heat within 106-104, but Porzingis and Tatum sealed the win at the free-throw line.

"They're a good team, they're going to go on runs," Tatum said. "You've just got to withstand it and answer." Tatum said the Celtics are "better than we were last year at this point" but cautioned that the pressure "really kicks up" after next week's NBA All-Star Game break.

"We're playing good basketball, but we've still got some ways to go," he said. "But I think

we're on the right direction." The Heat were without their scoring and assists leader Jimmy Butler, who was absent from the team after a death in his family.

They also lost Terry Rozier and Josh Richardson to injuries. Rozier made an awkward landing on his right leg on a drive to the basket in the third quarter. Richardson departed in the second quarter with a right shoulder injury.

Thunder bounce back

In Sunday's only other game, Western Conference contenders Oklahoma City snapped a two-game skid with a 127-113 victory over the Sacramento Kings.

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 38 points and Jalen Williams added 32 for the Thunder, who bounced back from a lopsided loss to the Dallas Mavericks on Saturday. The Thunder haven't lost three straight all season and they looked determined to keep it that way, jumping to an 18-8 lead midway through the first quarter.

"Usually when we lose and we lose big it's because of our first quarter," Gilgeous-Alexander said. "We set the tone early and that gave us the edge the rest of the game." Oklahoma City led by 17 going into the fourth quarter and Sacramento couldn't get the deficit below seven points in the final frame. Kings center Domantas Sabonis had a triple-double of 21 points, 11 rebounds and 14 assists and Malik Monk scored 26 points off the bench.

But De'Aaron Fox, who was averaging almost 27



MIAMI: Caleb Martin #16 of the Miami Heat dribbles the ball past Jayson Tatum #0 of the Boston Celtics during the fourth quarter of the game at Kaseya Center on February 11, 2024 in Miami, Florida. — AFP

points per game, was held to 15 and the Thunder scored 30 points off 18 Kings turnovers. "We got into a good rhythm," Gilgeous-Alexander said. "We

were playing fast, we were getting stops and when we get out in transition we're the best version of ourselves." — AFP

Women's 60m hurdles, men's 2-mile marks fall at Millrose

NEW YORK: Devynne Charlton set a women's 60-meter hurdles world record and Britain's Josh Kerr established a men's two-mile world best on Sunday at the 116th Millrose Games indoor track meet. Charlton, the 2022 world indoor champion from the Bahamas, won the 60m hurdles in 7.67 seconds, breaking the old mark of 7.68 set by Sweden's Susanna Kallur in 2008 at Karlsruhe, Germany.

"I knew I had it in me but it took a lot to put that race together," said Charlton. "I felt good in my prep heading up to today. I got the start that I needed. I just held it. I can't say it was more than that." Charlton, 28, won by 0.12 of a second over Jamaica's Danielle Williams, who won her second 100m outdoor world title last year, with American Tia Jones third in the same time.

Against a world-class field, Charlton made herself the woman to beat in next month's World Indoor Track and Field Championships at Glasgow. "I knew it was there," Charlton said of her record run. "But it's all about executing the race and crossing the line first. So many of these ladies have the capability to do it."

Kerr's winning two-mile time of 8:00.67 shattered the old mark of 8:03.40 set by Britain's Mo Farah in 2015 at Birmingham, England. "It was always going to be really tough, small margins," Kerr said. "I wanted to make sure I lose as little energy as possible."

"At 300 to go I was like it's now or never. I'm either not going to make it to that line or I'm hopefully going to break that world record." Kerr charged at the finish to defeat Grant Fisher, who set an American standard in the event with a runner-up finish in 8:03.62.

"Grant was so strong. I sat on him for a while," Kerr said. "He did so much of the work so thank you so much for that. And then just closed it down the last 600."

Kerr, a 26-year-old Scotsman, won last year's 1,500m world outdoor title and took bronze in the event at the Tokyo Olympics. St Lucia's Julien Alfred won the women's 60m title in 6.99, the fastest time in the world this year.

Coleman wins 60 meters

American Christian Coleman, a former world outdoor 100m and world indoor 60m champion, won the men's 60 in 6.51, which was .17 off his world record from 2018 and .07 off the year's world best by Noah Lyles last week.

