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By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The government on Wednesday did not attend the regular National Assembly session over sensitive remarks made by a lawmaker deemed offensive to HH the Amir, forcing the Assembly speaker to cancel the session. Ahmad Al-Saadoun told MPs at the scheduled start of the session that Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sharida Al-Maousherji called him the previous day to tell him the government will not attend the session. Saadoun said he later received a call from HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah informing him of the government's decision not to attend the session. As a result, Saadoun adjourned the Assembly until the next session on March 5, as the next two weeks coincide with Kuwait's National and Liberation Days. Saadoun did not tell MPs the reason why the government did not attend the session, nor did the government make any official announcement on the issue. But Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs Dawood Maarafi wrote

on his account on X that "Article 54 of the constitution states that 'the Amir is the Head of the State. His person is safeguarded and inviolable'." The minister's comment is a clear reference to a controversy that erupted in the National Assembly on Tuesday when MP Abdulkarim Al-Kandari objected to the action of the speaker who deleted remarks he made the previous week on the Amiri address. Saadoun decided to delete the remarks from the Assembly's minutes after finding the remarks were in violation of the Assembly's rules. Kandari objected and demanded that the issue be referred to the Assembly for a vote. During the vote, 44 MPs rejected Saadoun's action, which was supported only by three members and the 12 Cabinet ministers present. Under Kuwait's constitution, criticism of HH the Amir and his actions and decisions, even by MPs, is totally prohibited. Kandari did not issue any comment after the government's no-show. Even other lawmakers did not comment. It was not immediately known if the

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Erdogan in Cairo as Turkey, Egypt turn 'new leaf'



CAIRO: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan meets his Egyptian counterpart Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi during an official visit to Egypt on Feb 14, 2024. — AFP

CAIRO: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his Egyptian counterpart Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi said in Cairo on Wednesday that they were turning a "new leaf" in their relations after over a decade of estrangement. The two leaders also criticized the Zionist entity's conduct of the war in the Gaza Strip and called for a ceasefire. Sisi welcomed Erdogan with great fanfare at Cairo airport before the pair signed several agreements.

They both called for "a new stage in relations", an increase in trade to "\$15 billion per year within a few years" and diplomatic cooperation in the Middle East. Erdogan, an outspoken critic of the Zionist entity's conduct in its war with Gaza's rulers Hamas, again took aim at the government of Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The Turkish leader, on his first visit to Egypt in more than 10 years, denounced Netanyahu's "occupation, destruction and massacres". Erdogan said the Palestinians were "at the top of our agenda" and that it was "our priority to establish a ceasefire as soon as possible".

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Zionists strike Lebanon amid Gaza carnage

GAZA: Negotiations to pause the Zionist-Hamas war headed into a second day in Cairo on Wednesday, as the Zionist entity launched a series of deadly strikes on Lebanon, stoking fears of a wider conflict. Mediators in Egypt were hoping to secure a ceasefire that would see more captives released in exchange for Palestinian prisoners, as the Zionist entity prepares for a full-scale ground incursion into the Gaza Strip's crowded far-southern city of Rafah.

As talks continued in Cairo, the Zionist military has kept up its bom-

bardment of Gaza, with strikes on both Rafah and the southern city of Khan Yunis, where there has been heavy fighting. The health ministry in the territory said Wednesday that 104 people had been killed overnight. At least 28,576 people, mostly women and children, have been killed by the Zionist entity in Gaza, according to the latest health ministry figures.

A Hamas source told AFP that a delegation was headed to Cairo to meet Egyptian and Qatari mediators, after Zionist negotiators held talks with the mediators on Tuesday. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas urged Hamas to "quickly complete a prisoner deal, to spare our Palestinian people from the calamity of another catastrophic event". CIA director William Burns had joined Tuesday's talks.

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GAZA: A girl pushes a cart loaded with a jerrycan while walking past the rubble of a building destroyed in Zionist bombardment in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on Feb 14, 2024. — AFP

Modi opens grand temple in Abu Dhabi

ABU DHABI: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi opened a grand Hindu temple in the United Arab Emirates on Wednesday, capping off a two-day visit to the Muslim nation that is home to around 3.5 million Indians. A day earlier, tens of thousands of Indians filled a football stadium in the capital

Abu Dhabi, cheering on Modi who is seeking a rare third term in India's upcoming general election.

Modi's visit to one of India's largest trading partners showed how the Hindu nationalist has deepened New Delhi's relations with the Middle East. At home, critics say that since Modi took the prime minister's office in 2014, religious polarization has risen and Indian Muslims, who make up 14 percent of the 1.42 billion population, are being marginalized.

The opening of the temple in a Muslim country has garnered

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ABU DHABI: India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurates the largest Hindu temple in the Middle East on Feb 14, 2024. — AFP

Thousands mark 2005 killing of ex-PM Hariri

BEIRUT: Thousands of people gathered in the Lebanese capital Wednesday to commemorate the 2005 assassination of former prime minister Rafik Hariri and urge his son Saad to make a political comeback. Waving the pale-blue flags of Saad Hariri's political party the Future Movement, the crowd clapped and

cheered as he paid his respects at his father's tomb in central Beirut.

"We want Saad Hariri to return to Lebanon, so that security and stability return," said Dina Hleihel, 55, a supporter who was present at the rally. Hariri was thrust into the political limelight following the February 14, 2005 assassination of his father. Ever the reluctant politician, he resigned as prime minister after unprecedented nationwide protests broke out in 2019 demanding the wholesale overhaul of Lebanon's political class. In 2022, he announced he was leaving politics and boycotted a parliamentary election that year. — AFP



BEIRUT: Former Lebanese prime minister Saad Hariri greets supporters after he prayed at the grave of his father, slain prime minister Rafik Hariri, on Feb 14, 2024. — AFP



Zain claims biggest share at 11th Kuwait Creativity Award

Five trophies in recognition of its captivating TVCs and engaging community programs



Dr Nasser Almuhaissen, Madhi Al Khomees and Waleed Al Khashti with Zain's team.



The company claims the biggest share of trophies at the event.

KUWAIT: Zain claimed the biggest share of accolades during the 11th ceremony of the Kuwait Creativity Award, where it was recognized for its captivating TVCs, engaging media content, and successful awareness campaigns and community programs in 2023, becoming the most recognized company in the Award's 11-year history.

The company was awarded on-stage during the special event held under the patronage of H.E. Minister of Information and Culture Abdulrahman Al Mutairi, attended by Undersecretary of the Ministry of Information Dr. Nasser Almuhaissen and a distinguished group of guests including Kuwaiti music icon Abdulaziz Almufarrij (Shadhi Alkhaleej), veteran Kuwaiti anchorman Majed Alshatti, along with actors, artists, diplomats, ambassadors, content creators, influencers, and public figures from the local and regional media scenes.

Zain received a total of five awards: the Direction Award in recognition of its Eid TVC, the Creativity in Awareness Award in recognition of its Ramadan TVC, the Distinguished Entertainment Programs Award for its Eid Play 'Nothing Ever Like Zain', the Creativity in Community Service Award for its partnership with the Kuwait Diving Team, and the Public Relations Personality Award presented to Chief Corporate Affairs and Relations Officer Waleed Al Khashti.

Zain was awarded with the Direction Award for its Eid 2023 TVC in recognition of Director Khalid Alrefaie. The TVC amassed over 70 million



The accolades shed light on Zain's distinguished media and artistic projects.

views online and was produced by Joy Productions and Production House All Over Group. It featured the talented child actress Ritan (Falawla), the Rouh Al Sharq Egyptian choir, and a hologram of the iconic Andaleeb, with lyrics by Menna Al Kiey, vocals by Jassar, vocals supervision by Mohamed Rubat, music composition by Ehab Abdel-

wahed, and music arrangement, mix & master by Wesam Abdelmunem.

The company was also awarded with the Creativity in Awareness Award in recognition of its Ramadan TVC 2023, which shed light on the stigma of mental health. It received over 20 million views online and was produced by Joy Productions and Production

House VIP. The TVC was directed by Samir Aboud, featured Syrian actor Basel Khaiaf and Lebanese actress Razane Jammal, with lyrics by Heba Hamada, music composition by Ehab Abdelwahed, music arrangement by Ahmad Tarek Yehia, and also featured artists Rasha Sharnouby and Ahmed Saidaly.

In addition, Zain was awarded with the Distinguished Entertainment Programs Award for its Eid Play 2023 'Nothing Ever Like Zain', which delivered on its annual promise to bring the most spectacular of theatrical performances to its loyal fans. With daily mesmerizing shows throughout Eid holiday at the Arena Kuwait, the play mixed stunning theatrical performances with the latest technologies to present a show like no other that reflected positive values and featured top local and regional stars. The play was directed by Sameer Aboud and written by Hiba Hamada, with music composed by Ehab Abdulwahed and distribution by Ahmed Tareq Yahya.

The company was also awarded with the Creativity in Community Service Award for its partnership with the Kuwait Diving Team, where it recently presented a new and fully equipped boat to aid the team's marine protection operations in Kuwait. This was the fourth boat presented by Zain to the team throughout their partnership of over 25 years that started back in 1997. The boats were used by the team's volunteers to run and maintain hundreds of marine protection missions, resulting in the removal of thousands of tons of harmful waste, and the protection of tens of thousands of sea creatures.

In my view

The 'People's Forum'

By Dr Nermin Al-Houti

Talking is not limited to uttering words only! It's possible to convey messages without audible dialogues and replace them with audiovisual means instead. This was evident during the "People's Forum". On Saturday, the Cultural Center of Kuwait University organized an international festival that brought together the entire world under one roof, Kuwait University. The university hosted the entire world's cultures under the theme "People's Forum".

The words and lines I write today in this column carry many thanks and gratitude for all officials, organizers and participants in this activity. I also thank the Cultural Center and the Talkclub for their work that resulted in the People's Forum event, portraying a glowing image not only for Kuwait University but for the entire world.

Regarding the organization and reception, although it is their first activity, I confirm that all employees, volunteers and students outdid themselves in terms of hospitality, variety of program preparations and the ease of reaching the guests and visitors who wished to see and participate. We will not forget the program's arrangement, which was in harmony with the 10-hour duration that we did not feel. This indicates that good and outstanding activities, programs and shows were presented for guests and visitors.

The People's Forum was not concentrated in one place; rather, activities were located in more than one site. It was ensured that the visitor could move from one place to another without feeling tired or bored. Instead, the visitor had the desire to explore from one place to another to discover what was next and what other activities the People's Forum had to offer. The entire globe was in the palm of your hand for 10 hours, allowing you to experience many cultures and actively engage with them - that is our world, and that is the message of the People's Forum: People's cohesion through their cultures.

What was presented? This is not the question! Instead, what was not presented in the People's Forum? A list, though containing a lot, included every detail we enjoyed. For example, but not limited to: Recognizing costumes through citizens, performing arts along with its music, cooking art and training along with the language and culture of that kitchen, innovations by many international companies, performances by many Kuwaiti voluntary groups with the state's support for them, outstanding participation by those with special needs, formative and visual arts and the availability of many games and entertainment programs for children.

It was indeed a comprehensive forum for the world's cultures that deserves to be called the "People's Forum". Finally, with the best conclusion: "O you men! Surely we have created you of a male and female and made you tribes and families that you may know each other; surely the most honorable of you with Allah is the one among you most careful (of his duty); surely Allah is knowing, Aware." Holy Quran (49:13).



Group picture with Kuwait Times team.— Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Aliya Mawani looking through Kuwait Times archives with Yusef Abu Ghazaleh.

Canada ambassador visits Kuwait Times

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: Ambassador of Canada to Kuwait Aliya Mawani paid a visit to Kuwait Times and Kuwait News on Wednesday. She was given a tour by Public Relations and CSR manager Jana Alnaqeeb and the Kuwait Times team. The tour started with Alnaqeeb providing Mawani with an introduction to the history of Kuwait Times, founded by Yousuf Al-Alyan, and presenting her a framed copy of the inaugural edition.

The tour continued into the editorial department where reporter Ghadeer Ghloom provided an overview of the work that takes place in this section, in-

cluding writing, translating, editing and page designing. Ghloom also explained the printed reports are transformed into summarized video reports to align with Kuwait Times' digital vision.

Alnaqeeb then guided Mawani to the archives room, where content creator Yusef Abu Ghazaleh took her on a journey into the past to explore historical news reports. Abu Ghazaleh also prepared a set of questions from the archives, testing Mawani's information in a fun and entertaining manner, impressing the team with her quick and accurate responses.

In the studio, content creator Zainab Dashti discussed the work that goes into producing content for Kuwait Times, including interviewing school students and creating engaging social media content. Mawani extended her congratulations to HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the people of Kuwait on this month's national occasions.



Aliya Mawani holds Kuwait Times newspaper.

Workshop tackles cancer in children

KUWAIT: A Cancer Aware Nation (CAN) board member said a workshop was held under the theme 'You are the Apple of Our Eyes'

at the CAN Training Center at the Sabah Health Zone in cooperation with the Director of School Health Department, Dr. Wafaa Al-Kandary, and the head of the awareness program at the Health Ministry, Dr. Ghaidaa Mandani. The workshop was presented by pediatrician Maha Buresli. The subject was about how to deal with cancer patients in schools and how to discover some initial

signs of cancer in children. The Department of Children's Blood Cancer at the National Bank of Kuwait Specialized Children Hospital receives around 100-120 cases per year. The percentage of blood cancer patients is around 40 percent; most of them are under 12 years old, and 52 percent of them are citizens.



Amir's Bahrain visit mirrors depth of amity and historical bonds

Bahrain's top lawmaker hails positive outcome

MANAMA: Bahrain's top lawmaker, Ahmad Al-Musallam, hailed the positive outcome of the visit by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to Bahrain's King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa. The visit represents a major milestone in the ongoing collaboration between Bahrain and Kuwait. Speaker Al-Musallam said in a press release. He expressed deep pride and appreciation for the strong historical ties and enduring fraternal relations between the leaderships and people of both countries.

Al-Musallam appreciated the consistent commitment to strengthening the strategic partnership, especially in the economic and investment sectors. He highlighted a key high-level directive, emphasizing the formation of executive teams between the interior ministries of both nations to foster bilateral relationships and ensure security and stability in the region. He confirmed the alignment of supportive

stances on Gulf, Arab, Islamic, and international issues, emphasizing a shared commitment to supporting global efforts for security and stability.

Moreover, Al-Musallam affirmed the parliamentary endorsement of the points highlighted in the joint statement and the official discussions, which covered recent developments at both regional and international levels. His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah undertook the state visit to Bahrain earlier today.

Shared destiny

Bahraini Minister of Information Dr. Ramzan bin Abdullah Al-Noaimi said the visit of His Highness the Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, to the Kingdom of Bahrain mirrored the depth of amity and the historical bonds between both nations. Bahrain and Kuwait believe deeply that they have a shared destiny, and therefore they work

to strengthen mutually beneficial cooperation, the minister said in statements to KUNA on Tuesday.

"The partnership between both nations keeps strengthening thanks to care by King Hamad bin Isa and His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal," Dr Al-Noaimi said, noting that both leaders are keen on opening new horizons for cooperation to realize the common aspirations and objectives. The summit talks held by both leaders reflected a shared long-standing desire to expand cooperation and integration, he pointed out.

"The visit of His Highness the Amir of Kuwait falls within the framework of top-level visit exchanges by the leaderships of both countries, aiming to enhance cooperation in all areas and coordinate stances vis-à-vis regional and international issues." It will give momentum to cooperation in addressing regional challenges. Dr. Al-Noaimi said, affirming that both countries follow identical foreign policies that are

supportive of peace, security, stability, and development on a global scale.

He renewed the commitment of the Bahraini government to push to a new height the relationship with the government of His Highness the Prime Minister of Kuwait, Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, and realizing the common aspirations. The two countries signed several documents on joint ventures and cooperation in the political, economic, social, and cultural fields, which opened new horizons for bilateral relations.

Dr. Al-Noaimi spoke highly of "the wise diplomacy" adopted by Kuwait's leadership, which focuses on strengthening the GCC joint action, empowering the GCC to realize the aspirations of the peoples of its member countries, and promoting humanitarian action across the world. He expressed hope that Kuwait will continue to enjoy welfare, prosperity, and progress under its wise leadership. — KUNA



Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS) holds a workshop on sustainable agriculture in Kuwait in cooperation with the Spanish Center for the Development of Industrial Technology (CDTI).



KFAS holds workshop on sustainable energy

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS) organized a workshop on sustainable agriculture in Kuwait in cooperation with the Spanish Center for the Development of Industrial Technology (CDTI). The program is aimed at identifying modern methods in the field of sustainable agriculture so as to improve agricultural products and enhance food security in the country.

The workshop, which was held at the Foundation's building, reviewed the best practices used globally to enhance the quality of local agriculture, in addition to highlighting local and international success stories. Participants discussed opportunities for co-

operation with the Spanish Center to contribute to the preservation of natural resources and enhance economic profitability in order to help the agricultural sector in Kuwait.

The workshop was attended by the Spanish Ambassador to Kuwait, Miguel Aguilar, and a number of officials of the Foundation. The Director General of the Spanish Center for the Development of Industrial Technology, Pilar Carrato, delivered a speech in which she indicated her aspirations to enhance cooperation between the two countries and keep pace with global developments in the agricultural fields.

The workshop was attended by a number of researchers, academics, farmers, and interested parties from the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research, Kuwait University, the Public Authority for Agriculture Affairs and Fish Resources, the Environment Public Authority, the Kuwait Farmers Union, and a number of private sector companies.

The workshop dealt with topics presented by several local and international bodies related to ver-

tical farming, soilless agriculture, smart agriculture, ways to develop organic agricultural products and fertilizers, and modern methods of farm management. Experts in the agricultural fields from Spanish companies, researchers from the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research and Kuwait University, and a number of pioneers of local companies presented the topics of the workshop, most notably: Green Life, Burgan Agricultural Company, Techno Green, Beyond Organic, and MD and Tech.

The Spanish Center for the Development of Industrial Technology (CDTI) is a public entity under the Ministry of Science, Innovation, and Higher Education that aims to develop technology in Spain by providing loans and other financial assistance to support research and development projects in the private sector. The center is a focal point to enhance the competitiveness of Spanish companies by strengthening their technological position and facilitating the delivery of innovative solutions to the market for all sectors, technologies, and civilian-purpose fields.

News in Brief

CTBTO hails Kuwait

KUWAIT: Executive Secretary of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO), Robert Floyd, commended on Wednesday the cooperation between the CTBTO and Kuwait regarding the ban on nuclear tests and the organization's goals. In a seminar held at the Saud Al-Nasser Al-Sabah Diplomatic Institute titled (Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty) as a part of its cultural training season, he lauded Kuwait's full support for the organization. He praised Kuwait's contribution and its network of observation and monitoring stations, as well as its valuable role in supporting the organization's effort to prevent nuclear tests. — KUNA

KRCS' Ramadan campaign

KUWAIT: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) announced on Wednesday that it will launch its annual campaign (Ramadan Al-Khair) on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan in 13 countries around the world. In a statement to KUNA, Chairperson of Kuwait Red Crescent Society Dr Hilal Al-Sayer affirmed that Kuwait's humanitarian principles stand firm in supporting brothers and friends with their different situations and helping the needy, especially in the holy month. He said that the annual Iftar (fast-breaking) campaign aims to fulfill the needs of the fasting poor by distributing meals, baskets, and banquets. He noted that these efforts reflect Kuwait's leading humanitarian role and the directives of its political leadership to help aid poor families around the world. He added that Ramadan projects this year include 13 different countries in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. — KUNA

17,269 expats work in co-ops

KUWAIT: Minister of Social Affairs, Family Affairs, and Childhood Sheikh Feras Al-Sabah said that the percentage of citizens working in cooperative societies is 14.6 percent, pointing out that there are about 2,533 citizens compared to 17,269 expatriates. Regarding the measures taken to Kuwaitize jobs in cooperative societies, the minister explained that the "Fakharna" platform for Kuwaitization of supervisory jobs in societies was launched in cooperation with the Public Authority for Manpower. He pointed out that those who registered on the platform are screened during the specified period to ensure that the legal conditions stipulated in Ministerial Resolution 68/2023 are met. Also, there will be personal interviews before a committee. The committee will evaluate the candidates.