Japan's Abdul Hakim Sani Brown was second in 6.54 and Jamaica's Ackeem Blake third in 6.55. "I was just happy to win really. It was a world-class field," Coleman said. "I feel like I could have done some better things. I'll clean it up for next weekend."

That's when Coleman faces a showdown with Lyles at US indoor nationals.

"I'm looking forward to it," Coleman said. American Chris Nilsen won the pole vault clearing 5.82m while Ukraine's Yaroslava Mahuchikh took the women's high jump with a 2.00m effort.

American Bryce Hoppel won the men's 800m in 1:45.54 while Allie Wilson took the women's 800 in 2:01.61. Dylan Beard was a surprise 60m hurdles winner in 7.44 to lead a US podium sweep.

"Just came out here to have some fun. I knew the field was stacked," he said. "Wanted to be in the mix. I did a little better than that."

Elle St. Pierre won the women's mile in an American record 4:16.41 with Jessica Hull second, breaking her own Australian record in 4:19.03. Yared Nuguse, the American son of Ethiopian-born parents, won the men's mile in 3:47.83. — AFP

Australian under-19s lift WCup

BENONI: Australian dominance of major cricket events continued on Sunday when they beat India by 79 runs in the Under-19 World Cup final at Willowmoore Park in South Africa. Australia's senior men's team won the world Test championship and Cricket World Cup in 2023 — beating India in the finals on both occasions. The Australian women's team are the current 50-overs and T20 World Cup champions. Sunday's final between the only unbeaten teams in the tournament was surprisingly one-sided.

Australia made 253 for seven in their 50 overs after winning the toss and deciding to bat. Strongly-built left-hander Harjas Singh made a hard-hit 55 to highlight a solid batting performance. India's batting had been their strength leading up to the final but they crashed to 122 for eight against Australia's pace bowling attack. Opening batsman Adarsh Singh (47) was the only top-order batsman to shine. Murugan Abhishek (42) led some lower-order resistance before the five-time champions were bowled out for



BENONI: Australian players pose for a photo with the trophy after winning the under-19 World Cup youth one-day international (YODI) final between India and Australia at Willowmoore Park in Benoni on February 11, 2024. — AFP

174. Fast bowler Mahli Beardman took three for 15 and was named man of the match. Off-spinner Raf MacMillan took three for 41.

Australian captain Hugh Weibgen said at the post-match presentation that his team's bowlers had been the key to

their success. "With a bowling attack like ours we had a lot of confidence with 250 runs on the board. As a unit they bowl so well together. They know their roles and I will be surprised if all of them don't go a long way in their careers." Indian captain Uday Saharan said he was

proud of his players despite stumbling in the final. "Our preparation was good but the execution didn't go our way," he said. It was Australia's fourth Under-19 World Cup title but their first since 2010 when they were led by current international Mitchell Marsh. — AFP

CAN holds several sports activities

KUWAIT: Director of Haido Sport Academy Abdullah Al-Saleh, the sports arm of Cancer Aware Nation (CAN) said several sports activities took place during the 9th joint Gulf Week for Cancer Awareness that was held from Feb 1 until Feb 7, 2024 under the theme (We Are With You) under the patronage of Health Minister Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi. He said the first of such activities was Kuwait Football Amateurs League that started Nov 7, 2023 and continued until Feb 7, 2024 at Surra yards.

14 teams participated including Haido's team as the league is held under the patronage of Public Authority for Sport. Al-Saleh said CAN is honored to continually launch many sports activities in order to teach youth how to utilize their free time with sports and benefit from its positive effect in changing lifestyle.

He said sport is the cornerstone in keeping youth away from risk factors that cause a drop in immunity



Group photo of the winners.

and get diseases. It also contributes to the reduction of smoking rates among the youth that besides causing the secretion of happiness hormones helps people enjoy their lives.

He said CAN organized an awareness exhibition

about cancer, at Surra on Feb 2, which aimed at identifying the initial signs of cancer and means of prevention of many cancer types that are related to the healthy lifestyle that is related to eating healthy food and doing physical activities.

Chinese teen Pan smashes men's 100m freestyle world record

DOHA: Chinese teenager Pan Zhanle broke the men's 100m freestyle world record with a time of 46.80sec at the world championships in Doha on Sunday. Pan achieved the new mark leading off his team during the 4x100m freestyle relay to set up teammates Ji Xinjie, Zhang Zhanshuo and Wang Haoyu to seal gold for China in 3 minutes 11:08 seconds.

The 19-year-old shaved 0.06sec off the previous record of 46.86 achieved by Romanian David Popovici at the European championships in Rome in August 2022. "Yeah, it was an incredible time. I trusted my friends and we did our best," Pan said. "I said to myself 'swim hard'. I was shocked when I saw the time, I didn't expect to break the world record now, I wanted to keep it for the Paris Olympics." Italy took silver in 3:12.08 and the United States bronze in 3:12.29. Before

these worlds Pan had only one world medal, silver in the 4x100m medley relay last year in Fukuoka, Japan. He also has three Asian Games titles, including the 100m. His previous personal best was 46.97, which made him the fifth fastest man in the world before arriving in Qatar.

The Netherlands won the women's 4x100m freestyle relay as the quartet of Kim Busch, Janna van Kooten, Kira Toussaint and Marrit Steenbergen clocked 3:36.61. Australia took silver, 0.32sec adrift, with Canada completing the podium.

Earlier South Korea's Kim Woo-min won gold in the men's 400m freestyle on the first day of the swimming competition. Kim clocked 3:42.71 to edge out Australia's Elijah Winnington, the 2022 world champion. Germany's Lukas Martens took third place.



DOHA: (L to R) Silver-medallists team Italy, gold-medallists team China and bronze-medallists team US pose with their medals on the podium of the men's 4x100m freestyle relay swimming event during the 2024 World Aquatics Championships at Aspire Dome in Doha. — AFP

The 22-year-old Kim was on course to break Paul Biedermann's world record going into the final 100m but couldn't maintain the pace and finished over two seconds off the German's mark, set in 2009. Olympic champion Ahmed Hafnoui of Tunisia was a surprise casualty

in the heats, coming a lowly 17th overall and missing out on a place in the final. New Zealand's Erika Fairweather cruised to victory in the women's 400m freestyle, touching the wall over two seconds clear of China's Li Bingjie. Isabel Gose of Germany claimed the bronze. — AFP

Sports

Yamal strike twice to rescue Barca as Atletico stumble

We gave away goals and chances in many moments: Xavi

BARCELONA: Barcelona's 16-year-old starlet Lamine Yamal struck twice to rescue the struggling Catalans a 3-3 draw against Granada in La Liga on Sunday. Xavi Hernandez's side, third, shared the spoils with their relegation-battling opponents, 19th, after a thrilling battle at the Olympic Stadium, but now trail leaders Real Madrid by 10 points. Los Blancos thrashed second-place Girona 4-0 on Saturday to move five points clear at the top and take full control of the title race. Earlier Atletico Madrid's faint hopes of challenging for La Liga deflated further with a 1-0 defeat by Sevilla on Sunday.

Youngster Yamal sent Barcelona ahead but Granada battled back with goals from Ricard Sanchez and on-loan Manchester United winger Facundo Pellistri. Robert Lewandowski pulled Barcelona level but Ignasi Miquel again sent Granada in front, before Yamal struck his second, from long range. "It wasn't to be, it's another lost opportunity, but we have to keep working," Yamal told Movistar. "I've got the trust of the coach but right now I'm thinking more about the draw and that we dropped two points than in my performance." It was the kind of Barcelona performance which summarized why Xavi has decided to leave the club at the end of the season, convinced the club needs a change of direction.

"We gave away goals and chances in many moments," Xavi told Movistar. "The team had faith, desire and courage like always, but it wasn't enough and now (winning La Liga) is even harder for us." Yamal lit up the match from the right flank, a rare bright spark on another difficult night for the champions. Joao Cancelo turned well in the area and crossed invitingly for Yamal to fire home at the far post after 14 minutes. The winger became La Liga's youngest ever scorer with a goal against Granada in October when the teams met in a 2-2 draw. Barca should have doubled their lead before the break but Martin Hongla cleared off the line from Lewandowski's shot.

The Catalans were punished almost immediately when Pellistri crossed for Sanchez to rifle into the top corner past Marc-Andre ter Stegen. The German goalkeeper, making his first appearance since November after a back injury, showed signs of rustiness but could not be blamed for the goal. At the same stage last season Barcelona had conceded eight goals in La Liga, this was the 31st in 24 matches in this campaign, with two more to follow.