Extracorporeal Life Support Organization conference launched

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Chairwoman of the Departments of Anesthesia, Intensive Care and Pain Management Dr Huda Al-Foudary announced the launch of the Extracorporeal Life Support Organization conference for Southwest Asia and Africa on Feb 15-17 under the patronage of Health Minister Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi. Dr

Foudary said Kuwait hosts this international conference for the first time due to the high status Kuwait enjoys in the medical field and through the ECMO centers certified by the international organization.

Dr Foudary considered ECMO as one of the advanced services presented to those with acute cardiorespiratory failure at the intensive care unit, providing an opportunity for patients with critical cases. She mentioned 500 patients were successfully treated in previous years since the start of the service in Kuwait in 2017. She further explained that the conference, themed "Crossing Boundaries", will discuss various aspects of extracorporeal life support through 120 lectures by 80 elite experts and consultants in the field of intensive care for adults and children worldwide.

Dr Foudary also highlighted that there will be seven workshops on the sidelines of the conference, focusing on the care of ECMO patients and dealing with urgent cases through a simulation system. Additionally, she mentioned that 120 members of medical teams will be trained in caring for ECMO patients by experts from the international organization during the conference.



Dr Huda Al-Foudary

MoH launches 79 fully equipped ambulances

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi launched a new fleet of 79 fully equipped ambulances on Wednesday, including 10 vehicles for rough terrain. Addressing the launching ceremony, Dr. Al-Awadhi expressed his contentment with the availability of these service vehicles and their part of the emergency healthcare system with the appropriate trained crew. He said that an expected 100 more ambulances will join the emergency healthcare system throughout 2024, adding that these ambulances will be supplied with the latest and most innovative devices and will be linked to the current electronic system.

India seeks enhanced partnership with Kuwait in education

KUWAIT: The Embassy of India on Wednesday hosted a seminar on 'India's Higher Education Landscape' at the Embassy premises showcasing the advancements and future prospects of Indian higher education sector and exploring possibilities for increased collaboration between Kuwait and India. The seminar also discussed possibilities of setting up campuses of Indian universities in Kuwait, enrollment of Kuwaiti students in Indian universities, enrollment of Indian students in Kuwaiti universities, recruitment of faculty members and exchange programs between universities of both countries.

Lana Othman Al-Ayyar, CEO, Al-Rayan Holding Co, attended the seminar as the chief guest and Noura Al-Ghanim, chairperson of Union of Private Schools in Kuwait, attended the event as guest of honor. Indian Ambassador Dr Adarsh Swaika, Executive Director at QS World University Rankings and author of the book "India's Knowledge Supremacy: The New Dawn" Dr Ashwin Fernandes, and Vice Chancellor of Symbiosis International University, Pune, Dr Ramakrishna Raman participated in the seminar, a press release issued by the Indian embassy said.

The speakers said India's new education policy 2020 was a game-changer in bringing about a

On his part, the Health Ministry's Assistant Undersecretary for Engineering Affairs, Ibrahim Al-Nahham, stated this launch comes with the ministry's plan to introduce the ambulances in cooperation with both the department of transportation and the department of medical emergencies. These vehicles will be examined by their United States (US) manufacturer and will be equipped with state-of-the-art specifications.

Furthermore, Director of Medical Emergencies Dr. Ahmad Al-Shatti remarked that the launch of the ambulance fleet is a historical moment in the medical emergency field, which helped reach a number of 281 vehicles. The digitalization of the ambulance fleet will aid hospital emergency medical team interventions during times of crises, Dr. Al-Shatti explained, adding that through these new innovative specifications added to the ambulance fleet, emergency medicine will progress further and reach new heights in Kuwait. — KUNA



A seminar on 'India's Higher Education Landscape' is being inaugurated at the Indian Embassy premises on Wednesday.

transformational change in the educational sector of India. India is going to become a globally important education hub in the near future. The education sector in India is estimated to be worth \$117 billion and expected to reach \$313 billion by financial year 2030. India has one of the largest networks of higher education systems in the world -- 45,000-degree colleges, over 1,000 universities and around 1,500 top institutes, the speakers pointed out.

Indian Universities are successfully setting up campuses abroad including premier institutions like Indian Institutes of Technology in Abu Dhabi and Tanzania; Birla Institute of Technology, Pilani and

Amity University (Dubai); Sharda and Sambroom Universities (Uzbekistan) etc. India is one of the leading countries in patent filing and publication of research papers in international journals and foreign universities like Deakin University is setting up IB-Cat GIFT city in Gujarat, the release added.

Around 350 people attended the event including representatives of Kuwait University, Kuwait College of Science and Technology, AUM, faculty members of other Universities in Kuwait, principals of Indian and international schools, prominent members of Indian community, teachers and students, the release said.

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Burgan Bank sponsors FERYA culinary event

KUWAIT: As part of its comprehensive social responsibility program, Burgan Bank concluded its sponsorship of the FERYA culinary experience by Fohgha App, Bader Al Shatti (BDR) and Jassem Al Jarki. The event, which spanned two days, took place at Al-Assima Rooftop, attracting a large turnout of food enthusiasts. This sponsorship comes as part of Burgan Bank's celebration of Kuwaiti's multi-faceted lifestyle, including its rich food culture. It also comes as an extension of the Bank's support towards local chefs, entrepreneurs, and owners of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) who continue to contribute to the fast and consistent growth of Kuwait's food and beverage (F&B) landscape.

"Food is one of the key pillars of any culture around the world and an integral element of Kuwait's rich heritage," said Talal Hamed AlAyar, Senior Officer – Corporate and CSR Communications at Burgan Bank. "As part of our continued efforts to highlight the many unique aspects of the Kuwaiti culture, we were honored to support and sponsor the FERYA food event with its numerous engaging culinary experiences. We firmly believe that events such as FERYA are excellent platforms for some of Kuwait's most talented chefs and culinary artists who continue to innovate new ways to preserve the country's rich culinary culture by encouraging more people to learn about it and engage with it."

"Kuwait is a country that is constantly bustling with engaging cultural events that not only generate excitement in the city, but also bring people closer to one another and to their shared heritage," said Hamad Al Otaibi, Co-Founder of Fohgha. "We are hon-



Talal Hamed AlAyar

ored to be collaborating with leading entities such as Burgan Bank, whose unwavering support enables us to cover a wider spectrum of cultural events and present them in a quality that is fitting of our national and cultural heritage."

Throughout the event, 13 of Kuwait's top chefs prepared a wide range of delectable foods, representing their restaurants and most unique signature dishes. Visitors were also able to pre-book The Talks with recognized chefs, such as Faisal Al Nashmi, Chef and Co-owner of Street Food Group, Table Otto, and other local favorites, and Nouf Al Mutawa, founder of The Chocolate Bar. True to the spirit of the food culture, FERYA offered its visitors an authentic com-

munal experience whereby all food enthusiasts got to share the same table, encouraging conversation in a green, sustainability-themed set-up.

It serves to note that Burgan Bank is a longstanding supporter of Kuwait's culinary culture and F&B industry, with previous sponsorships including the Bank's support of the notable HORECA exhibition, which continues to play a central role in the development and growth of Kuwait's F&B market. The Bank also continues to reinforce the domestic entrepreneurial culture by developing banking products and services that cater to SME owners and entrepreneurs, as well as sponsoring events such as Farwah Expo and Ooredoo SME Marketplace.

KUNA partakes in FANA development meeting

DUBAI: The Federation of Arab News Agencies (FANA) held a development meeting on Tuesday led by the Director-General of the UAE's News Agency (WAM) and the head of the federation, Mohammad Al Rayssi, in the presence of Fatima Al-Salem, FANA vice president and Director General of KUNA. Speaking to KUNA in a statement, Al Rayssi said the gathering, which also featured head of Bahrain news agency (BNA) Abdullah Buhejji and FANA Secretary General Fraid Ayar, discussed means of enhancing cooperation and coordination among FANA member states and sharing expertise and knowledge as well as developing technical abilities.

Al Rayssi noted that the meeting also covered a mechanism for developing FANA action in order to provide best practices among Arab and regional news agencies. It is the first meeting after holding the FANA General Assembly in November 2023, during the activities of the Global Media Congress 2023 in Abu Dhabi, he stated. The federation seeks to improve services provided by Arab news agencies to the public in light of rapid developments in media and technology, in addition to determining new strategies to help the agencies keep pace with happenings around them, he elaborated.

Al Rayssi affirmed FANA's commitment to making joint efforts with its members as teamwork,



with the aim of achieving "our goals and boosting our status" as well as making a prominent position in the world media arena. The FANA, which includes 18 Arab countries, aims to foster professional bonds among member states, transmit Arab

news inside and outside, and encourage holding periodical meetings. WAM was handed over the rotating presidency from the Saudi Press Agency (SPA) during the 50th FANA General Assembly conference in Abu Dhabi. — KUNA

King Salman Centre honors KRCS for its humanitarian role

RIYADH: King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre honored on Tuesday what it described as successful partners and donors for their contributions during the year 2023, including the Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS).

Deputy Chairman of the KRCS, Anwar Al-Hasawi, emphasized in his remarks to KUNA his gratitude to King Salman's Center for this initiative, which inspires the rest of human aid and relief organizations, ensuring that every corner of the world receives the necessary relief.

Al-Hasawi praised King Salman's Center for offering relief to more than 95 countries, saying that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was always at the forefront of relieving the afflicted. The ceremony was held in Crowne Plaza, Riyadh, and was attended by the King's Consultant and General Supervisor of King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre, Dr. Abdullah Al-Rabeeah. — KUNA



Deputy Chairman of the KRCS Anwar Al-Hasawi



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KUWAIT: The Environment Public Authority, in cooperation with the Kuwait Society for Geosciences, held a workshop on "Applications of Artificial Intelligence in Earth and Environmental Sciences."

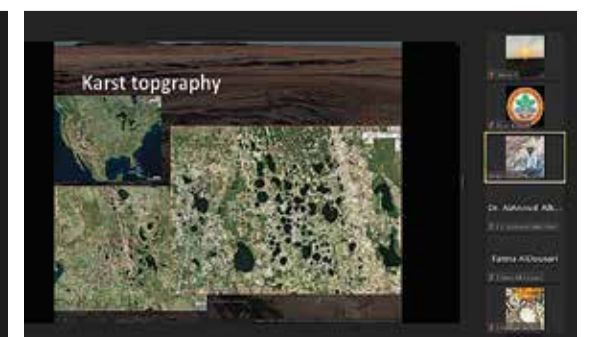
EPA and Kuwait Society for Geosciences organize AI workshop

KUWAIT: The Environment Public Authority, in cooperation with the Kuwait Society for Geosciences, organized a workshop on "Applications of Artificial Intelligence in Earth and Environmental Sciences." 35 teachers participated in the event. Jinan Behzad, Secretary-General of the Environment Society, confirmed that the workshop on "Artificial Intelligence Applications in Earth and Environmental Sciences" comes as a continuation of the role of the "Green Schools" program in awareness and education.

She indicated that the workshop (via the Zoom app) would reach the largest number of

participants. Behzad stated that the use of artificial intelligence in earth and environmental sciences includes a wide range of fields and applications and provides innovative solutions to understand the earth, its characteristics, and nature through the "Google Earth" program.

Dr. Muhammad Naqi presented a scientific lecture and applied models on the uses of artificial intelligence in the fields of earth and environmental sciences. He indicated that the "Google Earth" program offers many uses in the field of geological sciences due to its ability to display aerial images, terrain, and geological data in an integrated manner. "It provided rock analysis, providing accurate estimates of rock properties and mineral and geological forecasts. It also explored different geographical areas on the surface of the earth and identified terrain, mountain ranges, and volcanoes in a study of the city area," he added.





New Pakistan coalition echoes same old problems

Nepali mercenaries die for Russia in Ukraine

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KHAN YUNIS: In this file photo, a man inspects the damage in a room following Zionist bombardment at Nasser hospital in the southern Gaza Strip on December 17, 2023. — AFP

Danger at key Gaza hospital

Zionist military surrounds Nasser hospital, forces displaced people to leave under gunfire: Witness

GAZA: Medics are sounding the alarm at southern Gaza's Nasser hospital, where a nurse said snipers are killing people, sewage has flooded the emergency room and drinking water has run out. "It was a black night, with strikes and explosions all night," Mohammed Al-Astal, a nurse in the emergency department, told AFP on Wednesday.

Astal said the facility, located in Khan Yunis, has been "besieged" by the Zionist military for a month, with constant danger and no food or drinking water left. "At night, tanks opened heavy fire on the hospital and snipers on the roofs of buildings surrounding Nasser hospital opened fire and killed three displaced people," the 39-year-old nurse said.

He said dozens of young men and some women were detained in Tuesday by Zionist troops, who also "forced the displaced people to leave under gunfire". Gaza's health ministry reported that thousands of people, including patients, have been made to leave the hospital.

The Zionist military said soldiers "opened a secure route to evacuate the civilian population taking shelter in the area of the Nasser hospital", without commenting on the allegations of sniper fire. In a statement, the military said it "does not intend to evacuate patients and medical staff" and troops have been "thoroughly instructed" to protect civilians and medical facilities. Zionist forces operating across the Gaza Strip have repeatedly

raided hospitals, which are granted special protection under the laws of war.

'Critically important' hospital
World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said on Wednesday he was "alarmed" by reports from Nasser hospital, which he described as the "backbone of the health system in southern Gaza".

The agency has been denied access to the hospital in recent days and has lost contact with staff there, the WHO chief wrote on X, formerly Twitter. There have also been reports that the fighting in the area has destroyed warehouses filled with medical supplies, which the WHO said served hos-

pitals in central and southern Gaza.

The agency's envoy for the Palestinian territories, Rik Peepkorn, described Nasser as "a key hospital for all of Gaza". "We cannot lose that hospital ... this hospital is critically important," Peepkorn told journalists.

The United Nations said a week ago there are no fully functioning hospitals left in Gaza, with only 13 out of 36 across the territory working at some capacity. Hospitals have been overwhelmed by more than four months of war, during which more than 68,200 people have been wounded according to the latest Gaza health ministry toll.

The ministry says at least 28,576 people, mostly women and children, have

been killed during the Zionist entity's assault on the Palestinian territory since October 7, when Hamas attacked the entity, resulting in the deaths of about 1,160 people, mostly civilians.

Gaza's health ministry warned on Tuesday that the situation at Nasser was "catastrophic", with staff unable to move bodies to the mortuary because of the risks involved. "Healthcare workers, patients and companions in the complex are in grave danger," the ministry said, and reported that multiple people had been shot. Despite the persistent peril, nurse Astal said he did not want to leave the hospital. "We serve the wounded and the sick, this is my duty — and I won't give up even if they kill us." — AFP

'Parallel reality' in Turkmenistan's media landscape

ASHGABAT, Turkmenistan: "We know about Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. But we can't access them — everything here is blocked," said Byashim Ishangulyev, a fruit seller in the Turkmen capital of Ashgabat. To keep information from the outside world hidden from its citizens, Turkmenistan, one of the world's most closed and isolated countries, exercises almost total control over the internet.

Getting round the ban is no small feat. "Some people manage to connect to a VPN, but that's only temporary, it will also be blocked," 19-year-old Ishangulyev told AFP at a market in Ashgabat, referring to a Virtual Private Network. "Plus, the Internet is slow. So, if somebody manages to download an interesting video, clip or film, we all watch it together," he said.

Despite the effectiveness of the Turkmen firewall, the regime is constantly stepping up measures to prevent outside information seeping into the energy-rich Central Asian nation. President Serdar Berdimukhamedov last month announced his intention to "strengthen the country's cybersecurity".

Berdimukhamedov, in power since 2022 — the country's third leader since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 — has followed in his predecessors' footsteps in exerting maximum control. His father, Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov, previously ruled the ex-Soviet country for 15 years with an iron fist.

'Parallel reality'

Alongside social media, services like WhatsApp, Viber, Signal and Telegram are also blocked. Instead, Turkmenistan has Bizbarde, a local messenger under the government's control. For video, the authorities have launched Belet, a YouTube alternative purged of any content — both news and entertainment — that could show what life is like beyond the isolated country's borders. "There is no media landscape," said Ruslan Myatiev, whose Turkmen.News site is blocked inside the country.

At home, the Turkmen population see nothing but "propaganda to promote the cult of personality of the



ASHGABAT, Turkmenistan: In this illustration photo a Turkmen man reads a copy of the "Neutral Turkmenistan" newspaper. — AFP

Berdimukhamedovs — father and son," the Netherlands-based Myatiev said. "To prevent this parallel reality created by the media from collapsing, the rulers block the internet," he added.

All media outlets inside the country are state-owned. They only broadcast official news, reporting heavily on people offering their praise and thanks to the Berdimukhamedov regime. "Turkmen television is very boring, not informative, with the same shows over and over again," said Yusup Bakhshiyev, a 38-year-old civil servant who lives in the capital.

He used to be able to watch some foreign channels via a satellite link. But that is no longer possible. "Some local officials came to my house and told me to remove the satellite dish, as it was spoiling the architecture of the town," he told AFP.

After that, he subscribed to Turkmen cable TV. "The state controls the information and it receives income from the subscription," he said. Some Western channels — including France 24, BBC and Euronews — are authorized. But in a country where English is hardly spoken, their audience is minimal.

'Worst of the worst'

On their TV screens, Turkmen see endless footage of President Berdimukhamedov in action — reprimanding sheepish government ministers, planting trees in the desert, or receiving rapturous applause. His father, who has the official title of Hero-Protector — or "Arkadag" in Turkmen — maintains immense privileges and is still the subject of an intense personality cult.

He is often filmed at sports events, holding weapons or playing instruments. Sometimes the absurdity spills towards the extreme. The Arkadag newspaper recently reported that Gurbanguly travelled to Arkadag — a town named in his honor — to congratulate the players of the local football team, named Arkadag.

Behind the carefully controlled headlines lies a country with a bleak human rights record. The Freedom House NGO ranks Turkmenistan among the "worst of the worst" for political freedoms and civil liberties. It scores just two of 100 possible points in its rankings — lower than North Korea. Turkmenistan is also bottom of the Reporters Without Borders' press freedom index. — AFP

Spain, Ireland seek EU check on Zionist human rights record

MADRID: Spain and Ireland on Wednesday asked the European Union to "urgently" examine whether the Zionist entity is complying with its human rights obligations in Gaza under an accord that links rights to trade ties.

The Spanish and Irish prime ministers Pedro Sanchez and Leo Varadkar sent a letter to the European Commission urging it to "act urgently on the Gaza crisis". "Given the critical situation in Rafah, Ireland and Spain have just requested the European Commission urgently review whether (the Zionist entity) is complying with its obligations to respect human rights in Gaza," Sanchez wrote on X, formerly Twitter. More than 1.4 million Palestinians are trapped in the southern city of Rafah as Zionist troops prepare for a full-scale ground operation that has triggered international alarm over the potential for mass casualties. The Zionist entity's assault on Gaza has been ongoing for four months.