BARCELONA: Barcelona's Polish forward #09 Robert Lewandowski fights for the ball with Granada's Cameroonian midfielder #06 Martin Hongla during the Spanish league football match between FC Barcelona and Granada FC at the Estadi Olimpic Lluis Companys in Barcelona on February 11, 2024. — AFP

Pellistri put Granada ahead after Pau Cubarsi's wayward defensive header dropped to Uzuni. Barcelona swiftly leveled when Gundogan fed Lewandowski who finished clinically for his 10th goal in La Liga. Home fans hoped their team could kick on and take all three points but Granada - now unbeaten against Barcelona in five games - had other ideas. Miquel's header from Faitout Maouassa's cross gave Alexandra Medina's side the lead once again. It took a fine Yamal effort from outside the area to restore parity, with the youngster's strike flying in at the near post.

Atletico Madrid came up short against Sevilla, who earned a second consecutive victory for the first time all season to move 15th, four points clear of the relegation zone. Isaac Romero headed home after 15 minutes for the Andalucians with Atletico, fourth, trailing league leaders Real Madrid by 13 points. Their hopes of silverware are now pinned on the Champions League.

"We've lost a lot of points, so many, and games away from home - it's something that can't happen if you want to fight for La Liga," Atletico goalkeeper Jan Oblak told DAZN. "It's the truth, we have to be honest ... we're a long way off Real Madrid." Atletico coach Diego Simeone said he was not concerned by his team's defeat. "I'd be worried if we weren't playing like we were - I'm proud of what the players are doing and convinced the goals will come," he said. Atletico forward Alvaro Morata was taken off with a knee injury and Simeone said he hoped it was "as minor as possible". — AFP

News in Brief

Serie A to stay with 20 teams

MILAN: Serie A will remain a 20-team division after a league assembly scotched on Monday an attempt by Italy's biggest clubs to cut the number of participants to 18. In a statement, Serie A said that "the league's current format of 20 teams has been confirmed", following the meeting at its Milan headquarters. Italian media report that Inter Milan, Juventus, AC Milan and Roma were the only four clubs to vote in favour of the proposal, with the other 16 all voting against. The idea of cutting the number of teams in Italy's top flight has been floating around for a while as the number of games played by top clubs and players increases. Serie A's top four from this season will take part in the Champions League which from next term will have a new format. Teams will have to play two more matches before qualification to the knockout stages is decided, adding more games to an already crowded calendar. However Serie A's lesser lights refused to agree to a smaller division, a proposal viewed as one designed to only satisfy the biggest clubs' needs. — AFP

Basketball player stabbed

BERLIN: A 17-year-old Ukrainian basketball player was fatally stabbed after an altercation at a bus stop in Germany, police said Monday, in a case that has sparked outrage in Kyiv. Volodymyr Yermakov, who played at youth level for the Ukrainian national team and German side ART Giants Duesseldorf, died in hospital following the incident in the western city of Oberhausen on Saturday night. Yermakov and a Ukrainian teammate had a "verbal" dispute with two other teenagers on a city centre bus, local police said, adding that investigations into the background of the altercation were ongoing. As the two groups got off the bus, the clash escalated and the teenagers got into a "physical confrontation", police said. "According to initial investigations, knives were drawn," police said. — AFP

Rahul out of third Test

NEW DELHI: India's KL Rahul has been ruled out of the third Test against England but expected to be match-fit for the final two games, the country's cricket board said Monday. The Test begins Thursday in Rajkot with the five-match series level at 1-1 after India bounced back from their opening loss. Rahul and Ravindra Jadeja missed the second Test due to injuries but were named in the squad for the rest of the three matches subject to fitness. Rahul has reached "90 percent of match fitness and is progressing well", the Board of Control for Cricket in India said. "He will continue his recovery process at the National Cricket Academy (NCA) in Bengaluru to be completely match-fit for the fourth and fifth Test." Uncapped batsman Devdutt Padikkal has been added to the squad as Rahul's replacement. — AFP

Cricket great Procter ill

JOHANNESBURG: South Africa's swashbuckling cricket all-rounder and former national coach 77-year-old Mike Procter was seriously ill in intensive care on Monday, according to a news report citing his family. A friend of the family, speaking on condition of anonymity, confirmed to AFP that Procter was "in a very serious condition" after the report on leading news site News24. News24, citing a statement from Procter's wife Maryna and two daughters, said that he was being treated in the uMhlanga Hospital near the eastern city of Durban. "Mike experienced a complication during routine surgery last week. While recovering in the ICU, he suffered a cardiac incident. He is currently in the ICU working on his recovery," it said. — AFP

Haaland, De Bruyne returns as City plot to conquer Europe

MANCHESTER: The return of the Champions League comes at the perfect time for Manchester City with Erling Haaland and Kevin De Bruyne's comebacks from injury making the holders look formidable. Pep Guardiola's men head to FC Copenhagen for the first leg of their last 16 tie on Tuesday on the back of 10 consecutive wins in all competitions. A run that began while Haaland and De Bruyne were still sidelined by injury has only gained momentum since they made their return.



MANCHESTER: Manchester City's English midfielder #10 Jack Grealish (left) attends a training session at Manchester City's training ground in north-west England on February 12, 2024, on the eve of their UEFA Champions League Group round of 16 football match against FC Copenhagen. — AFP

Haaland scored his first goals since November as City eventually broke down Everton to win 2-0 at the Etihad on Saturday. De Bruyne had started on the bench with the Champions League in mind as Guardiola manages the Belgian's minutes after his season began with a hamstring tear that ruled him out for five months. But the 32-year-old has looked like his old self since returning with seven goal contributions in eight games this season.

De Bruyne was the provider for Haaland's second goal on Saturday and the Norwegian is delighted to have his delivery to feed off once more. "I try to do the same runs with everyone, but with him it's a bit more like I know I'm going to get it perfect. I know the ball is going to come," said Haaland. "You can see I don't even look at the ball for two seconds when he has it because I'm focusing on running towards the goal. That's the difference, nothing bad towards other players, but it's the small difference of knowing that the ball will come."

A double treble?

City became just the second English side to ever win the treble of Champions League, Premier League and FA Cup last season. Guardiola scoffed

at the suggestion they could defend all three earlier in the campaign, but they remain well on course to do so. The Premier League title race is fascinatingly poised with the top three separated by just two points, but City will edge ahead of Liverpool and Arsenal should they win their game in hand against Brentford next week. A trip to Luton awaits in the FA Cup fifth round and Copenhagen are not expected to pose many problems to the English champions despite their success against the other side of Manchester this season.

The Danes stunned Manchester United 4-3 in November as the Red Devils crashed out in the group stage. But City are a different beast as they look to become only the second club in the Champions League era to retain the trophy, after Real Madrid's three-in-a-row between 2016 and 2018. Guardiola has a fully fit squad to choose and a wealth of options at his disposal. Kyle Walker, Bernardo Silva, Jack Grealish and Josko Gvardiol started alongside De Bruyne on the bench at the weekend. — AFP

Napoli's misery continues

MILAN: AC Milan continued their pursuit of Serie A leaders Inter Milan on Sunday by beating Napoli 1-0 and dealing another huge blow to the troubled champions. Theo Hernandez scored the only goal of an engrossing game in the 25th minute at the San Siro, rolling home the winner after collecting a brilliant Rafael Leao pass. Milan stay eight points behind local rivals Inter in third after stretching their unbeaten league streak to nine matches, of which they have won seven. "We've done really well in the last month or so, we're almost going at Inter's pace, and they're having an incredible season," said Milan coach Stefano Pioli.

"Theo has a great understanding with Leao on the left, they know each other so well that they can always find each other." While Inter may prove too tough to catch, Milan's recent good form has solidified their spot in the division's Champions League spots. Milan are 13 points ahead of Bologna - who thumped Lecce 4-0 and took fifth place from Roma - and are almost certain to grab a spot in Europe's top club competition. The same cannot be said for Napoli as Walter Mazzarri's side are languishing in ninth, seven points from the top four, after their eighth defeat of a dismal title defense.