In the letter, the two leaders demand "an urgent review of whether (the Zionist entity) is complying with its obligations, including under the EU/ (Zionist entity) Association Agreement, which makes respect for human rights and democratic principles an essential element of the relationship," it says. The association agreement is the main basis for the bloc's trade ties with the entity. Signed in 1995, it came into force in 2000.

'Appropriate measures'

"If it considers that (the Zionist entity) is in breach", the Commission should propose "appropriate measures to the Council to consider", the letter said. The European Commission confirmed it had received the letter and would "look into it", spokeswoman Arianna Podesta told reporters.

Foreign affairs spokeswoman Nabila Massrali was not immediately able to say how the Commission would review the human rights element of the agreement but said there "must be accountability for any violation of international law". The EU, she said, consistently stressed the importance of protecting civilians and deplors the loss of life, with such messages passed on "in its contacts with the (Zionist) authorities". — AFP

International

Nepali mercenaries die for Russia in Ukraine

Lured by promise of citizenship, money, Nepalis risk lives fighting others' wars

KATHMANDU, Nepal: Nepali mercenaries are fighting for Russia in Ukraine, lured to kill far from their Himalayan homeland by promises of a passport and cash, but wounded returnees warn anyone tempted to join the war: "Do not come."

While Nepali soldiers-for-hire can bank in a month nearly double what they could earn in a year back home, conditions are brutal and many have been killed or wounded. "I watched my friends die in front of me," said Surya Sharma, who asked to use a pseudonym for legal reasons. "Nepalis going probably cannot even imagine how horrific the war is."

Shortly after the 24-year-old underwent basic training with Russian forces, his unit was attacked on their way to a frontline in eastern Ukraine. "When the bombs and bullets were raining, I thought my life was ending, that that was it," he said. "I was there to die."

Combining tough Himalayan terrain with grinding poverty, Nepal has long been a source of ferocious soldiers to fight others' wars, with the British army's Gurkhas the best-known example. But it is only legal for Nepalis to sign up for combat with a foreign military if there is a government agreement in place — which only applies to Britain and India.

From early on in its war in Ukraine, Russia has used mercenaries, including the paramilitary group Wagner, before its aborted mutiny last June. Neither Russia nor Ukraine will provide figures for how many foreign fighters are in their militaries, nor the number they are holding as prisoners of war.

But the Nepali government says more than 200 of the country's citizens have enlisted in the Russian army since it invaded Ukraine two years ago. Sharma believes there could be 10 times as many, including students, ex-soldiers and even former Maoist combatants. "We were among the early ones to join, but now there are many Nepalis, there must be 2,500 to 3,000," he said.

At least 12 Nepalis have been killed and another five are prisoners of war in Ukraine, the foreign ministry in Kathmandu said. Returnees say the true number of dead is also much higher, and according to local media Nepalis have fought for Ukraine too.

To attract fighters, Russian President Vladimir

Putin has offered Russian citizenship — which allows recipients to work — on top of monthly salaries as high as \$2,200. That tempts some in a country with a GDP per capita of little more than \$1,300, according to the World Bank — one of the lowest in Asia.

'Like a movie'

Videos by Nepali recruits undergoing military training in Russia started to surface on TikTok last year, prompting one former veteran to enlist in July. "It is a war, and we are taking a risk," the 39-year-old told AFP, asking not to be named because of the illegality of his actions.

The man, who had served for more than a decade in Nepal's army before working for the police in Dubai, accumulated about \$15,000 in six months before being wounded and having to return to Nepal, and is using it to build a house. "If there were good employment opportunities in Nepal, no one would go," he added.

Sharma, the 24-year-old, suffers searing pain every step he takes from the metal fragments buried in his legs. He says he was duped by a Nepali agent. Every year, hundreds of thousands of Nepalis seek employment abroad — 400,000 officially, many others illicitly — and many pay agents thousands of dollars to facilitate their journeys.

Sharma borrowed money to go to Russia on a student visa but discovered he was not allowed to work, and the only job he found was to fight. "I had loans to pay at home and couldn't send money," he said in his rented room in Kathmandu.

Despite having no prior military experience, he "chose to join the army because I had heard that the money was good. It was not because I wanted to, but my situation forced me to." He underwent a medical check-up before two months of basic training. "I was employed with the government, but I've heard there are Nepalis fighting in private forces too," he said.

The recruits — 15 of them Nepalis — woke at six to start the drills. "We learnt firing positions, how to make bunkers and how to target drones," he said. But "the language is also a problem", he added. "We cannot understand the instructions they give, and in

the Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement. It added that the military was "strengthening surveillance and vigilance, and closely watching for any additional signs and activities from North Korea".

Earlier this week, North Korea announced it had tested a new control system for a multiple rocket launcher it said would have an "increased" battlefield role. The cruise missile launches have prompted speculation from experts that it is testing the weapons before shipping them to Moscow for use in Ukraine.

Pyongyang and Moscow have bolstered ties in recent months, with leader Kim Jong Un making a rare trip to Russia to meet President Vladimir Putin in September. Seoul and Washington have accused the North of supplying Russia with weapons in exchange for technical support for Kim's nascent satellite program, which would violate a raft of UN sanctions on both regimes.

Unlike their ballistic counterparts, the testing of cruise missiles is not banned under current UN sanctions on Pyongyang. Cruise missiles tend to be jet-propelled and fly at a lower altitude than more sophisticated ballistic missiles, making them harder to detect and intercept.

Mohammad on Wednesday visited the Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha), where he received a copy of Nazaha's midterm report from its Chairman Abdulaziz Al-Ibrahim. During his visit, HH the Prime Minister also submitted his financial disclosure records to the authority according to law no. 2 of 2016 on the establishment of the Anti-Corruption Authority. In a press statement, the premier commended Nazaha's role in safeguarding the country's funds, combating corruption and applying the law on everyone.

be allowed across with her bandaged-up sons. Pressure has grown on Egypt to open its border to Palestinian civilians, hundreds of thousands of whom have sought shelter in makeshift camps by the border where they face outbreaks of disease and a scarcity of food and water. "For 100 days we have entered the crossing and begged them to let us cross, or to do anything to help us," Habiba Nakhalah said.

US President Joe Biden has said civilians in Rafah "need to be protected", calling them "exposed and vulnerable". But Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has insisted "complete victory" cannot be achieved without the elimination of Hamas' last battalions in Rafah.

Fears were also growing over southern Gaza's Nasser hospital, where a nurse said snipers were killing people, sewage had flooded the emergency room and drinking water had run out. Mohammed Al-Astal said the facility had been "besieged" for a month, with no food or drinking water left. "At night, tanks opened heavy fire on the hospital and snipers on the roofs of buildings surrounding Nasser hospital opened fire and killed three displaced people," the 39-year-old nurse said.

The World Health Organization said it had been unable to contact the besieged hospital for weeks. Rik Peepkorn, the UN agency's representative in the Palestinian territories, said requests to assess and restock the hospital with medical supplies had been denied, adding that "without support... this hospital might become non-functional too". Peepkorn said Nasser was "a key hospital for all of Gaza. We cannot lose that hospital... (it) is critically important".

Some Gazans in Rafah were already packing up their belongings in readiness to move but others vowed to stay put, fearing even greater misery and starvation in the bombed-out hometowns they fled. Ahlam Abu Assi said she "would rather die" in Rafah than return to the famine-like conditions facing relatives who stayed in Gaza City. "My son and his children have nothing to eat. They cook a handful of rice and save it for the next day," she said. "My grandson cries from hunger." —AFP



KATHMANDU, Nepal: Surya Sharma, who joined the Russian army as a mercenary to fight in the invasion of Ukraine and asked to use a pseudonym for legal reasons, walks along a street in Kathmandu on February 6, 2024. — AFP

the battleground that can be dangerous."

Sent to the frontlines in Ukraine, Sharma's unit — mostly Russian, with six Nepalis — was ambushed even before they reached Kupiansk in the east. Explosions killed several of Sharma's comrades and he was wounded in the legs and hand. "Sometimes it felt like a movie."

He spent months in hospital before deserting as he neared recovery to seek help from Nepal's embassy in Moscow. "I just couldn't return" to the front, he said. "So, I took a risk to return to Nepal, thinking I will either go to jail or home."

'Do not come'

Nepal has banned its citizens from working in Russia or Ukraine in any capacity, to try to prevent their recruitment. At least 12 people have been ar-

"It is believed that North Korea exported large quantities of multiple rocket launchers to Russia last year," Ahn Chan-il, a defector-turned-researcher who runs the World Institute for North Korea Studies, told AFP. He added that there may have been quality issues with some of the exported weapons and that the recent spate of testing could be leader Kim "taking action to address the issue".

'Put an end'

Kim repeated last week that Pyongyang would not hesitate to "put an end" to South Korea if attacked, calling Seoul the North's "most dangerous and first enemy state and invariable arch-enemy". In January, North Korea fired an artillery barrage near two South Korean border islands, prompting a live-fire drill by the South and evacuation orders for residents.

South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol has vowed a strong response if Pyongyang attacks, calling on his military to "act first, report later" if provoked. The hawkish Yoon has bolstered defense cooperation with the United States and Japan since coming to office in 2022, including expanding joint drills, to

rested in Nepal for sending people to fight for Russia. The men are often taken via India or the United Arab Emirates and taught elaborate lies to dupe authorities, say police.

"Nepal is a country that believes in non-alignment and in peace," Nepal's Foreign Minister NP Saud told AFP. "We do not have an agreement with Russia and have requested immediate return of those people." The Russian embassy in Kathmandu did not respond to requests for comment.

Speaking to AFP by phone from his Russian hospital bed, one wounded Nepali warned his countrymen to resist the lure. "No matter how much you prepare, it does not work when the bombs fall and the drones attack," said the 27-year-old. "I request others — do not come." — AFP

North Korea fires cruise missiles off east coast

SEOUL: North Korea fired multiple cruise missiles Wednesday, Seoul's military said, part of a string of weapons tests this year that have accompanied increasingly aggressive rhetoric from leader Kim Jong Un. So far this year, Kim has declared South Korea his country's "principal enemy", jettisoned agencies dedicated to reunification and outreach, and threatened war over "even 0.001 mm" of territorial infringement.

Pyongyang has also ramped up weapons tests, including cruise missiles, an "underwater nuclear weapon system" and a solid-fueled hypersonic ballistic missile. "Our military detected several unknown cruise missiles over the waters northeast of Wonsan around 09:00 today (1200 GMT) and South Korea-US intelligence authorities are conducting a detailed analysis,"

Cabinet shuns Assembly...

Continued from Page 1

government's no-show will extend to the next regular session on March 5.

Meanwhile, HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr

Zionists strike Lebanon amid...

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with David Barnea, head of the Zionist entity's Mossad intelligence service, which Egyptian media said had been mostly "positive". US National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby described the negotiations as "constructive and moving in the right direction".

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who was in Cairo Wednesday for talks with President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi, criticized the Zionist entity for "its policy of occupation, destruction and massacre". With regional tensions high, the Zionist entity launched strikes on Lebanon hours after fire from Lebanon wounded seven people in the Zionist entity, according to the Magen David Adom emergency service.

The strikes in south Lebanon killed four civilians including two children and wounded nine other people, a Lebanese security source told AFP, speaking on condition of anonymity. Since the outbreak of the Hamas-Zionist war on Oct 7, more than 240 people have been killed in Lebanon, most of them Hezbollah fighters but also including over 30 civilians. Hezbollah has traded near-daily fire with Zionist troops since the outbreak of the Gaza war, with tens of thousands displaced on both sides.

The potential for mass civilian casualties in Rafah triggered urgent appeals — including from close allies — for the Zionist entity to hold off sending troops into the last major population center they have yet to enter in the conflict. Rafah, where more than 1.4 million Palestinians are trapped, is also the main entry point for desperately needed relief supplies. UN humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths said any military operation "could lead to a slaughter".

Terrified civilians have been locked in a desperate search for safety. "My three children were injured, where can I go?" Dana Abu Chaaban asked at the city's border crossing with Egypt, where she was hoping to

Erdogan in Cairo as Turkey, Egypt...

Continued from Page 1

Turkey was "ready to work with Egypt for the recovery and reconstruction of Gaza in the medium term," he added.

For his part, Sisi criticized "(the Zionist entity's) obstacles which mean that humanitarian aid enters Gaza too slowly". Egypt controls the Rafah crossing into Gaza, and the Zionist entity insists on inspecting every aid shipment. Cairo has been hosting joint efforts with Qatar and the United States to broker a new truce between the Zionist entity and Hamas. A Hamas delegation was in Cairo on Tuesday, while a Hamas delegation was to travel to the Egyptian capital on Wednesday.

Turkey and Egypt cut ties in 2013 after Sisi, then defense minister, ousted Islamist president Mohamed Morsi, an ally of Ankara and part of the Muslim Brotherhood movement. At the time, Erdogan said he would never speak to "anyone" like Sisi, who in 2014 became president of the Arab world's most populous nation.

But relations have thawed since 2021, when a Turkish delegation visited Egypt to discuss normalization. By last July, Cairo and Ankara had appointed ambassadors to each other's capitals for the first time in a decade. In Nov 2022, Erdogan and Sisi shook hands in Qatar in what the Egyptian presi-

dency heralded as a new beginning for their relations. The two men have since met in several other countries, including Saudi Arabia in November and at the G20 summit in India in September.

Despite the long freeze in relations, trade between the two continued. According to Egyptian central bank figures, Turkey is Egypt's fifth largest trade partner. Earlier this month, Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said an agreement had been finalized to provide drones to Egypt. While the two regional powers have often been at odds — including supporting rival governments in Libya — their interests are aligned on two major conflicts: Sudan and Gaza.

Erdogan has emerged as one of the Muslim world's harshest critics of the Zionist entity for its bombardment and ground offensive in Gaza, which have killed at least 28,576 people, mostly women and children. On Wednesday, Erdogan said it would be "madness" if the Zionist entity were to follow through with plans for an assault on Rafah, the southern city where more than half of Gaza's population has sought refuge from the fighting, warning it would "eventually lead to genocide".

Istanbul served as a base for Hamas political leaders before the Oct 7 attack. The NATO member asked the Hamas chiefs to leave after some were captured on video celebrating the attack. Ankara in November recalled its ambassador to the Zionist entity, and has maintained intermittent communication with the Hamas leadership, who see Turkey as a potential ally in ceasefire negotiations. Erdogan said he had invited Sisi to visit Ankara "at the first opportunity". — AFP

Modi opens grand temple...

Continued from Page 1

widespread domestic press coverage in India and follows last month's opening by Modi of a massive temple in India built on the site of a 16th-century mosque destroyed by a Hindu mob in 1992. The UAE government gifted the 27 acres (11 hectares) in Abu Dhabi where the grand temple was built at a cost of about \$95 million by the Hindu BAPS organization that was founded in Modi's home state of Gujarat more than a century ago.

Hindu temples have for decades existed in the UAE, a Gulf state whose one million citizens are a minority in a country of some 10 million residents who are the backbone of the workforce. Accompanied by Hindu religious leaders and monks, Modi offered prayers and performed rituals as he toured the temple in an event

that was attended by members of the UAE government, Bollywood actors and the Indian community.

"This temple is a symbol of the shared heritage of humanity. It is a symbol of the mutual love between the Indian and Arab people. It reflects the philosophical connection between India and the UAE," Modi said to a crowd waving UAE and Indian flags. UAE Minister of Tolerance Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak Al-Nahyan, addressing the inauguration ceremony, praised Modi for strengthening relations and said the temple reflected the UAE's openness to different religions and ethnicities.

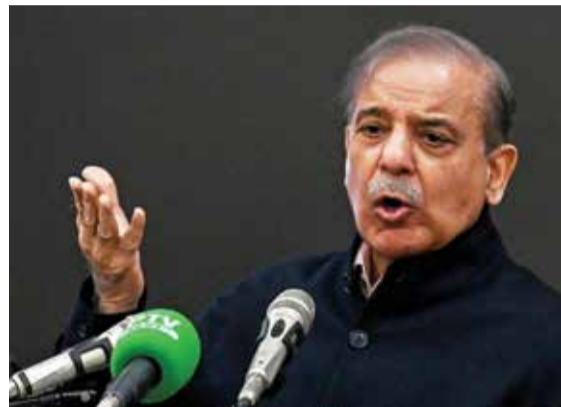
The opening of the first traditional, stone-carved Hindu temple on the Arabian Peninsula, the birthplace of Islam, is symbolic of the close ties between India and the UAE. Modi thanked UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, whom he refers to as his brother, for granting permission to build the temple. India's relationship with the influential Middle East state, built on more than a century of trade links, has expanded since Modi took office. — Agencies

International

New Pakistan coalition echoes same old problems

Fragile coalition arrangement suits military establishment governing nation: Analysts

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's newly declared coalition government echoes the 2022 alliance that ousted Imran Khan, analysts say, demonstrating the military's enduring influence, but also Khan's unspent opposition power. Last week's split-verdict national election delivered a surprise boon for independent candidates loyal to jailed ex-premier Khan, defying an army-backed crackdown with a combined showing larger than any other party.



LAHORE/ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's former Prime Minister and leader of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party Shehbaz Sharif.

But late Tuesday the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), favored by the top brass, said it would partner with the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and some smaller parties to form the next government. "The more things change, the more they remain the same," political analyst Hafsa Khawaja told AFP. "This is the same set-up, but just with the stamp of these elections."



NEW YORK: Democratic US House candidate Tom Suozzi speaks following his victory in the special election to replace Republican Rep George Santos on February 13, 2024. — AFP

Democrats flip seat of disgraced New York congressman

NEW YORK: Voters in suburban New York picked a Democrat to replace expelled Republican congressman George Santos on Tuesday, US networks projected, after President Joe Biden's party poured cash into TV ads to flip the seat in an election year.

CNN and NBC News both called the race in favor of Tom Suozzi, forecasting that he had defeated Republican Mazi Hironaka in the election, which was marked by a heavy snowstorm across the district. Suozzi, a veteran politician who previously held the seat and quit to unsuccessfully run for New York state governor, will serve out the remaining 11 months of the scandal-plagued Santos's term in the House of Representatives.

The win chips away at the Republicans' narrow majority in the lower chamber of Congress. "Thank God," Suozzi said in a victory speech in Woodbury after the race was called. A crowd of supporters began chanting his name as protesters holding Palestinian flags briefly stormed the stage, shouting "genocide." "Despite all the lies ... about Tom Suozzi being the godfather of the migrant crisis ... despite the dirty tricks ... we won." New York City Mayor Eric Adams, a Democrat, said Suozzi's victory "was good news for New York."

Biden, facing an uphill battle to get aid for key allies Ukraine and the Zionist entity approved in the Republican-led House, called to congratulate Suozzi on his win Tuesday night, the White House said. Pilip conceded during a speech in East Meadow: "We are fighters, I called my opponent and congratulated him," she said. Pre-election polling had showed that the race was tight, with Democrats reportedly spending \$14 million on advertising and the Republicans \$8 million. Aggressive attack ads were used by both sides, with Republicans seeking to paint Suozzi as soft on illegal immigration, while Democrats characterized Pilip as against abortion rights.