Napoli are a whopping 25 points behind Inter with the pair having played 23 matches, but more importantly are at serious risk of missing out on the Champions League. Southern Italy's biggest club, who romped to the Scudetto last term, have lost more league matches than they have won since Mazzarri took over from the sacked Rudi Garcia in November. "I think it (the Champions League) is possible. You saw today the level that we can get to. We've had everything thrown at us recently with injuries and we're getting big players back. "We need to be confident that we can get three points off anyone, as we showed with how we played today." — AFP

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Change of Name

I, JAGDEEP, holder of Indian Passport No. U8959079 having permanent address 141007, Punjab, India residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as (given name) Jagdeep Singh and (surname) Jagdeep. **(#5162 13/02/2024)**

I, HABIB AMAR SHAB HABIB IRFAN, holder of Indian Passport Number U0195176 having permanent address at Post Arab Colony Taluka, Gangapur Dist. Aurangabad, Pin 431109, Maharashtra residing in Kuwait at present hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as under (given name) IRFAN HABIB AMAR and (surname) BINSHAHAB. **(#5161 13/02/2024)**

I, RAVI MANDLA, holder of Passport No. N5197547, date of Issue: 06/03/2016. place of issue: KUWAIT, do hereby change my name to RAVI (as given name) MALEPATI (as surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be

known in name RAVI MALEPATI and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. **(#5160 13/02/2024)**

I, SIDDESH GURU PEREIRA, my address H. No. 417, Voilem Bhat Mercedes Muda Tiswadi, Goa, pin -403005. I have changed my name from Siddesh Guru Fatarpekar to Siddesh Guru Pereira. Hereafter in all my dealings and documents, I will be known by the name Siddesh Guru Pereira. **(#5159 13/02/2024)**

I, RAJAK ABDUL SAMAD, Holder of Indian Passport No. L9689719 Having Permanent Address Dx-17, Irani Wadi, Opp Sqaeters 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 RAZAQ ABDUL SAMAD. **(#5158 11/2/2024)**

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Ivory Coast crowned African champs

First host country to win AFCON since 2006



ABIDJAN: Ivory Coast's forward #15 Max-Alain Gradel (center) lifts the trophy on the podium after Ivory Coast won the Africa Cup of Nations (CAN) 2024 final football match between Ivory Coast and Nigeria at Alassane Ouattara Olympic Stadium on February 11, 2024. — AFP

ABIDJAN: Sebastien Haller scored a dramatic late winner as hosts Ivory Coast fought back to beat Victor Osimhen's Nigeria 2-1 in Sunday's Africa Cup of Nations final and complete the most remarkable of major tournament turn-arounds by claiming their third continental title. Nigeria looked set to repeat their 1-0 victory over the Ivorians here at the Ebimpe Olympic Stadium during the group stage when captain William Troost-Ekong - who had netted a penalty to decide that first meeting - rose to head in the opener late in the first half.

However, Franck Kessie equalized just after the hour mark and Haller turned in Simon Adingra's cross in the 81st minute to spark wild celebrations among the sea of orange in the Abidjan stands. Ivory Coast's success sees them add this year's title to those claimed in 1992 and 2015, while this win also allows them to join Nigeria on three Cup of Nations triumphs overall. Spearheaded by reigning African player of the year Osimhen, the Nigerians had looked the most formidable team in the competition over the last month.

But Ivory Coast's sense of destiny was simply too overpowering, as they became the first host country to win the AFCON since 2006. Didier Drogba captained the Elephants team that lost on penalties to Egypt in Cairo in that final 18 years ago, while this time he was among the spectators to witness a stunning victory for his country. "It is greater than a fairytale," said coach Emere Fae, who took

over a stricken team mid-tournament. "I am struggling to take it all in. When I think about all we have been through, the difficult moments, moments when we were behind, when we came back in the last minute of games. "We are miracle survivors."

Back from the brink

It is an incredible achievement for a side that was on the brink of elimination in the group stage after losing 4-0 to Equatorial Guinea on January 22. That was their heaviest ever home defeat and the Ivorians then parted company with coach Jean-Louis Gasset, replacing him with Fae, a teammate of Drogba's in 2006. They then began a remarkable turnaround which saw them oust holders Senegal on penalties, beat Mali with a last-gasp goal in extra time, and edge out DR Congo with a Haller goal in the last four. Their supporters packed out the stadium to its 60,000 capacity, with many fans having to watch from vantage points on stairways. Anyone wanting to dampen the excitement levels might have pointed out that Cup of Nations finals tend to be low-scoring affairs.