Migration and abortion are central political issues as the United States limbers up for November's presidential election set to pit Biden against Donald Trump in a re-run of the 2020 contest. One attack ad showed archive footage of Suozzi apparently boasting that he fought to keep immigration enforcement officers out of Nassau County, where a large part of the congressional district is located, when he was the area's top elected official. Anti-Pilip ads suggested she would seek a nationwide ban on abortions. Deep snow in New York's third congressional district, which includes small parts of Queens and Long Island's wealthy North Shore in Nassau, threatened to deter voters as authorities warned against driving. Both Suozzi and Pilip's campaigns responded by offering a dial-a-ride service for voters, while there were media reports that the Republicans paid for plows to clear roads in areas sympathetic to the party.—AFP

A weak repeat

The groundswell of support for Khan loyalists means a broad coalition is again needed to form the parliamentary majority required to mint a new government. But there are indications this version will be weaker than the last. PPP leader Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, foreign minister in the 2022-23 government, said this time his party won't take ministerial roles and will back the prime minister "on an issue-to-issue basis".

There is still a lot of negotiating to go, however, including a likely return to the presidency for his father, Asif Ali Zardari. If PPP doesn't take any ministries, that would make the administration effectively a minority government — a copy of the previous alliance but on a "weaker footing", said analyst Amber Rahim Shamsi.

Pakistan is in the midst of a grinding economic slowdown and the new administration must barter over belt-tightening measures to unlock a vital new International Monetary Fund (IMF) deal.

"Whatever government comes into power has to make many, many unpopular, tough decisions," Shamsi said. The PPP "is keeping away from this mess" in a bid to shore up its long-term prospects, she added. Analysts had predicted the election would see Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party largely wiped away after suffering a crackdown since being ousted by a PML-N and PPP coalition two years ago. After Khan turned on the generals who nurtured his ascent, he was buried by court cases and barred from office, while PTI leaders were rounded up and candidates forced to run as independents. But PTI-backed candidates took around 90 of the 266 elected assembly seats — a hefty opposition bloc set to continue bedeviling any incoming administration. "The establishment has tried to dismantle the party, but at the end of the day they've been unable to render it redundant," said analyst Khawaja. "PTI is going nowhere, even if it's a weakened party."

Subianto claims 'victory for all Indonesians'

JAKARTA: Former general Prabowo Subianto claimed victory in Indonesia's presidential election on Wednesday as preliminary results put him well ahead of his two rivals to lead Southeast Asia's biggest economy.

Polls have long shown the fiery defense minister to be the favorite after he pledged to carry on the agenda of popular outgoing leader Joko Widodo, who is accused of inappropriately backing his campaign and whose son is Subianto's running mate.

"All counts, all pollsters ... showed figures that Prabowo-Gibran won in one round," he told a cheering crowd of supporters at a packed arena in central Jakarta, referring to his running mate Gibran Rakabuming Raka, who stood beside him in a matching checked shirt. "This victory should be a victory for all Indonesians."

Official results are not due until next month but at least four government-approved groups — making projections based on official early tallying — showed Subianto winning around 57 percent for a clear majority in one round.

While claiming victory, Subianto stressed "we must still wait for KPU's official result", referring to the election commission. "We believe Indonesian democracy is running well. The people have determined, the people have decided," he told supporters.



JAKARTA: Presidential candidate and Indonesia's Defense Minister Prabowo Subianto (left) and vice presidential candidate Gibran Rakabuming Raka, Indonesian President Joko Widodo's son, react to supporters from a car. — AFP

3 women found guilty over Gaza paraglider images

LONDON: Three women who displayed images of paragliders as they marched at a London pro-Palestinian rally after the October 7 attack on the Zionist entity were on Tuesday found guilty of a terror offence.

Heba Albayek, 29, and Pauline Ankunda, 26, taped images of paragliders — the craft used by some Hamas militants to fly into the Zionist entity for the attacks — onto their backs. Noimutu Olayinka Taiwo, 27, was found to have stuck a similar image on the handle of a placard. They were all charged under the Terrorism Act.

The march took place on October 14, seven days after the attack that left about 1,160 dead, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on official Zionist



Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari speaks during two separate press conferences on February 13, 2024. — AFP

Army still commanding presence

Pakistan's military has governed the nation for much of its history and has generally held a kingmaking role even in periods of civilian rule. PML-N say their candidate for prime minister is Shehbaz Sharif — who helmed the alliance that ousted Khan and is regarded as amenable to military influence.

Likewise, analysts say a fragile coalition arrangement will suit the military establishment, as it remains keen to choreograph civilian affairs after

Khan's crusade of defiance. But "the military faces a dilemma regarding these politicians", according to Qamar Cheema of Islamabad-based think tank the Sanobar Institute.

Despite PTI faring better than expected in polls, leaders say the ballot was tampered with to prevent their landslide victory. The military relies on elected politicians "to contribute to a larger stability", said Cheema, and "unless and until this government enjoys public backing it won't be able to deliver." — AFP

Subianto, who was a military chief during the Suharto dictatorship a generation ago, needs more than 50 percent of the overall vote and at least a fifth of ballots cast in over half the country's 38 provinces to secure the presidency.

The 72-year-old — who pushed street protests and launched legal challenges after losing the previous two elections — thanked his supporters and called for unity. "Now the campaign is over, we must unite again." The government-approved polling groups' "quick counts" have also been used in previous elections by candidates to claim victory. The pollsters take samples at selected voting stations after polls have closed, and are allowed to watch the count by election officials.

Key youth support

Subianto's military service was a deciding factor for some voters. "He has a military background, so I think he will be a decisive leader," said Athary Firmanda, a 28-year-old office worker in Jakarta. Subianto was dismissed from the military in 1998 over accusations he ordered the abduction of democracy activists at the end of Suharto's rule, but he denied the allegations and was never charged.

He has since rehabilitated his image, thanks in part to a savvy social media campaign targeting Indonesia's youth that portrayed him as a "cuddly grandpa". That strategy appears to have paid off, and the ex-general acknowledged the youth vote helped him win in a country where millennials and Gen-Zers make up more than half the electorate. "I would like to say thanks to the young people, who are key supporters," he said in his speech, which he ended by dancing on stage in a nod to his image on TikTok. — AFP

NATO showcases spending hikes in riposte to Trump

BRUSSELS: NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg said Wednesday 18 of the alliance's 31 countries are set to hit its defense spending target this year, after Donald Trump threatened to encourage Russia to attack members not coughing up enough.

The Republican White House frontrunner was widely rebuked after saying he would not defend NATO members who had not met their financial obligations, in his most extreme broadside yet against the organization. Trump's comments in a Saturday stump speech drew condemnation from leaders including US President Joe Biden — his likely opponent in November's election — and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz. Stoltenberg laid out new defense spending estimates showing the number of states reaching two percent of gross domestic product was expected to jump from 11 in 2023. "That is another record number and a six-fold increase from 2014 when only three allies met the target," Stoltenberg told journalists ahead of a defense ministers meeting.

The NATO chief did not provide a breakdown of which allies are hitting the target. Overall though, he said European allies and Canada will have added more than \$600 billion to their defense spending since they set the two-percent goal a decade ago.

Spurred on by Russia's all-out invasion of Ukraine in 2022, last year saw an "unprecedented rise" of 11 percent of spending by European members and Canada, the NATO chief added. Stoltenberg reiterated a warning to Trump not to "undermine" NATO's collective security guarantee that all allies will help defend any member attacked. "We should leave no room for miscalculation or misunderstanding in Moscow about our readiness and our commitment, our resolve to protect allies," he said.

During his time as US president, Trump railed against Washington's NATO allies to pressure them to spend more on defense — and he has claimed credit for increased spending. Moscow's full-scale war on Ukraine has served as a wake-up call for European countries and saw NATO turn the two-percent figure into a minimum requirement. Key players such as Germany have ramped up their spending and are expected to meet the target this year. But the United States still accounts for the vast bulk of combined defense spending by NATO members.

Trump's broadside against US allies has raised the nightmarish specter for European officials of Washington tanking the 75-year-old alliance if he is re-elected. It comes as warnings swirl that Russian President Vladimir Putin could look to target alliance members if Ukraine loses the war. "NATO has the capabilities, we have the resolve to protect and defend all allies," Stoltenberg said. "We don't see any imminent threat against any NATO ally."

In the wake of Trump's comments, France said Europe needs another "life insurance" policy in addition to NATO to ensure the security of the continent. Stoltenberg said the US nuclear deterrent in Europe "works and we should continue to ensure that it remains safe and reliable".

Diplomats from multiple NATO countries insist that keeping the United States on board remains fundamental to deterring the threat from Russia. But they remain arguing about how genuine Trump's threats are, saying the alliance emerged from his first term unscathed.—AFP

figures. At least 28,473 people, mostly women and children, have been killed in the Zionist entity's relentless offensive in Gaza since then, according to Gaza's health ministry. Deputy Senior District Judge Tan Ikram at London's Westminster Magistrates' Court on Tuesday said: "I do not find a reasonable person would interpret the image merely as a symbol of freedom." But he added that "there's no evidence that any of these defendants are supporters of Hamas or were seeking to show support for them."

Ikram said he would not "punish" the defendants and handed each woman a 12-month conditional discharge. "You crossed the line, but it would have been fair to say that emotions ran very high on this issue," he added.

Nick Price, head of the Crown Prosecution Service's Special Crime and Counter Terrorism Division, said all three women had "knowingly displayed the images". "The fact that these images were being displayed in the context of a protest opposing the (Zionist) response to the Hamas attacks demonstrates a glorification of the actions taken by the group," he added. — AFP

Business

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2024

Furious protesting Indian farmers stalled but defiant

Govt erects fortress-like wall of concrete to stop 'March to Delhi'



AMBALA, India: Farmers with their tractors march towards New Delhi during a protest demanding minimum crop prices, at the Haryana-Punjab state border in Shambhu near Ambala about 200 kilometers (125 miles) north of the capital on Feb 14, 2024. — AFP photos

SHAMBHU, India: The line of tractors stretches nearly far as one can see — thousands of protesting Indian farmers heading to the capital New Delhi, determined to bring their anger and woes to politicians.

Many have driven on slow-moving tractors across India's northern Punjab state to demand guaranteed crop prices, waving flags, honking horns and chanting protest slogans. But they have been stalled halfway to New Delhi by a fortress-like wall of concrete.

Hundreds of baton-wielding riot police guard thick lines of barricades across the highway.

They are as determined to stop the farmers as the farmers are to smash through, using their tractors to push away the heavy concrete blocks. From behind rolls of razor wire, police alternate between raking the crowds with water cannon and dropping tear gas from overhead by drone.

On Wednesday, the two sides stood uneasily watching each other from some 50 meters (55 yards) away, as government officials and farming union leaders talked. "We work long hours in the fields and still struggle to make ends meet," said 40-year-old farmer Sandeep Kumar, from Punjab state's Mohali district. "But when we demand something from the government, we are met with pellets and baton charges."

Heera Singh, 55, his bloody foot wrapped in white gauze, said he was hit by a tear gas canister — but insisted he would not go home to recuperate.

Kites against drones

Dull thuds of tear gas canisters dropped from above punctuate protest chants, and the choking stench hangs heavy in the air long after the thick

The incendiary post came amid widespread concerns about a wider conflagration in the Middle East. Using a reverse image search, AFP fact-checkers found the video actually depicted an attack in Iraq's Kurdistan region. In another provocative post debunked by AFP, Hinkle wrongly claimed that Yemen had declared "war with Zionist entity" in support of the Palestinians.

While Yemen's Houthi rebels have targeted Zionist entity with missiles and drones, neither they nor the country's internationally recognized government has formally declared war.

In addition to raising tens of thousands of dollars on crowdfunding sites, Hinkle offers "premium content" to subscribers on X for \$3 per month. "Your support helps me continue exposing the Deep State after I was banned & demonetized by YouTube, Twitch, PayPal & Venmo," his appeal says.

When reached by AFP, Hinkle — whose false posts have garnered millions of views — refused to say how much revenue he was generating on X, instead criticizing coverage of the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East. Hinkle makes at least \$3,000 a month from paid subscribers, according to a rough CCDH estimate based on the engagement data of his subscriber-only posts.

Last August, Hinkle disclosed on X that he also earned \$1,693 through the ad revenue-sharing scheme, while complaining that other users with smaller engagement were getting bigger payouts.

parts of the AP-7 highway linking the two countries as they had done on Tuesday.

Other protests blocked traffic around Valladolid in the northwest, Toledo south of Madrid and Teruel in the east, the DGT said. Angry farmers have been protesting across Europe over rising costs, high fuel prices, bureaucracy and the environmental requirements in the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and its forthcoming "Green Deal".

Spanish farmers are also protesting low prices for their produce and the lack of financial aid to the sector. Agriculture Minister Luis Planas was to hold talks on Wednesday with players in the food supply chain and was set to meet with Spain's main agricultural unions, Asaja, COAG and UPA, on Thursday.

The unions are planning a huge rally in front of the agriculture ministry on Feb 21, and will rally again in Madrid on February 26 to coincide with the meeting of EU agriculture ministers in Brussels. In their statement, the unions urged European ministers to "act urgently to push through reforms in the food chain, to advance commercial agreements with third countries, to simplify red tape and to build flexibility into the CAP". Often referred to as Europe's vegetable garden, Spain is one of the bloc's leading producers of salad, fruit and vegetables but its farms have suffered from a long-running drought in the Iberian Peninsula for the past three years. — AFP



AMBALA, India: Police and Rapid Action Force (RAF) personnel block a highway to prevent farmers from marching towards New Delhi.

clouds disperse. The farmers say they launched their "Delhi Chalo", or "March to Delhi" — recalling a January 2021 protest when they smashed through barriers and rolled into New Delhi — because politicians are not listening.

"We have written letters and sent petitions, but the government has failed to respond," said farmer Bhupinder Singh. "We work so hard, but we don't save anything as input costs have gone up so much," Kumar added. On their own, the farmers say they are ignored.

But together — with two-thirds of India's 1.4 billion people drawing their livelihood from agriculture — they pose a potentially powerful force, with the protests coming ahead of general elections expected in April. Thousands of farmers have crammed into tractor trailers hoping to reach parliament. As drones

hover above, the farmers fly kites, saying they are using them to "distract" the police.

"We have no arms like them," said 36-year-old farmer Karnail Singh, from Punjab's Tarn Taran district. Others have soaked sacks in water, ready to be thrown onto tear gas canisters to dampen their impact. While demands vary, most farmers say the key issue is ensuring a legal guarantee of a minimum price for crops. The government in Punjab already pays a minimum price for wheat and rice, but the "system is ad hoc", said 37-year-old farmer Maan Singh. "What we want is a law that makes it binding for the government to give us MSP (minimum support price) for all of what we grow," Singh said.

"The government buys only what it wants, forcing us to sell most of our crop to middlemen at much lower prices." — AFP

Musk's X feeds monetization of wartime misinfo

WASHINGTON: Influencers on X are monetizing misinformation about conflicts in the Middle East, leveraging the platform's contentious policies that researchers say prioritize engagement over accuracy. Since Elon Musk's turbulent 2022 acquisition of X, formerly Twitter, the site has restored thousands of once-banned accounts and introduced a paid verification system that critics say has boosted conspiracy theorists. X also rolled out an ad revenue-sharing program for verified users, who often peddle hateful and false information to profit from the platform.

"Cynical pay-for-play controversialists today deliberately induce anger for engagement to game Musk's platform into giving them more visibility, and therefore more revenue for their views," Imran Ahmed, chief executive of the Center for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH), told AFP. X has seen a tsunami of falsehoods about the ongoing war between Zionist entity and Hamas, fueled partly by prominent US influencers such as Jackson Hinkle, who last month falsely claimed a video showed Iran bombing American military bases in Iraq.

Farmers' protests snarl traffic in southern Spain

MADRID: Spanish farmers kept up their protests over the sector's troubles on Wednesday, with tractors blocking roads notably in the south where they disrupted the first stage of a cycling race. Farmers in yellow hi-vis vests and tractors driving at snail's pace were slowing traffic along around a dozen roads across Spain without causing any major incidents, the DGT traffic authority said.

Most of the protests were in the south, around Granada, Malaga, Sevilla and Jaen where the main roads were blocked during the morning. In Antequera near Malaga, farmers blocked the A92 leading to Seville, according to an AFP TV reporter. Organizers of the five-day Ruta del Sol cycling race said they were forced to postpone the 162-kilometre (100-mile) opening stage because there were not enough police to secure the route due to the farmers' protests.

In the northeastern Catalonia region near the border with France, around 100 tractors blocked



Elon Musk

Britain-based creator Sulaiman Ahmed and Danish physician Anastasia Maria Loupis — both of whom AFP has repeatedly fact-checked for war-related misinformation — are also reaping the benefits of X's verification and paid subscriber programs.

Neither responded to requests for comment. CCDH's Ahmed said Musk has "created a topsy-turvy platform on which authoritative sources struggle to be heard above the noise — while liars and hate actors are put on a pedestal, generating revenue for themselves and the platform." X did not respond to AFP's request for comment. To be eligible for ad revenue sharing, users must meet requirements such as subscribing to X's \$8 per month premium subscription and having at least 500 followers. — AFP

World demand for LNG to jump 50% by 2040: Shell

LONDON: British energy group Shell on Wednesday forecast that world demand for liquefied natural gas would jump more than 50 percent by 2040, fuelled by China dumping coal. "Demand for natural gas has already peaked in some regions but continues to rise globally, with LNG demand expected to reach around 625-685 million tons a year in 2040, according to the latest industry estimates," Shell said in a report. Global LNG demand would grow beyond that date, "driven by industrial demand in China and economic development in South Asia and South-east Asia", the energy major added.

Steve Hill, executive vice president for Shell Energy, said China was likely to dominate LNG demand growth in the current decade "as its industry seeks to cut carbon emissions by switching from coal to gas". While LNG is cleaner than coal, it also produces greenhouse gases that contribute to global warming. Industry and many governments argue that LNG is a "bridge fuel" between coal and renewables such as wind and solar. — AFP

CBK launches 'Small, Medium Enterprises Financing Survey'

KUWAIT: In its continued efforts to provide a business-friendly environment that helps companies obtain appropriate financing, the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) launched "Small and Medium Enterprises Financing Survey". This recently launched questionnaire is comprehensive and sheds light on the process of obtaining credit and utilization thereof.

This came in a press release by the CBK Governor Basel A Al-Haroon in which he pointed out the importance of the participation of business owners and entrepreneurs in completing the questionnaire that shall be available on the CBK website throughout the year. The extracted data shall be analyzed every three months, to survey those of small and medium business owners in various sectors and assess their experiences for obtaining financing, with the aim to incentivize and nurture this vital sector of the national economy by providing a healthy and supportive economic environment.

The governor added that the results of the survey will help understand the challenges and opportunities for small and medium enterprises in obtaining finance and managing their financial needs, and underscore the conditions of financing and to which extent it would accommodate their financing needs. This contributes to identifying trends and potential risks in the financing market for this segment, and is necessary to maintain a stable, healthy and supportive environment for entrepreneurs.

The governor further pointed out that the results of this questionnaire will also help policymakers, lenders and stakeholders understand the underlying challenges and opportunities for taking well-informed decisions and developing solutions that support the growth of this sector, noting that the results will not be published and will be solely for the CBK's internal use. Al-Haroon concluded by thanking all the companies responding to this questionnaire, and appreciating their cooperation for the interest of the national economy.



Basel A Al-Haroon

Business



Waleed Khaled Mandani

- The local economy remained stable, supported by good oil prices, accelerated government project awards and overall recovery of economic activity.
- The new core banking system's deployment showcases Gulf Bank's commitment to better serve its valued customers using cutting-edge technology.



David Challinor

- For 2023, we had overall growth of 1.2%, with retail growth dominating, leading to another year of market share gains in the retail sector.
- We've embarked on a journey to bring down the cost to income ratio over time and targeting a further fall for 2024.



Dalal Al-Dousari

- We have a renewed confidence that the mortgage law will ultimately materialize as an alternative financing option through local banks.
- For the year 2024, we aim to maintain our growth strategy of growing retail faster than the market.

Gulf Bank holds its year-end 2023 earnings webcast for investors

Oversubscription reflects shareholders' confidence in Gulf Bank: Mandani

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank held its investors webcast on Tuesday, Feb 13, 2024 to present and discuss the bank's financial performance for year-end 2023. The webcast was organized by EFG Hermes and presented by Waleed Khaled Mandani, Acting Chief Executive Officer of Gulf Bank, and David Challinor, Chief Financial Officer of Gulf Bank. The discussion was moderated by Dalal Al-Dousari, Deputy General Manager of Investor Relations at Gulf Bank.

Operating environment

Waleed Mandani, Acting Chief Executive Officer of Gulf Bank, commenced the webcast with key updates regarding Gulf Bank's operating environment during year 2023. Mandani stated: "During the year, the local economy remained stable, supported by good oil prices, accelerated government project awards and overall recovery of economic activity."

Mandani added "One of the key milestones during the year 2023 was the implementation of Phase 1 of the new core banking system. This milestone represents a major leap in the bank's digital transformation journey. It empowers the bank to provide enhanced services, improve efficiency, and deliver seamless customer experiences. Another major achievement for the bank during the year was the launch of the latest version of its mobile application. The new version of the app incorporates advanced security features to safeguard customer data and financial transactions while providing a seamless user experience."

Mandani stated "the bank has obtained the necessary final regulatory approvals to setup Gulf Capital Investment Company, known as Invest GB, to operate officially as a wholly owned investment subsidiary of the Bank. We believe GB Invest complementary ser-

vices will positively enhance the fees and commissions income of the Bank over the long run."

Regarding Gulf Bank Capital Increase Mandani mentioned, "Furthermore, during the fourth quarter of 2023, Gulf Bank has successfully completed a capital increase totaling KD 60 million. This was approximately seven times oversubscribed. The significant oversubscription reflects shareholders' confidence in Gulf Bank's potential capabilities."

Key financial indicators

- Net profit grew by 15.2 percent.
- Earnings per share is up 13.2 percent to 21 fils.
- Recommended dividends of 12 fils and 5 percent bonus shares.
- Gross loans and advances reached KD 5.5 billion.
- NPL ratio stood at 1.2 percent and coverage ratio 466 percent including total provisions and collaterals.
- Capital Adequacy Ratio of 18 percent and Teir 1 Ratio of 15.8 percent.

Margins

Gulf Bank's Chief Financial Officer David Challinor responded to questions related to margins by saying: "For Q4 we continued to see the margin expand but at a slower pace than for Q2 and Q3. For the full year 2023 our net interest margin was 217 basis points versus the prior year which was 210. And this increase was in line with the guidance we gave at the beginning of the year. As you know the margin dynamics are complex as there are many variables."

Loan growth

Regarding loan growth and what segments drove

the growth, Challinor commented: "For the full year 2023, we had overall growth of 1.2 percent, with retail dominating, leading to another year of market share gains in the retail business. We're aiming to continue gaining market share, which we have done in both 2022 and 2023, so we think this second half trend will play nicely into our strategic goals for next year. We also believe that the market will be more active next year and have seen signs of positive movement in the project space locally. So, all in all, I think we should expect a solid year of loan growth next year more in line with long-term system average."

Credit cost & asset quality

Regarding the credit cost and asset quality of Gulf Bank, Challinor stated: "For 2023, the credit costs were KD 29 million which translated to a cost of risk of 54 basis points, we've had 2 consecutive years where credit costs have been historically very low. So, I'm very pleased with this continued low level of credit costs considering where interest rates are. Our NPL percentage continues to be very low at 1.2 percent, which is broadly similar to a year ago."

Operating expenses

Regarding operating expense and improvement in cost to income ratio Challinor mentioned: "The total cost growth was under 1 percent year on year, which is a strong outcome, and demonstrates our prudent approach to cost control during 2023. Looking at the cost to income ratio there's been a meaningful drop of 2 percent and it now stands at 45.6 percent down from 47.6 percent a year ago. Looking forward, we've embarked on a journey to bring down the cost to income ratio over time and are targeting a further fall for 2024."

Real estate financing

Regarding the home financing law and if there are any updates, Al-Dousari stated: "It's been nearly two years since the first announcement of the draft law of real estate financing for private housing in Kuwait. We have a renewed confidence that the law will ultimately materialize as an alternative financing option through local banks. We are optimistic about the potential mortgage law in Kuwait and its positive impact on the overall credit market. We believe that the law aligns well with our Bank's retail focused strategy, and we are in a good position to benefit from this market opportunity."

Before concluding the webcast Al-Dousari concluded with a recap on Gulf Bank 2024 key guidance indicators:

- For loan growth, our strategy remains unchanged, more in line with long-term system average that seems to have been around mid-single digits.
- We have guided earlier that cost to income ratio is expected to decrease. This achieved during the year and it's at a lower level compared to last year. We expect the declining trend of cost to income ratio to continue.
- We continue to proactively manage our balance sheet and we should expect, at this stage, the full year charge to land somewhere in the 50-70 basis point range.
- Our NPL ratio remained near the 1 percent levels over the previous quarters. We aim to keep our NPL ratio under the 2 percent mark due to our prudent risk management approach.

Body Shop's UK business slides into administration

LONDON: The UK arm of The Body Shop, the near 50-year-old cosmetics company renowned for ethical hair and skin products, has entered administration, administrators said Tuesday, placing thousands of jobs at risk. The retailer has appointed experts from FRP Advisory to oversee administration—a UK process where financial experts are drafted in to try and save parts of a firm. "Today, the directors of The Body Shop International Limited have appointed Tony Wright, Geoff Rowley, and Alastair Massey of FRP as joint administrators of the company, which operates The Body Shop's UK business," said an FRP statement.

"Taking this approach provides the stability, flexibility and security to find the best means of securing the future of The Body Shop and revitalizing this iconic British brand." Administrators will update creditors and employees in due course.

German private equity firm Aurelius had bought The Body Shop only in November, but the retailer ran into trouble in a tough economic climate over the key Christmas trading period. "The Body Shop failed to scrub out a sales decline, with damp revenues during the crucial festive period pushing an icon of eco beauty into administration," lamented Susannah Streeter, head of money and markets at stockbroker Hargreaves Lansdown. The Body Shop was founded in 1976 by Anita Roddick and has become a staple of the British high street, but it has been under various owners since she sold it to French cosmetics giant L'Oréal in 2006.

The Body Shop has about 200 shops in the UK, or around seven percent of its worldwide total of some 3,000 stores in more than 70 countries. The company directly employs about 10,000 staff, while 12,000 more are employed via franchises. Roddick, who died in 2007 from a brain hemorrhage, had rapidly expanded the business from modest beginnings with a determination to offer products that had not been tested on animals. She set out also to make her business environmentally-friendly, with customers encouraged to return empty containers for refilling at the original shop in Brighton, on England's southern coast.

"In the 1980s, the Body Shop was the place to go for young shoppers to splash out on fresh scented bubbles and beauty ranges, with a deep environmental conscience and a focus on social justice and conserving nature," added Streeter at Hargreaves Lansdown. "But now stores like Lush hold the bigger pocket money draw for tweens and teens, lured in by fragrant bath bombs and innovative product ingredients. "Rivals have stolen a march on what used to be the Body Shop's unique eco-credentials."

Brazil's Natura Cosmetics, which had bought The Body Shop from L'Oréal, sold it at the end of last year to Aurelius for £207 million (\$261 million at current exchange rates), far less than the previous owners had paid. Since taking over, Aurelius had already sold The Body Shop business in most of mainland Europe and parts of Asia to an unnamed buyer.—AFP



TOKYO: A man walks into the headquarters of the Sony Group Corporation in Tokyo on Feb 14, 2024. -- AFP

Sony hikes profit forecast but says PS5 sales to slow

TOKYO: Japan's Sony upgraded its annual net profit forecast on Wednesday but trimmed its PlayStation 5 unit's sales target, with the flagship console currently in its fourth year on the market. The conglomerate now predicts a full-year net profit of 920 billion yen (\$6.1 billion) instead of its previous target of 880 billion yen.

One reason for the more ambitious outlook is net gains on investments at Sony's life insurance business, the company said, announcing a plan to take its financial services division public in October 2025.

PlayStation 5 sales, meanwhile, are at risk of losing momentum, some analysts have warned, especially in the battle with US rival Microsoft. Sony said it now expects to sell around 21 million PS5 units in the current financial year—trimming an earlier target of 25 million.

"PlayStation 5 hardware will enter into its fifth year, which will be the latter half of the console's life cycle," said Naomi Matsuoka, Sony's senior vice president. She told reporters that Sony would "put renewed focus on its profitability", adding that "we expect its volume sales data to gradually start falling from the next fiscal year". When the PS5 was launched in November 2020, supply chain snarl-ups made it difficult to buy.

But those issues have now eased and Sony touted strong software sales and robust user engagement on Wednesday. Hideki Yasuda, analyst at Toyo Securities, told AFP before the earnings release that Sony's 25 million unit sales target for the PS5 was "a very high hurdle".

"Sony had to issue an ambitious target so

third-party game-makers would develop and release new games. The company could not set a target lower than for the PS4," he said.

Microsoft has made a strong push to boost its position, including with its \$69 billion takeover of Activision Blizzard, the maker of the blockbuster "Call of Duty" games. Sony's video game segment scored a hit with "Marvel's Spider-Man 2", which was released on the PS5 in October last year and became the fastest-selling PlayStation Studios game in the first 24 hours after release. "Despite the shot in the arm from its Spider-Man 2 title hit, which has come and gone", Sony needs to watch its back when Microsoft "launches Activision games, namely Call Of Duty (COD) franchises on its subscription Game Pass offering", noted Amir Anvarzadeh from Asymmetric Advisors.

For the three months to December, Sony saw "significant increases" in sales in its financial, gaming, sensor, music and pictures segments. Sales jumped 22 percent to 3.7 trillion yen in October-December for a net profit of 363.9 billion. The entertainment and electronics behemoth also enjoyed reduced tax expenses related to the dissolution of a subsidiary.

Music industry publication Billboard said last week that Sony had signed a deal worth at least \$600 million to buy half of Michael Jackson's "publishing and recorded masters catalog".

But Sony has declined to comment on the reported deal, which Billboard said could be the largest-ever valuation of a musician's music assets. Strikes in Hollywood last year dragged down the conglomerate's movie performance, and Sony said Wednesday that the impact would continue into the next financial year. Sony in January called off a proposed \$10 billion merger of its Indian operations with local rival Zee Entertainment.

The collapse is a blow to both firms' hopes of better competing with streaming rivals such as Disney, Amazon and Netflix in the booming entertainment market of 1.4 billion people.—AFP

Stocks bounce after data-induced drop

LONDON: European and US stocks rebounded Wednesday from the previous day's sharp losses, as dealers went fishing for bargains, digested lower-than-expected UK inflation and shrugged off equity losses elsewhere. Equities on both sides of the Atlantic tumbled on Tuesday after data showed that US inflation had slowed less than expected in January. That dealt a body blow to hopes of an early Federal Reserve interest rate cut and sent Asia indices mostly lower on Wednesday. But European indices climbed in Wednesday trading and Wall Street also opened higher, coming off losses of more than one percent.

"The prevailing feeling is that yesterday's knee-jerk reaction may be enough to reset equity markets following their near-uninterrupted bullish run since October last year," said David Morrison, senior analyst at Trade Nation. Wall Street's top stock indices have struck new highs in recent months on expectations that the Fed will begin cutting interest rates and the stellar earnings from tech firms. Morrison said "bullish sentiment prevails thanks to the robustness of the US economy and the health of the employment situation across the US, UK and eurozone."

The January consumer price index showed that US inflation is coming down, even if not as fast as markets had hoped. That and other data support the outlook that the US economy will escape falling into a recession despite the Fed hiking high interest rates to restrain rising prices. Morrison said that markets now expected the Fed to begin cutting rates in the middle of this year, and to make fewer cuts. Eyes are now on US producer price data due at the end of the week.

Data released Wednesday showing UK inflation held at 4 percent in January has helped offset some concern about the delayed cut in US interest rates, said OANDA analyst Craig Erlam. The data under-shot expectations but was double the Bank of England's target. "It's all about progress towards the goal of two-percent inflation and (interest) rates falling—and today is another encouraging step toward that," Erlam told AFP. The fading prospect of a dovish turn by the Fed sent the dollar surging against the yen, forcing Japanese officials to warn they would intervene in foreign exchange markets to support the country's currency.

Expectations for a US rate cut have been doused in recent weeks by a series of strong indicators—particularly on the economy and jobs—while several monetary policymakers warned they want to see more data before shifting. Asian traders ran for cover following the US inflation data, with Tokyo, Sydney, Singapore, Seoul, Wellington, Mumbai and Bangkok well down on Wednesday. Hong Kong rallied, however, as it reopened after an extended break for the Lunar New Year. Tech giants led the way on hopes China's leaders will announce further measures to support the country's markets and stuttering economy.—AFP

Sticky UK inflation stokes BoE rate-cut debate as prices soar

Elevated inflation extends a cost-of-living crisis for millions of people in Britain

LONDON: British annual inflation steadied last month, official data showed Wednesday, but prices still rose at double the Bank of England's target rate, adding to uncertainty over the timing of an interest-rate cut.

The Consumer Prices Index was unchanged at 4.0 percent in January from December, when it had surprisingly picked up, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said in a statement. The January reading was better than market expectations of an increase to 4.2 percent, but inflation nevertheless remains elevated, extending a cost-of-living crisis for millions of people in Britain.

The Bank of England's main interest rate sits at a 16-year high of 5.25 percent, with high inflation preventing cuts to borrowing costs. Wednesday's inflation data comes on the eve of critical economic growth figures that could show Britain slumped into recession in the second half of 2023, ahead of a general election expected this year. "Bank of England policymakers are a very wary lot and will want more evidence that inflation will hug the (BoE) target... rather than drift upwards again before they are confident about cutting rates," said Susannah Streeter, head of money and markets at Hargreaves Lansdown. "However, given this slightly better-than-expected reading, the prospect for rate cuts this year is more encouraging."

UK annual inflation has tumbled since striking a 41-year peak of 11.1 percent in October 2022. Global inflation soared as the invasion of Ukraine by major oil and gas producer Russia two years ago sent energy prices rocketing. The Bank of England and its

peers have helped to cool inflation by hiking interest rates several times up until last year.

Higher gas and electricity bills were the main upward contributor to UK inflation in January, but this was offset by falling prices for furniture and food, which dropped month-on-month for the first time in more than two years. "The cost of second-hand cars went up for the first time since May," ONS chief economist Grant Fitzner also noted. Recent falls in wholesale energy costs, falling wages growth and limited fallout on oil prices from the Middle East conflict should help dampen inflationary pressures in the coming months, according to EY analyst Martin Beck. "The ingredients remain in place... to start cutting interest rates in the next few months," added Beck, who expects the first reduction in May.

"Overall, the latest inflation data should reassure (policymakers) that the time to start cutting interest rates is approaching," Britain's Conservative finance minister Jeremy Hunt said despite the steady rate, inflation was on a downward trend. "Inflation never falls in a perfect straight line... We have made huge progress in bringing inflation down from 11 percent," insisted the chancellor of the exchequer.

As expected, the main opposition Labour party — far ahead of the ruling Conservatives in opinion polls — attacked the government's economic record. "Inflation is still higher than the Bank of England's target and millions of families are struggling with the cost of living," argued Labour finance spokeswoman Rachel Reeves. Official data Tuesday showed that Britain's unemployment rate dipped to 3.8 percent in



LONDON: A customer stands with a trolley as she shops for chilled food items inside a Tesco supermarket store in east London. — AFP

the final quarter of 2023, from 3.9 percent in the three months to the end of November. Analysts said that reading firmed the prospect of the BoE freezing interest rates for at least a few months more.

Attention now turns to Thursday's GDP numbers. Britain's economy shrank 0.1 percent in the third quarter of 2023 — and a fourth-quarter contraction would place it in recession. — AFP

Why fashion's 'recycling' is not saving the planet

PARIS: In H&M's flagship Paris store it is hard to find clothes that do not claim to be made from "recycled materials". Last year, 79 percent of the polyester in its collections came from recycled materials, and next year it wants it all to be recycled.

The Swedish fast fashion giant told AFP that recycled material allows the "industry to reduce its dependence on virgin polyester made from fossil fuels".

The problem is that "93 percent of all recycled textiles today comes from plastic bottles, not from old clothes", said Urska Trunk of campaign group Changing Markets. In other words, from fossil fuels.

And while a plastic bottle can be recycled five or six times, a T-shirt in recycled polyester "can never be recycled again", said Trunk. Almost all recycled polyester is made from PET (polyethylene terephthalate) from plastic bottles, according to the non-profit Textile Exchange.

In Europe, most textile waste is either dumped or burned. Only 22 percent is recycled or reused — and most of that is turned into insulation, mattress stuffing or cleaning cloths. "Less than one percent of fabric used to produce clothing is recycled into new clothing," the European Commission told AFP. Recycling textiles is "much more complex than recycling other materials, such as glass or paper", according to Lenzing, an Austrian manufacturer famous for its wood-based fibers.

For a start, clothes made from more than two fibers are for now regarded as unrecyclable. Those clothes that can be recycled must be sorted by color, and then have zips, buttons, studs and other material removed. It is often costly and labor intensive, say experts, though pilot projects are beginning to appear in Europe, said Greenpeace's Lisa Panhuber. However, the technology is "in its infancy", according to Trunk. Reusing cotton may seem like the obvious answer. But when cotton is recycled, the quality drops so much that it often has to be woven with other materials, experts say, bringing us slap back to the problem of mixed fabrics.

To square the recycling circle, fashion brands have instead been using recycled plastic — to the anger and frustration of the food industry, which pays for the collection of the used PET bottles.

"Let's be clear: this is not circularity," the beverage industry wrote in a withering open letter to the European Parliament last year, denouncing the "worrying trend" of the fashion industry making "green claims related to the use of recycled material". Recycling polyester is another dead end,

Steel woes push Thyssenkrupp into quarterly loss

FRANKFURT: German industrial conglomerate Thyssenkrupp reported a first-quarter loss on Wednesday, once again weighed down by its troubled steel unit. Between October and December, the steel-to-submarines group swung to a net loss of 314 million euros (\$336 million), compared with a profit of 75 million euros a year earlier. Thyssenkrupp, which runs its business year from October to September, partly blamed a 200-million-euro impairment related to "the higher cost of capital... especially at Steel Europe".

Group sales fell by nearly nine percent to 8.2 billion euros over the quarter, while order intake also declined year-on-year. Lower prices and weaker demand weighed especially heavily on the steel unit, which has long been Thyssenkrupp's problem child.

Once a symbol of German industrial might, Thyssenkrupp has suffered in re-

cent years as falling prices, high energy costs and competition from Asian rivals hammered its traditional steel business.

It is trying to shift to climate-neutral production — without burning fossil fuels — but this needs huge investments. The group has embarked on a major restructuring to try to turn the tide and is in talks with Czech billionaire Daniel Kretinsky about a potential joint-venture in the steel business.

"We are conducting constructive negotiations, but we have not yet achieved any results", CEO Miguel Lopez told reporters. Thyssenkrupp is also considering selling all or part of its marine systems unit. Here too, "nothing has yet been decided," Lopez said.