There were just 10 goals scored in the last 11 finals, five of which were decided on penalties after a 0-0 stalemate. Indeed, Ivory Coast's four previous final appearances had all ended goalless before going to penalties, two of which they had won. This looked set to be another nervy, low-scoring affair with chances few and

far between early on. However the home side then had a great chance on 34 minutes when Kessie found Adingra on the left and his shot was turned away by Nigerian goalkeeper Stanley Nwabali.

That proved crucial as Nigeria went ahead just four minutes later when Ademola Lookman's corner from the left was touched on and Troost-Ekong headed in from the edge of the six-yard area. Earlier in the tournament the Ivorians would have crumbled in such a scenario, but they deserve great credit for regrouping and throwing everything at Nigeria. Max-Alain Gradel's netbound shot was blocked in front of the line by Calvin Bassey five minutes after the restart, before Nwabali turned an Odilon Kossounou long-range piledriver around the post on 62 minutes.

They drew level from the corner which followed that, as Kessie - whose late penalty had rescued the hosts against Senegal in the last 16 - appeared at the back post to head into the net. It seemed inevitable that a second Ivory Coast goal would follow and it duly did with nine minutes of the 90 left as Haller got his studs to Adingra's cross and diverted the ball into the far corner. Behind for the first time since their opening match, Nigeria could not react, and Ivory Coast held on for victory. "Ivory Coast were better than us today," admitted Nigeria coach Jose Peseiro. "I am sad, my team is sad, but for me they did the maximum, each one. Sometimes you want to do something but you cannot do it." — AFP

Marathon record holder Kiptum dies in car crash

NAIROBI: Tributes poured in on Monday for Kenyan running sensation Kelvin Kiptum after the marathon world record-holder was killed in a car crash at the age of 24. The death of Kiptum, favorite for the marathon at the Paris Olympics later this year, has shocked Kenya and the world of athletics. The father of two was driving from Kaptagat to Eldoret in the Rift Valley, the heartland of Kenyan distance running, around 11 pm on Sunday when his car careered off the road and hit a tree.



Kelvin Kiptum

Police said Kiptum and his Rwandan coach Gervais Hakizimana were killed on the spot while a woman passenger was taken to hospital with serious injuries. "He lost control and veered off-road entering into a ditch on his left side. He drove in the ditch for about 60 meters before hitting a big tree," said an official police report from Elgeyo Marakwet County where the accident occurred. Images on Kenyan media showed the mangled wreck of the vehicle, its windscreen shattered, the roof and doors buckled and almost ripped off.

From herding goats in a Rift Valley village just a decade ago, Kiptum had announced he would attempt in April to become the first man to run an official marathon under the mythic two-hour mark. He burst onto the marathon scene when he ran a world record 2:00:35 in Chicago in October, slicing 34 seconds off fellow Kenyan star Eliud Kipchoge's previous record. He was just 23 at the time, and competing in only his third marathon. Kiptum also won his other two efforts - his debut in Valencia in 2022 and a follow-up in London the following year.

Kipchoge, regarded as one of the greatest marathon runners of all time, said he was "deeply saddened" by the death of the "rising star" who shattered his record. "An athlete who had a whole life ahead of him to achieve incredible greatness," Kipchoge said on X. Kiptum and the 39-year-old Kipchoge were expected to run together for the first time at the Paris Olympics. "We had been looking forward to welcoming him into the Olympic community at the Olympic Games Paris 2024 and seeing what the fastest marathon runner in the world could achieve," International Olympic Committee president Thomas Bach said on X.

As top athletes joined Kenyan politicians in paying tribute to Kiptum, tearful mourners gathered at the family home in the village of Chepsamo, consoling his father Samson Cheruiyot and his wife Asenath Rotich. Kenyan President William Ruto described Kiptum as "one of the world's finest sportsmen who broke barriers to secure a marathon record". "An extraordinary sportsman has left an extraordinary mark in the globe," he said on X. World Athletics said his Valencia debut was the fastest in history and mourned the loss of "one of the most exciting new prospects to emerge in road running in recent years". "An incredible athlete leaving an incredible legacy, we will miss him dearly," said its president Sebastian Coe, who only last week had been in Chicago to officially ratify Kiptum's historic time. — AFP

Chiefs win Super Bowl thriller

LAS VEGAS: Patrick Mahomes conjured another Super Bowl comeback on Sunday as the Kansas City Chiefs snatched a thrilling 25-22 overtime victory over the San Francisco 49ers to win their third NFL championship in five seasons. In a perfectly scripted finale before a celebrity-studded Las Vegas crowd including pop icon Taylor Swift, Mahomes found Mecole Hardman in the end zone with just three seconds remaining in overtime to seal a dramatic win in what was the longest Super Bowl in history.