Looking ahead, Thyssenkrupp cut its full-year outlook saying it now expected to break even in terms of net income after previously forecasting a positive figure "in the low to mid three-digit million euro range". Sales are seen coming in at the prior-year level, after the group had previously assumed a slight increase. Shares in Thyssenkrupp fell by nearly eight percent in mid-morning trading in Frankfurt. — AFP

Swedish union allows Tesla repairs as strike continues

STOCKHOLM: Sweden's metalworkers union said Wednesday it would temporarily allow some repairs of Tesla cars, as a strike over the electric carmaker's refusal to sign a collective wage agreement nears its fourth month.

The Swedish strike, launched by the metal workers' union IF Metall, began on Oct 27 when some 130 mechanics at 10 Tesla repair shops in seven cities walked off the job. IF Metall then extended the strike to include work on Teslas at other repair shops which served multiple brands.

The strike has since grown into a larger conflict between Tesla and almost a dozen unions seeking to protect Sweden's labor model, including postal workers, dock workers and even spreading to neighboring Nordic countries. "As the conflict looks set to go on, IF Metall is now offering a tempo-

rary exemption. It will help Tesla owners who have been hardest hit by the conflict," IF Metall said in a statement, stressing that Tesla was still refusing to sign a collective wage agreement.

Negotiated sector by sector, collective agreements with unions are the basis of the Nordic labour market model, covering almost 90 percent of all employees in Sweden and 80 percent in Denmark, and guaranteeing wages and working conditions. Despite the fact that many of Tesla's employees in Sweden are union members, they cannot benefit from the collective bargaining agreements unless Tesla signs on to them. Tesla chief executive Elon Musk has long rejected calls to allow the company's 127,000 employees worldwide to unionize.

The exemption to allow repairs will run from February 19 to April 30, and was only for Teslas not in a drivable state, IF Metall said. It will also only apply to repair shops that serve multiple brands and not the main Tesla workshops. In addition, it will only cover older cars and not those seeking repairs under a Tesla warranty. — AFP

Indeed, NGOs told AFP much of Europe's waste clothes sent to Asia go to "Export Processing Zones", which Paul Roeland of the Clean Clothes Campaign said were "notorious for providing 'lawless' enclaves, where even the low labor standards of Pakistan and India are not observed".

Exporting "clothes to countries with low labour costs for sorting is also a horror in terms of carbon footprint", said Marc Minassian of Pellenc ST, which makes optical sorting machines used in recycling.

The terrible truth is that "recycling is a myth for clothing", Greenpeace's consumer expert Panhuber insisted. Others, however, are turning towards new vegetable fibres, with German brand Hugo Boss using Pinatex made from pineapple leaves for some of its sneakers.

But some experts warn that we could be falling into another trap. Thomas Ebele of the SloWeAre label questioned the way these non-woven fibers are held together "in the majority of cases" with thermoplastic polyester or PLA. It means that while the clothing can be "sometimes broken down" it is not recyclable, he said. "Biodegradable does not mean compostable," he warned, saying that some of these fibers have to be broken down industrially.

But beyond all that, "the biggest problem is the amount of clothes being made", said Celeste Grillet of Carbone 4. For Panhuber and Greenpeace, the solution is simple: buy fewer clothes.

"We have to decrease consumption," she said — repair, "reuse and upcycle". — AFP



LEINFELDEN-ECHTERDINGEN, Germany: This file photo taken on July 28, 2023 shows the logo of travel company TUI displayed at the office of a travel agency at Stuttgart Airport in Leinfelden-Echterdingen near Stuttgart, southwestern Germany. — AFP

German travel giant TUI to quit London listing

FRANKFURT: German travel group TUI will abandon its listing on the London Stock Exchange and be primarily listed in Frankfurt, the company said Tuesday, after reporting a strong first quarter. Shareholders overwhelmingly voted in favor of de-listing from London, TUI said in a statement, ending the company's dual-listing structure.

TUI's exit is the latest setback to the UK exchange, which has struggled to defend its status as a preeminent global finance hub since Brexit and has seen a series of high-profile corporate departures.

Online betting giant Flutter is planning to switch its main listing from London to New York, while British chip designer Arm launched a blockbuster IPO in New York last year. Building materials giant CRH also switched its primary market listing to New York from London last year.

TUI's chief financial officer Mathias Kiep welcomed the vote outcome, saying it would lead to a "simplified structure" and improved liquidity for the group. He noted that there had been "a marked shift in liquidity" from the UK to Germany in recent years, raising the question of whether the dual listing still made sense for the company. TUI expects to enter Frankfurt's MDAX index as a single listing on June 24, when its listing on the London Stock Exchange will end.

Tuesday's vote came after the group reported revenues of 4.3 billion euros (\$4.6 billion) in the first quarter of its financial year, a 15-percent jump on a year earlier, as TUI continues to benefit from a post-pandemic travel boom. Underlying profit before interest and tax, normally negative in the first quarter due to seasonal factors, was "positive for the first time" at six million euros, TUI said, thanks to "sustained demand for travel with higher prices and rates". TUI, which offers everything from hotel stays to cruises and charter flights, added that it had welcomed some 3.5 million guests over the first quarter, an increase of six percent year-on-year. The group confirmed its full-year outlook, expecting revenues to grow by at least 10 percent. — AFP



ACCRA, Ghana: People go through secondhand clothes at the Kantamanto market in Accra, Ghana. — AFP

according to Lauriane Veillard, of the Zero Waste Europe (ZWE) network.

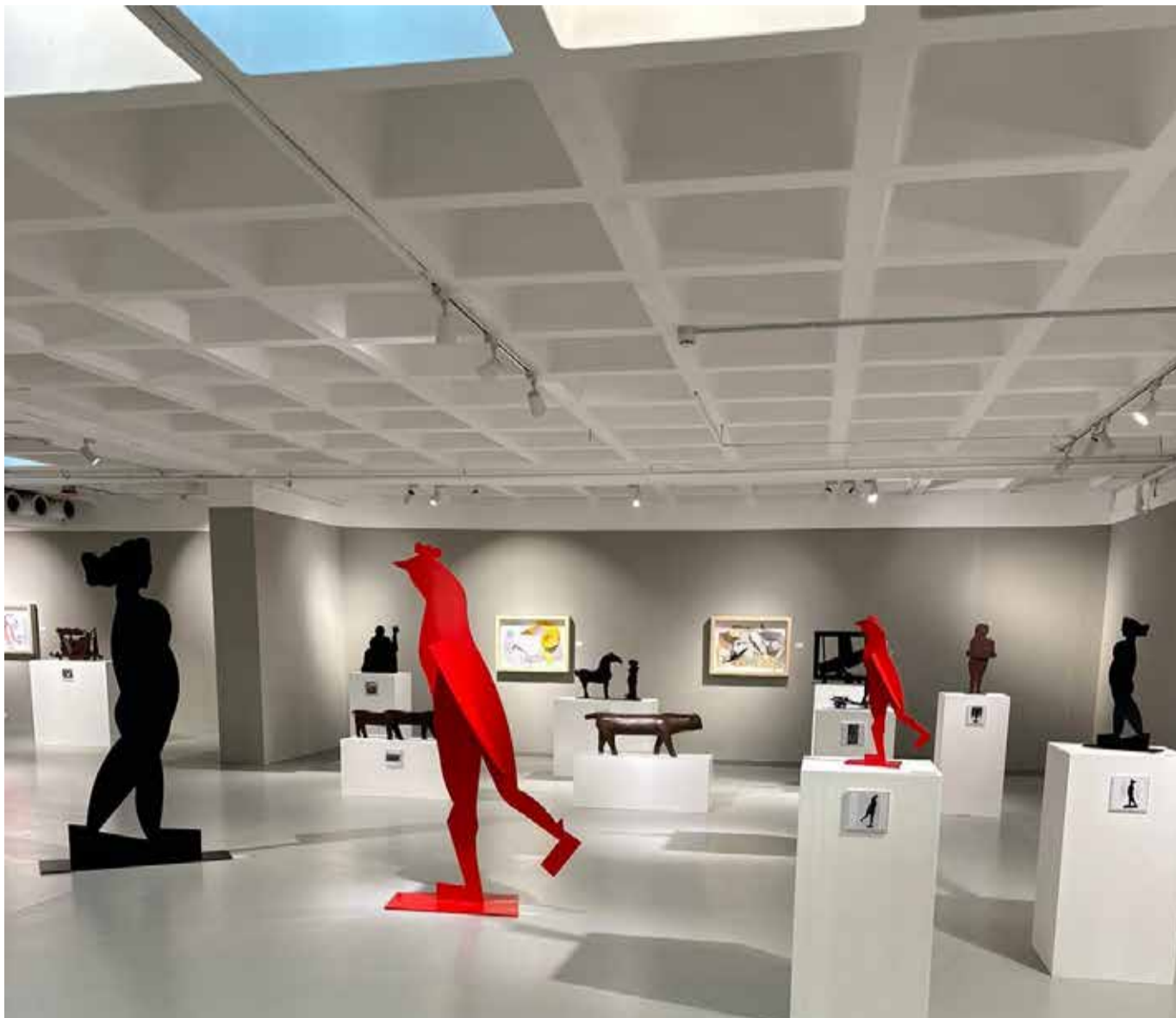
It is often impure and mixed with other materials like elastane or Lycra, which "prevents any recycling", she insisted. Jean-Baptiste Sultan, of the French NGO Carbone 4, is equally damning of polyester. "From its manufacture to its recycling, (polyester) pollutes water, air and the soil."

In fact, environmental groups have been demanding that the textile industry stops making polyester entirely — despite it accounting for more than half of their output, according to Textile Exchange.

So where do all those mountains of unrecyclable polyester and mixed fabrics end up after Western consumers dutifully bring them to recycling bins? Nearly half of textile waste collected in Europe ends up in African secondhand markets — most controversially in Ghana — or more often it is tipped into "open landfills", according to European Environment Agency (EEA) figures from 2019.

Another 41 percent of the bloc's textile waste goes to Asia, it added, mostly "to dedicated economic zones where they are sorted and processed". "The used textiles are mostly downcycled into industrial rags or filling, or re-exported for recycling in other Asian countries or for reuse in Africa," the agency said. A new EU rule adopted in November aims to ensure waste exports are recycled rather than dumped. But the EEA admitted that there was "a lack of consistent data on the quantities and fate of used textiles and textile waste in Europe".

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2024



CAP EXHIBITS KHALID FARHAN'S WORKS TO PAY TRIBUTE TO ADAM HENIEN

By Ghadeer Ghloom

The Contemporary Art Platform (CAP) exhibited the works of Bahraini artist Khalid Farhan on Tuesday. Farhan, a graduate from Cairo, told Kuwait Times his artistic journey started from drawing, later extending to exploring sculpture. Being in Africa during his studies, he gained interest in African art, alongside the

significance of the Egyptian pharaonic civilization representing a vast portion of the world's ancientness.

In Bahrain, where Farhan hails from, sculpture artists were very few, making it a unique field for him to pursue. Farhan presents abstract art that may be challenging to comprehend, as its beauty lies in its concept and not in its outside appearance. Farhan also said he is presenting this exhibi-

tion under the title: "A Tribute to Adam Henien", who used to be his teacher during his years of study.

This is Farhan's second time curating such an event. The initial exhibition took place in Bahrain and was a great success. With this exhibition, Farhan said he has selectively chosen Henien's most significant works and interpreted them in his own artistic style. While Henien special-

ized in three-dimensional art, Farhan explores the realm of two-dimensional art, achieving success through his connection and simplification techniques. Furthermore, Farhan's use of sheet sculpture sets his work apart, as only a few artists attempt this technique. The essence of his artistic practice revolves around renewal, change and continuous development.



Khalid Farhan explaining his artwork to visitors



Sax appeal: Zimbabwe sweethearts send surprise serenades



Misheck Nyamhotsi arranges a Valentine's Day "money bouquet", combining cut flower stems of red roses with up to as many as fifteen \$20 notes, at a local florist shop in Harare. — AFP photos



Misheck Nyamhotsi holds a bunch of \$20 notes in the early stages of arranging a Valentine's Day "money bouquet", combining cut flower stems of red roses with as many as fifteen \$20 notes, at a local florist shop in Harare.

Soaring romantic melodies reverberated among the homes and office blocks of Zimbabwe's capital Harare on Wednesday, as squads of saxophonists became surprise messengers of love. Despite decades of economic suffering, and a sometimes conservative culture that discourages public displays of affection, Zimbabwe has embraced Valentine's Day.

The cards, flowers and chocolates mirror the similar celebrations around the world, but this southern African country has also fallen for the idea of hiring a saxophonist to ambush and serenade one's sweetheart. Arundel Matoi, known on the sax scene as Sir Arundel, took his mission to play for lawyer Tarisai Leoba at her office seriously.

Hired by her Canada-based spouse to spring a musical surprise, he first pretended to be seeking legal advice as he toured her workplace. Then, sure of the terrain, he came back in with his instrument and launched into a solo rendition of "Love Nwantiti" by Nigerian artist CKay. Leoba was astonished but, luckily for her absent spouse, delighted. "What just happened is as special as the music is," she gushed. "This has never happened to me before and I was shocked. I felt very special. The feeling was overwhelming," she said. Matoi said he had spent a lot of time rehearsing with his saxophone for Valentine's Day, his busiest of the year.



Musician and saxophonist Arundel Matoi, who performs as Sir Arundel, collects a "money bouquet" from florist Mita Patel (left), for delivery to a client on Valentine's Day.

Mixed emotions

"I trained for this day. I have many visits scheduled," he told AFP. "Saxophone music, I would say is gaining momentum. 'I will say it's our time. People book us for parties, for weddings. It appears like it's a must: You must have a saxophonist.' One small disappointment: 2024 being a leap year, some feel women should take the plunge in gift giving, and the numbers hiring saxophonists to play for their men are lower.

The bouquets that accompany the solo are no less lavish. In a country where hyper-inflation has rendered local currency all but worthless, the flower arrangements are often intertwined with high-value US dollar bills. The sax-

ophone was invented by a Belgian, but its exotic music has become more and more accepted in Zimbabwe, according to the busy musicians. "Here it's very exotic in our traditional lines of music and, looking at it being a new thing in Zimbabwe, people have fallen in love with it," said Stephen Nyoni, known to fans as "Stavo Sax".

Hard cash

Saxophonists are fully booked for Valentine's Day and can charge between \$60 and \$200 -- a small fortune in Zimbabwe's inflation-haunted economy -- to surprise a loved one. "It's a good vibe. It's overwhelming, it's too busy but I appreciate it because we are getting a lot



Tarisai Leoba poses for a portrait after receiving a "money bouquet" from saxophonist Panashe Matoi, who serenaded her with his saxophone on Valentine's Day.

of engagements with the Zimbabwean crowd," Stavo said, as he rehearsed for his own packed schedule.

"People are really appreciating it and the demand of calls has been rising, but then there are a lot of saxophonists in Zimbabwe, so we share the clients and everything," he said. So, plenty of work for musicians, but how do the lovers feel about the intrusion? "People cry, they get confused, sometimes they don't even know what to do. It's a whole mix of emotions all the time." — AFP

Lifestyle



Gallery employees pose with an interactive artwork entitled 'Add Colour (Refugee Boat)', by Yoko Ono, during a photocall to promote the forthcoming exhibition 'Yoko Ono: Music of the Mind', at Tate Modern in London.--AFP photos



An artwork entitled 'A HOLE' 2009.



A gallery employee poses with an artwork entitled 'Helmets (Pieces of Sky)' 2001, by Yoko Ono.



Visitors walk past a poster during a photocall to promote the forthcoming exhibition 'Yoko Ono: Music of the Mind' at Tate Modern in London.



An artwork entitled 'Apple' 1966.



A gallery assistant poses with an interactive artwork entitled 'WISH TREE', by Yoko Ono.



A visitor takes a picture of an artwork by John Lennon and Yoko Ono, entitled 'WAR IS OVER! If you want it, 1969'.

London exhibition celebrates 'unknown artist' Yoko Ono

She is the world's most famous unknown artist—everyone knows her name, but no one knows what she does, John Lennon once said of the perceived disregard for his wife Yoko Ono, who turns 91 on Sunday. From Thursday, Ono's impact on conceptual art will be on display in a retrospective exhibition at the Tate Modern in London. The "Music of the Mind" show, which runs until September 1, explores the multi-disciplinary works of a woman more famed for being the murdered Beatle's wife than a conceptual art icon. "This exhibition is a true celebration of Yoko as an artist," one of the exhibition's curators, Andrew de Brun, told AFP. "Indeed, John Lennon was a very important collaborator for her, but we are very happy to be able to showcase her art."

Two hundred works

Spanning seven decades, the exhibition presents a detailed exploration of Ono's artistic legacy through 200 pieces, including installations, objects, videos, photographs, sculptures and documents detailing her performances and musical compositions. "We recognize the importance of Yoko Ono in contemporary art and culture," de Brun said of the retrospective, which the curators say is the most extensive ever done in Britain about Ono.

"By displaying some of her works, we help to showcase the significant place she occupies. "We are pleased to present her work to new generations of visitors... showing her activism, her campaigns for peace," the curator added. Since her initial exhibitions in New York during the 1950s, Ono has been a proponent of conceptualism—an art movement that posits the concept or idea behind an artwork is more important than the physical piece.

The exhibition examines some of the artist's most controversial works or performances, such as the video of "Cut Piece", a work she first presented in Japan and then in 1965 at Carnegie Recital Hall in New York. On stage, Ono appeared in a black dress and left scissors beside her, allowing the audience to cut off her clothing in an exhibit aimed at drawing attention to the violence so-

came to me and asked if it was alright to hammer a nail in the painting," Ono recalled in her text "Some Notes on the Lisson Gallery Show". "I said it was alright if he pays five shillings.

"Instead of paying five shillings, he asked if it was alright for him to hammer an imaginary nail in. That was John Lennon." Ono and Lennon married in 1969 and remained together until his murder



Visitors look at an art installation entitled 'Half-A-Room, 1967', by Yoko Ono.

ciety inflicts on women. The exhibition appears as a vindication of the artist's epic journey, after decades of being blamed by some for the breakup of The Beatles in 1970.

Meeting John Lennon

Ono's conceptual art installations at London's Indica Gallery in 1967 captivated Lennon. On that occasion, a work called "Ceiling Painting" invited visitors to climb a ladder and view through a magnifying glass the word "yes" that appeared on the ceiling. Lennon climbed the ladder and was amazed by the work, which is now being exhibited in London.

"When Hammer A Nail painting was exhibited at Indica Gallery, a person

in New York in 1980 at the age of 40. In their 13 years together, the couple released six albums and created experimental music recordings, short films, performances and installations.

With Lennon, the Tokyo-born artist achieved acclaim in music, a topic that the London exhibition also explores. The couple's 1980 release "Double Fantasy", recorded before Lennon's death, won the Grammy Award for Album of the Year. "When I hear music, my body just starts to move," Ono said in an interview in 2013. "That's just me. That's just my body. And I was like that as a child, too."—AFP

The lovers who left their heart in Havana cemetery

Cuban sugar magnate Juan Pedro Baro spared no expense when it came to building the immense marble tomb of his one true love in Havana's Colon cemetery, an unlikely repository of past passions. Baro's adulterous romance with one of Cuba's most beautiful women, Catalina Lasa, who died in 1930, scandalized high society, but lives on in the luxurious touches of her Art Deco mausoleum.

"The cemetery is full of love stories," said Mario Darias, a 66-year-old singer-songwriter who has written several books about the Havana graveyard, founded in 1876 and which extends over around 50 hectares (120 acres) in the heart of the city. With its elaborate sculptures and architecture, the cemetery is considered an open-air museum, housing the final remains of independence heroes, writers, musicians, painters and famous doctors.

But it is also a place where loves—some shocking, some hidden, some thwarted—are immortalized. Lasa's tomb represents one of Cuba's most famous love stories. The upper-class beauty was married to the son of Cuba's vice president when she met and fell in love with Baro. "High society took sides in this matter and turned their backs on them," explained Darias. The two lovers fled to Paris where they lived until 1917, when Pope Benedict XV granted their request to have Lasa's marriage annulled. The pair returned to Havana where they lived until Lasa fell ill and died aged 55. Her mausoleum, currently under restoration, is made of white marble and black granite, and topped with glass roses made by French glassmaker Rene Lalique, who died in 1945.

A scandalous age difference

Elsewhere lies the tomb of another

pair of lovers who raised eyebrows in their time, a teacher and student with a 30-year age difference. Modesto Canto (1890-1977) is buried alongside his much younger wife Margarita Pacheco (1920-1959) in a tomb bearing the sculptured busts of the pair and the phrase "united by eternal love."

"Many people were opposed to their relationship. Everyone said she was going to be widowed very soon, but she died first," said Darias. Not far away stands the tomb of Amelia Goyri who died while eight months pregnant at the age of 24 in 1901, and was buried with her baby atop her legs, as was the custom.

Her bereaved husband began a dedication to her tomb so intense that its emotion was contagious, and visitors to the cemetery began stopping to pay their respects to her as well.

A two-meter-high white marble stat-

ue of her was erected, but it was in 1914 that a myth was born and she earned her nickname "La Milagrosa," the miraculous one. When her tomb was opened that year, she is reported to have been found intact, with her baby in her arms.

Since then Cubans have flocked to her tomb to leave offerings and wish for luck, whether to conceive or protect a child, for health, or a school exam. Leticia Mojarrieta, 56, knows this love story and complies with the ritual of never turning one's back on the sculpture—which Goyri's husband used to do during four decades of visits to her grave. She is asking for protection for her daughter-in-law, who is pregnant and has just emigrated to the United States. "We detected a little liquid in the baby's chest. I came to ask for help" from La Milagrosa, she told AFP.—AFP



Detail of a high relief on a tomb door at Colon Cemetery in Havana.--AFP photos



Thank offerings are pictured on the tomb of Amelia Goyri (a.k.a. La Milagrosa) at Colon Cemetery in Havana.



An employee of the Colon Cemetery cleans among the graves near the mausoleum of Catalina Lasa and Juan Pedro Baro (right-back) in Havana.



Detail of the black granite doors of the Mausoleum of Catalina Lasa and Juan Pedro Baro at Colon Cemetery in Havana.



The bronze busts of the tomb of the couple Margarita Pacheco and Modesto Canto, known as "The Tomb of Love," are pictured at Colon Cemetery in Havana.



Across the sea from Venice, Albanian studio crafts CARNIVAL MASKS



An artist works on a carnival mask at the Venice Art Mask workshop in Shkoder.

As carnival celebrations are held across the globe, more than two dozen craftsmen in a quaint studio in northern Albania put the final touches on a series of elegant Venetian masks destined for balls, film sets, and street parties. Every year, the Venice Art Mask Factory in Albania's Shkoder produces more than 20,000 hand-crafted masks, including 1,700 unique pieces this year alone, to be donned by carnival revelers from Rio to Tokyo.

A lion's share of the masks crafted this season were delivered across the Adriatic Sea to Venice, where this year's carnival was dedicated to Marco Polo — one of the city's most iconic residents with celebrations marking 700 years since his death. "With feathers, lace or Swarovski crystals, Venetian masks this year are made to attract all eyes thanks to their sparkling elegance," Edmond Angoni, the owner and leading artist behind the Venice Art Mask Factory, told AFP.

Angoni also owns eight shops in Venice where his creations — costumes, gilded masks, and sumptuous dresses — are sold for up to 5,000 euros (\$5,350) each. Among the most popular items this year are large animal masks inspired by the works of Austrian painter Gustav Klimt and Czech artist Alphonse Mucha. Each new model



A visitor looks at carnival masks in the salon of the Venice Art Mask workshop in Shkoder.

mask is a work of art," said Gise Zeqo, who has been working at the studio since it opened 27 years ago.

Since opening its doors in 1997, Angoni's studio has produced hundreds of thousands of masks, including those worn in Stanley Kubrick's erotic thriller "Eyes Wide Shut", starring Nicole Kidman and Tom Cruise. "From the simplest to the most extravagant, large or small, each mask is a unique piece, a unique work of art," Angoni told AFP.

Alongside classic masks of Harlequin and Pulcinella that hark back to the Venice of old, new pieces feature the faces of Marilyn Monroe and Michael Jackson along with characters from the Netflix hit "Money Heist". The showroom alone attracts curious visitors in droves. "I'm in this extremely beautiful place, full of masks," said Anna Lisa Manciani, a customer from Italy, as she shopped for a mask for herself and her husband. "It's hard to choose." — AFP



A visitor takes a photo of carnival masks in the salon of the Venice Art Mask workshop in Shkoder.



An artist works on a carnival mask at the Venice Art Mask workshop in Shkoder.



A visitor poses with a carnival mask in the salon of the Venice Art Mask workshop in Shkoder.

Bali \$10 tourist e-tax comes into force

The Indonesian resort haven of Bali began imposing a 150,000 rupiah (\$10) tax on arriving tourists Wednesday to preserve the culture of the "Island of Gods", officials said. Tourist-dependent Bali attracts millions of foreign visitors annually and the beach-dotted island is trying to capitalize on its popularity to boost its coffers and protect its tropical allure. "This levy is aimed at the protection of the culture and the environment in Bali," Bali's acting governor Sang Made Mahendra Jaya said at a launch ceremony Monday.



The fee will have to be paid electronically through the "Love Bali" online portal and will apply to foreign tourists entering Bali from abroad or from other parts of Indonesia, according to a press release. The levy will not apply to domestic Indonesian tourists. Nearly 4.8 million tourists visited Bali between January and November last year, according to official figures, as the island continued to rebound from the Covid-19 pandemic after imposing a zero-tolerance policy on rule-breakers.

The palm-fringed hotspot has vowed a crackdown on misbehaving tourists after a spate of incidents that have included acts of disrespect to the predominantly Hindu island's culture. Incidents in recent years have included foreign tourists posing for naked photographs at sacred sites and flashing in the street. Last year, the local government published an etiquette guide for tourists who wish to visit Bali after being pressed to do so by the island's immigration office. — AFP

Roads, farming threaten Ecuador 'lost city' complex

Shielded by the jungle for hundreds of years, the remains of a massive 2,500-year-old network of Ecuadorian cities are being threatened by road and farm encroachment just as its long-held secrets are being revealed, researchers say. Traces of an Amazonian "lost city" were first discovered in 1978, but the full extent of what is now believed to be the largest and oldest such urban expanse were only revealed last year with the help of laser mapping.

The vast site, which covers more than 1,000 square kilometers (385 square miles), lies deep in the Upano valley on the foothills of the Andes mountain range in eastern Ecuador. It consists of ancient settlements of different sizes, connected by what researchers describe as a complex system of roads. Archeologists have also identified some 7,400 mounds in various shapes, made by human hands millennia ago.

They stand up to four meters (about 13 feet) tall and five times as wide and are believed to have been the foundations of homes, or communal areas for rituals or festivals. Some have already been damaged — wrongly thought by road developers to be natural formations that they could break through. "There is an urgent need... for a protection plan," said Spanish archeologist Alejandra Sanchez, who has been studying the site for a decade.

Beyond the road construction issue, Sanchez also described the risks posed by erosion, deforestation, and agriculture to the mounds, which she said are "destroyed very easily by rain, wind, plows." The Upano River, cradle of the Indigenous culture of the same name, is also



Ecuadorian archaeologist Alden Yopez speaks during an interview with AFP at the Universidad Catolica's Weilbauer-Porras museum in Quito.

the victim of voracious mining, both legal and wildcat.

'The tip of the iceberg'

As a first step towards having the site protected, Ecuador's National Institute of Cultural Heritage (INPC) is working on delineating the complex. The INPC in 2015 started mapping out the area using LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) technology, bouncing laser light off buildings or trees to measure landscapes. The data was shared with archeologists in 2021. Last year, Sanchez and Argentine researcher Rita Alvarez presented their analysis of the images in an INPC publication.

Then in January, a French-led team

reported their own findings based on the mapping data in the journal Science — giving global news coverage to the discovery. The site was first described by priest and archeologist Pedro Porras in the 1980s, according to the private Catholic University's Weilbauer-Porras museum in Quito, which displays finely decorated red-tinted vessels, and a piece of volcanic rock carved in a half-human, half-animal shape. It also houses maps and black-and-white photographs of Porras pointing to the mounds protruding from the ground. According to researchers who have studied the city network since the 1980s, the Upano people who built it had the political, economic, and religious organization typical of great civ-

ilizations. Construction on the mounds is thought to have begun between 500 BC and 300-600 AD — around the time of the Roman empire. Other urban sites discovered in the Amazon date from between 500-1,500 AD. And while Ecuador may once have "envied" the archeological riches of other Latin American nations, the Upano site matches them in "quantity, grandeur, history and cultural expression," archaeologist Alden Yopez of the Catholic University told AFP.

He believes discoveries so far are only "the tip of the iceberg" of an even bigger civilization, and that the site may extend up to 2,000 square km around the Upano, Palora and Pastaza rivers, where there are also signs of settlements. "The idea that the Amazon was an unpopulated space or only inhabited by nomads has been discarded," said INPC director Catalina Tello. — AFP



Geomatics analyst at the Institute of Cultural Heritage, Leonardo Auz, shows a digital representation of the relief of an area near the Upano River in the Ecuadorian Amazon, where there would be monumental archaeological remains.



Ecuadorian archaeologist Alden Yopez holds a piece found in the Ecuadorian Amazon.



Ecuadorian archaeologist Alden Yopez speaks during an interview with AFP.



View of pieces found in the Ecuadorian Amazon, at the Universidad Catolica's Weilbauer-Porras museum in Quito.



Ecuadorian archaeologist Alden Yopez holds a vase found in the Ecuadorian Amazon. — AFP photos

Sports

Mercedes unveils Mercedes 2024 car for final season with Hamilton

Wolff hopes revamped car can close the gap on the champions

LONDON: Lewis Hamilton admitted it felt "emotional" and "surreal" to take part in the final Formula One car launch of his Mercedes career on Wednesday. Hamilton, a seven-time Formula One world champion, will leave Mercedes at the end of the 2024 season in a stunning switch to Ferrari. The 39-year-old had signed a new two-year deal with Mercedes worth £100 million (\$126 million) in August.

But Hamilton recently activated a break clause to seal his move to the Italian team after admitting the prospect of "driving in Ferrari red" was too hard to turn down. Speaking at the Mercedes launch for the first time since his blockbuster move was confirmed, Hamilton said: "The last few weeks have obviously been emotional and it is very surreal to be here." "The focus through the whole of winter training is getting the team back to where we once were."

"We have had these difficult couple of years which have been really grounding for us. It has helped us regroup and really look at things."

Mercedes team principal Toto Wolff, standing alongside Hamilton at the launch, added: "It has been a very busy winter. It will be our last season with Lewis as we are keen on bringing a quick car."

Hamilton, who joined Mercedes from McLaren in 2013, won six of his record-equalling seven world championships with the Silver Arrows.

But the British driver has struggled to match Red Bull rival Max Verstappen since he missed out on what would have been a record eighth world cham-

ionship in 2021 in controversial fashion. His long goodbye to Mercedes made for an awkward final car launch at the team's Northamptonshire base. Hamilton answered just three questions from the Mercedes moderator during the brief nine-minute event.

"I came here in 2013 so 11 years with the team and now I am starting my 12th," he said. "It is such a privilege to work with a group of people where you see the work they do over the winter and you see a car come together at the beginning of the year and it is the most exciting part of the season."

'Found some clues'

Hamilton, without a win in two years, and teammate George Russell, will get their first taste of this season's Mercedes car during a shakedown test at rain-lashed Silverstone on Wednesday. "We have to be diligent, maximize practice and even one lap, George and I might get in the rain today will give us a feeling of what is to come," Hamilton said. Last year marked Mercedes' first winless campaign in a dozen years as they finished 413 points behind Red Bull. Wolff hopes the revamped car can close the gap on the champions in the coming season.

"This is a complete relaunch of a car. It is very different, not only on the aerodynamic front, but mainly underneath," he said. "The most important thing is to look inward, and what is it that we got wrong? We found some clues, we tried to eliminate as many variables as we could, and the buzz in the company is



SILVERSTONE: A handout image released by Mercedes on February 14, shows the team's British driver George Russell (2R), Team principal Toto Wolff (C), British driver Lewis Hamilton (2L), Technical Director James Allison (L) and Managing Director of HPP, Hywel (R) posing with their new Mercedes-AMG F1 W15 E Performance Formula One racing car during their 2024 season launch, in Silverstone on February 14, 2024. — AFP

something I have not seen for so many years.

"We know it is a big mountain to climb because if a team is so far ahead like Red Bull were last year that is not easy. But we have a superb driver com-

ination and hopefully a fast car. There are some good ingredients to be back at the front again." The opening Grand Prix of the F1 season is set for Bahrain on March 2. — AFP

Super Bowl draws record 123 million US viewers

NEW YORK: A record 123.4 million people tuned in to watch the Kansas City Chiefs beat the San Francisco 49ers in Sunday's Super Bowl — with the added attraction of an Usher-headlined halftime show and the attention-stealing presence of Taylor Swift.

Chiefs' quarterback Patrick Mahomes found Mecole Hardman in the end zone deep into overtime to seal a dramatic 25-22 win in what was also the longest Super Bowl game 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.

CBS parent company Paramount said in a statement that a total audience of 123.4 million across all platforms made it the "most-watched telecast in history" — up seven percent from last year's game. Paramount said 120 million people watched the NFL championship game on CBS alone, a record for a single US network.

The viewership total came in just behind that of the Apollo 11 mission's 1969 lunar landing, which was seen by up to 150 million in the United States across the country's three television networks at the time. Sunday's Super Bowl viewership was boosted by a confluence of non-sporting star power, with Usher leading an all-star cast that included Ludacris, Alicia Keys and Jermaine Dupri for the halftime show.

Slow jam king Usher held his own as he cap-



KANSAS CITY: Kansas City Chiefs fans wait for the Chiefs' Super Bowl LVIII victory parade on February 14, 2024, in Kansas City, Missouri. — AFP

tured 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." But pop superstar Taylor Swift didn't sing a word and was still the night's most-watched fan as she cheered on her boyfriend, Chiefs tight end Travis Kelce, from a luxury box with a coterie of famous friends including the rapper Ice Spice.

Swift's relationship with charismatic star Kelce has been a boon to television ratings, her every

move offering headline fodder. The "You Belong With Me" and "Anti Hero" singer's attendance at Chiefs' games has attracted many of Swift's younger, largely female fans — helping widen NFL viewership to a new demographic.

Beyonce was also in the stadium Sunday with her hip-hop mogul husband Jay-Z — and announced a new album during a commercial she did with telecoms giant Verizon, in which she repeatedly tries to "break the internet." — AFP

Piedt eyes prospect of 'famous' SA second Test win

HAMILTON: Recalled South African spinner Dane Piedt is eyeing a "famous, famous win" after claiming five New Zealand wickets Wednesday to give the understrength tourists a 31-run lead at stumps on the second day of the second Test.

New Zealand's batting succumbed to a disciplined attack led by Piedt, in his first Test since 2019, to be all out for 211 in response to South Africa's 242 in Hamilton. A Proteas team with just 40 Test caps between them have opened up the prospect of squaring the two-match series after crashing to a 281-run loss in the first Test at Mount Maunganui.

The Proteas have never lost a Test series to New Zealand, but most of their first-choice players have stayed home for a domestic Twenty20 competition. Piedt, who took career-best figures of 5-89 on a spin-friendly Seddon Park pitch, said his unheralded team had the self-belief to go on and win. "It has been a tough tour but we have a great camaraderie inside that dressing room," he said. "We're quite open and honest with one another and hopefully those type of things will come through now. "That's in the South African DNA and we'll fight as hard as

we can now to get a famous, famous Test win."

The 33-year-old off-spinner, not needed for the first Test, claimed the key wickets of Kane Williamson for 43 and Tom Latham for 40 after lunch, with New Zealand having started soundly to reach 75-1. Rachin Ravindra, who hit a double century in the first Test, played on to Tshepo Moreki for 29 at the start of a hectic third session in which seven wickets tumbled. Using good variation and finding decent turn, he removed Glenn Phillips for four and Will Young for 36, along with the last wicket to fall of Neil Wagner, who had raced to 33 off 27 balls before he was stumped.

Dane Paterson was also effective for the Proteas, with his accurate seam bowling earning figures of 3-39. His first wicket came in the opening over of the innings when struggling opener Devon Conway was caught behind without scoring. Latham said the tricky batting conditions meant it was crucial New Zealand's bowlers strike quickly on day three. "Dane (Piedt) showed on that wicket it's obviously taking a lot of turn so from our point of view, the game's in the balance," Latham said.

"Only 30 ahead, it's going to be an important first couple of sessions for us tomorrow. Hopefully we can take few lessons from how South Africa bowled." The Proteas started day two at 220-6 but lost their last four wickets in just 8.2 overs as Will O'Rourke tore through the tail to finish with figures of 4-59 on debut. O'Rourke bowled both of the overnight batsmen, with Shaun von Berg reaching 38 on debut and Ruan de Swardt 64. — AFP



HAMILTON: New Zealand's Rachin Ravindra plays a shot during day two of the second cricket Test match between New Zealand and South Africa Seddon Park in Hamilton on February 14, 2024. — AFP



Ravindra Jadeja

India won't change approach against 'Bazball': Jadeja

RAJKOT: India spinner Ravindra Jadeja on Wednesday announced himself fit for the third Test against England and said he planned to keep his bowling "simple" against the opposition's attacking mindset. The left-handed all-rounder missed the second of the series' five Tests due to a hamstring injury but will be available at Rajkot from Thursday with the series level at 1-1.

England won the opener before India bounced back with a win but the tourists' attacking "Bazball" style of play has remained the talking point of the series so far. "It is not that England are difficult to beat but they play with a different style and it takes some time to understand that," Jadeja told reporters.

"Once you understand their style and approach we can plan our game accordingly," he added. "We will keep it simple and let them do whatever they want to, we have our game plan and if we stick to it then there are chances of being successful."