The victory makes Kansas City the first team to win back-to-back Lombardi Trophies since the New England Patriots in 2003-2004, cementing the franchise's right to be regarded as the NFL's newest dynasty. "It means a ton," said Mahomes, who was named Super Bowl Most Valuable Player for the third time after the win. "With the adversity we dealt with this year and to come through, the guys never faltered."

Mahomes, meanwhile, warned the Chiefs' rivals that their latest win was just the start of their reign of dominance. "We're not done," he said. "We've got a young team. We're going to keep this thing going." For long periods, however, it looked as if Kansas City would be denied by San Francisco's ferocious defense. Chiefs star Travis Kelce, whose romance with Swift has captivated the NFL this season, had a nightmare start to the game, at one stage blowing up on the sidelines at Kansas City head coach Andy Reid in an extraordinary outburst. But with Mahomes pulling the strings,

the Chiefs finally battled through a below-par performance to deliver when it mattered once more. It marked the third time that Mahomes has led Kansas City back from double-digit deficits to win the Super Bowl, sealing his reputation as the heir apparent to the legendary Tom Brady. It was also the third time that 49ers head coach Kyle Shanahan has finished on the losing side in a Super Bowl after seeing his team go 10 or more points ahead.

"We all hurt," a deflated Shanahan said after the defeat. "Everyone knows how it feels. Don't have a lot of words for it. Obviously we're hurting. Our team's hurting. That's how it goes when you put yourself out there." The Chiefs fell behind 10-0 in the first quarter after San Francisco struck first through a 55-yard Jake Moody field goal and a brilliantly worked trick play that ended with a touchdown for running back Christian McCaffrey. Kansas City were left with just a Harrison Butler field goal to show for their first half efforts to make it 10-3 at the break.

Kelce meltdown, overtime drama

Kelce went berserk on the Chiefs bench, with the tight end screaming at head coach Andy Reid in apparent frustration at being kept off the field for the play when an early Kansas City drive ended with an Isiah Pacheco fumble. Kansas City's offense fared little better after the restart, with Mahomes giving up an interception to 49ers safety J'ayir Brown after an overthrown pass intended for Marquez Valdes-Scantling. San Francisco were unable to turn the possession into points, however, as defenses stayed on top,



LAS VEGAS: Kansas City Chiefs' quarterback #15 Patrick Mahomes celebrates with the trophy after the Chiefs won Super Bowl LVIII against the San Francisco 49ers at Allegiant Stadium in Las Vegas, Nevada, February 11, 2024. — AFP

forcing punts on the next three possessions. Kansas City added to their tally with a monstrous 57-yard Butler field goal that crept over the bar to eclipse Moody's record-long first-half effort. With San Francisco's defense still on top, Kansas City needed a stroke of luck and they got it when a muffed punt between 49ers defenders Darrell Luter and Ray-Ray McCloud allowed the Chiefs to recover deep in the red zone. Mahomes wasted no time cashing in, hitting Valdes-Scantling in the end zone from 16 yards. Butler's extra point making it 13-10. The 49ers came roaring back, however, on the next drive, Purdy showing great composure to lead a 12-play 75-yard touchdown drive that end-

ed with a Jennings score. A potentially costly missed extra point left San Francisco 16-13 ahead, and the Chiefs drew level on their next possession with Butler's third field goal to tie it at 16-16. Moody kicked a 40-yard field goal to restore San Francisco's lead at 19-16. That set the stage for Mahomes to lead the Chiefs to another Super Bowl comeback with just 1min 53sec left on the clock. As the tension mounted, Mahomes found Kelce for a 23-yard gain that took the Chiefs into kicking range. After once again failing to get the ball into the end zone, Butler stepped up to level it at 19-19 with three seconds left, forcing overtime. — AFP