England batsman Ollie Pope frustrated the Indian spinners with the unorthodox reverse sweep during his match-winning 196 in the opener. India came back in the next Test to defeat the tourists by 106 runs, with pace bowler Jasprit Bumrah returning a match haul of nine wickets and Yashasvi Jaiswal hitting 209 in the first innings. "We just have to play good cricket because the opposition is good," Jadeja said. "We will have to give our best to win the match. We will try to play as a team, like we did in the last match and hope for one or two outstanding individual performances." — AFP

News in Brief

Son hurt finger in brawl

SEOUL: Tottenham Hotspurs captain Son Heung-min injured his finger in a brawl with a teammate on the eve of South Korea's humiliating loss to Jordan at the Asian Cup, the Korean football body said, with one player involved issuing an apology on social media Wednesday. South Korea, ranked 23rd in the world, was beaten 2-0 by 87th-ranked Jordan in the semi-finals of the Asian Football Confederation competition in Qatar. According to a report from British newspaper The Sun, Son dislocated his finger in a "bust-up" that erupted at dinner the night before the game. The incident reportedly happened after some younger players on the team — including Lee Kang-in of Paris Saint-Germain — rushed through their meal so they could leave early to play table tennis. — AFP

Indian wrestling suspension lifted

NEW DELHI: Wrestling's top global governing body has lifted its suspension of India's wrestling federation, six months after sanctioning it for failing to hold timely elections following a sexual harassment scandal. Several wrestlers accused the Wrestling Federation of India's former chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, 67, of sexual misconduct and harassment last year. Three of the sport's top Indian stars, including Olympic bronze medalist Sakshi Malik and world champion Vinesh Phogat, led a weeks-long sit-in protest in New Delhi demanding Singh's ouster. United World Wrestling (UWW) said in a Tuesday statement that it had decided to lift the suspension on February 9 under certain conditions, including the assurance that all wrestlers would be treated "without any discrimination." "This non-discrimination includes the three athletes who protested against alleged wrongdoings by the former president," it said. — AFP

Pan sets the pace at worlds

DOHA: China's new men's 100 metres freestyle world record holder Pan Zhanle posted the fastest time of 47.82 seconds in the heats of the event at the world championships on Wednesday. The 19-year-old headed the list of qualifiers for the semi-finals later on Wednesday. Italy's Alessandro Miressi (47.94sec) and Hungary's Nandor Nemeth (48.03sec) were second and third fastest respectively. Pan had on Sunday timed 46.80sec to shave 0.06sec off the previous record of 46.86 achieved by Romanian David Popovici at the European championships in Rome in August 2022. 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 3:11.08. — AFP

Chepchirchir banned for doping

PARIS: Sarah Chepchirchir became the latest Kenyan athlete to be banned for doping, receiving an eight-year suspension on Wednesday after she tested positive for a banned substance for the second time. The Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU) said in a statement the 39-year-old 2017 Tokyo marathon champion had tested positive for testosterone in a sample after she finished second in the Chonburi Marathon in Thailand last November. Chepchirchir failed to respond to the charge before the deadline which the AIU took to be an admission she had broken the doping rules. She had failed to respond also when set a deadline to have her B sample tested. "The AIU confirms by this decision the following Consequences for the Athlete's second Anti-Doping Rule Violation: a period of Ineligibility of eight (8) years commencing on 22 December 2023 until 21 December 2031." — AFP

Sports

City thump Copenhagen, cruise towards quarters

Guardiola hails Kevin De Bruyne's form 'extraordinary'

COPENHAGEN: Pep Guardiola hailed Kevin De Bruyne's form "extraordinary" after the Belgian was involved in all three goals as Manchester City beat FC Copenhagen 3-1 on Tuesday to close in on the Champions League quarter-finals. De Bruyne's early opener was cancelled out against the run of play by Magnus Mattsson. Bernardo Silva restored City's lead before half-time, but they had to wait until stoppage time to add further punishment for the hosts when Phil Foden turned home De Bruyne's cut-back. De Bruyne was sidelined for five months by a hamstring tear suffered on the opening night of the Premier League season in August.

But since his return last month, the 32-year-old has scored two goals and provided seven assists in seven appearances. "Extraordinary," said Guardiola of De Bruyne's statistics. "The biggest players love to appear in the biggest stages. It's the hour of truth when you are in the last 16 of the Champions League and we start well." The English champions have now won 11 consecutive games in all competitions as they remain on course to repeat last season's treble of Champions League, Premier League and FA Cup.

Copenhagen had not played a competitive game for two months since sealing their place in the last 16 by dumping out Manchester United and Galatasaray in the group stages. "They had a great group stage so we had to respect them," said De Bruyne. "We started really well but I think we made one mistake and they pounced on it. We played a really good game. In the second half we created a

lot of chances, could have scored more and luckily in the end we scored the third one, so it is a little bit of an advantage now."

Grealish injury blow

That lack of match sharpness from the Danish champions showed in the early stages as City stormed out of the blocks. De Bruyne headed a glorious chance wide and Kamil Grabara denied Ruben Dias with a fine save inside six minutes. The former Liverpool goalkeeper had no chance when De Bruyne broke the deadlock on 10 minutes with a clinical low finish from Foden's pass.

Jack Grealish had been surprisingly handed just his second start of the year by Guardiola, but the England international lasted just 15 minutes before he pulled up with a suspected groin injury. City had enjoyed nearly 80 percent possession and barely let Copenhagen inside their half for the first 35 minutes, yet were made to pay for one moment of sloppiness. Ederson's poor clearance was straight into the path of Mohamed Elyounoussi and his blocked shot fell to Mattson to mark his debut with a stunning strike from outside the box. City regained their composure and the lead before half-time.

Mattson was unfortunate as his attempted clearance ricocheted off De Bruyne and perfectly into the path of Silva to flick beyond Grabara. The Copenhagen goalkeeper kept his side in the tie in the early stages of the second period with spectacular stops to deny De Bruyne and Doku. Grabara then twice won a head-to-head battle with Haaland in



COPENHAGEN: Manchester City's Belgian midfielder #17 Kevin De Bruyne, Manchester City's Norwegian striker #09 Erling Haaland and FC Copenhagen's Danish midfielder #39 Oscar Hojlund vie for the ball during the UEFA Champions League round of 16. — AFP

stoppage time. City were keen to build up a comfortable advantage with the second leg falling between crucial Premier League games against Manchester United and Liverpool next month. And they

finally got the third goal that should kill off the tie when the in-form Foden slammed home his 15th goal of the season as City extended their unbeaten run in European competitions to 21 games.— AFP

Kuwait to hold international equestrian event

KUWAIT: Kuwait international referee Nabeela Al-Ali said Kuwait's hosting of two star and three star category championships under the supervision of the International Equestrian Federation at the current time and the major success of the private sector in support of the equestrian sport in general and show jumping in particular contributed to elevating the technical level of riders.

She said that the international championship was attended by senior sports personalities from abroad including Chairman of Saudi Arabian Equestrian Federation HH Prince Abdullah bin Fahad bin Abdullah who lauded the organization and the success of activities.

Saudi rider Abdullah Al-Sharbatly won the Grand Prize heat in the two international championships while competition will be very strong in the third one. Competitions will continue today at the Marina Beach by holding three heats for heights of 120, 130, and 140 cm, then on Friday for 110, 120, 135 and 140 cm.

Competitions will conclude on Saturday for the grand prize at the height of 145 cm.

Kenya marathoner Kiptum's funeral to be held Feb 24

NAIROBI: The funeral for Kenya's world marathon record-holder Kelvin Kiptum, who died in a car crash at the weekend, will be held on February 24, an athletics federation official told AFP on Wednesday. "We have settled on February 24 following consultations with the family and the government which have taken over all the funeral arrangements and protocol," Athletics Kenya executive committee member Barnabas Korir said, a day after visiting the bereaved family.

Kiptum, a 24-year-old father of two, and his Rwandan coach Gervais Hakizimana were killed in a car accident on Sunday night in the Eldoret area, the heartland of Kenyan distance running in the west of the country.

His death, just four months after he broke the world marathon record, shocked Kenya and the world of athletics. "We expect some high dignitaries to attend the burial including the President

William Ruto and the head of World Athletics Seb Coe," Korir said.

He added that the funeral service would be funded by the government and would take place in Kiptum's family home in Chepsamo, near Eldoret in the Rift Valley.

'Sporting powerhouse'

"In honour of Kenya's departed world marathon record holder, a true national hero, the Government will support Kiptum's family in according him a befitting heroic farewell," Kenya's cabinet said in a statement on Wednesday. "Kiptum was a sporting powerhouse whose record shattering achievements inspired millions around the world. He remains the only human in history to run a marathon under two hours and 1 minute." Kiptum shattered the world marathon record in Chicago in October last year, slicing 34 seconds off the previous fastest time set by his Kenyan rival, Eliud Kipchoge.

He was the favourite for the marathon at the Paris Olympics, where he was expected to go head to head with Kipchoge for the first time. Athletics Kenya also announced on Wednesday that it was cancelling trials for the African Games that had been due to take place this coming Friday and Sat-



Prince Abdullah (center) with Nabeela Al-Ali and Masoud Hayat.



NAIROBI: A general view of the front covers of two Kenyan newspapers, The Standard and Daily Nation, with tributes of world marathon record-holder Kelvin Kiptum, in Nairobi on February 13, 2024. — AFP

urday "in honour of the late Kelvin Kiptum".

It said the selection process for the team that will represent Kenya at the Games, set to be staged in Ghana's capital Accra next month, will take place at a future as yet unspecified date. Tributes have poured in for Kiptum, with Coe describing him as "an incredible athlete leaving an incredible legacy". — AFP

Leeds pounce in promotion race

LONDON: Leeds thrashed Swansea 4-0 to move into second place in the Championship after Southampton's 25-game unbeaten run came to an end with a 3-1 defeat at Bristol City on Tuesday. Leaders Leicester moved 12 points clear at the top of the table thanks to a 2-0 win over Sheffield Wednesday. Southampton had not tasted defeat in any competition since September 23.

Russell Martin's men finally came undone at Ashton Gate as second-half goals from Sam Bell, Rob Dickie and Harry Cornick boosted the Robins chances of making the playoffs. Leeds took full advantage to continue their brilliant form with a seventh consecutive league win. Early goals from Crysencio Summerville and Joel Piroe on his return to Swansea put the visitors in command. Italy international Wilfried Gnonto added two more either side of half-time to take his tally to four goals in as many games.

"In terms of how we executed the game plan, it was the most disciplined and spot-on performance of the season," said Leeds boss Daniel Farke. Leeds move two points ahead of Southampton, but Saints have two games in hand to edge back in front in the battle for a return to the Premier League. All three relegated sides from last year are in pole position to bounce straight back up with Leicester closing in on automatic promotion. The Foxes struck twice in the first 36 minutes through Abdul Fatawu and Jamie Vardy to see off second-bottom Wednesday at the King Power.

West Brom remain in fifth as new signings Mikey Johnston and Andreas Weimann were on target in a 2-0 win over Cardiff. Norwich climbed into the playoff places as late goals from Gabriel Sara and Christian Fassnacht beat Watford 4-2. But victory for the Canaries was marred by a bust up between manager David Wagner and some of the Norwich support. Wagner's decision to substitute Onel Hernandez and Josh Sargent drew chants of "you don't know what you're doing" and the edgy atmosphere played a part in Watford battling their way back from 2-0 down to 2-2. — AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Hospitals

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507

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)

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Heat scorch Bucks in blowout

Tatum scores 41 in Celtics romp



MILWAUKEE: Giannis Antetokounmpo #34 of the Milwaukee Bucks drives to the basket against Nikola Jovic #5 of the Miami Heat during the first half of a game at Fiserv Forum in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. —AFP

LAS VEGAS: An under-strength Miami Heat thrashed the struggling Milwaukee Bucks 123-97 on Tuesday while Jayson Tatum scored a 41-point double-double as the Boston Celtics cruised past the Brooklyn Nets. Miami shrugged off the injury absences of Jimmy Butler, Terry Rozier and Josh Richardson to produce a shooting clinic in a one-sided rout on the road at Milwaukee's Fiserv Forum. Nikola Jovic led the Miami scorers with 24 points including five three-pointers while Duncan Robinson poured in six threes in his 23-point haul.

Miami went 19-of-40 from outside the arc, with six players finishing in double figures. Veteran Kevin Love also got into the shooting groove, making five three-pointers off the bench to finish with 19 points in what was a wire-to-wire win for Milwaukee. But the defeat left recently installed Milwaukee Bucks coach Doc Rivers with plenty to ponder as his team prepares for the All-Star break.

Rivers took charge last month after the shock dismissal of predecessor Adrian Griffin, with the brief of helping improve Milwaukee's defense. Yet it was another porous display by the Bucks, who struggled to build any kind of momentum against a well-organized Miami unit. "Speed, pace - they were quicker on everything at both ends," Rivers said after the loss. "You have these nights, you hate them, but it is what it is. I thought as bad as it looked defensively, I thought our offense was way worse tonight. It started early.

Bayern turn focus to Lazio after Leverkusen humbling

ROME: Bayern Munich captain Manuel Neuer insisted Tuesday there is no leadership problem at the club after a stinging defeat by Bayer Leverkusen put their long reign as German champions under threat. Reeling from a 3-0 humiliation at the hands of Leverkusen, Bayern head to Lazio on Wednesday knowing only a deep run in the Champions League will salvage their season. Bayern have won the Bundesliga each of the past 11 years but now trail Leverkusen by five points, and Neuer said it is not just up to the senior players to turn the situation around. "We have a lot of leaders in our own ranks," Germany goalkeeper Neuer said on the eve of Bayern's first leg of their last-16 tie in Italy.

"Thomas Mueller wasn't on the pitch, Joshua Kimmich came on as a substitute and was injured. It's true that with a well-oiled team and a certain spine to it you can sort things out," he said. "But if one of the leaders is missing, like at Bayer, others have to take over." Thomas Tuchel finds himself increasingly under pressure at a club whose coaches are judged primarily on the team's Champions League showings, particularly in recent years when Bayern's financial might made domestic dominance a formality.

"At half-time I thought it was just awful offense. Right now our team gets its personality from the offensive end and we don't want that; we want to get our personality from playing hard and doing defensive things. And tonight we didn't do that." Giannis Antetokounmpo led Milwaukee's scoring with 23 points while three players - Malik Beasley, Damian Lillard and Bobby Portis - all finished with 16 points apiece. Miami, beaten by Denver in last season's NBA Finals, improved to 29-25 with the win and are seventh in the Eastern Conference standings. Milwaukee fell to 35-20 and are third in the East behind first-placed Boston and second-placed Cleveland.

Celtics romp, Suns down Kings

The Celtics meanwhile stretched their unbeaten streak to five games with a 118-110 defeat of the Brooklyn Nets, with Tatum in dazzling form to finish with 41 points, 14 rebounds and five assists. Jaylen Brown added 19 points, while Al Horford and Derrick White added 16 points each as the Celtics improved to 42-12 at the top of the East.

The Celtics led from the first quarter, stretching their advantage to 23 points by the third quarter before Brooklyn rallied in the fourth to get within six with less than three minutes remaining. "I was just in a good rhythm," said Tatum, who scored 31 of his points in the first half. Elsewhere Tuesday, the Oklahoma City Thunder blew past the Orlando Magic 127-113. Jalen Williams (33) and Shai Gilgeous-Alexander (32) combined for 65 points as the Thunder recovered from an 11-point deficit in the first quarter to run out convincing winners.

Despite winning the double, Niko Kovac never recovered from a last 16 elimination at the hands of Liverpool in 2019. Tuchel's predecessor Julian Nagelsmann's days were numbered after his Bayern were dumped out by Villarreal at the quarter-final stage in 2022. A poor display against Lazio, who sit eighth in the Serie A table, could push Tuchel closer to an unthinkable exit, less than a year after joining the German champions.

'Nothing has changed'

With 13 games remaining, Bayern could still bridge the gap -- particularly given Leverkusen's reputation for second-place finishes -- but it was the manner of the defeat which was most troubling. Bayern only had one shot on target compared to Leverkusen's eight and no clear chances at goal. "We need to take something from that bad game and turn it into something positive. Everyone is motivated and hungry to deliver a better performance," said Neuer. "Lazio might not be the biggest name on people's lips but we've already struggled against weaker opponents... They deserve to be in the knockout stages and we're not going to underestimate any team."

Xabi Alonso's side showed they are clearly the best in Germany, despite a budget dwarfed by that of the six-time European champions Bayern. Despite Tuchel's previous success, the highlight of which was winning the Champions League with Chelsea in 2021, he has failed to put his stamp on a Bayern side too often reliant on indi-

viduals. Bayern CEO Jan-Christian Dreesen told reporters on Saturday that "nothing had changed regarding the question of the coach's future". But the fact that Tuchel has failed to put his stamp on the club despite taking over just six months after Alonso's appointment at Leverkusen will worry the Bayern hierarchy.

do Magic 127-113. Jalen Williams (33) and Shai Gilgeous-Alexander (32) combined for 65 points as the Thunder recovered from an 11-point deficit in the first quarter to run out convincing winners. At the top of the Western Conference, Minnesota stayed one game ahead of Oklahoma City with a 121-109 win over the Portland Trail Blazers. Anthony Edwards scored 41 points in the comfortable victory on the road. The Timberwolves lead the West with a 38-16 record, one game over the Thunder, who are in second on 37-17. In Phoenix, the fifth-placed Suns overcame an 11-point third quarter deficit and dazzling performances from De'Aaron Fox and Domantas Sabonis to edge past the Sacramento Kings 130-125 in a see-saw encounter that saw 17 lead changes.

"That's a tough team to stop, I'm glad we got the win," said Phoenix star Kevin Durant, who led the Suns scorers with 28 points, with Devin Booker adding 25 and Eric Gordon 23. "You've got to give Sacramento credit - they just don't stop playing and they're always in the game," Durant added. Fox led the Kings scoring with 40 points while Sabonis had a 35-point triple double with 18 rebounds and 12 assists. In Los Angeles, the Lakers had too much firepower for the lowly Detroit Pistons, who are bottom of the Eastern Conference with a league-worst 8-45. The Lakers cruised home 125-111, with LeBron James leading the home side's scorers with 25 points. — AFP

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No title for Kane?

Already eliminated in the German Cup by third-division Saarbruecken, Bayern are looking down the barrel of a first trophyless season since 2012. That this should happen after the silverware-starved Harry Kane arrived at the club has not passed unnoticed. Bayern would however be in a far worse position without their 100-million-euro (\$108 million) striker, who has scored 28 goals in 28 matches in all competitions this season.

Kane received little service on Saturday from a stodgy Bayern midfield. Veteran Thomas Mueller slammed his side's performance, saying "Leverkusen were taking risks, looking for solutions and playing football." "We're playing from A to B, B to C, and nobody plays freely or takes risks," Tuchel said Mueller had earned the right to speak his mind. "If someone is allowed to put out a statement like that it's Thomas," ventured Tuchel. "I can't imagine anyone underestimating this game, particularly after what happened on Saturday. It's very important that we don't just hammer ourselves with criticism as we need to play with confidence." — AFP

Osaka advances as Gauff, Jabeur dumped out of Qatar Open

DOHA: Naomi Osaka battled into the last 16 of the Qatar Open on Tuesday but Coco Gauff and Ons Jabeur crashed to surprise second-round exits with straight-sets defeats. Four-time Grand Slam champion Osaka brushed past Croatia's Petra Martic 6-3, 7-6 (11/9), continuing a comeback from maternity leave after giving birth to her daughter in July. Osaka grasped control with a break in the fourth game of the opening set. She broke twice more in the second set—either side of dropping her own serve—only to blow a chance to close out the match at 5-4.

Martic threatened to force a third set as she won the first four points of the tie-break, but Osaka then saved four set points before her opponent double-faulted down match point. It is the first WTA tournament in almost two years at which Osaka has won back-to-back matches. She goes on to play Ukraine's Lesia Tsurenko, who knocked out fourth seed Jabeur 6-3, 6-2. Tsurenko won nine straight games from 3-1 down in the first set to notch her first victory over a top-10 player in five years.

Jabeur has endured a difficult start to the year. She admitted she was still hampered by a right knee problem that affected her in Abu Dhabi. "Definitely much better than last week, but it's still there, unfortunately," said Jabeur. "It will not heal in two or three days, but I'm doing my best to heal it, and I think it's going to be very positive for the next weeks." World number three Gauff lost 6-2, 6-4 to Katerina Siniakova in her opening match, marking the first time she has failed to reach the quarter-finals of a tournament since Wimbledon last year. — AFP



DOHA: Tunisia's Ons Jabeur in action in the round of 32 match against Ukraine's Lesia Tsurenko during their Women's Singles tennis match at the Qatar WTA Open at Khalifa International Tennis and Squash Complex in Doha. — AFP